



The Institute for Public Involvement & Responsible Dialogue - Inspired

Schools (though certainly not only schools) are struggling with how to respond to some of the more troubling dynamics of modern American society; the polarization of opinions - and the attendant toxicity of public discourse - the growing disparities in resources, the seeming disdain for truth, and the deepening of divides among communities. Leveraging our unique position as a Quaker school, we have the opportunity and the obligation to show that it is possible to engage in spirited discussions about contentious issues while also respecting, listening to, and learning from those with whom one disagrees. We seek to be local and even national leaders in developing curriculum and practices that schools can use to change the tone of the conversations around the most challenging issues we face (race, class, social and ecological justice, immigration, etc.) and to give students opportunities to take meaningful action on these issues.

Young people have come of age with no public model for discourse that is both vigorous and civil. In its place, they've been fed a diet of superficial sound bites, demagoguery, and infotainment, while living in echo chambers that rarely challenge them to step outside their intellectual comfort zones. Their opinions are often uninformed by personal experience with those affected by controversial laws and policies, and they have few opportunities to act upon their beliefs regarding the underlying issues these laws and policies are meant to address. By forming The Institute for Public Involvement & Responsible Dialogue (Inspired), Friends School will become a laboratory and a model for a better way of understanding and acting upon these critically important issues.

Program Concept:

Inspired will exist to provide structure, oversight and funding for a wide-ranging program of on-campus and off-campus experiences designed to help our students become the kind of citizens who can successfully manage the challenges and opportunities they will face through respectful dialogue and meaningful collaboration with members of Baltimore's many communities. Though Inspired is still in its early stages of development, we anticipate several ways in which it will foster our larger strategic goals:

- Fund a chair to ensure that a member of the faculty is responsible for developing and overseeing the program from Pre-Kindergarten through 12th Grade, now and in perpetuity.
- Identify and offer programmatic and curricular resources to support faculty, staff and program development.
- Provide professional development for faculty and staff so they are equipped to lead our students in their engagement with the full range of communities and individuals in our City.
- Offer mini-grants to incentivize faculty to enrich their classrooms with Inspired-related

programming.

- Bring to campus speakers who represent a diverse set of viewpoints and who serve as models for vigorous and respectful discourse around challenging topics.
- Help faculty and students develop enhanced media literacy skills to be more educated and discerning consumers of news.
- Enhance and leverage activities and learning programs already underway, such as our partnership with the McKim Center of Baltimore City, a community center serving children in the Jonestown area, which is located in the original Meeting House where Friends School was founded in 1784.

These are, of course, just a sample of the kinds of opportunities that the Inspired program could make possible. We'll be guided by input from many sources as we seek to flesh out this initiative and establish it as a signature aspect of the Friends School experience.

In short, The Institute for Public Involvement & Responsible Dialogue is a faithful expression of our belief that, 'the world needs what our children can do.'