



College Prep Students Make 300 Points of Growth on SAT Scores

By Michael Madormo, Upper School English Teacher

Over 130 students learned how to improve their SAT scores, how to apply for colleges and explore their goals and dreams for the future during the past two summers in the “I Know I Can” College Prep Academy.

Students scores grew an average of 300 points overall in that time frame — no small accomplishment given the difficulty of the SAT test. The better scores have improved students’ chances of attending the university of their dreams.

This program has been successful for many reasons. First, students at Ramallah Friends School are deeply motivated and committed to improving their English and math skills scores. They work tremendously hard to excel. Students voluntarily stay after school to meet with teachers, work hard on daily homework assignments, participate actively in games and competitions in class and generally show a positive attitude toward the learning.

Second, most of our teachers come from the “Teach for America” program and have learned powerful lessons while getting to know the life, the environment and the community of Ramallah. The teachers have built strong relationships with the students, act as mentors for them and are motivated to ensure each student achieves success.

Third, our program is committed to develop the whole person, body, soul and mind, by encouraging the student to be aware of the impact their actions have in a community and the world. Our program emphasizes the importance of being a responsible member of the community and teaches them to act as such. Through motivational guest speakers from the community such as, Sam Bahour, Sa’ed Atshan, Fadi Quran and Laila Atshan, our students have been inspired to become leaders for change in our community.

In the upcoming year we are planning to add an English course to develop the reading and writing skills of students in the Lower School. Stay tuned in for more in the future!

Friends School Newsletter

Winter 2012



My participation in the Quaker Yearly Pilgrimage 2012

By May Zaru, 10th grade RFS student

Being a 16-year-old Palestinian Quaker and an active member of the Ramallah Friends Meeting, I recently realized my role as an advocate for youth, peace and justice issues. During the summer of 2012, I attended the Quaker Yearly Pilgrimage in which I met young Friends from different areas of the world. We visited the United Kingdom, Netherlands and Belgium. It was a very unique and exciting experience for me. It was a great opportunity to explore the differences and diversity within the world wide Quaker family. I wrote a poem about my trip and I hope you enjoy reading it! Follow this link to the poem: <http://www.palfriends.org/mai.pdf>



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 Quaker Education in Palestine
 since 1869

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*Photo on the cover: Michael, on the left,
 with the students who participated in the
 "College Prep Program" in summer 2012*

Ramallah Friends School is a
 ministry of Friends United Meeting



Above: Ramallah Friends School graduating class of 2012

Right: Participating students at the college prep program Summer 2012



Lower School News in Brief

By Hendrik Taatgen, Lower School Principal

Start of the Year

Ramallah Friends Lower School started the year right after the Eid Al Fitr holiday in good spirits by participating in Teacher Orientation Week. Returning staff welcomed nine new teachers, seven of whom came from the USA. Orientation Week was filled with workshops and activities, creating enthusiasm as we all prepared for the first day of classes which was to greet an unprecedented 751 students on campus. Of course, all students were very happy to see us, including the new preschoolers and their parents. These students now receive instruction in the new preschool building, allowing students in grades 1-4 to benefit from the smaller size of classes (25 instead of 30) in the Whittier building.

Building Activities

Our hope was to have the campus construction and renovation activities which began over the summer to have been completed before the first day of classes. Unfortunately some projects ran into problems, causing delays. We managed to cordon off the areas of

unfinished projects. It was unfortunate to have to ask preschool parents to postpone bringing their kids to school by one day. We were, however, thrilled to have at least the elementary school start right on time. The construction projects scheduled to be completed by Christmas are the two new soccer courts with AstroTurf and the upper floor of the new preschool building which will include Khaldoun Tabari Hall, a large multi-purpose space. Despite the delay, hopes are high because we are seeing progress. Last year's landscaping project is a vast improvement to the brand new look of our campus.

Making a Start with Building a Creative Learning Community

With the new preschool building completed and the move of students in grades 1-4, we began our goal of being a creative learning community. This increase in space offered us the opportunity to create four new classrooms for the students in grades 1-4. Reconfiguration of the old principal's home allowed even more opportunity

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For rarely are sons similar to their fathers: most are worse, and few are better.

By William Robbins, Lower School English Teacher

Like Telemachos in Homer's epic story, *The Odyssey*, I am one of the rare sons that are similar to their fathers. Before I came to Ramallah, I wanted those similarities to end with physical appearance. I accepted my father's curly hair, bright blue eyes and even his over-extended lower jaw. However, I didn't want to accept our similar extroverted temperament and sensitive character. In that vein I joined most sons rejecting something from their fathers, and I was worse for doing so. Now that my own personal odyssey led me to Ramallah, I've realized that the similarities I fought so hard to deny are exactly the things I cherish most.

At home in Alabama, my father gave his whole heart to my brother and me. Some boys can say that their fathers never missed a game; my brother and I can boast our father never missed a practice, least wise a game. I learned later that this type of dedication led to his success at the workplace. He is quick to laugh and even quicker to tears, a man who never waived from following his compassionate spirit.

I remember a time, around the end of my days at the university, when I looked in the mirror and saw a little too much of my father. I was afraid. I wanted to run away from it all. So I did, all the way to the Middle East. I became a teacher in Ramallah because I thought I could be part of a political solution here. Later I learned that my heart was not with politics but where my father's heart was, with the children. Like my father, my greatest joy is giving children the attention, care and affection that they deserve.

I'm blessed to be one of the rare sons. It's my hope that your sons and daughters will be among the few who are better for it.



William Robbins

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to improve the quality of education. Our program now has two core teachers each with an assistant to collaboratively plan for teaching students in small groups. Each small group rotates around the building to "learning centers" (math, science, reading, writing, etc.). Compared to the traditional classroom setting, these learning centers allow teachers to respond much more effectively to the differing needs and learning styles of individual students. We started this exciting project with two classes in grade one with the expectation that it will stimulate other teachers to make creative adjustments in their own classroom enhancing student learning throughout the whole school.

Towards PYP Authorization

While RFS as an International Baccalaureate (IB) World School it offers the IB Diploma Program and the Middle Years Program (MYP). However, the elementary school is still without the Primary Years Program (PYP). Last year, it was decided to reconfigure the RFS curriculum by adopting "Understanding by Design" (UbD), the pedagogical foundation of PYP. UbD values student understanding over student memorizing, and encourages teachers to engage collaboratively in planning backwards. Last year we made significant progress in teachers understanding of the importance of teaching for understanding. This year our goal is to ensure teachers know how to plan, teach and assess for understanding. There is a proposal for making this second year of UbD implementation part of the larger PYP Master Plan. RFS should receive PYP authorization in the spring or autumn of 2015. This proposal is currently under study. One thing is sure — Lower School teachers and staff are working hard to offer students the best education they can receive in Palestine!



Kindergarten students playing in the outdoor area for the new KG building.

Expansion and Growth

By Mahmoud Amra, Upper School Principal

Year by year our institution has grown, not only in terms of the number of students we are educating, but also in terms of our own capacity to teach them. The 2012 and 2013 academic years have already witnessed, and will continue to see, dramatic growth and development in our program with 14 new teachers.

We are fortunate to already have such a diverse array of educators, and this has only gotten better. New teachers are reinvigorating the curriculum with not only their energy but also new methods of teaching. While the first year can be tough on any new teacher, they are fortunate to have a strong core of experienced teachers, mentors and friends within the school.

In other big news, pending the construction of a new building (much thanks to USAID and the ASHA program), the Upper School will be hosting the 6th grade in the future. This effort will not only mean a new building, but dramatic changes throughout nearly every program from lunch to sports in order to accommodate this growth.

The Fuad Salim Zaru Library has moved back home to the “old” (administrative) building after a four year absence.

Ms. Lisa Marouf is still stocking the shelves with new materials every day and still reminding students of the academic and literary gems that we already have.



Upper School students at Fuad Salim Zaru Library

In the 2012-2013 academic year the library will also be expanding further into the digital world. While still in its infant stages, the new Friend's School audio-visual library is already the largest digital collection of academic support materials in Palestine. While it is still growing exponentially by the week, there are already thousands of hours of lectures, documentaries, speeches and debates available for our students in every discipline. We are currently working to make this library available to students through their Friend's School accounts.

Finally, in addition to providing learning materials, the library has begun to play a much more active role in teaching the Approaches to Learning to Middle Years Program (MYP) students. Classes are now regularly held in the library, and a much better emphasis is being put on academic disciplines such as referencing and research in order to better prepare our students for the next step.

Upper School News in Brief

By Mahmoud Amra, Upper School Principal

Homeroom

Traditionally, the 15-minute daily morning homeroom had been used for little more than attendance taking and announcements. Today, homeroom is working itself into an integral part of the MYP and International Baccalaureate (IB) Programs.

Every morning, homeroom teachers with the assistance of our guidance counselor are conducting theme-based activities with students. Through discussions, debates, movies and activities, Upper School students are engaging with concepts such as integrity, empathy and critical thinking, in new and unique ways.

Sports

The Friends Schools have always recognized that taking care of students' health is as important as shaping their minds. In 2012, this philosophy was put into action like never before through radical changes in the sports program. It began with the renovation of our sports facilities. Today, Upper School students now have a beautiful

football field and running track, a volley ball court, three basketball courts and a tennis court, as well as an indoor gymnasium.

While students still attend physical education classes as part of their curriculum, they are also now required to partake in two hours of after school sports activities as well. In order to have something for everyone, eight different coaches now offer boxing, tennis, volleyball, American football, fitness, football, skateboarding, roller skating and ultimate Frisbee.

After school activities

On most days of the week, when the final bell rings, many of our students and teachers do not go anywhere. After school activities are quickly becoming the norm rather than the exception in a student's week. These hours — all of which are volunteered by students and staff — are critical opportunities to deepen the learning done in class, build character and guide students through activities that the regular school day does not allow for.

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Towards Digital Communications with Parents and Students

By Salim Zughayer, RFS IT Manager

It is not about the technology; it's about sharing knowledge and information, communicating efficiently, building learning communities and creating a culture of professionalism in schools. The technological aspirations at Ramallah Friends School are defined in this statement. Getting to the point where a student and his peers can remotely observe their teachers' updates is a dynamically amazing development for the school.

Lately, Ramallah Friends School's IT Department had the fortunate ability to develop many contemporary techniques enhancing the information and communications technology for the school. The new software provides RFS portals acting as a doorway to communication between students, teachers and parents. Teachers now encourage parents to follow up on their child's homework, exams, digital report cards, tardiness, absence and behavioral records. The smart synchronizer directly transfers an email to parents providing reports on each and every activity their child performed. There is an email reminder that kindly asks parents through a friendly text to check the portal.

RFS has begun using Google apps to help connect teachers, students and parents. Providing this technology is another remarkable step our IT program took in the school's educational trajectory. Google apps offers to schools and many other educational entities tools to improve teachers', students' and parents' proficiency in using technology for educational purposes. The apps provide useful features such as: user and group



Salim Zughayer

provisioning, emails, user-managed forums and mailing lists, shared calendar, archiving, search, discovery and blogs. In addition, the school highly benefits from the ability to share documents. Teachers can upload any related document and have students check it online. This feature can be beneficial since it cuts down on paper use and reduces time and effort. Personal teacher Google sites are also a major accomplishment in our technological endeavors. Teachers have their own Google site allowing them to update the progress of their respective subjects as well as the homework, exams, projects and any other relevant data of their students. Parents can log on to the teacher's page and review any related information about the student, class or project. On this page, teachers, students and parents can communicate easily and effectively.

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In addition to the already mentioned sports program, students have the choice of participating in a wide variety of different activities. The History Club (and soon to form Philosophy Club) engages in debates, watches films and builds on or reviews class lectures. The Drama Club and Slam Poetry Club give students a chance to express their artistic passions in unique ways. The Environment Club and the Hiking Club both give students and teachers alike the opportunity to better know and appreciate Palestine's rich natural heritage. Finally, for the journalistically inclined, the Friend's School newspaper brings students together to tell their stories to the world — stay tuned for forthcoming issues.

Go Palestine Summer Camp: a second year of success

The summer camp aiming to reconnect Palestinians youth of the Diaspora with their roots and form a better sense of their identity was held this summer and again deemed a huge success. Nearly half of the 48 students participating (ages 14-18) came from abroad and participated in a three-week program focusing on service, cultural emersion, reflection time, trips and of course time to relax and have fun. The bonding and life changing experience of the campers is documented on the camp website: www.summerinpalestine.org. Planning is underway to hold the third camp during the summer of 2013.



Top right: Upper School students attending the weekly Monday chapel
Right: Eighth graders working on a project for the social studies class

From the Director's Office

By Joyce Ajlouny, RFS Director

Steadfast, We Remain

As I was writing this entry, the horrific violence against the people of Gaza was erupting. I thought about the irony of my message at this time. While I was planning to report on our school's facilities development, schools and homes were being destroyed throughout the Strip. While I wanted to share how our elementary school students were enjoying the new safe landscaped areas and sports fields, children were being killed by Israeli bombardment; and while I was going to talk about the proud parents and their active engagement with the school, I thought of the hundreds of mourning mothers and fathers in Gaza. As I was receiving reports about our school's academic program from both our principals, our students did their own reporting by sending me their poems, art and audiovisual productions expressing intense feelings about what is happening to their people. Even if Ramallah is being spared from the bombardment this time around, our hearts and minds are with our people. We pray for their safety, but also for an end to the military siege and occupation imposed on them. We pray for peace with justice for all. While the violence was happening, our school resolutely endured as it has for over one century. The teachers kept teaching, the workers kept building and the children kept playing. In Arabic, this continuation accurately represents the meaning of *Sumoud*, or what could be translated as steadfastness.

Helping us endure throughout, are lovely partnerships taking root between gracious supporters and a competent and dedicated staff. We are so happy to see our students enjoying the new landscaping at the Lower School with two new AstroTurf fields, many new gardens and play areas created. The new kindergarten is also now complete and the upper floor has opened its doors to students this fall. The new Khaldoon Tabari Hall at the Lower School is undergoing finishing touches and we expect it to be ready by Christmas time. The Upper School campus has also seen improvements completed during the summer months, namely newly refurbished outdoor basketball fields, a drop-off/pickup area for parents, residential facilities for international staff and a new running track surrounding the large field.

While we are thankful for all the support we receive to make these dreams a reality, we also know that together we can continue to make a difference in the lives of children. **I am asking you to consider your support to our students' financial aid fund** (allowing vulnerable and underprivileged children an opportunity to receive a top notch Quaker education) **or towards any other cause of your choosing by completing the form on page 7.** Thank you again for encouraging us to succeed in our steadfastness as we face the hurdles along the way.

Wishing you and yours a Merry Christmas and a peaceful New Year!



Lower School students excited to see their new field completed

Participate in the future of the Friends School, with your tax-deductible gifts!



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U.S. \$ Gifts: Tax-deductible gifts should be made payable to the Ramallah Friends School and sent to: **Global Ministries, Friends United Meeting, 101 Quaker Hill Drive, Richmond, IN 47374-1926, or online at www.fum.org.**

Sterling (£) Gifts: should be made payable to the Quaker International Educational Trust (QuIET), noting "for Ramallah" on the back and saying if Gift Aid may be claimed, and sent to: QuIET, Yew Tree House, Church Street, Bloxham, Banbury, OX15 4ET or Brian Morphy at QuIET, Tel: 01 295 720019; e-mail: brianmorphy@tiscali.co.uk.

*Donate either to the General Award Fund (partial, any amount) or ESJ Award Fund (full). Tuition fees for 2011–2012 range from U.S. \$2,500 to \$2,700.

For further information and inquiries, feel free to contact our office at development@palfriends.org or Tel: +972-2-295-2286, www.palfriends.org.

Support RFS through Online Giving!

Through an initiative aimed at saving money and resources, we have begun to shift much of our correspondence online. Donations can now be made with the click of a mouse on our **completely secure** online donation page (designed and supported by eCommerce, a U.S.-based company). Donations made through this secure site are U.S. tax-deductible; please visit our web page for other donation methods. As always, we will never share your information with a third party. Visit www.palfriends.org and click "Donate" for more information.

Friends School, Ramallah/AI-Bireh Scholarship Donors, Restricted and General, March 1 – October 31, 2012

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*Top left: Upper school students at their computer lab class
Top right: First graders in their Art class
Bottom left: Upper school students enjoying playing soccer in the newly renovated sports field
Bottom right: Lower school students enjoying their time during the recess.*



RFS students at work and play