

June 2021

Dear Great Plains Yearly Meeting Friends,

What a joy to be writing you this annual letter. I have fond memories of hearing these minutes over my many years at GPYM. Today it is my turn to add my voice to those who have gone before me.

The 2020-21 school year has been anything but “normal.” I joined the WFS staff in September of 2020 when one of the WFS founders and then Head of School, Pam Chambers, took the COO position at Kansas Heart Hospital. I know it was a very difficult decision for Pam as her heart and passion were with the school and the students she served every day. We miss Pam’s leadership and know her gifts are being used to further God’s work in the world.

My work life as a Teaching Artist was put on hold in March of 2020 when the Pandemic began. Having served on the WFS board for more than 15 years and knowing a bit about the school and its mission, I was asked to fill the HOS position this past year. It has been a great year to use my gifts with the students, families, staff, and volunteers at Wichita Friends School.

We began our fall with 40 students from Preschool through 4th grade. We finished the year with 34 students. A variety of situations resulted in the decline of students, including COVID.

Pam put in place some very important COVID guidelines that helped keep us safe this year. My role was to help keep everybody on the same “COVID preventive page” and be the “grumpy Principal” who reminded folks daily to wear masks, socially distance and wash your hands 57 times a day! Because of our great students and staff, we were able to have in-person classes all year, with the exception of 1 ½ weeks before Christmas when one of our Pre-K para’s tested positive and we had to have ZOOM school for that class. A highlight was having an in-person graduation for these 16 pre-kindergarten students. Much JOY was expressed during this celebration.

One tragic loss this year was the death of one of our staff members. Kaylah Blackmon was a young paraprofessional in our Prekindergarten class. Kaylah joined us in November when we made a shift in our teaching staff. Kaylah was a bit unique as she came to us with bright red hair (dyed) and tattoo up and down her arms, but Kayla

quickly became a great big part of our school. She came in not really knowing what she wanted to do but quickly learned she had a gift and a love for children. Her warm smile and easy going nature were just what our students needed. She taught each of us so much. She is greatly missed.

One very exciting development this year was the beginning of a new Endowment fund to expand the diversity at the school. The endowment has been seeded with a \$1,000,000 gift that will be paid out over the next 10 years. The board is committed to increasing this fund so more BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) and low-income students will be able to experience the value of a Quaker school. You will be hearing more about the opportunity to contribute to this fund during the next year. We hope you will consider making Wichita Friends School part of your planned giving to help increase the diversity of our school.

I would like to publicly thank friends of GPYM who have volunteered and or donated to the school. Special thanks to Connie Adams, Sue Wine, John Wine, Jim Perkins, and Patty Savely who serve on our board. A big thank you to those who give financially to support the school. Throughout the year funds come from the yearly meeting and from individuals in GPYM to support annual needs. Tuition covers half the cost of education so we must raise 50% of our budget each year (\$150,000). You have helped us touch student's lives in a way that is unforgettable. Your gifts have been priceless and so very much appreciated.

Thank you for your love and care of the school.

Warmly,

Mr. Aaron (Aaron Fowler)

Head of School