

A TEACHER'S PERSPECTIVE: Why I Choose MPFS

Each fall, newsstands are lined with special education issues with articles on choosing the right school for your child. As a parent, it is one of the most important decisions you'll make. Here at Media-Providence Friends School, the idea of "choosing the right school" got us thinking about our dedicated faculty. It's not just parents who are doing the decision-making when it comes to education; our teachers are faced with the same task.

Why do our outstanding teachers choose to teach here? And, most importantly, why – year after year – do they stay? After speaking to faculty across grade levels we came to see several common threads in their reasons for choosing to teach at MPFS.

Each teacher interviewed said what initially made her look to independent schools for employment is flexibility in the classroom and the ability to shape a curriculum based on the students. "Teaching here, I get to decide what is best for my students on that day at that hour," says Teacher Lisa Dainton who has been teaching our PreK-4 class for eight.

Similarly, one of our kindergarten teachers, Teacher Heather Chamberlain, found that the big difference between MPFS and the public school where she used to teach was how

the curriculum was being implemented. According to T. Heather strict, unrealistic timelines made it impossible for her to accomplish what she wanted, even with a great curriculum.

At MPFS, she found that she was able to build a curriculum and then "apply it in a way that was most developmentally appropriate for all of the students." She goes on to say that, "What is great about what we do here is we teach to where the kids are, so we're able to develop programs and activities that will challenge both your more advanced learners and students who need more support."

Community and collaboration was another subject that came up repeatedly with our teachers. Teacher Angela (4th & 5th grade and elementary school coordinator), Teacher Jen (middle school math and 7th grade advisor), and Teacher Daryl (4th – 8th grade science and 6th grade advisor) all attributed community and values to what initially attracted them to MPFS as well as what keeps them here. Quaker values, a strong sense of community, and the ability to collaborate with

This special issue includes our 2014-15 Annual Report of Giving

A TEACHER'S PERSPECTIVE | Continued on page 9

Our dedicated faculty chooses MPFS each day!



Dear Friends,

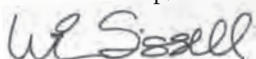
This issue of *Dragon Tale's, Choosing MPFS*, has had me reflecting on my years at Media-Providence Friends School and how I first came to teach here. I was teaching at a public school in Philadelphia and, though I loved the students and families I met there, I was troubled by the low expectations set for students, the lack of confidence the students' abilities, as well as the priorities set for teachers in the classroom (lots of testing, even then). Around this time, former Head of School Ginny Christensen, who was my professor at Penn where I was pursuing my Masters degree, encouraged me to apply for positions teaching Humanities and Technology at MPFS.

As it turned out, it was all the things I wanted out of teaching and education. I wanted to be able to really challenge kids, to help them make connections between what they were learning and real life, and do a lot of creative, hands-on teaching. It was a place where there was support for parents and connections with kids. In addition, the Quaker testimonies upheld at MPFS, and how that comes through in the curriculum, really felt right. It honored everyone.

What continues to stand out to me at MPFS, year after year, are the students. I am consistently amazed at the level of maturity MPFS kids possess. This is due in part to our curriculum, the way we – as educators – speak to them, and the expectations we have for them, academically and socially. Our students have a level of ability and maturity that allows them to go deeper into conversations in the classroom, express themselves in confident ways about complicated concepts and subjects, and develop strong bonds with their teachers and classmates. And at the same time, because of the safety our community provides, our students get to be kids for much longer! They get to run on the playground, play with friends regardless of age, or curl up with a book to simply enjoy reading.

Fifteen years after choosing MPFS for the first time, I'm happy to have chosen it again and again, as a teacher, as Head of School, and also as a father to my two daughters. Choosing a school for the student in your life is one of the most important decisions you'll make, and we know it's one that you'll make not just once, but many times each year, each week, each day. Read on for unique perspectives from our faculty on how they navigate this important decision as well as the final installment of our division spotlights featuring preschool and kindergarten faculty, an introduction to our middle school math teacher, and updates from outstanding alumni!

In Friendship,



W. Earl Sissell
Head of School

LETTER FROM The Head of School



Earl Sissell, Head of School

Strategic Planning Underway

Purposeful periodic strategic planning, as part of our consistent prioritization of overall good governance, has been an integral part of keeping MPFS strong, successful, and mission-focused since 1876.

In April of this year, the Board of Trustees approved the undertaking of a comprehensive strategic planning process, the goal of which is to maintain and strengthen the great things the school is already doing, and to gather ideas for growth and improvement. This process will identify priorities and create an implementation plan that will guide MPFS' development over the next five to ten years.

We are working in partnership with Mason Barnett, who leads Mason Barnett Associates, a local organizational development and strategic planning consulting group. In addition to bringing to us her professional expertise, Mason is Quaker and is familiar with the life and importance of Friends schools.

Our work this year is exciting and transforming for the entire community.

This summer, Mason conducted phone interviews with people “who have either been associated with the school in the past or who support the school in the broader community,” which helped guide the development of surveys and focus groups.

The process began in earnest with the start of the school year. In September, Mason conducted online surveys—which elicited an excellent response from current parents along with faculty and staff—as well as focus groups representing various constituencies, including alumni and alumni parents, Media Meeting and Providence Meeting members, current parents, faculty and staff, and Board members.

Mason collected and analyzed survey and focus group data to inform the creation of strategic task forces to address specific areas: Academic Program, New Enrollment & Marketing, Quakerism & School Values, Retention & Communications, Professional Development, Finance, Advancement, and Facilities.

In early October, task force members convened and got to work. Each task force was charged with researching and discussing its designated focus, and then recommending actions to be undertaken during 2016-2021.

Task forces are expected to complete and submit their recommendations by January 31, 2016. This will put us in a good position to complete the plan in the spring of 2016 and to begin implementing it in preparation for the 2016-17 school year.

The wisdom of so many caring voices has been a major benefit of this comprehensive and inclusive undertaking. We hope that from our many voices will come a vision and plan that our entire community embraces and will work to support in the years to come.

In the meantime, we will continue to maintain, enrich, and expand the education that already makes MPFS a school where our students experience “Meaningful Learning for a Purposeful Life.”



Welcome Our New Trustees

Chris Shuster

On November 27, 2013, Chris Shuster spent the morning at MPFS outside in the rain facilitating parking and assisting guests arriving for our Grandparents & Special Friends Day. In a neon orange and reflective silver vest layered over a poncho keeping him only partially protected from the downpour, Chris was—as he always is—visible, memorable, and effective.

Joining our parent community in 2012, Chris stood out immediately as an enthusiastic and energetic supporter of MPFS, getting involved with school events, teaching an after-school enrichment class, and voicing ideas and encouragement with purpose and plenty of humor.

He and his equally involved wife Kathleen McCullough have two daughters here: 5th grader Grace and 1st grader Chloe.

“One of the things we credit as bringing us to MPFS is Sir Ken Robinson’s TED Talk about the modern public-school education system in the U.S.,” Chris says. “That in-

spired us to look at independent school options in search of a ‘whole-child’ educational approach.”

Chris’s advocacy of our educational philosophies and his engagement here drew the attention of the MPFS Board of Trustees and an invitation to come aboard this year.

A graduate of the University of Dayton, holding English and Philosophy degrees, Chris has professional experience in instructional design and training and now sells technology and big-data solutions in the healthcare industry. He has traveled extensively and often benevolently, spending time at the start of his career volunteering at a homeless shelter in Chicago and in South Korea teaching ESL.

An avid cyclist and ice hockey player who combines intensity and levity in his work and play, Chris describes himself as a family guy who loves to be involved and for whom the education of his children is the number-one priority.



Martin Pepper

When members of the MPFS community answered WHY?’s call last December to work the phones for the station’s on-air membership drive, Martin Pepper was a particularly popular pledge-taker. We were told that calls were directed randomly, but we suspect that Martin’s wry, reassuring manner and mellifluous British-accented delivery earned him the caller’s choice award!

Originally from the United Kingdom, Martin is an IT professional with degrees in Chemical Physics and Computer Science from the University of Surrey. He crossed the Atlantic for an expat work assignment in New York City, where he met his wife Jennifer Camp. “And the rest is history,” he quips.

Moving to Media with his family in 2009, Martin is currently an IT manager of a 25-person team supporting PECO’s gas and electric business.

Seeking “a middle-school program that focuses on active engagement with students and parents and provides an excellent educational experience that will set our son for high-school success,” Martin and Jennifer enrolled their son Tom in 2014. Tom is now in 7th grade here.

Prioritizing diversity and inclusion, and actively involved in Transition Town Media toward carbon footprint reduction, Martin finds much common ground with MPFS. He appreciates “the peaceful and respectful atmosphere and the way the school inculcates values.”

It’s important to Martin to support the school that supports his son, and he is delighted to have the opportunity to do so as a new Trustee.

Identifying himself as a keen sportsman, Martin counts sailing, crew, cycling, tennis, hang gliding, and skiing among his interests. He also loves toys (including Legos) and board games and has even held some board game patents. “I have a passion around innovation and I’m young at heart,” he says.



Josh Oberfield

After completing a two-year cohort with the Friends Council on Education (FCE) Leadership Institute this past spring, Josh Oberfield sought to put what he learned into practice.

The FCE Leadership program addressed governance, which “spoke” to him, so Josh reached out to Head of School Earl Sissell to express interest in Board work here.

Josh’s relationship and experience with MPFS dates back to the early 1980s, when he was a student here. “I’m humbled and proud to be back in the swing with a school that I still have as a part of me,” he says.



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While every effort was made to include all donors, if we have omitted your name, please contact us so that we can make corrections in the next issue.

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A Full Mind, A Mindful Education: Susan Holak '69

Susan has remarkable recall of her years at MPFS, where she attended through 6th grade (then the uppermost grade), graduating in 1969.

"I remember teachers like Janet Donahue, going to Meeting for Worship Wednesday mornings, assemblies and the music that would play as we would enter and leave, when Margaret Sutherland and other Meeting elders spoke (about developing a conscience, for example), Friday afternoon walks to Media Library, our 5th grade trip to Williamsburg, French class and a project setting pricing for food such as quiche and beef bourguignon, and a rocket ship learning incentive that would move an inch closer to the ceiling with every book we read," she reminisces.

Perhaps the images are still so vivid half a century later because she thinks back to them with such fondness. "My time [at MPFS] had a very positive influence on me and added depth to my life," says Susan.

"When I left, I went to public school and my elementary education here provided me with a solid background to make that transition. It also helped me gravitate to higher education and academia."

Susan earned a B.S. in Economics from the University of Pennsylvania, and an M. Phil. and a Ph.D. in Business from Columbia University. She has been awarded fellowships toward doctoral research and to attend the Japan Studies Institute, and has taught as a visiting professor at the American University of Rome.

Currently, Susan serves as Founding Dean of the School of Business at College of Staten Island, The City University of New York. Previous responsibilities at the school include Associate Provost for Institutional Effectiveness, Professor of Marketing, area chairperson of marketing in the Business Department, and the Director of the Honors College of CSI/CUNY.



Susan Holak, Class of 1969

She believes that studying Business and applying her degrees to education have allowed her to leverage her communications skills and action-oriented style. Susan has been published in business publications and journals and has written about nostalgia as an academic study. "I also came away from grade school able to write," she adds, which she credits largely to her MPFS education.

While founding CSI's School of Business has kept Susan quite busy, when she has some extra time, she enjoys being active in community building and service, as well as studying other cultures (particularly Russian and Japanese), including languages, cuisine, and literature.

In recent years, Susan has reconnected with the school and has chosen to give back by donating to our Annual Fund, Facilities Endowment Fund, and our Auction fundraiser. "I believe in educational causes," she says. "I want to help the school provide others with an education and experiences similar to what I had."

Our Newest Alumni Head Off to High School



Congratulations to the MPFS Class of 2015! At their June commencement, our recent graduates reflected on their years here: *"It has been quite a ride, and I loved being here."* ... *"The environment here at MPFS is one any parent would wish for their child."* ... *"I have grown academically,*

socially, and emotionally." ... *"I'd like to give thanks to my teachers for helping to broaden my view of myself and of the world."*

Presenting our newest alumni: (from left): Cole Parham, Breanna Mullarkey, Farid Stephens, Jaelynne Bethea, Avery Johnson, Charlotte Evans, Justin DiPrimio, Liam Sinclair, Tasia Green. Our graduates are attending: Archbishop John Carroll High School, The Christian Academy, Delaware County Christian School, Delaware Valley Friends School, Elkton High School, Friends Select School, Garnet Valley High School, and Upper Darby High School

MPFS 1999-2003 Alumni Reunion: December 18

Here's to a time of butterfly clips, pocket-less jeans, Justin Timberlake's ramen hairstyle, and the very first iPod! If you graduated from MPFS between 1999 and 2003, reconnect with old friends to reminisce about good times – and bad trends – during our reunion at Media's Sterling Pig Brewery on Friday, December 18th. Save the dates now and stay updated by submitting your contact info via our Alumni page at mpfs.org and by joining the Media-Providence Friends School Classes 1999 – 2003 group on Facebook.

DIVISION FOCUS: Lifelong Foundations Laid in Preschool & Kindergarten

In a *New York Times* article published earlier this year titled, "Let the Kids Learn Through Play," psychologists and educators discuss the lifelong benefits of unstructured learning for preschool and kindergarten students. With the institution of programs like No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top, young students have been pushed more towards didactic instruction of which "there is little evidence that this approach improves long-term achievement;

inspiring curiosity in young learners. This is largely done through a flexible curriculum that encourages play and "unstructured" learning with a very purposeful goal for each individual student: to foster a love of learning in the early years to create the foundation for lifelong academic and other future successes.

Teacher Heather Chamberlain, one of our kindergarten teachers at MPFS, says the foundation laid in preschool and kindergarten truly prepares children to be strong students for the rest of their academic careers. She stresses the importance of shaping curious learners over rote learners through hands-on activities and play. "We want what we're teaching them to not just be on the surface. We want them to be able to apply it to everyday life. It's not just the academic piece of reading or writing. They have to know how to work with other kids, how to communicate, how to problem solve. That's how they are going to be able to gain that deeper knowledge and not just regurgitate something that's been taught to them," she says.

T. Heather credits MPFS' small class sizes and safe community environment for enabling her students' curiosity to drive lessons when beneficial. She says there are times when a five minute lesson can turn into a twenty minute lesson when her students start asking those deeper questions – and she is able to allow for that kind of flexibility in the classroom. "We get to go where students want to go: having discussions, answering questions, relating it to our lives, making connections. All of those things have to happen in an environment children feel safe in and if they don't feel safe then they're not going to be curious."

In his book *The Hurried Child: Growing Up Too Fast Too Soon*, child psychologist David Elkind speaks to the "the pressure for early academic achievement," a stressor that both "impairs the student's ability to learn and the teacher's ability to teach." PreK-4 Teacher Lisa Dainton says that what makes MPFS a standout school for young learners is that children are not rushed out of their childhood. T. Lisa says that while the academic component at the preschool level is of course a priority, the social-emotional education is a crucial component that informs those skills for a lifetime.



in fact, it may have the opposite effect, potentially slowing emotional and cognitive development, causing unnecessary stress and perhaps even souring kids' desire to learn."

At Media-Providence Friends School, our preschool and kindergarten faculty's teaching philosophy is centered on

“If they can’t work together and feel safe, be safe, feel confident, feel calm, feel loved, have energy expended outside, it doesn’t matter what academic skills you provide for them because future successes in life are not about being able to regurgitate that knowledge. It’s about how to collaborate and adapt to new skills that we don’t even know we’re going to need,” she says. T. Lisa also reports an increased attention span and care in the classroom with her four year olds who are taught without the stressors and pressure of more formal, rote education.

Teacher Van, our Pre-K 4 Assistant, says that what she values most about the teaching philosophy at MPFS is that the skills she is strengthening in her students will serve them throughout their lives both academically and in the professional world. “We teach self-reflection at a young age. We encourage students to speak from how they feel about a situation, to be introspective. It will continually help them to become a stronger person and that confidence creates strong students.”

As preschool and kindergarten students grow and move into higher learning, what MPFS teachers consistently see in their graduates is a strong sense of self that carries them through to lower school, middle school, and beyond. “A sense of self, especially when you are going into high school is maybe the most valuable thing you can have,” says T. Heather. “Our students are not being easily persuaded to

do something they might not feel comfortable with because they understand there are alternatives and there are other people that they can socialize with and feel valued.”

T. Lisa goes on to say that as early as preschool, MPFS students are taught how to handle tough situations. “They are taught how to not be a victim. They are given that self-confidence and awareness of who they are, who other people are. So starting here in and progressing all the way through, they are more than prepared for 9th grade.”

The foundations for academic excellence laid in pre-school and kindergarten at MPFS creates curious elementary school students who grow into inquisitive, organized middle school students well-prepared for the challenges of high school and beyond. David Whitebread, a Cambridge University psychologist says that play can be seen as insignificant to development in young children when in fact, the opposite is found scientifically. Whitebread says, “...it’s essential to their development. They need to learn to preserve, to control attention, to control emotions. Kids learn these things through play.” What might seem like frivolous at a young age is actually crucial to building strong foundations for higher learning. MPFS creates whole students, building social-emotional skills to strengthen academics in an environment that fosters curiosity for young learners through play and learning that is structured for young minds.

A TEACHER'S PERSPECTIVE | *Continued from cover*

other classes and faculty members were all listed as reasons teachers continually choose MPFS.

Teacher Van Ngyuen, PreK-4 assistant, spoke of her desire to work in a safe, welcoming community, which she found in Quaker education. What made MPFS stand out from other Friends schools was the emphasis placed on faculty collaboration. “I’m a big proponent of the quality of our work (being) tied to the depth of our relationship with others. If we don’t know each other well, if we don’t trust each other, (on) the faculty and staff level, we won’t be able to properly care for the rest of our community,” says T. Van.

For T. Van, professional development at MPFS happens in the classroom each day. “This is a learning community for the students but also

for the adults. We learn from each other and from the students. Every single day coming here I have felt like I’m growing and that’s what I appreciate the most about this place. I think most of my personal growth has been with direct communication and cooperation with the other teachers here.”

Teacher Clare South, our newest kindergarten teacher who taught kindergarten this fall came to us from Scotland. She says she was also looking to teach in Quaker education but what drew her specifically to MPFS was our emphasis on 21st century skills throughout grade levels. “MPFS teachers are truly getting learners ready for the real world with the skills that they would need and it really resonated with me. It’s not just about imparting kids with all this knowledge. They need skills like teamwork, cooperation. Kids

now-a-days are going to be doing jobs that we can only dream of!”

The three most important factors that draw teachers to the school (and keep them here!) are flexibility in the classroom, community and collaboration, and emphasis on 21st century skills. Here at MPFS, we know that when parents talk about choosing “the right school” it is a decision that is made not just once, but many times throughout the academic year. The same holds true for our faculty. We’re proud to have such an outstanding and dedicated group of teachers to carry out our mission and who choose MPFS each day. Without our faculty, we could not achieve the level of academic excellence along with the values-infused environment that is the centerpiece of Quaker education.

MEET Teacher Jen Trayah, Middle School Math Teacher

Teacher Jen is in her second year of teaching middle school math and we are thrilled to share her story. T. Jen joined us last year from People's Academy Middle Level in Morrisville, Vermont, noted as a New England League of Middle School "Spotlight School." She has her BA in Education and her BS in Math as well as her MA in Education, all from Johnson State College, also in Vermont.

Early in Jen's career, she realized that her calling was teaching math specifically at the middle school level. "I realized how important it was to teach that age group and that at that age if students don't have a good teacher who really cares and shows them that math can be fun and beautiful and applicable to their lives and can really open doors for their future, then they might close off to it for the rest of their lives," says T. Jen. Once I realized that, it was like ok this is where I need to be."

T. Jen stresses the importance of building confidence around math and taking away the stigma that being "naturally good at math" is somehow ingrained in a student's genes. "You wouldn't say, 'I can't read so my kid can't read.' It's a skill that's learned not one that's passed down," she says. "I feel like it's part of my job to dispel that myth."

T. Jen speaks with enthusiasm about the program Big Ideas Math, which she brought to MPSF last year. This is her second experience implementing the program at the middle school level. When Jen was teaching at People's Academy, she was part of

the curriculum search committee that researched and implemented the Big Ideas Math program. She was happy to have the flexibility to bring this program, which she says is a challenging, rigorous program that prepares students to be critical thinkers and problem solvers, to MPFS.

Over the last year, T. Jen has embraced Quaker education in the classroom and feels the mindfulness curriculum is crucial to her students' mathematic success. At the beginning of each class T. Jen leads a mindfulness exercise as part of the Learning to Breathe curriculum, which encourages students to focus and be in the moment without outside distractions. "Forget what just happened. Forget what's coming. We're here. Let's be in the moment. Let's be ready to learn math. I feel like we do a really good job here of creating that environment to learn and be in the moment. I've never seen that happen anywhere else," says T. Jen.

In preparing students for academic success in the future, T. Jen says it is very important for students to know how to handle stress. "Being ready to deal with stresses in your life – the stresses in your learning – and being able to learn from your mistakes is really key," she says.

Outside of the classroom, T. Jen loves spending time with her 3 ½ year old daughter (who can't wait to start pre-school next year at MPFS!) and exploring her new hometown in West Chester.



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TRUSTEES | *Continued from page 4*

After majoring in Psychology with a concentration in Biology at Muhlenberg College, Josh earned his graduate degree in Education from the University of Pennsylvania.

His professional experience is primarily as an educator at Friends schools, and Josh has spent the last 12 years at William Penn Charter School, where he teaches social studies, Quakerism, and art at the middle school level. He also coaches baseball and soccer at Penn Charter.

“The mission and foundation of Quaker education attracts me—teaching the whole child, balancing academics with character, and being reflective about work and actions,” Josh says.

“Having worked at larger Friends schools, I also feel very appreciative of the work that is done at a smaller school, such as MPFS,” he continues. “Students get a very real, meaningful Quaker education here.”

Josh is a legacy Board member, following in the footsteps of his mother Lynn, who is also a former MPFS Head of School. As a Trustee, Josh seeks to help enrich the MPFS educational experience, expecting his focus to be on our current strategic planning process specifically addressing our facilities and the school’s connection with our partner Meetings.

He and his wife Annie have two daughters “and a big, old dog named Quincy.” Josh’s hobbies include being active in sports, playing music, hiking, reading the newspaper, and watching EPL soccer.



Kindergarten handshake

“Are you following along?”



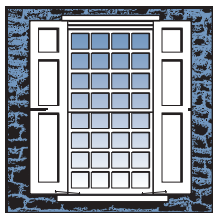
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**Parent-Teacher-Alumni vs.
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Spring Auction, April 15

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