

**COMMENTS FROM TIM DELEHAUNTY**  
**Delivered at State of the School, Jan 25, 2018**

What I hope to do in the next few minutes is orient you to what I see happening at Tower School, and what I've learned in my first five months that makes Tower School distinctive and strong. I'm going to use Twitter, posts that I've made over the first half of the year to explain my observations. (The thing about Twitter is it easily allows me to retrace my steps through the first months of the year.) And then I'm going to give just a couple of ideas of places where we can build on strengths, opening the conversation of what will happen in the spring when we begin to dig in with the community about strategic planning. And then at the very end, I'll save a few moments for us to do something with the 3x5 cards you were given. Are we ready? Great.

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When you move to a new school, as my family and I have, people ask you all the time, "How is that new school? How is Tower?" I've gotten the question from people here in the community, from faculty, from old colleagues, from friends in the business, from family. "How is your new school?"

I usually answer the question by talking about what I had seen THAT DAY at school, something that made me so sure that Tower was the place I hoped it would be. The place where students are "known and needed." As I said during the interview process, I was looking for a school where students were known and needed. One of the stories I've told happened in November:

I was at drop-off in the morning and students were getting out of their cars. The Pre-K students are always fun to greet as they sling their backpacks onto their shoulders. On this particular day, they each carried a long, tube shaped piece of construction paper that they had decorated at home. A piece of art. Each student was proud as they walked past me. Some wanted to share, some were too shy. But they were obviously proud and looking forward to showing it to their teachers. And I thought, "This is what it means to be known. A student who is known is confident that what they bring to the class will be appreciated by the teacher and classmates."

And then I saw this: [slide of bulletin board showing the turkey made by Pre-K showing all of the individual "tubes" going together as feathers on a turkey for Thanksgiving]

This is what it means to be needed. If you don't come to school on this day, the class doesn't have its spectacular presentation. To be needed gives a student great motivation. And I've found everywhere at Tower that students are known and needed -- and that they are confident and motivated because of it.

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But I've been asking a question of my own during these first five months. I've asked it of faculty, alums, parents, students. My question is, "What is real at Tower?" After five months, here is what I know is real.

## **1. A TRUE AND DEEP ACADEMIC STRENGTH**

Tower is a place of true and unique academic strength. How do I know? Let's start at the end, with our fourteen year-olds. As Mary Dailey, who directs our secondary school counseling efforts, tells us continuously, our students are "known and needed" at area secondary schools. The list speaks for itself. We've been doing a lot of research on this over the last few months in our background work for the Strategic Plan, and we can see that. At one of our respected secondary schools, we have 100% record of admission. And I'm not talking about 3 for 3. I'm talking about 60 for 60. Tower does not style itself as a feeder school to any one or two places --and we shouldn't as it's our independence which is our strength, but we are feeding secondary schools the students that they want. Tower has a clear success rate at placing students into top secondary schools; and those students build successful records at those schools. Those of you who were at the Upper School parents night heard Head of Upper School Ryan Buckley relate his conversations with his contacts in the secondary school world: those admissions directors and officers want Tower students. We are elevating and maximizing students' choices for secondary schools.

How else do I know? The panelists of young alums who come back here -- and I've heard a couple of those panels now -- tell a compelling story. Our current secondary school students talk about being ahead of their peers sitting next to them. They have more skills -- reading, writing, math. Spanish. Student leadership. They are more organized in how they do their work. They know how to form relationships with teachers which benefit them in their work. They work harder. They have the grit to persevere. I am hearing this, too, from alums of all ages. It is perhaps most striking from alums in their 20's and out in the workforce, who look back at their total education. One such alum told me, "I learned how to think at Tower." This speaks to a true and deep academic strength at Tower.

You also see this academic strength when you look closely at our classrooms, which leads to a second REAL thing at Tower:

## **2. EXCELLENT TEACHERS FOLLOWING AN INTENTIONALLY TIMELESS AND TIMELY APPROACH**

Remember your own education for a minute. We all have one or two teachers we point to and say, that teacher made a difference for me. That teacher opened up my way of thinking and working. Walk up and down these hallway. Classroom after classroom has a teacher like that. What do they do? I break it into four components.

### **Introduce important, relevant content or questions**

Our teachers start here, with the topics that are important. Some of these topics are given to students. Multiplication tables. Algebra. Literature. How to understand global climates. American history. Life science. Spanish. Some of this content might be thematic: The theme of human rights. The theme of growing. The theme of the individual vs. the group. Some are based on student interest or student questions within these topics. For example, what is the campus expansion project (which both the first and third grades asked this fall)? Who are the new members of our community (second grade)? Why, in 1692, did a community burn young women at the stake and what can we learn from this? How do conditions change in Salem Harbor, how can we show those changes, and why does it matter? No matter what the topic, what our teachers bring this content to life. Create interest and enthusiasm about it. The reason why your children, as some of you report, run into the school building in the morning is because of the excitement of teachers for them -- the students -- and for the content they teach. Children love ideas and subjects.

[show slides of tweets]

### **Promote the hard work of discovery**

I have learned that Tower School is not a place where things are handed to students. Our teachers put students in the position to construct knowledge. This is HARD WORK. But it's also motivating. And it's the place where our students learn the important habits and skills of process. For our youngest students, this is about imaginative play and the use of our senses to understand the world. With older students, this is where we teach writing process, the drafting process, the scientific method, active reading, problem solving. It is also through the hard work of discovery that we teach curiosity, resilience, trial and error and how to look outside oneself for inspiration and ideas. It goes almost

without saying, where we model and promote collaboration. All of these are tools for discovery. This is what we mean when we talk about experiential education as a central tenet to what we do.

[show slides of tweets]

### **Develop academic skills**

The heart of what we do. Reading, writing, listening and speaking, reasoning, critical thinking, problem solving. This is conjugating verbs in Spanish class and doing declensions in Latin. This is memorizing vocabulary. Setting up math problems. For younger students, it's sorting and grouping and counting about sounding out. It's multi-sensory experience done intentionally to teach handwriting and reading. This is also where you'll see teachers using plenty of quizzes and tests -- to evaluate specifically and to make automatic these skills.

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There are no photos that go with this. Why? This is grit, perseverance, homework, elbow grease. This doesn't make for fancy tweets or photos on the website. But it's vital here at Tower.

### **Apply what has been learned**

We learned this from our founders. Adeline Tower and Helen Runnette in the 1910's and 20's were talking about the importance of applying knowledge. More important, Helen wrote, than knowing math facts was the ability to apply them to solve a larger problem. Brain research and educational research of this century has borne her out. When is not placed in some larger environment or used to tackle some larger problem, it remains superficial. We cannot afford to put superficial learners into the world in the 21st century. Our teachers have known this for a long time -- before it was fashionable -- that knowledge has to be applied, has to be practiced in the real world. The knowledge is not only more likely to stay with the students, it also teaches students continually to ask the question, "What can I do with this? What can I solve or create? Who can benefit?"

[show slides of tweets]

When you consider this, it's not surprising that arts aren't just something which fits nicely into Tower School, they are VITAL. Because the arts work this way naturally.

[show slides of arts tweets]

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### **Why does our teaching approach matter?**

So why does it matter that this is how we approach teaching? Well, I started by saying that this approach is “timeless and timely.”

It’s timely for this reason. We cannot predict the future. But we can reasonably assume a couple of things. First, we don’t know the jobs and careers we are preparing students for. They are unknown, and even the one that ARE known (doctors, lawyers, teachers etc) are changing. So students who have the flexibility to take a skill or bit of content learned in one place and transfer to another place will be at a premium. The twenty-something graduates are already saying this is true.

Why is it timeless? Because we can also reasonably assume that the world will speed up. The amount of content our children will need to handle is enormous compared to what we’ve had to handle. How will they make decisions about it? How will they sort it? Make something of it? Critical judgement is paramount. Ethical judgement is paramount. Where will children learn this skills? Only in a pedagogy that creates the space for students to practice this kind of thinking and with adults -- with excellent teachers -- who will go into these spaces with students and help them learn how to think. That’s what the Tower approach does.

[show slide of four approaches to teaching just described]

I believe that most schools fall into two types. The first type does well the first [*Introduce important, relevant content or questions*] and third [*Develop academic skills*] parts of the pedagogy. These schools have good short-term outcomes. Their students may perform well on some kinds of testing, often standardized. But they are not ready to think creatively and proactively when truly complex problems are put in front of them.

The second type excels at the second [*Promote the hard work of discovery*] and fourth [*Apply what has been learned*]. These schools produce thoughtful students who are inclusive thinkers and work well in groups. They can think novelly and often present ideas well. But they often do not have the skills and background to do more complex academic work.

What I see at Tower School is an approach to teaching which strives intentionally to educate students completely -- content, discovery, academic skill, application.

### **3. A COMMUNITY OF JOY AND SERVICE**

This is real at Tower. Tower does joy well and it does service well. That's due to all of you. This is not a small thing. We want our children to have fun, we want them to feel connected. But we need to model for them a community and a world that they will quickly become responsible for. And I believe more and more that we have to model adulthood for our children. And we have to teach -- intentionally teach -- the skills of adulthood to our children. Think about it yourselves. Whatever your age. Participation in community and civic life and civil discourse. Who are the adults in your mind that you pattern your own life after? WE are those adults -- all of us -- for these children. TOWER ADULTS TAKE THAT ROLE seriously. And we model joy. We model optimism. We teach skills. We teach toughness and grit. And we put our children into challenging situations that they will grow from. These things lead to true independence and to true global citizenry.

I also see great joy among our teachers. I have had one on one conversations with each of them to talk about their teaching lives. And they all talk about how special Tower feels -- a special teaching environment that they do not take for granted and that they see as their responsibility to contribute to.

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### **4. AWESOME BUT NOT PERFECT:**

My sister Beth, who is an artist and small business owner in Western Colorado, has a saying, "Not perfect, but awesome." Can we do more? Of course we can. The Strategic Plan will help us to think about Tower in ensuing years, and we need your feedback on this plan. We're scheduling meetings for the spring to get your input. That process of input started two years ago with many of you in this room.

Here are places we can go: I'm going to give you just four, for now.

1. Dean and Taylor outlined a financial model. We are committed to being responsible with tuition. We respect greatly the investment people make for a Tower education. How can we responsibly grow the school with

Tower-appropriate students and families so that we can rein in increases? That's a priority. It's not just a Tower challenge; it's an industry challenge at every school. And I see great creativity and resolve in the Board of Trustees so that Tower can be leader in figuring out ways to answer this industry-wide challenge, so that we are not only competitive with our north shore neighbors but that we can set a standard for how to take on the challenge.

2. We are the elementary school in our area that knows its students best. I don't have a doubt about this. Our size, our structure. Our people. Our approach. But we can do more. We know that there are many modalities for learning, many preferences and abilities for learning, many kinds of learners and many ways . As we learn more and more about the brain, more and more about how learning styles can help to personalize learning, we can be the place that.
3. We can measure better. I am glad the Strategic Plan has begun with a look at data. We need to measure more thoughtfully as we make decisions about program.
4. Diversity. I did not realize the diversity of Tower until I arrived. We reflect the diversity of the North Shore, and we in many ways reflect the diversity of the world, with our many international families. How do we make the most of this strength? We know from all kinds of research that groups with people of diverse backgrounds and points of view make the best decisions and create the best institutions. We have that diversity. How do we leverage it?

But we need ALL of you in this conversation. Please attend the community sessions for the Strategic Plan on April 4 and May 1, both at 6:30.

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## **SUMMARY:**

Individuals who are known and needed + teachers who follow an intentional pedagogy + community which models joy and service = TOWER STUDENTS OF CHARACTER AND CONFIDENCE.

This is what's real at Tower School.