

MORNING REPORTS

Trudy E. Hall, Head of School

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Good morning. After a full week of classes, sports and community service following your long winter break, I know you are thinking TGIF. As we head into the weekend, I want to open an important dialogue with you, one we will continue for the foreseeable future.

We are living in historic times. Next Tuesday our nation will witness the inauguration of the first African American president. Here on campus we will make certain that if you wish to see history in the making, you can do so. But these are historic times in other significant ways as well. From the headlines, we all know that our country is experiencing an economic recession. Some experts say that it is the worst recession since the Great Depression. Although you may find this hard to believe, there is no one on the faculty or staff who lived through that depression, so this is a new experience for all of us as well.

What is different about this recession from other recent economic downturns? This is a global recession. Look around this room. There are young women here from all corners of the globe. Each of you has a story to tell about the ways in which these uncertain fiscal times have touched your life. For some of you, a friend or family member may have lost a job. For others, a parent may have changed careers. Some of you may have moved to a different house, or received fewer presents at the holidays, or given up a family vacation. Those of you who live outside America have seen the value of the American dollar fluctuate and have felt the impact of that volatility on the buying power of your country's currency. This recession has touched nearly every business sector around the world, and, yes, it has touched education as well. Every type of school—private, public, college, secondary or grade school—will need to think in different ways about how to sustain their educational missions.

This morning I want to speak briefly about what may be different at Emma Willard in the months ahead. First—and this is most important: your school is nearly 200 years old. For the historians among you, that means it has survived the Civil War, World War I, the Great Depression, World War II, and the surge toward coeducation in the chaotic 1970s. We have lost our founder, we have had four campuses, we have opened and closed primary grades, and we have managed to live bravely without tunnels for over four years now. We have been, are, and will be committed to educating girls until long after you come to see your granddaughters perform in Revels. So what I am talking about will not affect the quality of education you will receive, but will change the way we allocate scarcer resources in order to insure that we are funding the right priorities.

Next week our alumnae and your parents will receive an update about the fiscal decisions we are making. That update will be posted on our Web site where you can read it as well. I hope you will make the time to do so. In times such as these, we all learn the importance of discipline and responsibility, essential attributes for any successful life.

I believe that nothing we have planned to date will adversely affect our ability to deliver a first-rate education to you as that is our primary responsibility. Our priorities will include

ensuring educational excellence, addressing any and all safety issues that make this environment less healthy or secure for you or the people who work here, supporting our staff and faculty, sustaining, and when possible increasing, our financial aid resources as we know this economy may place Emma Willard out of reach for our students and their families. Finally, our priorities will include taking care of this historic campus.

We will be altering some of our habits to reflect a more prudent approach. For example, you may see fewer dessert choices. We may keep the dorms a degree or two cooler, and you may need to wear clothing appropriate for the season. We will not know the full extent of the decisions for some time as no one knows or can accurately predict how the economy will fare in the months ahead. So we will focus on needs versus wants; to think about what is *most essential* to your educational experience and not what might be nice; to do less so that we can focus on what we do well. As I said to the faculty just prior to break, the history of Emma Willard School is filled with the stories of bold moves that were taken in trying times much like these. Just ask Ms. Hanmer if you would like a few examples. (I hope you know the story about the murals on the walls of Slocum that were painted when the school canceled spring break during World War II, and all the students stayed on campus and sacrificed vacation. Don't worry, I certainly won't be asking either you or the faculty to do that!) It does seem, however, that as a school we are best at bold thinking when the external threats are greatest.

I would be remiss if I did not end my remarks with some good news and several requests. First, the good news: despite the economy, we are seeing much activity in the admissions office. Applications have increased, and fifty families have registered for Monday's Open House, our largest Open House in recent years. As we ask for your assistance in welcoming these visitors, please know that a strong enrollment will be one of the key essentials to ensuring our continuing excellence. Many of you have already asked if there is something you can do to help with our finances. Helping us host these prospective families is a tangible something that you can do.

But there is more you can do. You can participate in this ongoing dialogue, as we live through these unusual and historic times together. We will be establishing a suggestion box for your ideas; we will continue the open forums started by the School Council as we consider our many options; we will make efforts to ensure that those who are interested understand our budgeting process; and we will respond as openly and responsibly to your questions as we are able to, although I hasten to add that you might not agree with all the decisions we may make in the coming months, and there will be times when we simply do not yet know the answers. Let me remind you, rarely do you all agree with all of my decisions other than Principal's Play Day, which, by the way, will remain a tradition later this year...but not today.

Someday you will tell your children the stories about your Emma Willard experience during these times. You have a choice. Your stories can become adventure filled or not. They can become opportunity filled or not. They can become growth producing or not. Whatever else those stories become, let's make certain that they become stories about how a remarkably strong, remarkably resilient community of smart young women made a difference as it wrote its own version of these historic times.