



DEAN ROHRER

School's move makes sense

By William C. Kashatus

Episcopal Academy's decision to relocate from Merion to Newtown Square was based more on the changing demographics of enrollment and the competitive market of independent education rather than the need to expand its campus.

Though I certainly sympathize with the feelings of those who believe that Episcopal belongs in Merion, closer to its historic commitment to educate the more socially and economically diverse population of Philadelphia, the decision to relocate is part of the reality of contemporary independent education.

Since the 1960s, Episcopal has had to compete for students with the Haverford School, William Penn Charter, Germantown Friends School, Germantown Academy, and Chestnut Hill Academy/Springside School, as well as a

growing constellation of elementary feeder schools. Hoping to capitalize on a growing suburban community, Episcopal in 1974 established a satellite lower school at Devon for students too young to travel to the Merion campus on their own.

The 1980s and '90s brought an increasing number of students from the upper Main Line and Chester and Delaware Counties. The demographics of enrollment and the competition dictated the move to the outer suburbs, where Episcopal now finds itself in the enviable position of being one of the very few coeducational K-12 day schools.

The move to the western suburbs is not a new phenomenon for Episcopal. When the Rev. William White founded the school in 1785, it was situated at Second and Market Streets in Philadelphia. Over the next 136 years, Episcopal moved no fewer than six

Episcopal Academy won't be harmed by following its base farther west.

of the late 20th century.

Enrollment reflected the same religious diversity of most private schools. Religious education was grounded in ecumenical chapel programs, an exemplary community-service program, and in a religion curriculum that encouraged students to examine their relationship to a supreme being through critical reading, writing and thinking.

Essentially, Episcopal was not so different from most of the Philadelphia area's other private schools, though it was more successful than most in educating the mind, body and spirit of the student. What impressed me more was the quality of the faculty.

As a young teacher, I was blessed with a department chair who taught me how to balance a rigorous course load with the demands of coaching and graduate studies. Another veteran teacher taught me the importance of consistency in disciplining students.

The athletic director inspired me to write and publish on sports-related educational issues. And the leaders of the community-service program gave me a remarkable

model that I later used in developing a service-learning program at another school. All of those things were done with compassion, a firm sense of integrity, and a light-hearted sense of humor.

Ultimately, the success of any school is not determined by its location or physical

plant, but by the quality of human beings who compose it. By that measure, Episcopal Academy has been, is, and will continue to be one of the finest schools in our region.

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times, almost always westward and closer to the suburbs.

Not surprisingly, there were school officials, alumni and parents who were just as distraught about the last move to "suburban" Merion in 1921 because they felt Episcopal was abandoning a commitment to educate the city's children.

To be sure, White, the first Episcopal bishop of Pennsylvania, had a genuine philanthropic commitment to educating the city's poor children. In addition, the Vestry of Christ Church stipulated that the head of the school and the trustees had to be Episcopalian who lived in the city.

It was believed that such stewardship was necessary to ensure the threefold mission of the school: to "dispense religious doctrine" along with the academic curriculum; to "train young men for the Episcopalian ministry"; and to "lay the foundation for a collegiate education for those who intend to take it."

My experience as a teacher at Episcopal in the late 1980s revealed that the school had adapted that mission quite nicely to the social and economic realities



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