

VOYAGES



Arieanah '21

the way students can “deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world.” We can’t think of a better way to describe the role of OSS. It also describes the purpose of the Core Values and tools that underpin the lessons learned here—both academically and personally.

“Students can deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world.”

Paulo Freire, Educator

Our students study the impact of themes like Civic Engagement and Courage on history, literature, science and more. They work consciously to develop and practice them. They know that building a better world requires that they bring out their very best selves. And they know that best selves bloom at OSS.

This issue of *Voyages* highlights some of the many ways in which OSS students and community members met a difficult year with courage, creativity, hope and compassion.

Bringing Out Our Best Selves

Middle school is a time of transformation—especially for girls. Its influences either enrich or encumber how girls see themselves as they step out of childhood. Many of us, gender aside, can trace the impact of those critical years through our lives. Many of us also came of age during a time of social change. Yet few of us can compare the pace and nature of that change to what is happening now.

Today’s students are experiencing their own transformation just as the world around them seems to be doing the same. And this struggle for social change is not something they can watch or cheer from the sidelines—they were born into its center. They understand the

stakes in ways that many of us, at their age, did not.

We see that clearly at OSS. Our students came to school this year acutely aware of current events: the pandemic affecting their families; injustice affecting their communities; discord affecting their country; climate change

affecting their planet. They brought a hunger to explore and understand these things, to impact them—not just be impacted by them.

Paulo Freire, an educator whose philosophy informs and inspires much of our work at OSS, conceived of education as

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Creating Change

Our Active Civic Engagement (ACE) unit challenges eighth-graders to make a difference in the world using the tools of STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Math). Though this year's class was also challenged by pandemic restrictions, they completed a range of creative projects appreciated throughout the community.



The Process

The challenge began with students identifying the problems they wanted to solve. Each selected an issue that she cared about—often one that she or a loved one has

faced. Then, students practiced “Research Before Action,” gathering information about those affected by the problem and others already working to address it. With a focus on root causes, students then envisioned and implemented their own inspired, impactful solutions.

Bringing Comfort

Rayn and Aaliyah ran with an idea they'd had since fifth grade. They wanted to help foster children feel more comfortable and supported. Their idea was to provide backpacks filled with fun and personalized items. “These bags are meant to pass the

time while kids wait to be placed,” Aaliyah explained. The girls had further developed the idea for the School's Shark Tank event last year. This year, they brought it to full fruition by distributing 30 backpacks to Child & Family Services. “We reached out to people working in foster care to make sure we gave kids exactly what they needed,” Rayn said. This included puzzles, activity books, toys and blankets. For a personal touch, they wrote notes and named the stuffed animals. In a thank you note, one recipient wrote that the kit “genuinely makes my day a lot better.” Another described loving her new stuffed animal, Brittney, as well as the blanket keeping her warm at night. “I now aspire to do things for others when I leave here and get better,” she wrote. “I hope whoever gave us the backpacks gets kindness in return.”

Raising Awareness

Other eighth-graders dealt with the problem of discrimination. Arieannah, whose passion is art,

wanted to help people in the LGBTQIA+ community and encourage others to be their allies. She created a stunning and colorful poster showing people backed by a rainbow with the words “We are HUMAN” above them. “My project is a combination of art and informative sources,” Arieannah explained. “I made an art piece to draw people in and then put a QR code at the bottom.” Scanning the code leads to a document she wrote about challenges faced by the LGBTQIA+ community. It also links to support resources like a national hotline. Businesses across New Bedford were happy to display the posters. The artwork has been widely shared on social media and was featured at a school Pride Month celebration in June.

Speaking Truth

Kyleah also chose to tackle discrimination. She used the art of storytelling, an approach inspired by her own experience. When she first came to OSS, Kyleah



was reluctant to express herself. However, teachers and classmates provided encouragement and opportunities to speak up and share her voice. “Once I started, I found myself in the habit of doing it again and again,” she said. For her project, Kyleah asked student volunteers to share stories about times they felt hurt or discriminated against based on an aspect of their identity. She compiled their stories into an infographic. The project was designed to combat ignorance by helping people understand what it's like to experience indignities, harassment, and threats. Kyleah also wanted those who experienced discrimination in the past to better understand it in the present. She found that the advice they were able to offer to others was especially powerful.

Loving Ourselves

Lanah focused on improving self-esteem, creating “Embrace You” kits to honor Black and Brown children in our community. “I designed these kits to embrace how important it is to just love yourself and love who you are as a person inside,” she said. Each kit included two anti-racism books, a pack of crayola crayons with shades for a variety of skin colors, a journal, stickers, bracelets, and a small mirror—then they were distributed in the New Bedford community via social media. Throughout the project, Lanah used 4-C skills—critical thinking, collaboration, creative thinking and commu-

nication—such as posting a questionnaire on social media that reached out to those who might benefit. A school volunteer, inspired by Lanah's idea, offered to purchase both books for the kits. “Having other people recognize what students are doing in schools to make a change feels good,” she said.

The Power of Purpose

Anyce began her project with a keen awareness of the isolation that so many have felt throughout the pandemic. Concerned

“...I do my best work when it has a purpose I love or when it is helping someone else,”

Anyce

that the February school break period would be especially difficult, she developed activity kits to help keep OSS students active, safe and happy. They included personalized word searches, puzzles, a workout, and a meditation guide, all of which were accessible both on paper and online. “This taught me that I do my best work when it has a purpose I love or when it is helping someone else,” she said. “I was able to engage the majority of the OSS community in what I worked hard on, which was exciting!”

Making A Difference

Despite the pandemic's restrictions, all of the students completed and enjoyed this year's ACE challenge. “They had stamina because they cared so much about their projects,” said Tobey Eugenio, Creativity Director and STEAM instructor. “They all made a difference, and that's important.”

We Did It! Together!

by Sarah Herman, Head of School



When the pandemic began, learning remotely was our only option. It required titanic effort from people who already worked immensely hard. Yet even at its best, we knew, distance learning just wasn't good enough. When summer arrived, our in-person programs truly offered “a breath of fresh air.” We were so energized to be together, safely, in our Outdoor Classroom. It gave us experience and confidence in our Covid protocols. It deepened our conviction that learning together matters, a lot.

As fall approached, health officials warned about surges. Doubt clawed at our confidence. There was uncertainty and tension, but there was courage and commitment. We resolved to host school in person, with the OSS@Home option, for as long as we possibly could.

Every day together felt precious—we knew it could change at any time! Each evening we'd celebrate the victory of another day when students could bond and learn together, teachers could see and guide them, and parents could go to work. Day after day, students expressed their joy to simply be together in class! *We made it through the entire school year in person, with zero Covid transmission and just a few at-home retreats to keep it that way.*

Looking back, we are grateful and proud. We're grateful for the staff and faculty who put our girls' education first, for students and families who followed protocols without complaint, and for community members who helped us weather this storm in countless ways. **Because of this courage and commitment, our students were able to achieve educational gains at a time of unprecedented challenges.**

This poem by Lalah Delia reminds us of the potential that challenge represents:

*Grapes must be crushed to make wine.
Diamonds form under pressure.
Olives are pressed to release oil.
Seeds grow in darkness.*

*Whenever you feel crushed, under pressure,
pressed or in darkness, you're in a powerful place
of transformation and transmutation.*

Trust the process.

Covid helped us recognize how important it is to be together, to work and learn together. It underscored our Community Core values and tools, bringing out our brave resilience and caring while sharpening our ability to organize and communicate. It showed us what these qualities, along with day-by-day determination, allow us to achieve, together.





Gill Barnard with OSS students.

In for the Count

Several of our volunteers were comfortable enough with the School's safety measures to work right alongside us throughout the year.

Ronny Kimball supports the front office, among other activities. "OSS deserves the highest praise for their response to the pandemic," she said. "Everyone adjusted to the habit of wearing a mask and practicing distance rather quickly."

Joan Dalton tutors and assists with Cooking Club. "The news is full of stories about the stress of learning remotely on students and families, so it has been a ray of sunshine to see the girls in class

and in the halls—happy, engaged, and creating!"

Teresa Mozaz leads our Spanish Club and works with students. "OSS has done a superb job keeping in-person classes while protecting staff and students," she said. "As a volunteer, I love being here and doing anything I can to help students better themselves."

If there's anything more courageous than showing up in the midst of a pandemic, it's choosing this particular school year to start volunteering! **Gillian Barnard** is a new academic

Volunteer Nanci Winterhalter taught a yoga class in the Outdoor Classroom to benefit OSS.

Love's Labor Undaunted

In a normal year, Our Sisters' School has over 150 volunteers. They answer phones, assist visitors, and catalog library books. They tutor and lead clubs. They tell our story and raise funds, recruit students and support graduates. They govern and facilitate our work. Volunteers embody our Core Values as active, engaged community members who make a difference. This past year, understandably, many had to suspend this labor of love. However, more than half continued, finding new ways to offer their time and talents.

Making It Work

"You made it pretty easy to keep volunteering," 13-year veteran **Felicity Hoyt** told us. Like many, Felicity maintained her tutoring schedule by moving it online for the winter months. "I really wanted to be there in person, but it meant so much that I could still meet virtually with my student."

"Thank goodness for Zoom,"

agreed **Laurie Curtis**, a tutor, office volunteer and committee member. Laurie was able to carry out all three roles remotely for much of the school year, returning as soon as she could. "I missed laughing with Blanca and Pam in the office!"

Gale Beaton also has several volunteer roles, and one was uniquely essential this year. Gale is our school nurse! Working remotely, Gale was key to our pandemic response, helping to plan for reopening, track contact cases, communicate protocol and procedures with families, and keep us connected with local services.

Gert Montour, now in her eighties, has been with us for four years. "It was so great to have Gert come into school this year to read with me," her student, Anyce '21, told us. "Even on remote weeks, we texted and checked in. Working with Gert this year improved my STAR scores and I am so grateful for her and her support."



"Kudos to the entire school for being so nimble, resilient, and determined to be 'normal.' That inspired me to keep showing up, week after week."

Linda Fenton

Joan Dalton working with OSS students.



Laurie Curtis

They even packed gift and snack boxes for attendees.

To prepare eighth-graders for school interviews, the Secondary School Support Committee practiced with them virtually and in person outside. "Zoom interviews were more engaging and comfortable," chair **Cece Armstrong** observed. "One-on-one interviews with both parties wearing masks were a challenge!"

And That's Not All

We could fill pages more with examples of volunteer fortitude and commitment! But those who have shown up in person, online, and in spirit know who they are, and so do we! We are indebted to each of them.

With the birth of her third child, Margaret McSweeney is stepping down as Volunteer Coordinator for the upcoming school year. It is a role Margaret will miss. "I have been so inspired by our volunteers, especially by their desire to continue during the pandemic," she wants them to know. "They give so much and ask nothing in return. They truly nourish our community."

coach. "It was a strange year to join the community, however it was also a good year." Gill told us. "It is so encouraging and motivating to see the outstanding support for Our Sisters' School and their families from the local community."

Continuity and Challenge

More than 50 OSS board and committee members leveraged tools like Zoom to keep meeting, but their challenges didn't end there. The pandemic hampered outreach strategies and required entirely new approaches.

"It was truly amazing we were able to hold events," reported Graduate Support Committee chair **Betsy Kellogg**. The team virtually delivered an Attitude of Gratitude event in November and two online Spring Flings.

NEWS FROM SISTER SAILORS

Elena Bartolomey '14 is a rising senior at Bridgewater State University majoring in Marketing and minoring in Women and Gender Studies. She made the Dean's List and applied for summer internships with organizations that focus on professional development of women in business.

London Brum '20 is an honor roll student at Bishop Stang High School, and also holds the title of Miss Massachusetts High School America 2021. She has spoken to dozens of youth groups, including in Cape Verde (with the help of Janie Correia '20), about building respect to encourage a bully-free and safe environment.

Kianna Fonseca '13 just graduated from Emmanuel College. She majored in Sociology with a concentration in Social Justice and Social Inequity. Her sister, **Isabelle '17**, graduated from Loomis Chaffee School and will be studying at Boston University in the fall. Their cousin, Alex '22, is a rising eighth-grader at OSS!

Stanna Freeman '12 works as a certified Surgical Technologist at Mass General Hospital. After graduating from GNB Voc-Tech, she studied at the New England Institute of Technology.

Lynea Gilreath '13 has helped to lead many protests for justice in New Bedford. A spoken word artist and educator with the New Bedford Public Schools, she has been a featured speaker at many events, including the John Lewis tribute.

Keeilah Jewell '18 was selected as an inaugural MacLeish Scholar at The Hotchkiss School where she is a rising senior. She'll visit Yale University this summer, where she will research literary materials in Yale's Special Collections, write creative pieces, and learn through hands-on experience the process of bookbinding, paper making, and letterpress printing.

Melanie Luperon '13 graduated from UMass Dartmouth where she majored in Computer Engineering with a concentration in Cybersecurity. She began working at Dell Technologies in June.

Molly Medeiros '12 works at Capeway Vet in Fairhaven, and will receive her bachelor's degree in Biology from UMass Dartmouth next year. Despite the interruption of Mt. Ida College's closing, she remains focused on her studies and plans to apply to veterinary schools in the U.S. and the Caribbean in 2022.

Trinity Monteiro '13 graduated from UMass Amherst's Isenberg School of Management where she held a leadership position in the Women in Sport Management Club. She is participating in an internship with the NBA this summer!

Jaeliana Ortega '12 studied Data Science and graduated from UMass Dartmouth. She's working full-time at Dell Technologies and has also started her own business, Poppin Treats, a mini dessert and bite-sized treats company. The quarantine hobby has blossomed and Jae was interviewed by the local newspaper and radio station!

Jesley Ortiz '13 studied Electrical Technology at GNB Voc-Tech. To the wonderful surprise of OSS Founding Trustee Bernadette Souza, Jesley showed up for the kitchen installation at the office of Youth Opportunities Unlimited! Jesley is working as an electrician for the City of New Bedford.

Nia Rodrigues '20 and Ava Silva '20 were two of 42 students who represented GNB Voc-Tech to compete in the career and technical areas at the State SkillsUSA Technical and Leadership Conference. They were both awarded bronze medals!



Jesley Ortiz '13

Isabelle Fonseca '17 (second from right) at her graduation from Loomis Chaffee School with her family, including Kianna '13 (center) and cousin Alex '22 (far right)

"OSS taught me to have an open mind and a better growth mindset."

Jay Silva '19, Greater New Bedford Regional Voc-Tech High School '23

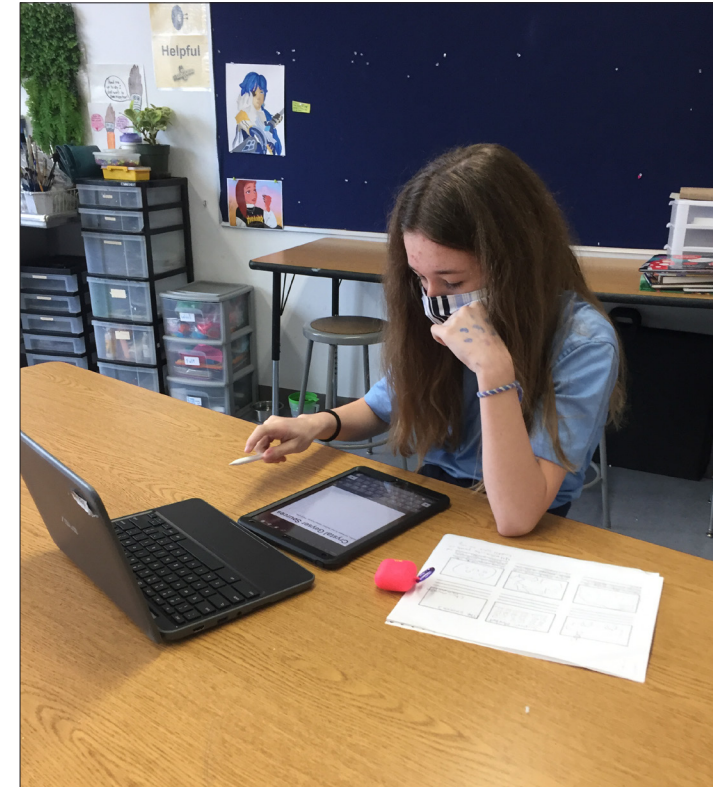
The Classes of 2017 and 2021 will attend:

Boston College
 Boston University
 Bristol Community College
 Clark University
 Dartmouth High School
 Emmanuel College
 Greater New Bedford Regional Voc-Tech High School
 Massachusetts College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences
 Nichols College
 Providence Country Day School
 UMass Amherst
 UMass Boston
 UMass Dartmouth

Graduate Studies:

Krystal Argueta '12— Master's in Social Work, University of Pittsburgh (2021)
Irene Luperon '11— Master's in Global Medicine, University of Southern California (2020)
Tashi Pires '12—MBA, Business Analytics, UMass Dartmouth (2021)
Tampson Tavares '12— Master's in Accounting, UMass Dartmouth (2021)

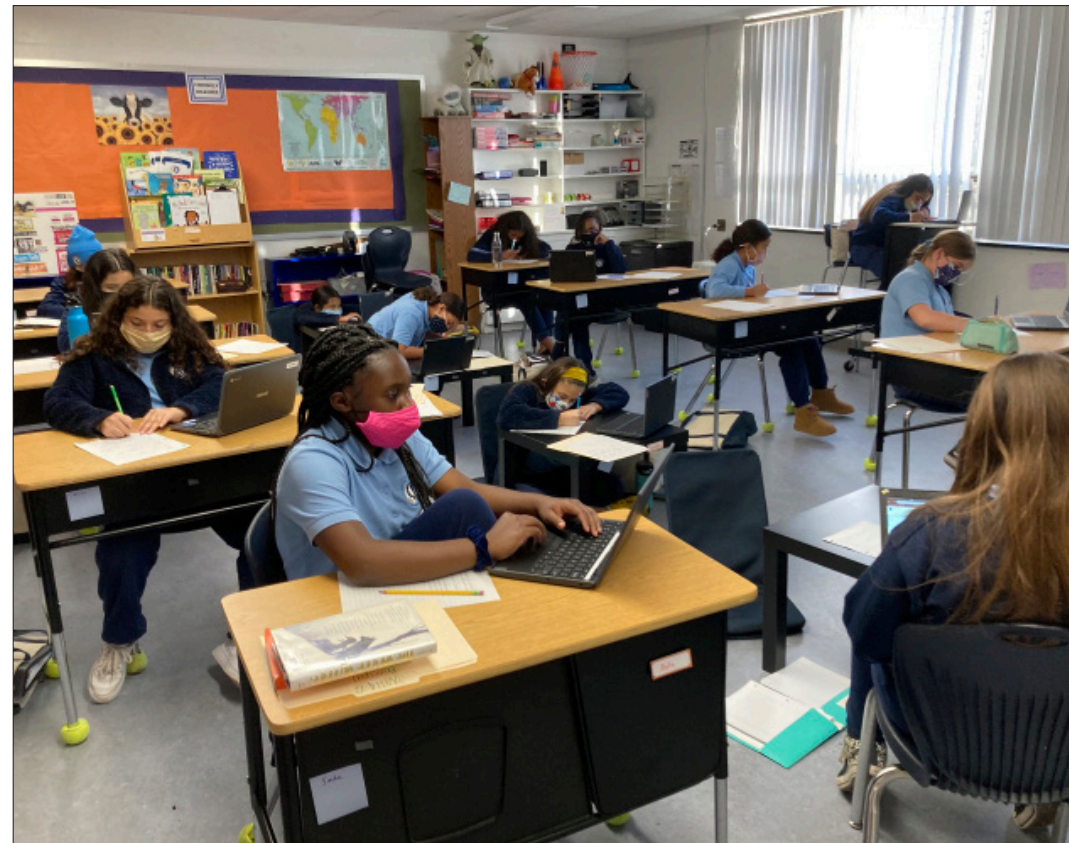
Persevering through Covid at OSS...



A Case Study on Caring and Courage

Some things can be so difficult and yet so simple. Ayla gave a great example in a fifth-grade humanities essay about a 24-hour long family car trip. "My siblings forgot to bring headphones and it was so loud," she wrote. "wanted to yell at them to turn down the volume. Thankfully, my mom asked first." Ayla worked hard to keep herself and her siblings busy during the grueling ride. She thought up interesting games and they had some snacks. Then, her brother's soda spilled all over her!

Ayla wanted to yell, complain, do something to deal with the frustration. She almost did, too, until she saw how tired her brother looked. And she knew how tired her parents were. So rather than yell, or even say a word, Ayla just cleaned up the mess. "Courage means facing your fears, doing big or small things," she explained. "Like not bothering my mom and dad."



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As an independent, tuition-free, non-sectarian middle school, our mission is to educate and inspire economically disadvantaged girls from the New Bedford area. OSS empowers girls 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.

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.

SUPPORT THE OSS FUND

Unlike charter schools, OSS is not eligible for state funding as a single-sex school and we rely solely on our friends and foundations. Your generosity makes it possible for OSS to provide a transformative education to our girls. Make a gift today at www.oursistersschool.org or contact Georgie Goulding, Director of Advancement, at ggoulding@oursistersschool.org or 508.994.1255, to discuss the different ways you can help OSS.

ANTI-RACISM STATEMENT

At Our Sisters' School, we are committed to an inclusive and diverse community, dedicated to our core values of Excellence, Community, Civic Engagement, and Leadership. We condemn all forms of racism—individual, interpersonal, institutional, and systemic. We will be diligent in identifying, discussing, and challenging issues of race and ethnicity to ensure diversity, equity, and inclusion in all of our work, including student, staff, volunteer, and trustee recruitment, anti-racist curriculum development, and community engagement. We pledge to address any inequities we discover, using just and fair practices to yield a better understanding of ourselves and our school.

NON-DISCRIMINATION STATEMENT

Our Sisters' School, Inc. admits girls as students to the School regardless of their race, color, national or ethnic origin, religion, creed, or sexual orientation. The School does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national or ethnic origin, religion, creed, or sexual orientation in administration of its educational policies, admissions policies, scholarship programs, athletic and other school administered programs.

Our Sisters' School, Inc. employs personnel of any race, color, national or ethnic origin, gender, gender identity, religion, creed, and sexual orientation to all the rights, privileges and activities generally accorded or made available to personnel at the School.

