



SAINT ANN'S SCHOOL

Vincent Tompkins
Head of School

*Whate'er is well conceived is clearly said,
And the words to say it flow with ease.
—Nicolas Boileau-Despreaux*

“The Words to Say It”: Diversity and Inclusion at Saint Ann’s

Education is the process of making sense of the unknown and integrating it into our experience. It is the encounter with the traditions of one’s culture, or of other cultures, and from that encounter shaping a world view. It is “I” and “thou,” “we” and “they.” It is the acquisition of languages, signs, symbols and tools that enable us to describe and create reality, to converse with one another, to understand a people far distant in time or space, to make something beautiful. It is a celebration of our shared humanity. It is a sacred trust, the deepest impulse and first prerequisite of which is love.

Diversity is essential to every aspect of an education thus conceived because a school that embraces differences of race, class, religion, gender, and sexuality is more likely to create the richest possible environment in which education as I have described it can occur. When a student’s sense of self evolves in a diverse context, powerfully important habits of mind—openness, flexibility, artistic creativity, empathy—are formed that homogeneous environments do not readily awaken. Particularly at Saint Ann’s, where the role of the teacher is critical but the encouragement to students to learn from their peers is constant and essential, diversity stimulates critical thinking, challenges inherited assumptions, and requires of students and teachers alike the effort to see and understand the world from perspectives that do not mirror their own. Diversity in who we are and what we teach is a testament to our belief that talent and excellence—in the students we admit and the faculty and staff we hire—should be sought not within the narrow confines of certain neighborhoods or zip codes or pedigrees but with the broadest possible scope. We seek deliberately to embrace the variety of experiences and perspectives that the city around us offers us as we construct the symposium that is Saint Ann’s.

During the eight years that I have been head of school at Saint Ann’s, I have made diversity a central focus. Through our hiring, admissions, and teaching we are making this extraordinary school a more inclusive and equitable community of teachers and learners. While the national climate of 2018—in which the vision of the United States as a pluralistic democracy is under assault—lends urgency to our work, it is work that is vital to our school regardless of whatever political winds may swirl around us. This document is not a road map but instead describes the destination toward which our school is traveling and the principles that will guide our journey.



The mission of Saint Ann's today is to offer—to those brave enough to want it and privileged enough to have access to it—education in a different key, oriented away from competition and toward curiosity; away from relationships based solely on the authority of adults over children and towards the enticements of a shared intellectual journey on which travelers are sustained by books, plays, experiments, proofs, dances and songs. Our school turns away from education as mere preparation—for adulthood, college, career—and turns toward the fierce embrace of the *now*. We are a patient school, seeking to have a transformative influence on the young people we teach, one that is fully realized in the lives they choose to lead and the manner in which they lead them.

In our students, teachers, and administrators we seek out similar traits: a lively mind, an openness to learning from others, a multiplicity of extraordinary voices, talents, and interests. Children possessing these traits are to be found in every possible circumstance, in every community within our city. In shaping our school we believe that differences of aptitude—in one child preternatural dexterity on the violin, in another precocious ability to decode a novel, in a third the ability to create marvels with a brush and canvas—make for the richest possible learning environment. We celebrate each child's attributes—talented musician, gifted reader, remarkable artist—while encouraging all of our students to believe that they can excel in myriad pursuits. We should think of identity in fundamentally the same way.

The work we are engaged in and the changes we hope to achieve point us toward a destination that should be both deeply familiar to those who have devoted their lives to Saint Ann's and thrilling to those who share the belief that we can be a more inclusive and equitable institution. We are a school that continues to shape a student body that is as racially, artistically, socio-economically, and politically diverse as the city around us. And so we should be:

A school that seeks out teachers whose capacious intellects, vibrancy, and varied backgrounds and experiences will create the liveliest of symposia.

A school that confronts intolerance but that never thinks “toleration” is an end in itself.

A school that grants the widest possible latitude to freedom of thought and expression so long as every member of the community is treated respectfully and equitably. We will remain wary of orthodoxies that stifle the open exchange of ideas and expression that are essential in every single classroom at Saint Ann's.

A school that deconstructs norms—whether of race or class or other identifiers—that embrace some members of the community but not others.

A school where students can discover and reinvent themselves in a multitude of ways, gathering in an art studio one day as artists, the next in the theater as actors, the next in a laboratory as chemists, and the next at a high school Friday Meeting as students of color or white students to share in that context how their racial identity has shaped their sense of self, their consciousness, their experience in the school and in the world.



A school where the risks and tensions that conversations about identity entail are openly acknowledged and confronted, where categories of identity are not essentialized but are nevertheless respected, so that each of us has the freedom to construct our own sense of self and determine how we wish to move through the world.

A school where our curriculum reflects three things: the richness of human experience and expression; the idiosyncratic choices of the teachers we select to share their knowledge, expertise and passion; and the commitment we make to see every child flourish. The first of these characteristics signals our enduring commitment to subjects and skills that further the humanistic project at the heart of a Saint Ann's education. We embrace idiosyncrasy and teacher autonomy not as ends in themselves but as the surest means to inspired teaching. And in inspired teaching we see the greatest hope to ensuring that every child flourishes.

A school whose teachers find in the material they select something that speaks to their own interests and passions while striving to create within every classroom an atmosphere in which a multiplicity of voices, views, and experiences are celebrated.

A school where we continue to ask whether the topics, methods and texts being chosen offer students from all backgrounds the same rich engagement and whether the experience or culture of certain groups is privileged over others.

A school that equips students with the emotional maturity and fluency they need to engage openly and knowledgeably in meaningful conversations about group identities and the role they play in our lives, our society, and our school. All of our students should possess in this realm the same fluency they demonstrate when discussing a Shakespeare play, a Toni Morrison novel, the origins of the Civil War, or Euclidean geometry. We cannot expect them fully to profit from the diverse learning environment we create here unless our "fierce pursuit of knowledge, skill and artistry" embraces the full humanity of each member of our community. Success in this task enables them to avoid the traps of unconscious bias and bequeaths to them the emotional and intellectual tools they will need to change a world in which tribalism, institutional racism, homophobia, misogyny and ignorance still flourish.

We are already on our way to becoming the school I have described. The routes to continue the journey are already under construction: in individual classrooms; in Friday Meetings in the high school and community lunch in the Middle School; in more extensive searches when we have openings for faculty and staff; and in new forms of outreach in our admissions process.

The work of the coming years is to be sure that those and other avenues are extended, that their direction is clear, and that they do not deviate from our enduring principles as a school. Our journey is an adventure of our own creation, and we will endeavor to pursue it with joy and with purpose.

Love,