

Foote Evolves, But the Core Remains the Same

Commendations for a Caring, Intellectually Curious Community

As you'll read in the following pages, Foote was officially re-accredited by the Connecticut Association of Independent Schools (CAIS) in January. The process of assessing the school and its programs involved every member of the faculty and staff, along with the Board, alumni, and parents. The reaction of the Visiting Team was overwhelmingly positive and reaffirming. They told us they "had never seen a school that lives its mission as deeply and authentically."

Schools really do "feel" different from one another, even schools that share many programs and policies. Those differences are surely a reflection of a school's history. What is it that sets Foote apart?

I hear from former students — the youngest, who are still in high school, and those in retirement — that particular experiences and special teachers influenced them to become the people they are today. Different alumni, of course, cherish different experiences. For some it was the value placed on intellectual curiosity. For others, it was the central role the arts played in their education. And yet for others, the sense of community and the joy of learning have remained with them for years and decades.

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Charlayne Hunter-Gault, left, visited Foote this winter to talk to students about her experience as one of the first two African-American students at the University of Georgia and about her career as a journalist. Speakers such as Ms. Hunter-Gault bring their unique perspectives and their stories to Foote, one of many ways our students learn about the world around them.

carries the influences of many teachers, students, parent volunteers, Board members, and nine Heads of School. But the soul of the place — the focus on children and what works best for them — remains. Martha Babcock Foote, a Bryn Mawr graduate and progressive educational thinker, created a child-centered program. She encouraged her

students to approach challenges with spirit and confidence and her teachers to make the most of the natural curiosity and creativity of their students. A great deal has changed in the past century — it seems unlikely that Mrs. Foote considered the idea of Foote students studying Chinese or using iPads in their classrooms for example! — but the core that makes Foote work so well for children is unchanged. Recent research confirms what Mrs. Foote knew: the powerful impact of a devoted and skillful teacher, the importance of a caring and supportive relationship between

children and the adults in their school, and the benefits of the K–8 (or 9) model in which students attend a single school for nine or 10 years.

Perhaps the single most important change at Foote since Mrs. Foote's day has been the increasing diversity of the families who join this school community. We have students whose families have lived in New Haven for many generations and others who are newly arrived from countries throughout the world. Within Foote's student body are native speakers of more than 25 different languages. More than 30 percent are students of color. The extraordinary diversity of Foote families allows every student the opportunity to understand, share, appreciate, and value the differences that enrich our community and our world. Each child develops knowledge of himself as well as respect for the differences that make others unique. Foote's remarkable diversity provides the best possible environment in which to prepare for life in the 21st century.

I hope you share my sense of pride in our wonderful school. Some of the many commendations from the CAIS Accreditation Visiting Team are included on the following pages. They praise teachers' work at every grade level and in every academic discipline. I am very happy to share them with you!



Carol Maoz
Head of School

After Sandy Hook

Families across the United States and especially in Connecticut were deeply affected by the horrific and tragic events that took place at the Sandy Hook School in Newtown. At Foote, we were thoughtful yet decisive in our response. We began by communicating with parents in a timely and supportive manner. Our first communication to parents went out via email within an hour of the shootings, reassuring parents that their children were safe and that we were in contact with the authorities regarding safety measures. The following day, another communication went to parents. Recognizing that Foote is so much more than just a school that their children attend, the message offered guidance as to how they could best speak to their children about this tragedy as well as an explanation of how we were going to respond when the children returned to school after the weekend. We were careful about responding in developmentally appropriate ways based on the children's ages. The faculty met with our consulting psychiatrist before the children arrived so that we could gain guidance and support on that all-important day. Over the course of the next few months, a number of security updates were sent to parents and the school conducted a live lockdown drill, which had been planned prior to the tragedy.

Security issues are always on our minds, and being prepared is essential. Just days before Sandy Hook, Foote's crisis team met with an alumna who runs a crisis communications firm to be sure we were as ready as we could be if we ever encountered a crisis of significant proportions. After Sandy Hook, Business Manager Jay Cox and I attended a security summit sponsored by the Connecticut Association of Independent Schools, then met with the New Haven chief of police for advice. As a result, we recently reviewed and adjusted our on-campus security procedures to further ensure the safety of our students and our staff.

It is important for all schools to continually evaluate the security of their campuses. As we make our decisions, we take into account both the safety and security of our children as well as the special culture of our school. Foote's campus is a learning laboratory, a hive of activity that allows children to move beyond the classroom to explore and discover nature and the outdoors. As one student serving on a recent admissions panel told prospective Foote parents, "Foote is my second home."

We are doing our utmost to keep it that way.

Sincerely,
Carol