VIRGINIA BEACH FRIENDS SCHOOL

Knowledge. Character. Community.

Head of School Report
September 2021

Overall Summary:
School is in session! The first day of school has successful passed and now we found ourselves happily in September. The opening weeks of school have been highlighted by excited students eager to learn, happier parents welcoming schedules back to their lives, and amazing Friends School teachers creating magic in the classroom.

While the school year is off to a great start, VBFS quickly felt the impact of COVID-19. On the second day of classes, the school had to quarantine the Prekindergarten classroom due to a positive COVID case in the parent community. The PreK classroom quickly rolled into its virtual curriculum and returned to class on September 8 after its quarantine period was over. Since this opening school COVID exposure, the school has updated its COVID protocols in its efforts to protect all community members. In summary, VBFS has now instituted daily temperature checks for Cottage through 8th grade students before entering any school building each morning. The school has decided that if a student or employee tests positive for COVID-19, and the student or employee was indoors with others during the transmission time frame, regardless of universal mask wearing, non-vaccinated students and employees will be required to quarantine.

Thankfully, while beginning the school year with a COVID-19 situation was not ideal, VBFS has been fortunate during the totality of the pandemic regarding overall quarantine situations. The school's recent quarantine was only the fourth such event since the VBFS program restarted in June of 2020 after quarantine restrictions were lifted for all schools. VBFS is not alone as several local independent schools also had to quarantine classes in the opening days of classes.

The hiccups caused by COVID have not slowed down or changed any school calendar events, to date. On Thursday, September 2 VBFS hosted its Back-to-School Night via Zoom. This event was originally scheduled to be an in-person masked wearing event for parents. However, out of an abundance of caution, the school moved it to a virtual event like last school year's Zoom Back-to-School Night. The evening was highly successful with strong parent turn-out across divisions. The next major school event is the Back-to-School Community Picnic schedule for Thursday, September 23 from 5:00 to 7:00 pm. This event will be held at Bayville Park right next to the playground, Shelter #2. Off-site locations give the school more COVID flexibility.

Overall, the tone and tenor to the early days of school has been wonderful. Despite COVID-19, faculty, students, and parents all seem grateful to be back at school and learning in-person. Certainly, there will be ups and downs to the school year, as to be expected. However, if the early days of school are any indication of what the next ten months of school will look like, VBFS is store for a terrific school year.

Admissions and Social Outreach Update:

Enrollment by the Numbers

For August…

- VBFS had 59 inquiries, slightly more than July.
- The school hosted 10 tours in August, 9 less than July.
- August saw 17 completed applications with 16 accepted and enrolled students. Two students were rejected.

Currently, VBFS has 155 students enrolled with a waitlist in kindergarten and 3/4 the grade. Due to changes to our COVID policies with requiring masks indoors for ages two and up, VBFS lost three families.

From November 2020 to August 2021, *the school has had…*

- 530 inquiries
- 150 tours
- 90 completed applications
- 67 new students as of 8/16/21
- 80 returning students
- 155 students enrolled as of 9/09/21
- Waitlist for Pre-Kindergarten, Kindergarten, Third and Fourth Grade

Looking to the future, the biggest hurdle facing the school regarding enrollment is attrition and controlling this number.

In 2020-21 the school lost 36% of student population and 41% in 2021-2022. These losses, in many ways, can be attributed to the constant flux the school has seen over the previous three years (enrollment losses from 2015-2018, retiring the Upper School, selling the land, and the return of *some students back to public school after the first full year of COVID in 2020-21)*.

For 2021-2022, 36 went to another school (over half of these went back to public school), 12 moved, and 7 were dismissed for poor fit.

- The goal for attrition this year is no more than 49 students, which is 33% attrition.
- Ultimately, VBFS wants the attrition rate below 20%, like other independent schools its size.
- For 2022-2021, the school is currently projecting 174 students, with 109 returning students and 65 new students.
- For 2020-2021, we increased enrollment enough to have two 1st/2nd classrooms added.
- For 2021-2022, we increased enrollment enough to add a standalone Early Kindergarten program.
- For 2022-2023, the projection hope is to increase enrollment enough to add 5 extra students in Early Kindergarten, going from 10 to 15 students, and adding a second teacher, and a second Third/Fourth Grade classroom.

- In 3 years, we went from 71 students in July 2018, to 147 students as of 8/16

Academics:

Curriculum

The start of school has been a busy time for Sandra Fink and academic life at VBFS. Sandra spent a large portion of her summer building the individual academic schedules for all Friends School students. This is no small task for any school. However, at VBFS, due to our mixed-age classrooms that are sometimes mixed but other times not, schedule building is even harder. For example, all 3rd and 4th grade students meet for Social Studies, S.T.E.A.M, P.E., Art, and Music. However, for math, Spanish, and language arts, these students meet on their own individual grade levels. Therefore, at VBFS we say, "We are mixed-age where it makes sense and on grade level where it makes sense." This same scheduling issue is addressed for all elementary and middle school classrooms that are mixed-age.

Sandra has also been busy working with teachers to make sure all classrooms' technology needs are met, updated, and ready to go in the event classrooms need to quarantine due to COVID-19. The school had its first classroom quarantine due to COVID-19 on the second day of classes. Luckily, because of Sandra's quick work, the classroom teacher's preparedness, and parent flexibility, students didn't miss a beat during their remoted study.

Sandra has also been making sure the school's classroom technology platforms - Seesaw for Early Childhood through 2nd grade, SchoolCues for 1st through 4th grade, and Jupiter for 5th through 8th grade are all updated and working as they should be.

Faculty Enrollment Support

Faculty enrollment committees led by Sandra Fink continue to regularly interview prospective Friends School students. These interviews are multi-layered that see various faculty members reviewing applicant's admissions folders prior to an enrollment decision being made. Academic assessments given by either the classroom teacher of the grade being applied to, or by Sandra Fink as Academic Dean, are part of all Kindergarten through 8th grade admissions decisions.

Zoom Back-to-School Night

The VBFS Zoom Back-to-School Night was well attended on all levels. Teachers did a wonderful job engaging parents virtually. Nothing can replace in-person parent/teacher meetings. However, the VBFS faculty have mastered making connections with parents via Zoom.

Development, this summer:

Anna Canada, VBFS Development Director, has been hard at work. Below, Anna highlights her past, current, and future initiatives.

August Development

PAST

- Completed and created a Back-to-School newsletter for Meeting members called, "The Loop." We plan to do an issue bimonthly to strengthen communication with Meeting.
- Completed and created a newsletter for alumni called, "The Loop" featuring an alumni spotlight article on Cameron How. Updated the alumni email list, adding 150 new contacts. The newsletter

will be posted to the alumni page on the website and was shared on the Virginia Beach Friends School Alumni Facebook page.
- Drafted a development letter to be sent out that explains the annual fund and importance of monetary contributions and volunteerism at the school. Also, created an annual fund trifold to accompany the letter that is going home with each student on Wednesday 9/8.
- Submitted a grant application/packet for the Mary Morton Parsons Foundation.
- Attended the SC Retreat with a focus on the upcoming strategic plan for the school.
- Continued to expand our presence on social media outlets by posting frequently on Instagram and Facebook. We currently have 882 followers (+3.2%), have reached 3,770 accounts within the last month (+313%), and have had 824 content interactions (+86% in the last month) on Instagram. We've had 20+ new members join the VB Friends School Parents group on Facebook.

CURRENT

- Working with Daniella & Brian Bigda of Ella J. Designs (the school's back-end tech team) to develop a "News" section on the website. This will be a huge addition to the site adding a plethora of content for SEO (Search Engine Optimization) purposes, and it will be a home base for our community members to discover news on school wide activities and happenings.
- Will continue to increase activity on social media with reporting on improvements and interactions.
- Working on plans for the Back-to-School Picnic that will be held on 9/23. We are hosting the event off campus, and this will be a simple community building event. We are looking to host the event at a reserved shelter in an outdoor location at Bayville Park.
- Working on plans for the Boo-Fest which will be our first big fundraising event of the year to support the annual fund. The event will be held outside on campus on the evening of 10/16. This will be a fall/Halloween themed event with a fundraising goal of $30k.
- Assisting in the pre-construction process in any way.

FUTURE

- The focus over the next many months will be on the capital campaign. Continue meeting with capital campaign committee members and potential lead gift donors, continue to work within Wealth Engine to discover prospects for the mid-level donations.
- Planning for Back-to-School Picnic and Annual Fund kickoff.
- Work on the school's strategic plan that was discussed at the SC Retreat.

Buildings and Grounds:

Playground Update

The playground is finished, and the entire student and parent population love it!

Campus Wide

Danny Grondin continues to improve the campus on multiple fronts. Currently, Danny is replacing and updating all picnic benches on school grounds. Multiple outdoor seating areas of been created for all ages to promote outdoor learning spaces along with an effort to mitigate COVID-19. Danny is also working on re-painting the parking lines on the entry road into the school, along with filling in potholes. As we roll into the fall, Danny will be working on screening in the back porch of the Cottage and creating a new Crisis Management Plan for the school community.

Masterplan and New Ballard Building Update

On September 1, the school submitted a modification to its Conditional Use Permit through the school's Land Use attorney, Bryan Plumlee, and WPL Landscape Design. The school now waits until November 10 for it to be reviewed by the Planning Commission. If this review goes well, the modification to the CUP will go before the City Council for final approval in mid-December.

Triangle Property

Bert Poole continues to research the complexities of the Triangle property. The school is still waiting for Bert's legal opinion on what the best path forward for transition of this land to the Meeting.

Counseling, Service, and Diversity

School Counseling

Dee Talbert's focus in the opening weeks of school has been to make sure all students make a smooth transition back to school. Dee's focus in August and early September has been on…

- Ensuring all PEP's (Personalized Education Plans) for students with learning differences are complete.
- Making sure copies of a PEP's are Provided to the Learning Specialist and Academic Dean for review.
- Dee has been working with the Learning Specialist to schedule appointments with parents to review each student's plan. She has also reached out to other new parents discuss students educational background where needed.
- Dee also met with all faculty members to present and discuss all PEP's to ensure the faculty is aware of needs of each student.

Diversity

Dee continues to do excellent work as the school's Diversity Director. During the late August faulty work week, Dee conducted diversity training for all faculty members. During these meetings, she discussed the importance and the goal of developing an Anti-bias curriculum for all age groups. At this time, Dee encouraged each department to look at their current curriculum to determine how and what are the best ways to address issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

In the school's efforts to eliminate gender bias and respecting pronouns, the school has added pronoun choice to all applications. The administrative team will also be discussing eliminating gender terms from sports teams. As an example, instead of girls or boys basketball teams – simply saying, basketball team.

Finally, the school continues to work towards becoming more inclusive environment and hopefully attracting a more diverse population in an ongoing project.

Special Programing:

Summer Camp

Candice and Jason Weast will be meeting the week of September 9 to thoroughly go through an overview of summer camp from this past year looking at what did and did not work. Jason is also planning to follow-up with each of the lead teachers from our summer camp program(s) to get their input about what worked and did not work from this past summer.

Extended Care

Extended Care has been operating as expected since the start of school. The school is still looking to fill some gaps in staffing with regards to the different sections of extended care for the remainder of the year. We are aiming to have the gaps for the first quarter filled by the end of the week of September 17.

Co-Curricular Program(s)

The school is currently working on establishing the details of the 2021/22 co-curricular. Our hope is to be ready to start registration by September 20 with a potential start date for programs by September 27. We are hoping to have the following classes ready for September 27:

1. STEM Club (Pre-K & Kindergarten)
2. Art Club (1st – 4th)
3. Girls on the Run / Run Club (3rd – 8th)

The following clubs are in the design phase and have not yet been confirmed:

1. Builders Club
2. International Fun Club
3. Forensics Club
4. Drama Club
5. Gaming Club (Minecraft just for now)
6. Yearbook Club
7. Lego Club

Athletics

Currently, the MS student body has been surveyed for athletics and the school has a potential list of sports teams to proceed forward with at this time.

1. Basketball
2. Volleyball
3. Golf
4. Soccer

The follow sports are potential sports teams that administration feels could potentially be a good fit for the school, but does not have the generated interest yet from the student body:

1. Tennis
2. Bowling
3. Swimming
4. Cross-Country

Based off the above list, the school would like to be able to mirror these programs in the lower school level as co-curricular clubs. This will help the school maintain interest in these sports once students come of age to participate in our middle school sports program.