



RAISING

healthy children

BY KATHLEEN DAVIDSON, PHD

Educators from Carolina Friends School in Durham explore the relationship between health and education.

healthy, happy teachers = healthy, happy kids

What better time to address how Carolina Friends School approaches rejuvenation and relaxation than on a spring day, with trees in bloom throughout our campus? Indeed, experiencing nature is an important part of life here, which is why we allow healthy chunks of time for outdoor breaks, are grateful for the creek and nature trail, and cultivate school gardens.

For me, being outdoors is rejuvenating, especially among children. I love to visit our Lower School playground, learning about the frog club, peeking into forts, hearing about fairy antics, and taking laps around the building myself.

Not every workplace enjoys a 126-acre natural setting, so I'll gladly share some other ways in which we at CFS renew ourselves. Just as our approach to education is holistic, we take care to provide opportunities for staff members' total well-being. Healthy, happy teachers nurture healthy, happy students, after all.

Professional renewal is key to a vibrant school. We devote significant resources to our staff's professional development—conferences on writing, math, design and engineering, technology, differentiating instruction, conflict resolution, neuroscience, and more—to stay in tune with best practices. This year, for example, one CFS teacher will engage in a summer project in the Peruvian rainforest, as part of the Educators of Excellence program sponsored by the NC Museum of Science.

Just as important, we are afforded some remarkable opportunities for personal and community enrichment.

As a Quaker School, we participate in the Friends Council on Education, which offers peer networks, leadership institutes, and programs like Spirited Practice and Renewed Courage (SPARC). SPARC invites cohorts of teachers to periodic retreats over a two-year period, during which they use collaborative inquiry and reflective tools for self-directed professional development.

Our entire staff begins each school year with a retreat, a time when we're away together for a mix of work and play. As a school for children ages 3 to 18, with three campuses, we cherish the times when we gather as a whole staff, believing in the value of knowing what's happening throughout the School, not just in our own neck of the woods. At retreat, we focus on a theme, which is carried throughout the year on days devoted to staff development.

At one retreat, we were given pedometers, to encourage us to walk our talk, literally! (I'm one of several staff members who enjoy walk-and-talk meetings with our Principal.) We also have the opportunity to take weekly Pilates and yoga classes here after school. A gift!

In 1984, a wise and generous CFS family created an endowment to support staff members' renewal. The Jenny Hall Fund has helped individuals with costs of items or programs to support our health and well-being: bicycles, classes, mindfulness training, iPads, massage, travel, and more.

In 2006, the School created another program: Personal and Community Enrichment (PACE) grants. PACE grants have helped staff members travel in pursuit of dreams they could share with the community. One of the first grants enabled a teacher to explore Mongolia; his class recently opened a Mongolian Museum to share their research.

Other staff members have traveled to Costa Rica, New Zealand, Wales, England, India, Kenya, and other destinations. One of my favorite PACE grants was given to a math teacher who traveled to a remote Nicaraguan village to construct a building for eight looms that have enabled women to develop a successful cottage industry there.

This year a teacher will travel to the Netherlands to participate in a course on the Cold War at the University of Utrecht. Another will go to Kenya to visit schools and meet the founder of the African Great Lakes Initiative (part of a Friends Peace Team active in conflict resolution initiatives there). And a third PACE grant recipient will volunteer as a teacher at Ramallah Friends School, in Palestine's West Bank.

I feel humbled and proud that my colleagues envision such opportunities for renewal. When encouraged to dream big, we do!

We start small, and close to home. I'll close by noting the foundation for all our renewal efforts: the practice of silence. As a Friends School, we value silence. We start and end each day and meeting with a period of *settling in* and *settling out*. We gather, settle ourselves, and attend to the still small voice inside that connects us to something larger than ourselves—refreshing mind, body, and soul. h&h

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