

Wichita Friends School, 2026

I am so happy to be able to attend in person the organizational round table at GPYM this summer. I enjoy learning about the broad ministries of Quakers in our country and across the world. Here are some updates about Wichita Friends School:

Our marketing efforts and a superb staff have allowed us to reach an all-time high for enrollment this year. We experienced the highest enrollment in 31 years this past Spring, and we are grateful. Two years ago growth prompted us to open another preschool classroom. We are on the verge of needing to open a second 4-year-old classroom, and have been preparing to meet this need if and when enrollment numbers make it necessary. Managing up-front preparation expense prior to having tuition income is challenging, but this is a good problem to have. At this point, I am not sure where the money will come from to add a fully equipped classroom, but I trust that a way will open if we are true to our mission and continue to have happy families. The more than doubling of our enrollment in the past five years is a testament to our staff and the care they give, and reflects our growing reputation on the west side of Wichita. Our sustainability relies on both increasing our numbers and on continued gifts from supportive Friends and friends.

Our solar panels, which GPYM Friends were a critical factor in attaining, have served us very well, keeping our energy bills very low which in turn saves us money each month. The entire solar project would not have been possible without GPYM's vision and support. We are so very grateful for this partnership. When I speak with people out in public and on tours of our school, the solar panels always receive comments of praise for our care of our environment and long-term vision.

Our weekly Wednesday morning Worship continues to be a very positive experience with our students. We lock down the entire school to enable every staff member and all our students to walk through the field to Heartland Meetinghouse. Our Worship time is filled with singing, quiet between songs, focused energy, and peaceful Spirit.

I, personally, attend Heartland every so often on Sundays and deeply appreciate the waiting worship in their small community. Such a different energy than when WFS children fill every bench to capacity on Wednesdays! We are fortunate that Connie Adams and Aaron Fowler lead our worship. My heart is filled as little ones as young as 2 1/2 years are prompted to speak a "thankfulness" out of the Silence. It is very special to listen to what they share! I have mentioned this before -- if you are ever near Wichita on a Wednesday morning, you have an open invitation to join us in Worship at 9:30.

WFS staff continue to learn more about Quaker education each month at our professional development and we employ Drew Smith, Executive Director of the Friends Council on Education, for yearly training during our August in-service. We embed a small Quaker SPICES curriculum tailored for each classroom age-level throughout our daily and weekly teachings. Our school staff has even joined Heartland Friends Meeting on occasional Sundays for worship and has found that time very special for us to be immersed into the depth and beauty of unprogrammed Quaker worship. I will also add that our staff feel very welcomed and valued by Heartland members. Sharing the knowledge that we and our work are valued is very special.

For the first time since my arrival five years ago, 100% of our staff are returning this fall, which I am beyond thrilled about. This allows us so much continuity as a staff and for our children. I love our staff and appreciate the dedication they bring to the school. To say I am blessed by this staff is an understatement.

We continue to offer enrichment classes of Music, Art, PE, Sign Language, Library, Board Games, Worship, Godly Play, Spanish, and Baking to educate children about our world and life. We have a number of volunteers who help us offer all these opportunities for our students. Another great learning experience for our students is monthly field trips. These opportunities provide a broad array of experiential learning outside of the classroom. In a time in education when recess is being cut or eliminated, we continue to offer all students a 30-minute morning recess and a 30-minute afternoon recess. Additionally, our elementary students receive a 30-minute noon recess. Public schools near us may get 15-20 minutes combined per day. We fully recognize the need for children to move and develop community in free-play time. A special recess highlight is planting a vegetable and butterfly garden in the Spring and harvesting cucumbers, tomatoes, and peppers for our snacks in the Fall.

A special shout-out to GPYM for your continued support of Wichita Friends School! We deeply appreciate your financial gifts, the inclusion into your organization, and your prayers for our sustainability and the future of our school.

Sincerely,

Shelly Hoffman
Head of School