

CRAIG GEMMELL

HEAD OF SCHOOL

✉ craig_gemmell@brewsteracademy.org

Head Lines

INTO THE LIGHT

After a packed few days of trustee meetings late in January, trustees Joan Hill (**Sarah**, '20), **Ronn Bronzetti** '92, Steve Webster (**Brooke** '08 and **Tori** '11), and Karey Fix (**Will** '11 and **Keenan** '13) joined Assistant Head Kristy Kerin and me for a visit to Brewster's newly completed escape room – built by a mix of crafty, tech-savvy students and members of our IT staff.

Escape rooms are cropping up everywhere. Their central conceit: to solve puzzles until a magical click of a final door lets occupants out and into the light. Our room and those like it are the height of adventure and expressions of clever use of technology. Escape rooms

represent a wonderful alternative to the mind-numbing Netflix binging to which so many are falling victim.

Fifty minutes later, we had failed. Pathetic. Perhaps we were a bit dim-witted from our meetings. More likely, we're just not as clever as the senior class team, who took a scant 20 minutes and didn't receive as many clues as we did from one of the escape room's architects, **Logan Young** '18. Nonetheless, we all enjoyed this new experience.

Our meetings leading up to our failed foray into the escape room were surely intense. We had talked about huge opportunities for the school as we chart our course for the future through presentations considering long-term financial modeling, campus master planning, programming, and the like. Big issues, all of which required immense focus. And as a means of giving

context to our decisions, we invited students to the meeting on Friday to sit on panels that considered the "lifer" (four-year) Brewster program, dormitory culture, and the freshman experience. We also organized a breakfast on Saturday during which a host of student organizations met with trustees to share work: our robotics team, International Student Organization, Gender Sexuality Alliance Plus, PEEPS (student peer counselors), ONE (one nationality and ethnicity) and Best Buddies – it really turned the volume up in Estabrook.

As we de-briefed from the meetings, trustees focused on their engagement with students far more even than they did in our

intense efforts at long-range planning. I was struck triply.

First, as I looked back at how stunningly impressive our students *all* were who sat on panels or talked about their co-curricular interests, I felt deep pride when I saw how well our kids represented themselves and their school when unscripted. In short: they were stunningly articulate, honest, self-aware, cognizant of our shared values and how those map against their actual and wonderful experiences. There was no marketing spray on the experience; just Brewster kids reflecting authentically on how compassionate a place this school is in 2018; how they are loved and cared for by adults who have, at heart, the desire to support them; how they are cared for by each other; how grateful they are to be here; and how they see how we can become yet stronger.

And as they spoke, trustees listened and engaged with them in real dialogue, person to person.

Second, as I looked back at how deeply interested our board is in our *actual students* and how their work at core is to ensure that we keep our promise to students, parents, and the world, I felt profound gratitude for this committed group of volunteers, since their interactions underscored what I had long felt – that every single person in this group sees the salient elements of this school ever more clearly as our broad work in support of this school, and all for which it stands, unfolds in these times, filled as they are with uncertainty and opportunity both.

Third, as I thought about the broader work of the school as we navigate purposefully all of us – teachers, students, trustees, graduates, parents alike – aspire to make, I realized that in the midst of our machinations over finance and facilities, differentiation and draw on endowment, we need to use our students as guides. They are bright and don't miss anything: they'll help us to navigate every puzzle before us, making our current perseverations into a promising future.

In closing, regardless of your relationship to Brewster, know that we value your voice, we want your involvement. Many hands make light work and will surely make our wonderful school yet greater in a world filled with puzzles to be solved as we strive to open the door to our bright future. / BA /

