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Promise Fulfilled

With a new strategic plan underway, **Buckingham Friends School** strengthens its ability to develop well-rounded and engaged students by enhancing its campus in exciting ways.

by **MATT COSENTINO**

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With a proven track record of success spanning more than two centuries, Buckingham Friends School often taps into its history and embraces the values that have served its students so well. At the same time, it has adopted forward-thinking concepts that further its mission to develop well-rounded people, from kindergarten through eighth grade, who are eager to make a difference in their communities and beyond.

In short, Buckingham Friends School strikes a perfect “balance”—a word that Head of School Paul Lindenmaier uses often when discussing the Quaker school’s ideas about 21st century learning. Balance seems to be at the heart of just about everything at Buckingham Friends School, from the ways children are taught, to how and where students spend their time, to the tools utilized in the classroom.

That way of thinking also inspired a 2019 strategic plan—called “Realizing the

Promise”—in which school leadership engaged community members and alumni to affirm its mission while creating a shared vision for the future. The result: new programming, greater support for teachers, and the expansion and enhancement of the school’s facilities and programs, which is now underway.

“The school has had a strong community for 229 years, and everyone came together five years ago to chart a course for the future,” Lindenmaier explains. “One of our strategic objectives—after reviewing our programs, taking care of our teachers, and building our enrollment to our optimal level—was to provide a campus that suited our vision for the future of teaching and learning for years to come. We did that as a whole community, and we’re excited that we’re now well into these projects that are going to enhance the school.”



Buckingham Friends School is improving its campus to support the School's vision for the future and a "culture of innovation" while maintaining a commitment to the roots of a Friends education. One of the campus enhancements will include a new gymnasium.

One of the major pieces of the strategic plan is a new, standalone science building located near the woods on campus. Expected to be completed by the end of this winter, Lindenmaier believes it will be a game-changer in a key area of instruction.

"It will help us balance kids learning the right skills, concepts, and everything that's important to learn as they prepare for high school, but also enhance our ability to provide signature, experiential learning opportunities," he says. "The building includes a teaching porch where a whole class can bring things from the woods, like a rotten log or mucky marine life from the pond, and can make connections and extend science teaching and learning to the outside. I think that's a wonderful resource.

"Instead of using traditional lab tables, we're going to be filling the space with maker's tables and 21st century tools," he continues. "As we know, children learn best when they have real, hands-on learning experiences. Our 44-acre campus has that space, and the new building connects us even better with it."

An additional benefit to the science building is that it will allow for all of the classrooms for grades three through eight in the main building to be expanded. As a result, students will have more space for special projects, as well as for independent and collaborative learning.

Other campus enhancements include a regulation-size gymnasium to replace its 50-year-old predecessor; a space connecting the new gym and the arts building; and outdoors spaces such as rain gardens, play areas, and a picnic grove for gatherings.

"We also built an amazing new Lower School playground with Indigenous Ingenuities (a landscape designer) of Doylestown," Lindenmaier says. "Like we did with all of the other projects, we engaged the kids and they really helped us come up with a vision for

the playground. It's quite a stellar accomplishment and they're having a blast."

Inside the classroom, technology is an important element, with young children being introduced to robotics, and Chromebooks being part of the curriculum in third, fourth, and fifth grades, and personal laptops in grades six through eight. The goal is to make sure that students become fluent in those tools, not entirely reliant on them.

"We still want to provide real, hands-on experiences, and we still emphasize discourse," Lindenmaier says. "Our kids are reading advanced texts in literature, and they're engaging in mature conversations with their peers and teachers. It's that balance of giving them the tools they need to succeed as 21st century learners, but also giving them the experiences they need to strengthen their abilities to collaborate, demonstrate critical thinking, be open to the ideas of others, and know how to be critical readers and resource hunters, and that requires the act of teaching—it doesn't all come naturally over the technology. It's all an issue of balance."

The ultimate goal is to have students experience personal growth and become responsible members of society who are invested in the issues that affect their own neighborhoods and communities, as well as those across the globe.

"A concern of Friends education for 300 years has been to provide a quality of education that develops the whole learner, but also



we've always had a concern for personhood," Lindenmaier says. "We've always seen our school as holding a public purpose, and helping to generate citizens. That's why we teach values, civility, and the mindset of being a caring steward of the world, and also a caring citizen in the future."

Even as Buckingham Friends School graduates go on to attend a range of renowned private and public high schools in the area, most stay connected to the place where they built their educational foundation for years to come. Lindenmaier, a lifelong Quaker himself, believes that those who get a chance to visit or even someday send their own children to Buckingham Friends School will be pleased with where the institution is headed.

"The school is experiencing an exciting period in its long history," he says. "We wanted our spaces to continue to support a culture of innovation while maintaining our commitment to the roots of a Friends education. Our mission is very clear about the individual promise of each learner, but also recognizing its public purpose and the importance of community and core values today." ■

➔ Buckingham Friends School

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