



Quaker Education in Palestine since 1869

Innovative Middle School Building Now Open

By Huda Shamieh Faramand, Middle School Assistant Principal



The Middle School learning community challenges the traditional classroom setting and allows students to work in groups easily.

In pursuit of its goal to become one of Palestine's leading educational institutions, Ramallah Friends School is determined to experiment with new methodology and curricula in the service of our local community and of high academic standards. To this end, the Middle Years Program (MYP) was introduced in 2010, as a means of better preparing our students for the International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma Program during their high school years.

In order to meet the educational standards and requirements of the IB Middle Years Program, RFS constructed a new building for students in grades six, seven, and eight. Opening in the academic year 2016–2017, the Middle School building has become a part of the Upper School campus, with thanks to design, construction, and furnishings funded by ASHA/USAID.

The design of the new building was informed by the intention to create a supportive, healthy, and functional environment for learning. Based on our vision of an inspirational learning space, we worked with the design firm Fielding Nair International, specialists in innovative school design.

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Friends School Newsletter

Winter 2016



Green School Award

On October 26, our school, having been awarded the Green School Award for the academic year of 2016/2017 as part of Ramallah Municipality's Environmental program, was inaugurated as Ramallah's 2016 *Healthy and Environmentally-Friendly School*. The inauguration included a flag-raising ceremony at the school, an Arts exhibit presenting recycling projects from the hands of our students, and the attendance of parents and the media. We are proud to see the Green School flag flutter above our campus as we celebrate winning this award for the second time in five years.



Ramallah Friends School
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P.O. Box 66
Ramallah, Palestine
Tel: +970.2.295.2286
Fax: +970.2.295.8320
Web: www.rfs.edu.ps

Joyce Ajlouny, Friends School Director
Jumana Thalji, Assistant to Director
Newsletter Editor: Jumana Thalji

*Photo on the cover: RFS Kindergarten students
during the olive picking trip*

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ministry of Friends United Meeting

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Innovative Middle School Building Now Open

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The Middle School learning community that was designed to meet our vision is quite different from a traditional classroom. To encourage a collaborative and student-centered approach to learning, our building consists of three floors which each contain a common area as an informal learning station outside the classrooms.

Furthermore, the classrooms have glass walls to allow teachers to assist students during their collaborative work in the common area, and to further affirm the spaces as one learning community. Each floor includes learning support, counseling rooms, and a teachers' lounge for grade-level teachers to meet and participate in ongoing professional development and planning for interdisciplinary units. Each floor also contains one Da Vinci Studio.

Da Vinci Studios are learning spaces designed for hands-on and project-based approaches to learning across all curriculum areas. These student-centered interdisciplinary areas adapt easily from a science lab to an art studio, and support practical work in visual arts and the science curriculum areas.

On the ground floor, the media center/library serves several purposes. It includes an area for individuals and small groups to work together and do presentations; networked computer research stations; and a traditional print resources section.

Because technology plays such an important role in supporting both students' learning process and their teachers' efforts to promote learning, all learning areas and school facilities are fully equipped with computers and smart projectors connected through both wired and wireless digital networks.

Ramallah Friends School continues to rigorously develop and implement learning strategies which align with the school's vision: to produce a generation equipped with a strong and constructive mind-set to serve their own communities and to face the future with knowledge, skills, confidence, and the determination to fulfill their dreams.

Lower School News in Brief

By Frieda Dahdah Khayat, Lower School Interim Principal



Lower School staff during one of the Professional Development Program sessions.

The Lower School is looking brighter and brighter each and every day! With the support of every community member, our children are learning together and growing towards excellence. **Collaboration leads to success** will continue to be our school motto. "Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much."—Helen Keller

As usual, we are very proud of our improvements and achievements. As the school principal for the first year, I would like to share some of these things with you.

Principal's Visit to the United States

- As part of the Professional Development Program at RFS, I was given the opportunity to attend the 45th USFWI Quaker Triennial Conference in Iowa during the summer. Additionally, I had the pleasure of meeting with several educators and friends in Oregon; principals and superintendents of schools, as well as professors from George Fox University. This visit allowed me to exchange experiences with other educators, and to share the success of our Problem Solving Program teaching conflict resolution. Thanks to my wonderful hosts from Northwest Yearly Meeting and the Friends United Meeting for making this trip possible.

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Learning Empathy Through Taking Action!

By Jalal Abukhater, interview with Duha Masri

Duha Masri is a source of inspiration to her students. Guided by the principles set out in the school's Quaker values and the IB Learner Profile, Ms. Masri led an initiative last year to assist in the rehabilitation of ten elementary school libraries in Gaza which had all suffered severe damage during the Israeli assault on the Strip in 2014.

Duha Masri is Head of Kindergarten, and the Primary Years Program (PYP) coordinator at the Lower School. "We are not a charity, we empathize and we take action," said Duha as she described the significance for her students of learning that they can act in a positive and constructive way rather than feeling helpless as their peers experience adversity. Duha believes empathy evolves through community work, and that students will learn, be inspired, and become involved in their world by taking action.

The PYP initiative, titled *Books for Gaza*, successfully collected nearly 7,900 books, and a substantial monetary contribution of \$54,000, before it concluded last year. However, the work continues today as communications and transfer of material between RFS and various Gaza-based institutions continues. One example is Al-Khidr Monastery in Deir Al-Balah, a 1700-year-old monastery that is currently being renovated by Nawa for Culture and Arts Association, where a children's library is due to be opened for the first time in the city. In November,



Books that were delivered to Deir Al-Balah children's library.

this new library will be stocked with books donated through the RFS campaign, along with other library materials.

The *Books for Gaza* campaign was driven by an urge to practice our school values and philosophies, and had a positive impact on all parties involved. RFS' young students were heavily involved from the onset. They visited libraries and were responsible for choosing the various books that they felt their peers in Gaza would enjoy.

The drive for this campaign accentuated the importance of decent and dignified education. Duha believes that this form of cooperation is not a favor, but rather our collective duty as responsible human beings.

Lower School News in Brief (continued from page 2)

Induction Week

- Moving towards our goal to become a Primary Years Programme licensed school for the International Baccalaureate, we are preparing and empowering our teachers with the necessary skills through intense workshops. During induction week, IB trainer Rula Barghoutti conducted the "IB: Teaching and Learning" workshop, and I conducted the "Teamwork and Collaboration" workshop for all fifty teachers. These workshops were followed with intensive planning and preparations for the academic year of 2016/2017.

Lower School Upgrades

- With the dynamic technology changes of the 21st century, education is also dramatically changing and demanding more and more resources. I am proud to announce the opening of a second computer lab in the Whittier Building, equipped with the latest in technology to enhance our students' learning. In addition, the Learning Support Program Department (LSP) installed a Sensory Box aimed to maximize each and every student's learning process. These learning and development boxes comprise aids that encourage children to develop their speech and improve understanding and co-ordination.



Fourth graders at the bake sale in support of the white gifts program at the Lower School.

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My Student Council Experience

By Jeneen Shehadeh, senior of 2017

RFS has been my second home for more than ten years. It has taught me much over the years that I've grown as a person. One skill I've gained is leadership—mostly through class projects where I would take control and approach my colleagues with an open mind, confidence, and fairness. This skill, in particular, also gave me the confidence to engage in the Student Council elections process.

The election process is not easy—I have seen how the candidates work to show what they have to offer. I worked hard one year with my friend, Ibrahim Imseeh, who successfully ran to become president. We tirelessly put up posters and talked to voters about his campaign goals.

Usually, the campaign lasts for a week, with the election taking place on the last day. By the end of the day when all votes are in, three or four members of Student Council, accompanied by representatives of each nominee, count the votes. Students wait anxiously until all the results are read out. This year, I was part of this crazy process. I was the one recording each vote for each nominee; mind you, there are around 720 students, all of whom get to vote.

I was also part of the Student Council for the 2015–2016 academic year. It was truly an experience of a life time! As the treasurer, I was in charge of money and fundraising, and overseeing the events and budgets. It was not easy, especially when it comes to fundraising. I am grateful for how Student Council gave me more confidence and creativity, improving my negotiating, public speaking, and thinking skills. In addition, special relationships are built among those on Student Council:



Handing over the students' council keys from the previous president to the new elected one for 2016.

eleven people in a room for long hours, having meetings and joking around, builds a strong bond between us all.

In my opinion, RFS' Student Council is a very important aspect of the school. We are the link between the administration and students and therefore our position is very important in trying to serve the students. It is an experience that I will cherish, and that I recommend to all students, whether you become one of the members of the Council or a club it oversees. It saddens me that my time is over; however, I'm excited to see what the next generation has to offer!

Upper School News in Brief

By Riyam Kafri Abu-Laban, Upper School Principal



New multimedia lab at RFS science building.

It is a new year filled with new beginnings and the hope to continue building a strong community of learners who are knowledgeable, inquisitive, open-minded, and tolerant.

- The year began with an inspiring induction week. Teachers worked together on several activities that helped set the tone for the academic year. Exercises varied from team-building to answering strategic academic questions.
- The Upper School's Science Building has seen improvements through the refurbishment of the biology, chemistry, and physics labs, and the creation of a new multimedia lab; the improvements were made possible through support from USAID/ASHA grants. The new multimedia lab features Macintosh computers and software. These will be used for teaching graphic design, animation, and film making for Middle School students. The

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I Know I Can, Too

By Silvia Nassar Mustaklem, co-director of I Know I Can, Too Summer Academics Camp

**"I know I can | Be what I want to be
If I work hard at it | I'll be where I want to be"**

With this chant, about 140 students from the third through sixth grades started their day for a whole month at the *I Know I Can, Too* Summer Academy Camp that was held at the Lower School (FGS) during July, 2016, in collaboration with *Teach for America*.

For the past few years, this program that develops students' English-language reading and writing skills, and offers extra-curricular activities with a wide variety of team-building games, has been a significant success due to the inspiring and devoted team of international English teachers, teacher assistants, volunteers, and managers. Supportive parents and dedicated, enthusiastic campers are an integral part of this success.

This summer, we worked on three main themes: respect for self and others; issues of social justice; and changing the world for the better. Topics were offered in fun and engaging ways through reading and writing projects, and activities where students steered the learning process.

Part of what made the program special were the diverse activities offered in the afternoons. Indoor activities included digital art, arts and crafts, journalism, TV/radio broadcasting, strategy games, science club, drama, and slam poetry. Outdoor activities included rugby, yoga, dodgeball, basketball, kickball, team sports, zumba, and dance.

Team-building games were the campers' favorite part of the program. Eight differently-colored teams competed against one another. Games varied from team-building activities to intellectual thinking games that were both thrilling and challenging. We look forward to offering this program again next year, and graduating another group of young scholars.



Team-building games were the campers' favorite part of the program.

**The I Know I Can, Too Summer Academies were planned and led under the directorship of former RFS teacher Michael Madormo, and served 262 students, aged K–10th Grade. The program also focused on SATs and college prep and team-building processes, and offered various extra-curricular activities as we welcomed kindergarten-aged students for the first time this summer.*

Upper School News in Brief (continued from page 4)

studio also includes a sound room which will be used for teaching sound editing and recording, as well as broadcasting RFS's first online radio program.

- A new Student Council was elected on Saturday, October 8, 2016, after an energetic and exciting election campaign by the candidates. It is always a pleasure to watch students participate in this democratic process.
- We are excited to be renewing an old partnership agreement with Langkaer STX/HF/IB World School. We hope that this partnership will lead to an exchange visit between the DP1 (Grade 11) students of both our schools in April, 2017, as we nurture our students to become global citizens.
- This year our students will travel to four international Model United Nations (MUN) Conferences—in Jordan, Turkey, Netherlands, and France—before hosting the annual Palestinian MUN Conference on our campus in 2017. Please keep all of them in your thoughts as they represent the school, and hold them in the Light.



Upper School students campaign for their favorite nominee during Student Council elections.

Donor Thanks

We would like to thank the following people for their recent donations to Ramallah Friends School:

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*Donate either to the General Award Fund (partial, any amount) or ESJ Award Fund (full). Tuition fees for 2016-17 range from U.S. \$2,600 to \$4,020.

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

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Lower School News in Brief (continued from page 3)

Classroom Environment

- Within our classrooms, our dedicated teachers have been leading their students through Learner Profile activities. They are focused on setting a positive, welcoming tone in their classrooms, establishing meaningful relationships with students, and routinizing daily procedures. With expectations in place, a safe learning environment established, and data collected, our classrooms are now focused on academic instruction.

Olive Picking Activity

- RFS Kindergarten students went on a field trip to the nearby village of Deir Dibwan to participate in the olive picking season. They were hosted by Ala Ali, an RFS Alumnus (Class of 1991), and had 'manakeesh' for breakfast, a traditional Palestinian dish of thyme and cheese.

Back to School Party

- In collaboration with all vested members of our school community, our Back to School Party was a great success. With over 1000 guests attending, the party was filled with games, food, entertainment, and environmentally friendly activities where our young students planted trees and colorfully painted garbage bins. It was a lovely and memorable night for the Lower School.



Olive picking.



Ramallah Friends School
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Left: Graduating class of 2016.

Lower left: I Know I Can, Too camp students during one of the sports classes.

Above: New middle school classroom.



Friends School Newsletter

