

NEVERTHELESS,
Our Sisters' School at 15
SHE PERSISTED



OUR STORY



“Nevertheless, she persisted.”

This is the story of Our Sisters’ School, from an idea in 2006 to a school celebrating its 15th anniversary with 69 students and 163 graduates.

The story belongs to a community of supporters, board members, staff, faculty, volunteers, and families who come together believing in the promise and the power of an all-girls education.

It is the story of our students – courageous and confident, who take on the challenges of a robust curriculum. They are sister sailors embarking on a life-changing educational voyage.

This book is dedicated to all of you who make this journey possible. Nevertheless, you persisted...

DEDICATION

MEMORIES FROM FOUNDING TRUSTEES

“When we had the ribbon cutting, Mayor Scott Lang said, ‘This is a wonderful opportunity. This is a great school. Any time you are in City Hall, come in and see me...’ Soon after that, I said [to the students] ‘What’s an education? The ability to ask a better question. If you go in and talk with the mayor, he’s like you, he’s busy. Don’t ask him a stupid question. Think of something that’s interesting to him. That will bring him out.’”

Toby Baker



“I’m so impressed with the parents, particularly in the beginning, that they took the risk to send their child to OSS.” **Chrissie Bascom**

“The initial group pulled together all sorts of people from different walks of life and different experiences, which was really valuable.” **Gaelen Canning**

“Being involved with the startup of the School is one of the most rewarding experiences in my professional life.” **Kate Dabney**

“I became involved with OSS after meeting with like-minded women who were committed to quality education for girls in our community, especially low-income girls and girls of color. OSS provides access and opportunity for girls and their families to have a well-rounded education in a safe, secure and supportive environment that assists them in achieving their goals.” **Gail Fortes**

“I know the impact that OSS has on the girls. I feel an obligation that wherever I go, that everybody gets to learn about the School.” **Helena DaSilva Hughes**



September 2008

“I believe in the extraordinary value of creating a middle school for girls in New Bedford. The gang who led the way was so committed. I was happy to follow!” **Beppie Huidekoper**

“We were almost trying to find a reason why we shouldn’t do it. But we kept coming up with reasons why it made sense.” **Doreen Lopes**

“Something I really love about OSS is that everyone holds the kids to high expectations.” **Joan O’Brien**

“You can’t not be involved once you hear the story.” **Bill Prescott**

“I told parents, ‘How cool is it to be really firsthand involved with your child’s education – where you can truly see what’s going on and how you can be the best advocate for your child?’ I said, ‘Trust me.’” **Bernadette Souza**

“The inception of the School was about relationships – if you believe in the universe putting people together intentionally, at the right time, in the right place.” **JoAnn Tschaen**

THE BEGINNING



Left to right: OSS Founders Toby Baker, Lisa Schmid Alvord, JoAnn Tschaen, Doreen Lopes

“*Never would I have imagined where the journey would take me when fate, working double time, led Toby Baker to introduce me to JoAnn Tschaen and Doreen Lopes in 2006. All of us shared a compelling desire to bring a much-needed opportunity to New Bedford’s girls. We formed the nucleus of what quickly became a large coalition of like-minded people who believe in our mission, in themselves, and in each other. I am so grateful to all the early supporters – they have made OSS possible. I’m also grateful to all those who have followed as they turn the School’s promise into reality every single day.*” **Lisa Schmid Alvord**

Our mission, as an independent, tuition-free, non-sectarian middle school, is to educate and inspire economically disadvantaged girls from the New Bedford area. Our Sisters’ School empowers students to step into the future with valuable life skills and a mindset of achievement and excellence by providing a safe, supportive and academically challenging environment.



“It was just a phenomenal experience to work with people who truly had their hearts on their sleeves every single day and put in unbelievable dedication and passion to the work in front of us.” **Lisa (Yates) Mattison, Founding Head of School**

The Standard-Times
SERVING THE SOUTHEAST COMMUNITY
SouthCoastToday.com
TUESDAY, March 25, 2008
New Bedford, Mass. Hometown Edition

Lease launches Our Sisters' School of New Bedford

By DON CUDDY
Standard-Times staff writer

NEW BEDFORD — With the stroke of a pen, a new school came into being in the city on Monday afternoon. Our Sisters' School of New Bedford, a private, tuition-free middle school for girls, will open its doors in September after its board of directors signed an agreement to lease space from the Tifereth Israel Congregation on Brownell Avenue, across from Baitonwood Park. The site includes classrooms, offices, a multi-purpose room and athletic fields.

"I'm very happy that this day came to be. The energy that you have brought into this building bodes well for the future of both institutions," Rabbi Raphael Kanner told those who had gathered for the official signing ceremony, which featured representatives from each party. "I think we've established an opportunity for both to flourish."

"We welcome you with open arms and we hope this is going to be a wonderful marriage," Barbara Samuels, president of the Tifereth Israel Congregation, told her guests as glasses were raised to toast the future of the cooperative venture.

As an independent single-sex school, Our Sisters' School is not eligible for a number of state and federal programs. The new school is funded exclusively by private donations, according to board member William Prescott, retired headmaster of the Wheeler School in Providence, and will seek additional support from foundations and corporations once it opens its doors.

"We did a major fundraising last summer and fall," said Jon O'Brien, chairman of the facilities committee for Our Sisters' School.

"We were able to raise over \$1.5 million to get this project going and now we have signed a five-year lease on this facility with an option to renew for five."

After renovation work is completed this summer, the school will occupy office space prior to its official opening in the fall.

"When we open our doors, 30 girls will come here and a whole new world will open up for them," said Lisa Schmid Alvard, president of the board and a founding member of the school. "It was an idea that three of us had, myself, Doreen Lopes and JoAnn Clarke. Then a great group got involved and we had this synergy from New Bedford and the area around it."

The name for the school derives from the city's maritime history. Whaling captain's wives were once known as "sister sailors" and equating the launch of a new school with an ocean voyage seemed appropriate to the board, Mr. Prescott said.

Leasing classroom space for the school will allow the use of available funds for programs and curriculum rather than making large capital outlays for facilities, said Lisa Yates, executive director of the school.

"It was important for us to get the school up and running and to prove ourselves. Taking over a space that is already equipped as classrooms will allow us to meet that objective without spending a great deal of money. It's also a great location in the city," she said.

The school is currently recruiting both teachers and pupils. In lieu of a salary, college graduates who teach at the school will receive room and board, health insurance and a stipend.

Thirty girls will make up the student body in September and 15 more will be added the following year. The school will eventually serve 60 girls in Grades 5-8. Ms. Yates has recently been going around the city, meeting with parents who have expressed interest in having a child attend. Class size will be limited to 15.

"That's critically important," Mr. O'Brien said. "To do this kind of work with kids, you need small classes if you're going to make any headway."

LISA SCHMID ALVORD, president of the board of directors and founding member of Our Sisters' School of New Bedford

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March 25, 2008

The Standard-Times
SERVING THE SOUTHEAST COMMUNITY
SouthCoastToday.com
TUESDAY, December 30, 2008
New Bedford, Mass. Hometown Edition

Pair creates a place where girls can RAISE THEIR HANDS

By BRIAN BOND
Standard-Times staff writer

NEW BEDFORD — Education changes lives and shapes the future. This is a belief Lisa Schmid Alvard and Lisa Yates share. Their interest in education has taken different forms, but they have come together to help create a tuition-free private school for girls.

Ms. Alvard is president of Our Sisters' School, an all-girls school for fifth- and sixth-graders that opened in September, and Ms. Yates is its executive director.

The school is supported by private donations.

For their efforts in establishing an innovative educational option in the city, they have been named The Standard-Times' 2008 New Bedford Women of the Year. Nominations for the award came from the community and members of the newspaper staff. Recipients were selected by a newsroom committee.

"I think education is the most transformative aspect in a child's life. It is the basis for everything... Currently, 26 students attend the school, located at 145 Brownell Ave. Looking ahead, Our Sisters' will add a seventh grade next year and an eighth grade the year after next. The school ultimately will have 60 students. The name of the school refers to "sister sailors," a name for wives who joined their sailor husbands on long journeys.

She said she always wanted to be in education, and that she was drawn to the field because it is a long-term investment and a way to affect the future.

"New Bedford's young people have so much to offer each other, their community and the world at large, and providing opportunities for them to do so, and to be active citizens and shapers of the future, is really exciting," she said.

More than two years ago, Ms. Alvard conceived of the school with JoAnn Clarke, executive director of Trips for Kids, and Doreen Lopes, executive director of Nativity Prep School of New Bedford, an all-boys school that served as a model for Our Sisters'. Ms. Alvard credited Ms. Yates with helping turn the idea into a reality.

"I've never seen them down," said Toby Baker, a member of the board of directors, of Ms. Alvard and Ms. Yates. "They're always enthusiastic."

Empowering girls can benefit the whole community.

"When you educate a girl, you not only educate a girl, but you educate her family, and in turn, you end up educating the community, and it has this ripple effect by educating this one girl," Ms. Alvard said, borrowing from oft-spoken sentiment.

The Women of the Year attributed the school's success to the hard work of staff members and the many volunteers supporting the project.

"We really are the tip of an iceberg of just so many people who came together to make this possible, and it's really a wonderful example of community," Ms. Alvard said.

"If you can make sure your educational system is powerful and strong, then you know you're going to help create great citizens and a great country. It is the basis for everything."

LISA SCHMID ALVORD, president of Our Sisters' School

December 30, 2008

Founders discuss creating a school for underserved girls.
Meetings with community members, educators and supporters.
2006

Lisa Yates hired.
OSS incorporates as a nonprofit.
Board of trustees formed; mission statement written.
Building leased from Tifereth Israel Synagogue.
2007

School opens on Sept. 3, with 11 fifth graders and 15 sixth graders.
2008-2009

OSS begins year two adding one more grade.
OSS partners with Trips for Kids (now Y.O.U.).
2009-2010

OSS opens school year with four grades.
The first Class of 2011 graduates.
2010-2011

Advisory Council established.
2011-2012

Sarah Herman arrives as second Head of School.
OSS partners with Community Boating Center.
2013-2014

Each student receives a Chromebook.
2014-2015

STEAM program launches.
Alison Coolidge Boreiko joins Lisa Schmid Alvard as co-president.
2015-2016

OSS adopts first strategic plan, "Empowering Girls."
"Community as Campus" concept introduced.
2016-2017

OSS celebrates 10th anniversary.
Outdoor Classroom opens.
2017-2018

Lisa Schmid Alvard becomes Founding Chair Emerita.
Martha Sullivan joins Alison Coolidge Boreiko as co-president.
Accreditation by AISNE [Association of Independent Schools of New England].
2018-2019

School institutes three months of distance learning due to pandemic.
Greenhouse opens in the Outdoor Classroom.
2019-2020

Creative Suite established, expanding STEAM curriculum.
2021-2022

OSS celebrates 15th anniversary.
Kerry Lynch joins Martha Sullivan as co-president.
2022-2023

"The families had such hopes and dreams for their children. They really wanted their girls to have an experience that was going to put them on a different path and change their lives."

**Lisa (Yates) Mattison,
Founding Head of School**



BUILDING THE FOUNDATION

OSS believes that when we educate a girl, we are educating a family and are helping to lift our community. Since 2008, we have been inspired by the hope of our students and their families who take a chance on us, donors who believe in us, a talented faculty and staff who work tirelessly, and just as vital, a committed team of dedicated volunteers who support us. Together, we are building a joyful and extraordinary school for our students to pursue their dreams and build our community with unfettered aspiration and resilient determination.



Left to right: Gale Schultz, June Pina, Poo White, Priscilla Kennedy



2011-12 AmeriCorps teachers



“When you work that hard, and that passionately on something with people...the relationship that you build with those people is pretty strong.”

Margaret McSweeney, former AmeriCorps (2008-2010) and humanities teacher (2012-2014); current Advancement Associate and Volunteer Coordinator (since 2017)

In the early years, four experienced Lead Teachers – Priscilla Kennedy, June Pina, Gale Schultz and Elizabeth “Poo” White – were instrumental to the success of OSS by guiding and mentoring a team of eight AmeriCorps teachers. As the School grew, the need for experienced teachers became apparent. Today, we have a professional team leading the work and more than 120 volunteers give over 4,000 hours of their time to OSS. They are tutors, nurses, librarians, writers, musicians, filmmakers, administrators and so much more.

POLISHING THE JEWEL

In 2013, OSS welcomed Sarah Herman as the second Head of School. A seasoned educator whose experiences growing up at Interlocken International summer camp informed her belief that a powerful education must inspire curiosity, a desire to explore and an appreciation for failure and reflection.

Recognizing how far the School had come in five years, and acknowledging that there was much more to be done, Sarah described her new role as “*polishing the jewel*.” She introduced the Community Core program – a set of values and ideas that help shape a common understanding of how we live, work, and learn together. OSS believes in building **Community** and developed these four Core Values:

EXCELLENCE

is achieving mastery, one step at a time;

COMMUNITY

is at the heart of why we're here;

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

is lending a hand to do what needs to be done;

LEADERSHIP

is seeing, showing, and paving a better way.



“The founding Board and Lisa [Yates] Mattison were pioneers. With tremendous courage, vision, creativity, and collaborative spirit – they had the daring and the grit to create OSS on a blank page.”
Sarah Herman

COMMUNITY



"The core values have been ingrained into the lives and minds of OSS students and are the values that make a clear distinction between each sister sailor and an average middle-schooler." Ava '16, St. George's '20, Brandeis University

"I am proud to say that I am part of such an inclusive community where I feel safe and can be myself. This inclusivity is the result of the Community Core curriculum, in which all students are challenged and pushed to use the many social and emotional tools and become our best selves. These tools are essential to my growth and time at OSS." Isabelle '17, Loomis Chaffee '21, Boston University

"Before coming to OSS, I thought that school was only about academics, but that changed. I realize now that school is more than academics, it's about relationships and how relationships build a strong and positive community..." Aaliyah '17, Dartmouth HS '21, Bristol Community College

COMMUNITY CORE

Community Core tools are a part of everyday life at OSS, in and out of the classroom. There are 54 tools that the entire school strives to use and practice. Examples such as "Let Go of the Familiar," "Assume Goodwill," and "Be Inclusive," offer everyone a shared language and frame of reference to inspire, persevere, and grow. This is how we learn from each other, resolve differences, and work to build a community together on and off campus.



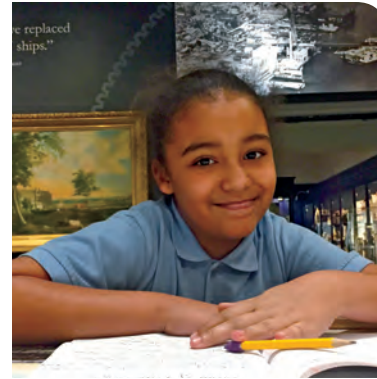
"When you start the 5th grade, you feel like it is just a silly thing that the School made up. But as time goes on, you start to realize that it is a lifestyle, and by the time you get to the 8th grade, you realize that it is like the law of life." Savannah '20, Dartmouth HS

- Samples in the Toolbox:**
- Take Initiative
 - Think Flexibly
 - Overcome Obstacles
 - Value all Ideas
 - Be Reflective
 - Listen to Learn
 - Take Space, Make Space
 - Honor Emotions

COMMUNITY AS CAMPUS

The walls of our school building do not define our learning spaces – we see the whole community as our campus. Experiential education and partnerships with New Bedford’s rich variety of cultural, environmental, and educational groups have greatly expanded and deepened the learning beyond the classrooms.

Our Community as Campus concept offers our students new perspectives of looking at the world, new ways to engage with their city, and set goals for their own futures. Whether they are learning to sail or building model boats, making art for a display downtown, mentoring younger students in STEAM [Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts & Math], volunteering in support of other nonprofits, or speaking at conferences and events, OSS students bring their best selves to every experience – learning while they are giving; giving while they are learning.



“Through sailing, I learned about the importance of clear communication and establishing roles in a team.” **Keeilah '18, Hotchkiss '22, Pomona College**



“The collaboration between our two organizations has allowed the CBC team to grow as educators and expanded our students’ learning potential. The unique opportunity to work with students throughout the school year over four years supports cultivating meaningful relationships. Thirty-six OSS alumni have gone on to participate in our Sailing Instructor Leadership Training program.” **Andy Chin, Assistant Director, Community Boating Center**

“The Outdoor Classroom and greenhouse have dramatically increased the amount of time students spend outside during school hours and increased their interest in nature, the environment and gardening in their own communities.” **Jocelyn Chin, Science Dept. Head and Teacher for Grades 5 & 6, Garden Coordinator**



NATURE

OUTDOOR CLASSROOM

Students, teachers, staff and volunteers read, learn, work and play in the Outdoor Classroom. Until 2018, this beautiful space was just a parking lot with a few pieces of sports equipment. It took the vision of dedicated staff and board members, creative input from students, generosity of foundations and donors, and the efforts of volunteers, students, and their families to bring this project to life.

Initiated by master educator Tobey Eugenio, our Outdoor Classroom provides space for formal instruction and informal learning to enhance and strengthen the OSS experience. Use of this space facilitates students' capacities for innovation, design thinking and compassion for nature. OSS students love what they create in the Outdoor Classroom and greenhouse – from the vegetable and flower gardens to performances and art projects, science experiments, fitness, and unstructured play. It also serves as a location for the extensive OSS summer program.



“...for me personally, I'm both a hands-on and visual learner, so going outside and looking at the plant or drawing it helps me focus and succeed.” **Allison '23**



“I took home the carrots that I grew and my mom didn't believe me that I planted them and picked them.” **Fifth-grade student**



MEETING THE MOMENT

Every day at OSS, our Community Core tools help us practice and teach social and emotional literacy, providing strategies for dealing with adversity and problem-solving. These tools helped us meet the challenge of remote teaching and learning when OSS had to pivot to distance learning in March 2020 due to the pandemic. We built our plan in phases, and kept students stimulated and maintained connections. Our technology infrastructure made it possible for a quick transition to students learning at home.

Remarkably, OSS conducted in-person classes for the first full school year of the pandemic. Many of our volunteers continued with their work – tutoring online or in the Outdoor Classroom, checking in with our students and their families, advising OSS on Covid safety protocols and procedures, conducting mock secondary school interviews via Zoom, doing outreach for enrollment, and a team even cooked for a multi-week Soup-a-Thon providing meals for our students and families. The community came together, and persevered.



“Ayla is highly engaged in all of her classes even though she is fully remote this week. Thank you for helping her keep her love for learning during her first unique year at OSS.” **Val Silva P’20, ’24**

“During this pandemic, when I think of OSS, a few things come to mind: leadership, collaboration, creativity, dedication and teamwork. I believe what Aden has learned in the classroom is serving her very well during remote learning, and more likely will serve her well in life.” **Addis Alemtsehay Ackah P’23**



“We knew we wanted to keep students learning. We wanted to make sure we continued to care for one another, and we didn’t want to lose ground. We figured if we can make sure folks feel supported, stay healthy and learn something, we’ll do a great job. They are valuing their education. They are adapting. That’s what sister sailors do.” **Ariana Wohl, former Academic Dean**

CREATIVE SUITE

OSS students stretch their minds in a space that sparks independence, imagination and growth. The Creative Suite is the STEAM Lab, Think Tank, Art Studio and Media Lab. STEAM is a project-based course that pushes our students to create and design projects that respond to real-world issues. Students delve into computer coding, electricity and circuits, video production and animation, and design thinking and making.

The Creative Suite is a hub for interdisciplinary learning. With its direct connection to students' interests, hearts, and minds, it naturally attracts and advances learning related to every other subject in the School.



"STEAM class has helped me build my thinking skills to solve challenges and problems in our world." **Attyanna '23**

"The skills and mindsets that students learn in the Creative Suite will open up a world of opportunity for them, wherever they go. They'll be able to move through life with the ability, confidence, and drive to recognize, articulate, and solve difficult problems. They'll make this world a better place."

Tobey Eugenio, Creativity Director, STEAM & Art Instructor, Student Council Co-Leader

"STEAM has helped me grow as a person and helps me understand real world problems better. It shows me that there is a way to make things better. I just think it's amazing that I get to practice skills in middle school that will let me make a difference in the future. STEAM to me is more than building, it is something that could build a better future for me and everyone after me." **Daishaly '23**

EQUITY, JUSTICE & BELONGING

Social justice has always been at the heart of our work at OSS. Central to our purpose is teaching and learning for freedom of opportunity and growth. We seek to build a more democratic, equitable, and antiracist school and society.

Students' reading selections, topics of inquiry, artistic expressions, and most importantly, their interaction with the community, empower them to explore identity, responsibility, action, and impact. We aim to create and sustain the best environment possible in which each learner thrives and has access to opportunity, regardless of identity markers. We listen to needs, take action, and hold ourselves accountable while we continuously learn, improve, and celebrate.



Arieannah '21, Greater New Bedford Regional Voc-Tech HS

"I believe in OSS because it provides middle school girls with a supportive environment and an engaging curriculum that allow them to explore their worlds, to develop their voice, to 'find their extraordinary.'" **Alison Coolidge Boreiko, current trustee & former co-president of the board**



"I feel like we've helped students find the beauty in New Bedford and learn to love their city." **Katelyn Rapoza, Math Dept. Head and Teacher for Grades 7 & 8, Student Council Co-Leader**

GRADUATE SUPPORT

The number of our graduates grows steadily, and so has our graduate support program. Our goal is for OSS to be a supportive and encouraging constant – from a warm welcome on a return visit, to guidance on choices and opportunities ahead. Amy Sanders, Director of Secondary School Placement and Graduate Support, says, *"We're not here to shepherd students along a particular path. We're here to support them as they take flight."*



"Amy was such a help to my daughters and to me. She was with us through the highs and lows, like a member of the family." **Kristen Mendes, P '17, '22**

Sankofa Swan Songs Tradition

Each eighth grader shares a farewell with the entire school before graduation. These essays let them pause to contemplate this important moment in their lives. "Sankofa," a Twi word from the Akan tribe of Ghana, means to encourage learning from the past to inform the future, reaching back to move forward. Here are just a few portions that have been shared over the years.

"Being at OSS, I have learned to celebrate the flaws of my peers and most importantly my own. I have learned to create my own happiness and be my own independent person, less of a follower and more of a leader." **Modupeola '19, Dartmouth HS**

"OSS has taught me that mistakes are ok, asking for help is ok and you should be proud to seek help. You are owning up to not knowing, and that's good!!! Realizing that you aren't right teaches you a lot about yourself and what your needs are as a person." **Adrianna '22, New Bedford HS**

"The support I have received is like that really important beam in a building. Without that beam, the building crumbles." **Nishaye '22, Tabor Academy**

"Kindness is something that isn't new to this community, but in a place that has so much of it, it's easy to forget how impactful an act of kindness can be. A note tucked in the corner of my cubby, a hug, an envelope, or just a short conversation when I really needed one." **Amelia '18, Lincoln School '22, Bennington College**

Through 15 years, OSS has simultaneously stayed true to its mission and has constantly challenged itself to become a stronger, braver and more inventive school for underrepresented girls.

Our focus on community has been a hallmark of OSS. New Bedford was, and is, our community and our classroom. We are grateful to our partners who have worked with us to enrich and expand the learning experiences for our students. Today, New Bedford is not only our campus, but also our place of collaboration and connection.


From conception to this anniversary celebration, OSS has been powered by volunteers, a dedicated staff, partners, donors, and a committed board. Together, we all keep the dream alive.

Now, at 15, we celebrate. We are deeply grateful for all who have made this possible and most especially, to our students and graduates who are the heart of OSS. We are proud to be part of your journey. Here's to another 15 years of empowering girls to "find their extraordinary."

Sincerely,



Kerry Lynch
Co-president,
Board of Trustees



Martha Sullivan
Co-president,
Board of Trustees





Our school's name honors the bravery of the women known as "sister sailors" who boldly headed out to sea from New Bedford's harbor during the city's whaling days. Like these women, OSS students courageously embark on a voyage in a challenging academic environment carefully crafted to support them as they discover and achieve their greatest potential, while finding true north on their moral compass.



Our Sisters' School

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www.oursistersschool.org

"Thank you for making my dream come true – watching my granddaughter stand taller, speak louder, and think more independently is a joy."

Paula Monteiro GP '24

"My journey at OSS was like a marathon. You know it'll be long, but then you show up and you're like 'Oh, this is harder than I thought!' Now I'm finishing the final sprint, and as a prize I am handed... myself. The version I wanted to be all along. OSS is like a gem-making machine... and I'm coming out like a diamond!" **Anyis '22, New Bedford HS Academy of Honors**

To learn more about

OSS at 15:

