

RUN THE RACE WITH PERSEVERANCE

Hebrews 12:1

**EPISCOPAL SCHOOLS CELEBRATION 2023-2024
OCTOBER 1-7, 2023**



National Association
of Episcopal Schools
Excellence Through Association

Episcopal Schools Celebration 2023

NAES Executive Director's Message



“Run the Race with Perseverance” (Hebrews 12:1)

The Rev. David A. Madison, D.Min., Executive Director

As a student of an Episcopal school, I could tell that my experience was different from my friends attending school elsewhere. One of the biggest differences was how I related to the adults in the building. Hearing my friends talk about their teachers, it was obvious there was a fundamental difference in how we viewed our teachers. I knew deeply that the adults in the building were completely on my side and wanted the best for me, even when they were pushing me beyond what I wanted to do as a teenager. While I frequently found their interventions annoying—as any teenager would—I knew their actions came from a place of wanting what was best for me, even though I would never admit it at the time. This demonstration of their love was fundamental in my learning how to persevere.

Studies show that a major indicator of student success is whether or not they have an adult personally involved in their studies and academic development. The research confirms what our gut tells us—the student-teacher relationship is critical. Studies indicate that there are five critical aspects of this type of relationship: adults showing students that they care about them; challenging students to become their best selves; providing support to accomplish their goals; sharing power; and expanding students’ sense of possibilities and opportunities.* These types of relationships increase a student’s motivation to learn and allow them to experience greater levels of psychological and physiological well-being.**

We shouldn’t be surprised by any of this, really. Students thrive and can persevere when they are known, valued, and loved. In fact, we all do. What I didn’t realize as a teenager is that the adults in my school needed healthy relationships, too. As adults, we experience the importance of having relationships where we are supported in our work and lives. Research shows that adult wellness is directly tied to whether or not one has healthy relationships in one’s work and professional lives.*** When looking at a variety of activities that support wellness—from exercise to getting the right amount of sleep—having healthy relationships moves the well-being needle the most.

Despite what our culture often tells us, much of life is a team sport—not an individual event. And, being on a team is to be in a relationship with each other. Scripture confirms this, as well. Our lives in faith are not meant to be something that is just between us and God. Rather, we are all connected in the greater story of salvation and that connection still offers encouragement for us today. In the book Hebrews, the author recounts stories of faith pioneers who have gone before us and accomplished amazing things in their communities

to the glory of God. It's not simply sharing wonderful biographies. The point of these stories is to show that we are supported by that "cloud of witnesses" in our work today. In the same way that our earthly relationships encourage and support us, we shouldn't forget the encouragement of those who have gone before us as well and the encouragement that their stories continue to offer us today.

Episcopal schools are "cloud of witnesses" schools where the entire community (past and present) exists to support and encourage one another in our shared mission of helping young people be the best they can be. Have you ever taken a moment to consider the adults and the students who have gone before us? Have you considered the things they have accomplished that can enable us to do the things we are called to do today? Each of us stands on the shoulders of those who have given of their time, talent, and treasure in years past.

So what are we to do? Are we to simply sit back and bask in the cheering? Are we to simply enjoy the fruits of their labor? To the contrary! Rather, because we have been supported by this community, we are called to move forward and run the race with perseverance. We do this by showing kindness to our neighbors—not just to those who are similar to us. We do this by respecting the dignity of every human being in our daily interactions—not just respecting those who think as we do. We do this by honestly facing when we individually or institutionally have fallen short and need to do better—not shying away from difficult conversations because they are uncomfortable. In summary, we do this by simply trying to make this world just a tiny bit closer to the Kingdom of Heaven.

It's a marathon. It's not easy. And our world desperately needs it. Our world needs to be reoriented to the Kingdom that Jesus describes. And Episcopal schools are positioned to help with that reorientation. I envision our schools being part of that cloud of witnesses. Communities involved in bringing forth that Kingdom of God—on Earth as it is in Heaven.

*P. C. Scales, E. C. Roehlkepartain, and B. J. Houlberg, *The Elements of Developmental Relationships: A Review of Selected Research Underlying the Framework* (Minneapolis: Search Institute, 2022), <https://www.search-institute.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/ElementsofDevelopmentalRelationships-FINAL.pdf>.

**J. Sethi and P. C. Scales, *Developmental Relationships and School Success: How Teachers, Parents, and Friends Affect Educational Outcomes and What Actions Students Say Matter Most* (Contemporary Educational Psychology, 2020).

***D. G. Myers, "Close Relationships and Quality of Life," in *Well-Being: The Foundations of Hedonic Psychology*, ed. D. Kahneman, E. Diener, and N. Schwarz (New York: Russell Sage Foundation Publications, 2003), 374–391.