

The Power of Accreditation and Mission

All school go through an accreditation process of one form of another, and the most powerful part of the process is that one refocuses on the mission of the school. Our mission has not changed much since our founding in 1961, but reviewing the mission offered us the opportunity to look at all aspects of our school to see how they flow from our mission. The newly stated mission is: *St. John's Episcopal School graduates lifelong learners who are academically prepared, sound in character, and of enduring faith, principles as vital to the future as they were at the school's founding in 1961.*

We used to say that the academics "are a given," but with such a clear focus on wanting our students to have an "inquiring and discerning heart" it became clear that the academic was too important not to be part of our root statement about ourselves. Our commitment to a challenging curriculum with teachers who differentiate to reach each student are vital in our mission. With the call to look again at all we do through the lens of our mission, it might have remained unstated.

Our "Traits for Success" include those characteristics that will, we believe, bring our students success but are part of our Episcopal essence, as "the courage to will and to persevere" rank high on that list and are part of becoming a St. John's student. Our nine Traits for Success, Organization, Attentiveness, Courage, Faith, Persistence, Positive Attitude, Flexibility, Generosity and Responsibility are woven throughout our curriculum and co-curriculum, in daily announcements and month assemblies. This refocus on sound character during the writing of the self-evaluation did not really change who we are or even what we do, but simply the greater awareness that is created in the process builds and strengthens what we do. One way we changed in the process is the expansion of an arts program, OASIS (the Olney Arts School in a School), where our students take extra lessons in the performing arts (from voice and instruments to theater and dance) and have now opened it up to the larger community. We find ways to help our students find themselves and opportunities to shine

The Rector and the Chaplain have changed the weekly services to be more accessible to the students (now separated by age more often) and more engaging (increased student participation and hymns that they enjoy singing and fit the season). Over the years, we have continued to develop our community service programs, now doing even more in conjunction with our Church. (We are a parish school.) Offering concerts, making sandwiches, selling pumpkins, helping prepare palm crosses to be sent throughout the country (with African Palms USA, another mission of the Church). Our science programs, at all levels, bring creation to our students through bugs and rocks; the environment, weather, and space; life science, chemistry, and physics. We work to form "a spirit to know and to love you, and the gift of joy and wonder in all your works."

No, I am not suggesting that all of this would not have existed or was not a focus before working on our accreditation self-evaluation, but it helps bring us to a self-awareness, a change in perspective, a required dive into the both the nitty-gritty and the highest levels that has strengthened the Episcopal identity of St. John's.