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BUFFALO BUSINESS LEADERS

Inside Western New York's No. 1 High School

A research-based approach at Buffalo Seminary
equips girls to reach their fullest potential.



When Blair Parker was recruited as head of school for Buffalo Seminary (SEM) in 2023, she'd never heard of the school, much less been to Buffalo. It only took a day trip from New York City to understand the school's unique appeal.

"As a former history teacher, I needed a school whose history I'd be proud to tell," Parker recalls. At SEM, she got that.

SEM was founded in 1851 by progressive parents wanting an equal education for their daughters. Decades later, in 1916, SEM offered the only girls' basketball team in the region. With no outlet for competition, they formed their own intramural competition—dividing the school into Hornets and Jackets, a friendly rivalry that has grown to be a staple of school life and a beloved tradition, connecting current students to SEM's alumnae.

Today, SEM continues to be a forward-thinking pioneer in girls' education. It is not only the oldest school in Buffalo, but also the best, as recently ranked by Niche.com. Classes are small, averaging just 12 students. "We are a place for smart, curious girls," says Parker. "Our individualized programming means there are endless opportunities for students to explore their interests, whether that's the arts, athletics, STEM, politics, or all of it."

The Connections Model

At the heart of SEM's curriculum is the research-backed belief that "connections" are pivotal to girls' education. "This means fostering connections between learning and the real world—such as how calculus applies to a hobby—as well as fostering connections in relationships between peers and teachers," Parker says.

With 16 interscholastic athletic teams, students have abundant opportunities to pursue their favorite sport or even try new ones. Athletes are routinely sent to Division 1 college programs in rowing, swimming, squash, and more. With the SEMFlex program, Olympic-bound athletes can remain connected to their academics while traveling for training. "We are small but mighty," says Parker.

Boarding and Beyond

SEM is Buffalo's only boarding school, offering five-day and seven-day boarding as well as day-program enrollment. "It's extremely hard to find an urban boarding school. Many are secluded in rural environments. But SEM is located in Elmwood Village, a vibrant town in Buffalo with coffee shops and bookstores," says Parker. "Buffalo is called the City of

Good Neighbors, and my young family has found it to be an incredibly open and welcoming place."

SEM students hail from all corners of the globe, currently representing eight countries. Short-term exchange programs are offered in Australia and China. These global exposures—both at home and abroad—open students to a world of international possibilities.

History in the Making

SEM celebrates its 175th anniversary in 2026, but Parker is equally focused on the school's future. In her first year, she banned cell phones during the school day, making it the first school in the region to do so. "It was a bold change that needed to happen in order to continue being who we are," she says. "We're preparing our students to be leaders, and we want to see more SEM grads. SEM should not be a secret anymore."

SEM
BUFFALO SEMINARY
EST. 1851