

Wichita Friends School, 2024

First, I want to give a big “shout out” to GPYM. Our solar panels have been up and running since last October, and we are so grateful! Our average monthly savings in utilities cost since then is \$650.00, and we’re using this savings to pay back the loans. GPYM is a huge part of our going solar. Not just the loans from the yearly meeting and monthly meetings. It was Cliff Mesner, Aaron Fowler and Jim Perkins who first had the dream. Now we not only have greater financial security for the future, we have a very visible statement about environmental stewardship on our grounds. Thank you so much!

A highlight every week is our Wednesday mid-week worship time. Most weeks we are able to walk through the field to Heartland’s meetinghouse. There is something about this space that leads us into quiet. I have been amazed that even our 2 ½ and 3 year olds are able to settle themselves for a couple minutes at a time. In between quiet times, we sing songs about Spirit and God’s Love. And, in the Quaker way, we share out of the silence. I believe the centering we receive from our 20 to 30 minutes of worship extends out into the rest of the week, building community and awareness of our gifts and blessings.

This has been a year of physical improvements and repairs for us. We have recently completed some major security enhancements on campus, funded by a grant from FEMA. Here again, GPYM members were instrumental in this process. I’m grateful for the grants-writing assistance of Sue Wine, Connie Adams and Aaron Fowler. With this grant funding, we have added a fence around both playgrounds and the field, security lights and cameras on all sides of the building, a camera and intercom at the front door so we can see who wants to enter our building, intercoms connected to all classrooms and administrative offices, bollards (concrete posts) at the front and back entrances to make forcible vehicle entry impossible and exterior door numbering to help EMS if they are called for an emergency. There is some sadness in preparing for disasters and intrusions. We would like to not feel

the need but it feels very good to have a safer environment for our children and teachers.

Board members and parents have given us volunteer hours to paint our concrete light pole bases, bollards and some playground equipment with bright primary colors that give us more visual energy and reflect the joy of our children. With the fenced-in field, we are taking advantage of having a soccer player from Newman University on our staff; Matt regularly organizes great soccer scrimmage fun for everyone, preschool and elementary children.

Our incorporation of the Quaker SPICES into our curricula and daily life continues to be strengthened. Drew Smith of the Friends Council on Education joined us for a day during our August teacher in-service days. Having Drew here two years in a row, supported by a grant for the FCE, has been a wonderful faith gift to our teachers. Our kindergarten teacher is leaving us this year to teach in a Catholic school, but our other teachers are returning and I am thrilled with the retention of the strong community they have formed and their developing understanding of the special qualities of a Friends education.

We continue to have a great enrichment class curriculum, mostly led by volunteers. Connie teaches our music and Godly Play classes and leads our Wednesday morning unprogrammed worship and song time, joined by Aaron when he can carve time out of his teaching schedule. Some of our children (and teachers!) are developing some proficiency with Sign Language, thanks to Patrice Stephenson. Our elementary children, in particular, love using sign in some of their communications with each other and their teacher. We also have weekly classes in cooking and baking, Library (taught by a retired children's librarian), Spanish, art, and P.E. I teach the P.E. classes, using skills developed in my former public school teaching years, and greatly value the opportunity this gives me to develop deep relationships with our students.

In 2022 we applied for and were granted licensure to accept 2 ½ year-olds, and are discovering that this is a priority for parents in our West Wichita/Goddard/Maize area. This gives us quite a range of developmental

levels among our students which is both challenging and enhancing. When we walk to Heartland for Wednesday morning worship, preschoolers are paired with older kindergarten and elementary children as walking buddies. This practice has stimulated some delightful older child/younger child friendships that have blossom even more in our all-school activities and field trip experiences.

Another huge part of our community is our parents and grandparents. I'm grateful that they are eager to volunteer to drive and accompany us for our monthly field trips; they have planned and carried out a Thanksgiving meal celebration and have helped with other all-school special events. I think some of our parents and grandparents had as much fun as the children with the games and sports set up for our recent field day. One of the advantages of being a small school is the development of a close-knit community.

One of our biggest challenges is always finances. Enrollment is slowly moving upward since the pandemic, but I would like to grow by 10 to 15 more full-time students. Our numbers lead us to an expectation that we will open a second 2 ½ to 3 year-old class this fall. I wish our elementary numbers were higher, but being near two very good school districts in Maize and Goddard reduces the local need for private elementary education.

Another challenge is finding people interested in serving on our board. We recently lost 3 board members, all from the same family. The five remaining members bring me a lot of strength and experience in both education and in living in a Quaker way. You all know Connie Adams, who is clerk of our board and helps with our marketing efforts. Aaron Fowler is serving as clerk of our Finance Committee and is one of my 'go-to' people for discernment. Sue Wine is an active worker for our facilities needs and is joined by her husband John to take care of classes when all our teachers and paras come upstairs for lunch together once a month. Linda Becker is not officially Quaker, but she says she feels very "at home" with us and brings valuable wisdom from her years of teaching and working with curricula in Kansas schools to our Education Committee. Jim Perkins is our board member emeritus, serving on

Finance Committee and supporting me and the school in so many strengthening ways. I continue to learn from this gentleman each week.

Thank you, GPYM for all the support you give Wichita Friends School – your financial gifts, your gifts of individual talents, your guidance in the Quaker way of education, and your prayers for our well-being. I am deeply appreciative and feel honored and blessed to be a part of the GPYM extended community.

Yours sincerely,

Shelly Hoffman, Head of School