



Friends Council on Education

The **QUAKER SELF-STUDY and MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL PROCESS** for **FRIENDS SCHOOLS**

Revised Fall 2021

The Quaker Self-Study and Membership Renewal Process (MRP) is the means by which Friends schools periodically affirm their intention to be guided by the basic tenets of the Religious Society of Friends and demonstrate evidence of putting these Quaker beliefs and principles into practice. Through this process schools maintain their membership in Friends Council on Education. Equally important, however, is the opportunity the MRP provides for schools to pause every so often, reflect meaningfully upon their Quaker underpinnings, celebrate the areas in which they are true to their mission, and discern appropriate next steps in the ongoing effort to live more fully into their identity as Friends schools.

The fundamental and abiding strength of Friends schools is our rootedness in Quaker faith and practice. There is a profound and hopeful ambition in the Quaker vision of schools as spiritual communities. When we approach this potential, our schools are places rich in love, challenge, collaboration, fruitful conflict, and a generative sense of what is possible in ourselves, in the classroom, and in the broader community. Through our work in Friends schools we support both children and adults in bringing the light of the spirit to one another and out into the world.

To engage in the MRP, each school is expected to form a self-study committee that includes representation from all constituent groups – faculty, administration and staff, trustees, parents, alumni/ae, and (as appropriate) students and Friends Meeting members. Over the course of a full year, the committee facilitates study across the school community, examining the school's policies, practices, protocols, and culture through the lens of Friends Council's *Principles of Good Practice for Friends Schools: Affirming the Quaker Identity*. These principles fall under seven dimensions of institutional life, the first six of which are: Mission, Worship, Equity & Justice, Governance, Administrative Leadership, and Program, Curriculum, and Community Life. The aim of the self-study phase of the MRP is for members of the school community to engage in meaningful and generative conversation, to gather or draft documentation that is called for in the MRP guide, and to prepare a report confirming the school's adherence to Friends Council's principles of good practice.

The final section of the self-study report - and arguably the most important - is entitled Continuing Revelation. It is here that the school is asked to reflect upon the self-study process itself and describe whatever has been learned through the year's focused reflection and analysis. In this final section of its report, the school is asked to list a set of next steps that have emerged through the self-study process. In this way the Membership Renewal Process provides a roadmap for a school's ongoing institutional renewal and growth.

Once this report has been received by Friends Council on Education, the school will be visited by a team of seasoned educators drawn largely from Friends Council member schools who will, in turn, report their observations to Friends Council's Membership Committee. This committee will offer commendations and recommendations back to the school, and to the Friends Council Board, which is ultimately responsible for approving the school's membership renewal.

Our ability to sustain a clear focus on the Quaker identity of our schools comes and goes amidst the many challenges of contemporary institutional life. Indeed, healthy spiritual life in schools seems to unfold in cycles: periods of active focus and attention to this dimension of the community, sharpening our vision, developing key skills, consolidating our efforts of faith and practice, and strengthening the commitment of the community to our most fundamental values. This vital work is often followed by a quieter period of living out the fruits of this labor, using the community's renewed strengths to turn to other important strategic initiatives. In time, the need for a new cycle of community reflection and inquiry into Quaker faith and practice comes around again. Gathering all members of a Friends school community in this reflective work, engaging the full range of voices in this dialogue, and making new the meaning of Friends faith and practice in the life of the school is a process that is forever renewing as new insights and understandings come to light and the community lives into its sharpened identity. Herein lies the essence of the Quaker understanding of "continuing revelation" as applied to our work in Friends schools.

The *Principles of Good Practice for Friends Schools*, as time-honored and firmly established as they may appear to be, must *themselves* be subject to continuing revelation, undergoing revision from time to time as new understandings regarding our work in the world emerge. Following events during and after the spring of 2020 in our nation's history, Friends Council was compelled to revise the *Principles of Good Practice* to articulate more explicitly a commitment to matters of racial, economic, social, and political equity and justice, using the Membership Renewal Process as a vehicle to call Friends schools to a higher standard with regard to these matters than had previously been done. And, while Friends schools have long honored diversity across many dimensions of personal identity - including gender, sexual orientation, family structure, religion, national and ethnic origin, physical and intellectual ability, and more - we recognize that our nation's history with regard to Black and indigenous peoples warrants especially focused attention in the self-study process. In order to redress historical wrongs that span centuries, including within our Friends schools, going forward we are called to redefine our schools as explicitly *anti-racist* in their policies and practices. The current version of the *Principles of Good Practice* embodies this deepened commitment to live our Quaker testimonies of integrity, equality, and community to their fullest.

In the process of revisiting these *Principles of Good Practice*, Friends Council has addressed another pressing issue that must be embraced by our schools in order to prepare our students for responsible and engaged citizenship in the decades ahead: the increasing reality of climate change and the related environmental, political, economic, and social ramifications of this crisis, all of which are deeply intertwined with matters of equity and justice. Over the past decade and more, Friends schools have exercised environmental stewardship in countless ways - whether participating in the work of the Friends Environmental Education Network, incorporating "green" technologies into capital improvement plans, taking steps to reduce their carbon

footprint, or establishing policies and practices that model concern for the earth, and more. This updated version of the *Principles of Good Practice* asks schools to explicitly address this critical aspect of our Quaker testimony of stewardship and environmental justice, describing the steps they have already taken and outlining future initiatives that are being planned.

As this revised version of the *Principles of Good Practice* is published, Friends Council urges each school, regardless of its place in the cycle of the Membership Renewal Process, to engage with the document - and in particular with the new section on Equity and Justice - during the coming year. While the MRP requires a formal and comprehensive self-study once every ten years, the work of revisiting our Quaker underpinnings, affirming our adherence to core principles and practices, and identifying next steps in living more truly into the mission of Friends education must be an ongoing process, carried out annually in all corners of each Friends school community.

PRINCIPLES of GOOD PRACTICE for FRIENDS SCHOOLS: AFFIRMING the QUAKER IDENTITY

Revised Fall 2021

I. MISSION

Principles

- The school's mission embraces the core tenets of the Religious Society of Friends, including its principles, testimonies, and practices.
- The school's mission supports both the spiritual and the academic formation of its students.
- In keeping with Friends testimonies, the school's mission articulates a commitment to educate its students toward advocacy and agency for greater social, political, economic, and environmental justice in the world at large.
- The school values its interconnectedness with the Religious Society of Friends.

Confirmation

1. Share the school's mission statement, and describe the process by which it was last reviewed and revised.
2. Attach the organizational by-laws or charter that clearly describes the school's affiliation with the Religious Society of Friends.
3. Provide a few examples (brochures, promotional materials, publications, web materials) through which the school's Quaker philosophy and mission are described.
4. Describe how the school maintains a living relationship with the Religious Society of Friends, Quaker meeting communities, Friends organizations, and other Friends schools.
5. Provide a few examples of the school's published documents that illustrate its commitment to the values of diversity, equity, justice, environmental stewardship and sustainability. Further, describe the adoption and implementation of strategic initiatives that address the school's commitment to these principles.

II. Worship

Principles

- Meeting for worship in the manner of Friends is fundamental to the Quaker essence and character of the school, and is fully articulated, understood, and embraced as central to the school's mission and philosophy.
- The school holds meeting for worship in the manner of Friends in a developmentally appropriate way at least weekly, as well as on special occasions.
- The school's meeting for worship honors the diversity of religious identities within its community and in the world at large while at the same time embodying Quaker faith and practice.

Confirmation

1. Describe the yearly calendar for weekly meetings for worship, and those held on special occasions (e.g. opening day, baccalaureate, commencement, etc.).
2. Briefly describe how each constituency group in the school is oriented to and educated about the spiritual underpinnings, purpose, and practice of meeting for worship.
3. Relate one (or two) stories that illustrate how meeting for worship has recognized and honored religious diversity within and beyond the school community.
4. If the school uses a different term for its meeting for worship, briefly describe the reasons for the community's particular language.

III. Equity and Justice

Principles

- The school's mission encompasses a vision of community that embraces diversity, equity, justice, inclusion, and promotes a sense of belonging for all.
- The school commits resources to sustaining a diverse and inclusive community.
- The school engages in an ongoing analysis of both its history and its current operations and is committed to uncovering and redressing the ways in which it has explicitly or inadvertently reinforced racist or similarly biased structures and practices.
- At all levels of its operations - from its governance, administrative structures, admissions, financial aid, hiring, and personnel policies, including faculty/staff evaluation practices, to its finances, business practices, and constituent relations - the school exercises its commitment to furthering diversity and upholding equity, justice, and inclusion.
- The school's program and curriculum is explicitly anti-bias and anti-racist, addressing - in age-appropriate ways - the history and contemporary ramifications of systemic oppression, bias and prejudice, and political, social, and economic power dynamics.
- The school provides regular opportunities for trustees, faculty, staff, students, parents, and alumni to engage in meaningful education, reflection, communication, and action with regard to matters of diversity, equity, justice, and inclusion.

- The school is committed to holding itself and its community members accountable in regard to matters of diversity, equity, justice, and inclusion.

Confirmation

1. Share the school's published statements, policies, or procedures that demonstrate the school's commitment to diversity, equity, and justice.
2. Describe three to five institutional structures or practices that illustrate the school's existing commitment to diversity, equity, and a sense of belonging for all members of the community.
3. Describe recent institutional initiatives, across the full range of school operations - from administrative policies and practices to program and curricular reform - that illustrate the school's continuing effort to become a more diverse, equitable, inclusive, and just community.
4. Describe the channels through which people of color and other affinity groups within the community - including current students, faculty, staff, and parents, as well as alumni and former employees - have opportunities to connect with one another, affirm their identity, share experiences, voice concerns, and bring matters forward for consideration by the school's administration.
5. Describe efforts by the school to expand faculty, staff, and student racial diversity. Include data to demonstrate the results of those efforts.
6. Describe a recent challenge that has called the school to redress a matter of injustice from the past or the present.

IV. Governance

Principles

- The school is in a vibrant care relationship with a monthly meeting, or its board membership includes sufficient representation of Quakers to model, support, articulate and advocate for the school's continuing Quaker identity.
- All board members, regardless of religious affiliation, embrace their responsibility to be ambassadors of and advocates for the school's Quaker mission.
- The board emphasizes the centrality of the school's Quaker mission and identity, as well as its commitment to diversity and inclusion, as it seeks new members and appoints its leaders.
- The board provides robust trustee orientation around Quakerism in general, Friends decision-making, and other practices followed within a Quaker meeting for business.
- The board's governance structure includes a subcommittee that is charged with overseeing, evaluating, and providing ongoing trustee education regarding the school's Quaker identity.
- The board's governance structure is charged with overseeing, evaluating, and providing ongoing trustee education regarding the school's commitment to matters of diversity, equity, and social justice.
- As it exercises its responsibility for fiduciary and strategic planning, the board holds both the school's Quaker identity and its commitment to matters of diversity, equity, and environmental justice as essential elements in both the content and the implementation of new initiatives.

Confirmation

1. Describe the process by which the board recruits members of the Religious Society of Friends as trustees.
2. Describe the process by which the board recruits trustees who will bring a range of diverse backgrounds, perspectives, and lived experience to the stewardship of the school.
3. Provide a list of the school’s current trustees, indicating any Quaker affiliation as well as any other relevant information to demonstrate the range of perspectives represented on the board of trustees.
4. Describe the board’s orientation protocols to introduce new trustees to Quakerism, Quaker-based decision-making, and other practices peculiar to the Society of Friends.
5. List the Quaker-related board development and other networking opportunities attended by board members during the past three years, e.g. Friends Council workshops and peer networks meetings, etc.
6. Name the board subcommittee charged with overseeing the school’s adherence to its Quaker identity. Describe recent work that has been carried out by this committee.
7. *Describe the school’s governance and administrative structure that is charged with overseeing the school’s commitment to diversity, equity, and justice and name the committee or work group charged with accomplishing this task.*
8. List the Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging-related board development and other networking opportunities attended by board members during the past three years.
9. Describe a recent challenge faced by the board of trustees that was resolved through a Quaker-based process of discernment and decision-making.
10. Describe recent trustee development work, a policy decision, or a strategic initiative undertaken by the full board of trustees that moved the school forward in its commitment to equity and justice.

V. Administrative Leadership

Principles

- The head of school models the use of sound Quaker practices, and is a primary ambassador of and advocate for the school’s Quaker identity.
- Other key leaders in the school are also responsible for understanding, communicating, and supporting the school’s Quaker identity in developing and implementing programs.
- The head of school is responsible for the orientation of faculty, staff, and other key administrators in Quaker tenets and practices. Further, the head of school leads the school community through processes that ensure both personal and institutional continuing revelation.
- For schools that are in a care relationship with a Friends meeting, the head of school, together with the board clerk and the clerk of meeting, actively participates in relationship-building with the Meeting.
- The school’s administrative leadership participates in and facilitates ongoing professional development work for all school personnel in the areas of equity, justice, and environmental literacy.
- The school’s business policies and practices reflect an understanding of the complexities of economic and social justice.

Confirmation

1. Briefly describe how the school attracts Quaker administrators, faculty and staff and orients all to Quakerism, Quaker-based decision-making and meeting for worship.
2. Give a recent example of the head of school, and also at least one key administrator, using Quaker-based decision-making for a major decision.
3. List Quaker-related professional development and networking opportunities attended by the head, faculty and other key leaders during the past three years, e.g. Friends Council workshops and peer network meetings, etc.
4. Describe the school's efforts, including its challenges, to attract and retain faculty and staff of diverse backgrounds.
5. Describe the school's efforts, including its challenges, to attract and retain families from diverse backgrounds and a range of socioeconomic levels.
6. Describe recent professional development initiatives, both mandatory and optional, designed to increase the equity, justice, and environmental literacy of both faculty and staff.
7. Share one or two areas of substantive growth and opportunity for the school as it seeks to become a more inclusive, socially and environmentally responsible community.

VI. Program, Curriculum, and Community Life

Principles

- Friends' tenets, testimonies, and principles are at the core of all aspects of school life and inform the program, the curriculum, and the school's relationship to the wider community.
- Students are introduced through the program and curriculum to the practices, beliefs, and traditions of Quakerism and are guided to understand these principles at the root of the school's community life.
- Visible in the school's ethos is a culture of respect demonstrating the belief that there is that of God in every person.
- The school's program, curriculum, and pedagogy is characterized by a culture of inquiry-based, reflective practice consistent with Friends' ongoing search for truth.
- The school has a fundamental commitment to be an inclusive community grounded in respect for each of its members. The religious, cultural, ethnic, racial pluralism of the school community provides an opportunity to foster the religious and spiritual formation of people from a variety of religious backgrounds.
- Community outreach, service-learning, and other forms of community involvement are tangible expressions of the school's Quaker identity and are essential elements of a student's educational experience at all levels.

Confirmation

1. Share two or three stories that exemplify ways in which the school fosters a sense of community in which all students, faculty/staff, and parents have the opportunity to be authentically seen, heard, and valued, and all experience a sense of true belonging.
2. Describe how the school orients students and parents unfamiliar with Friends faith and practice to Quakerism, Quaker pedagogical approaches, Quaker-based decision-making, and the school’s overall Quaker identity.
3. Describe the ways in which students are grounded in the school’s Quaker identity through the teaching of accountability, responsibility, reflection, respect, and non-violent conflict resolution.
4. Give a few examples of how Quaker history, practice, and testimonies are embedded and taught in the academic program.
5. Briefly describe how Quakers and Quaker organizations are integrated into school life.
6. Identify ways in which the program and curriculum introduce students to world faith traditions, global studies, multicultural experience, ethics and moral reasoning, and the role of religion in historical and contemporary contexts.
7. Identify two or three ways in which issues of equity and justice are woven into the school’s program and curriculum. Further, in what areas do you plan growth?
8. Describe some elements of the program and curriculum that are intended to develop students’ environmental literacy and conscience.
9. Describe or provide documentation of the school’s service learning/community engagement/community outreach program.

VII. Continuing Revelation

It is expected that out of the self-study process will emerge new insights about what a school’s Quaker identity and commitments call us to do. In this section, describe what has been revealed as particular strengths of the school, plus areas that need to be more fully addressed. In short, what has been learned and what are the school’s growing edges? Provide an annotated list of three to five initiatives that will be undertaken in the coming years, weaving into these action steps evidence of continued growth in embracing the school’s Quaker identity, its commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice, and its work to support a more environmentally sustainable future for our planet.

RESOURCES FOR THE MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL PROCESS SELF-STUDY

- *Advices and Queries for Friends School Community Life*
- *Governance Handbook for Friends Schools, second edition*
- *Leading in the Light: Celebrating 325 Years of Quaker Education in America*
- *Principles of Good Practice for Friends School Boards & Every Friends School Trustee*
- *A Quaker Book of Wisdom: Life Lessons in Simplicity, Service, and Common Sense*
- *Readings on Quaker Pedagogy: Philosophy and Practice in Friends Education*
- *Additional diversity, equity, justice, and inclusion resources will be forthcoming.*