

## FREDERICA ACADEMY BOARD OF VISITORS MEETING

September 24, 2021

Frederica Academy is flourishing on multiple fronts, and I am so glad that we are all here together not only for this morning retreat, but for this larger chapter in the school's history... to enjoy this time and continue to build on the positive trends that we now see and feel emerging at the school. Again, thank you for your continuing interest in, and support of, the school.



The brand that we have been working to solidify the last couple of years and even before that is gaining traction both internally and externally. It does take a few years to provide with consistency the experience day-in and day-out in order to establish definitively a brand, and then a few more years to begin to strengthen and harness that brand into a reputation that people can rely on and trust. My sense is that FA is beginning to move down that pathway.

In most every metric that matters to me, the school is trending upwards. You will hear and see an abundance of data in the next hour from Helen Rentz, John Pope, Sandi Channell, and Laura Nevins, and all of that is critical in understanding where the school is positioned to date. But beyond those figures, some of the other criteria that we judge ourselves by every day are: parent/customer satisfaction, student academic achievement and character development, faculty and staff quality of work life and fulfillment, college placement in "best fit" colleges and universities, student happiness and pride in their school, financial strength and stability, our ability to plan and prepare for the future, and a culture that increasingly recognizes and values a best effort and compassion. In all those ways, by all those measures, my sense is that we are faring well and again moving in the right direction.

As importantly, we continue to refine who we are, the kinds of services and experiences that we can effectively provide, and how best to deliver those services and experiences. We continue to better understand who our customers are and who they might be in the future. We are still eager to improve and have the energy and thoughtfulness to follow through on that eagerness.

We are certainly not without challenges, both internally and externally, but importantly between the school leaders, the faculty and staff, the parents and the students, and other friends of the school, we have the collective talent, wisdom, and experience to address those challenges. We now have 330 families at the school; 450 students, over 700 parents and approaching 100 faculty and staff. That's a lot of opinions and differing needs for people highly vested in the institution and their children; and hearing and responding to those needs and harnessing those opinions toward a single destination can, on occasion, be a challenge, and we are working on that even as we meet.

As I mentioned a moment ago, you are going to hear updates from Helen, John, Sandi, and Laura, and I think those will be very helpful as you get up to speed as to the present status of the school.

I am going to spend my last few minutes in front of you this morning sharing the three factors that I believe have recently contributed the most to the present position of FA today.

Operating a school can be a complicated business, and there are certainly multiple facets within the institution that need to be both high functioning as well as aligned to create and sustain a healthy school day-in and day-out, year-in and year-out. Offering the most meaningful and relevant programs; securing, supporting, and retaining the best teachers; providing sufficient facilities to support and inspire students; creating a culture that prizes ambition, compassion, and respect for others are all but a few of the elements that contribute to a successful school.

But if you asked me to identify the three most significant impactors in FA's recent successes, I would say, hands down, it is the work of the Leadership Team, the work of the Board of Trustees, and the loyalty and advocacy of the parents.

The Leadership Team has had the most positive and significant impact of all of the factors that have contributed to any successes that the school has experienced of late. Each individual member of the team is extremely well qualified for his/her respective job, and we continue to develop synergy as a group as we work together and build a shared history as a team. The competence and stability of this group have proven the foundational lynchpin for much of what we have accomplished at school these last years.

In my mind, I divide the team up into three distinct segments, although they intermix at every meeting and in almost every conversation and function entirely in a holistic, connected manner. Mike Temple, Laura Nevins, Leigh Toomey, and Becky Pruitt are the educational leaders of the school - plain and simple. These four administer the daily operations within their divisions including hiring, supporting, and evaluating the teachers; developing the curriculum; impacting student culture and quality of life; communicating with students and parents within their respective divisions, and heading parent relations. I am so sorry that you will not have the opportunity to meet Mike, Leigh, and Becky this morning - a treat for another time; but you will momentarily meet Laura in the context of her role as the college counselor.

Helen, John, and Sandi provide the bulk of the indispensable support to those first four so that they can focus on the core business of the school...educating children. Helen in Admissions, John in Advancement, and Sandi in Finance and Personnel are an incredibly impressive trio with long and deep ties to the school and an abundance of knowledge and good judgement that for years now have paid massive dividends for the school. Their job descriptions in reality are a bit more encompassing than I am describing here, and their individual and corporate contributions to the past, present, and future operations of the school cannot be overstated.

The other two members of the Leadership Team are the department heads of two of the larger and more visible departments on campus - athletics and fine arts; Carl Nash in athletics and Dr. Tess Nielsen in Fine Arts. Both are indefatigable supporters of the students practicing and performing within their departments who are incredibly generous sharing their expertise and time with the students in their charge.

It is the continuity and stability of leadership at the Board level especially including the Board Chair, Greer Brown; their discipline to focus on best practices of governance while resisting the temptation to enter operations; and their generosity, willingness, and availability to provide thoughtful counsel when solicited by the Head of School that have made and continue to make a significant, positive difference at Frederica. Having a primarily present-parent Board can present challenges as Board members can find themselves torn between advocacy for their individual children and what is in the best interest of the larger school community. Our Board continues to do an admirable job of wrestling with that potential conflict and, to date, the best interest of the

larger school unfailingly remains the focus of their attention. That present-parent dynamic can also offer a huge advantage as our Board is deeply invested and engaged in the life and welfare of the school, and that passion has proven an immeasurable asset.

As you heard me mention a minute ago, there are about 330 families now at FA - many of whom are new in the last three years, but many who have significant time and resources invested in the school over a much longer period. The deep loyalty and allegiance to the school; the appreciation for all that the teachers do and the trust that they afford them; the constructive, critical eye for providing feedback to help us realize our best selves, and the incredible volunteer support and generosity directed towards the school have all enabled FA to achieve our present posture and played a major role in galvanizing our school's culture today.