

**IDEALS**

POST OFFICE BOX 4438 NEWTOWN, PA 18940-0908  
T. 215.579.6569 F. 215.579.6579

## REFLECTIONS

### *about* **GEORGE SCHOOL TEACHERS**

*by Head of School Nancy Starmer*

While attracting and retaining the finest teachers has constituted a challenge at all points in the school's history, the new century brings its own set of challenges to this task. Wealthy suburban public school systems—and some of the most heavily endowed independent schools—are offering their teachers starting salaries that are thousands of dollars above what George School can offer. Several of these schools are offering signing bonuses to attract graduates from prestigious universities and merit pay increases to their most successful, experienced teachers. Such practices not only challenge our ability to compete in the marketplace, they challenge us to articulate our fundamental beliefs about the role and responsibilities of the profession.

At George School we seek to attract teachers for whom teaching is a leading, a gift of service. We look for scholars not because their degrees add prestige to the school but because the habits of mind that scholars develop—the habits of precision, patience, persistence, an open mind and an enduring curiosity about the world around them—are qualities that we want modeled and taught to our students. We look for teachers who can inspire students in the classroom and the studios, encourage them on the playing field or the stage, work side-by-side with them on service projects, support them in the dormitory, challenge them to reach out to others and to live their lives deliberately. We look for teachers who will engage willingly in the difficult and time-consuming processes of collaborate decision-making and truth seeking. In short, we look for teachers who are models of the people we want our students to grow to be.

This is a tall order for our teachers, and a tall order for the school. It means most of all that we must provide our teachers with the support they need to do their jobs well. Part of that support must come in the forming of a living wage.

Providing our teachers with the support they need to do their jobs well involves more than just a living wage. It involves providing them with the ability to live on or close to campus, so that they have time and the opportunities to make meaningful connections with students and to engage deliberately with colleagues. It means that teachers have opportunities for professional growth and enrichment. It means attending to the community life of the school. And it means giving teachers a chance to act meaningfully in the world outside George School on occasion.

We are lucky up to this point to have been able to attract so many fine teachers to the school—and to keep them here. The support that we received during the Second Century Campaign enabled us to expand our professional development opportunities for teachers and to dramatically improve our dormitory apartments.

An impending nationwide teacher shortage, however, combined with the lure of constantly growing salaries in this area (the local Council Rock school district now boasts the highest teachers salaries in the state), and the fact that close to half our faculty is currently a decade or less from retirement, means that we cannot rest here. Support for endowment, for sabbaticals, for professional development, and for faculty housing will be critical if we hope to continue to attract and retain the finest teachers over the coming years.