

The Head's Letter

2019-2020
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In this issue

2 School Leaders Respond:

What is a moment of great joy/ fun/humor that you have seen or experienced in these past weeks that might not have happened without the pandemic and needing to move to remote learning?

We all know that sometimes never before seen challenges inspire creativity. Share one problem-solving technique you or someone at your school proposed and implemented that you would term "great." It could be in any area of school life -- the classroom, admissions, community, communication, etc.

10 Head of School Appointments

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Jane Armstrong
IT Founder, Managing Partner

Bill Lyons
IT Founder, Managing Partner

Sara Armstrong
Manager & Editor of *The Letters*

We wrestled a bit with what this letter should offer. We knew that:
1) You have been bombarded with vast information and questions regarding COVID-19 and the impact it has had thus far and could have on our schools; 2) We are not experts either, and you probably didn't need one more publication talking about all of the challenges both current and future; and 3) Without a crystal ball, the best we could offer was to share moments of joy and inspiration.

You may have noticed that this year we have made an effort to focus on a theme for each issue. We had been working on one dedicated to "joy." While school leaders can often get weighed down by people and operational challenges, most independent school professionals still find regular and fulfilling joy in their work. Most independent school alums will recall the goofy or moving traditions and events, an amazing trip, a hilarious faculty member, a dining room meal, or a seemingly all important athletic contest won or lost when asked about what they remember most happily about their time at school. It is less likely that they will first note an interesting chemistry lab or the book they read in 10th grade English. Independent schools do fun traditions so well, and they feed the specialness of our school communities. We are saving the issue that shares the everyday and seminal event joys that are quirky, thoughtful and, of course, independent for another day when people are back in their school buildings living those joys.

For this issue, we reached out to school people around the country and asked about moments of joy and moments of creative problem solving that have come about as a result of the pandemic. What are the silver linings that have arisen?

Not so surprising, but certainly worth noting, a number of school leaders shared that the most significant silver lining for them has been the increased family time, the extra time they have to just be with their families and time that is not full of rushing from here to there.

We welcome hearing about your moments of joy, and in the meantime, we hope the anecdotes shared here will bring a smile or two.

Jane Armstrong
Managing Partner

Bill Lyons
Managing Partner

Questions Posed:

- ***What is a moment of great joy/fun/humor that you have seen or experienced in these past weeks that might not have happened without the pandemic and needing to move to remote learning?***
- ***We all know that sometimes never-before-seen challenges inspire creativity. Share one problem-solving technique you or someone at your school proposed and implemented that you would term “great.” It could be in any area of school life -- the classroom, admissions, community, communications, etc.***

Gregory J. Schneider ***Belmont Hill School (MA)***

I think the success in recreating community has been most surprising and important. Events like a virtual community road race, a virtual coffee house and orchestra for our students, and then “Friday Forums” created by the boys have sustained the community. Another wonderful piece of this has been inspirational videos from alumni cheering our boys on that we share every Friday. I have a new appreciation for the connection our alumni feel with our boys.

It has been important that we dissolved our old admin structure and have re-organized task forces around the challenges that continue to evolve. The structure was totally different in April than it was as a traditional school, and now we are re-shuffling all of it again for May as we turn our attention to fall planning. It seems to help us to be in nimble in a new way.



Carney M. H. O'Brien ***Washington Montessori School (CT)***

Professionally, we have known we have something special— really special — educationally to contribute to the global educational community. There has not been a lot of motivation (or scientific/industry-backing) for translating a century-old, scientifically-based, hands-on, highly-relational educational program for distance learning. Now, education has become a best-as-possible rather than best-practice question.

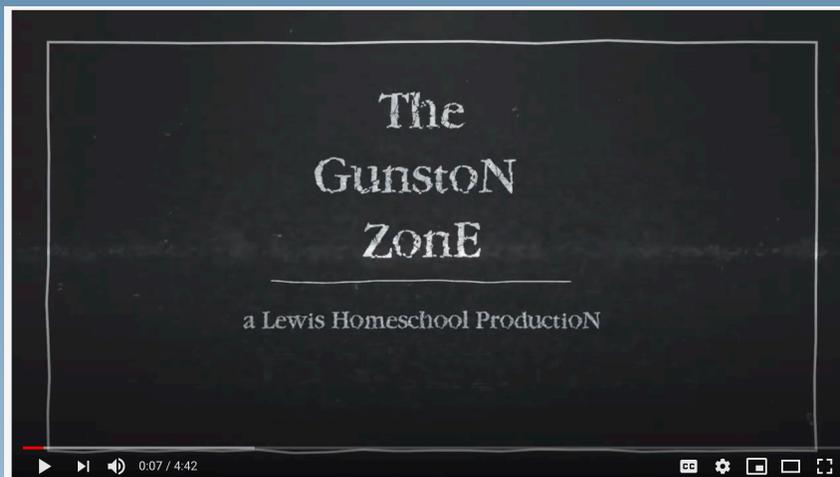


I'm torn between our ambassador program (talk about word-of-mouth messaging and marketing!) and our adherence to classic Montessori “phase in” periods — it makes parents insane (sometimes) but ultimately serves children well; we are, to borrow a phrase from Jim Collins, a crawl, walk, run organization. Our Ambassadors meet weekly with our assistant head for enrollment management and me to review messaging, and we launched online learning from the most basic to incredibly detailed, prioritized, enhanced and augmented.

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John Lewis
The Gunston School (MD)

Here's some **fun**:



[The Gunston Zone Hidden Treasures video](#)

In terms of **creativity**, we completely revamped our admin structure into a team approach, and we're dedicating every Wednesday to faculty tech upskilling:

Several days ago, I read [an article](#) that stopped me in my tracks.

Nine out of 10 children across 185 countries are currently out of school right now— that's over one billion young people worldwide, 50 million of whom live in the United States. Having hosted a Horizons summer program on our campus for nearly a decade, Gunston is keenly aware of the long-term impact of learning loss on students, and our rapid transition to distance learning reflected our deep sense of urgency to prevent this loss for our students.

At this point, after five weeks of distance learning, our concerns about meaningful and significant learning loss for our students have largely subsided. We expect that by the end of the semester, students will have sustained their academic progress. However, while minimizing learning loss was our primary concern at the outset of our distance learning program, we've recently embraced the idea that **a secondary goal of our distance learning efforts should be to prepare students for what commentators are calling "the acceleration of the future."**

My many recent conversations with Gunston parents have confirmed the dramatic changes being wrought in the workplace by the COVID-19 crisis. Most of these are easy to spot: the regularized use of videoconferencing; a push for universal rural broadband; the rapid global adoption of 5G technology; further integration of teleworking and telemedicine; and the dramatic growth in on-demand services like grocery delivery.

In education, Temple University professor Dr. Larry Dignan writes that COVID-19 will "accelerate changes that were already in play." These, I think, are also reasonably easy to identify. They include the further improvement and integration of sophisticated Learning Management Systems (for Gunston, that's G-Suite for Education), coupled with the "mainstreaming of remote education," especially at the post-secondary level. We also anticipate that students and families

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will expect and choose educational options that smoothly integrate the rapidly expanding toolkit of instructional technologies that enhance the learning experience. Most of these tools aim to promote the values embedded in the first sentence of Gunston’s mission: rigor, nurture, and personalization.

In response to this acceleration of the future, Gunston is currently dedicating every Wednesday to professional instructional technology upskilling. We’ve identified instructional technology skill development as a top strategic priority for Gunston over the next five years, and our ONLY priority for the next 3-6 months. Indeed, by the time school commences in Fall of 2020, our entire faculty, staff, and administrative team will be Certified Google Educators, and we will have mastered and integrated dozens of instructional learning applications that will enhance the learning process for students in every academic department.

Will instructional technology kill the brick and mortar classroom? Will all education in the future be delivered online? We believe the answer to both of these questions is a firm no. Indeed, as a recent [New York Times article](#) noted, “The best education continues to be intensive, expensive, and done in person.” However, we also believe that COVID-19 will change education dramatically, and for the better. From the various articles I’ve been reading, perhaps Dartmouth professor Joshua Kim captures it best:

The necessity of teaching and learning with asynchronous and synchronous platforms will yield significant benefits when these methods are layered into face-to-face instruction. We will come back from COVID-19 with a much more widely shared understanding that digital tools are complements, not substitutes, for the intimacy and immediacy of face-to-face learning...(and) courses will be better for the practice that professors have received in moving content online, as precious classroom time will be more productively utilized for discussion, debate and guided practice.

Although my mind swirls in helpless frustration every time I consider the billion children out of school each day, I’m comforted by the notion that Gunston’s 215 students have a dedicated team of adults working tirelessly to sustain their learning. As always, we invite your questions and feedback, and we are deeply grateful for the ongoing support of the community as we navigate this unique tim

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Angel Gonzalez
De La Salle Academy (NY)

I think one “technique,” or perhaps more precisely, framework, my leadership team and I used was intersectional thinking. From the start, we committed to making decisions not just as administrators, but to think through our plans as parents, children, teachers, adults, caretakers, workers, under-resourced families, technological newbies, etc.

Doing this gave us pause, it pushed us to think about our rollout equitably and justly. As a result, we put forward a three-phase plan that gradually helped us build capacity, gather information, and be mindful that we needed to balance academic continuity with collective healing/care.



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Have you sent a letter or written a blog post that prompted a vibrant conversation in your community? Willing to share it? Send it to sara@independent-thinking.com.

Kim Ridley
Fayerweather Street School (MA)

Fayerweather believes in the power of community in transforming learning spaces. I receive great joy and inspiration from observing the way we have been engaging with students through the transition from in person to remote learning. Daily, I witness the DNA of our school in the interactions, creativity and leadership of our teachers and administrators. I have been in awe of the way we have transformed important projects into virtual opportunities. One such example was the 5/6 biographies project. The students choose a living or posthumous hero or person of interests to them. They do research, write a paper and present as the person they are studying. They embody their subject in dress, voice and perspective. In collaboration with the teachers, the Director of Curriculum and Instruction, Director of Technology and Marketing and Communications, they created a wonderful virtual Biographies Project that maintained the same rigor, thoughtfulness and fun that the entire community took part in. The students were so excited and proud of their work, as



people could join in on Zoom and ask questions to the participants. It was an example of true commitment and love for teaching and learning. Watch out next for our “Kitchen Sink Regatta!”

Amazingly, we transformed our admissions yield events into virtual parent coffees, student panels, and informal parent gatherings that have been well received by prospective parents. For our new families, we recorded several student voices and connected those voices to the virtual tour of our school. It turned

an empty school into a place of liveliness as you could hear the giggles, laughter, and joy of the students describing their favorite spaces in the school. The transformation still captured the true warmth and care of Fayerweather.

Jay Underwood
George Jackson Academy (NY)

What brings joy? Hearing kids say “I miss you” during virtual meetings and knowing they mean it.

Our teachers believe in the importance of maintaining a sense of fun and levity during these times. One starts every class with a silly joke. Another has initiated chess and Rubik’s cube tournaments. And all of us on staff have virtual Happy Hour every couple of weeks. Gotta keep spirits as high as we can!

Tim Johnson
Pingree School (MA)

More on a personal note, I have cherished observing my own four children interact with classmates and their amazing teachers in their own distance learning plans over the last few weeks. It is another powerful reminder that great teaching is possible in almost any context, including closets, kitchens, and basements! We owe our teachers unbridled gratitude right now.

I have appreciated how my colleagues and friends in surrounding Boston-area schools have bonded (creatively, in shared misery?) in the herculean leadership challenge of this moment. Their candor and personal stories have been fuel for my own leadership and courageous problem solving.

Craig Gemmell
Brewster Academy (NH)

Since the start of March, the crisis management team has met relentlessly, first in a conference room and then via Zoom. When we started we were all business, and matters we were dealing with were quite dire. Now our calls inevitably begin with members sharing the virtues of the shows that they are binge-watching. Today we discussed *Tiger King*, and one of the team members let us know that he is planning to do a puppet parody of the show. We laughed and had the sort of convivial feeling we never would have had if not for the time COVID has required us to spend together.

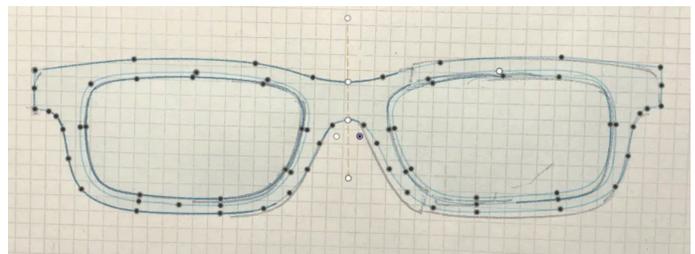
A joyful [story](#), too, from Brewster:
The Superhero Across Campus
by Suzanne Morrissey

Anyone who knows Brewster ELL teacher and chair of the World Languages Department Mr. Vince Alvelo knows he is a huge fan of Captain America. But even “Cap” would have had a tough time rescuing the situation when Sage, Mr. and Mrs. Alvelo’s 11-year-old son, broke his glasses recently. The lenses were fine, but the frames were another story. And with stores closed due to the pandemic, Sage was going to have a very difficult time using his computer for distance learning, among other daily necessities, without his glasses.

Enter Wes “3D Superman” Matchett. When Mr. Alvelo reached out to the Tech Office for advice, Mr. Peter Gilligan suggested talking to Mr. Matchett, who, last year, created a stellar 6-foot model of the Saturn V rocket in honor of the 50th anniversary of the Apollo 11 moon landing using the school’s 3D printer. When student tours came by the Tech Office, Mr. Matchett would describe his father’s job working on the Saturn V rocket, its place in history, and how the model was 3D printed. The 3D printers are also used in the Computer

Design and Digital Arts courses, where students learn 3D design and use 3D printers to see their digital creations become physical objects. A summer intern student designed and 3D printed mounts for Apple TVs that are used all over campus. 3D design and printing is a major component of the Brewster robotics program, led by Mr. Matchett. The team started using 3D printed parts several years ago for simple spacers and last year won a regional FIRST Robotics event with a major component that was 3D designed and printed by the team. The equipment is also put into service when a need arises for quick, temporary campus signs.

When Mr. Matchett heard of Sage’s optical plight, he set to work. “I was happy to do it and it provided a great challenge. I’ve never modeled anything like this,” Matchett explained, adding humbly, “I guess the tutorials I’ve been following are paying off.” First, he traced the pieces of the broken



frames and used a photo to outline them in a CAD tool. This created the basic shape. Next, he printed test shapes to compare and fine tune. Finally, he printed a test into which



he could carefully fit the lenses. All that was left was to print the new frames in Sage’s favorite colors. (Spoiler alert: This boy loves

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Spiderman!) The entire process took just one day, so Sage had his clear vision back the next morning.

The experience left Dad filled with gratitude. "We are so very thankful to Wes and the Brewster IT department who went above and beyond to help Sage, our youngest," Mr. Alvelo wrote in a note to his colleagues. "We were at a loss about what to do! There are wonderful, beautiful, and incredibly kind people in our Brewster community in this challenging season of our lives."



The elder Alvelo noted that the fact that the new specs are in Spiderman colors is truly icing on the cake. "I may say that I'm Cap," he added, "but it's the IT department here that is filled with real heroes of Brewster!"

The Alvelo family includes college student Trey, who has worked in Brewster's Advancement office and the BASS program for the past two summers, as well as Brewster brothers Jayce '20 and Kai '23. Mom Traci Alvelo is one of Brewster's permanent subs and the CLP in Vaughan House, the family's home. They're all grateful for Mr. Matchett's 3D printing expertise and quick action.

So what does our own 3D Superman think of his newfound adoration from the Alvelo crew? "It was just the right thing to do," Mr. Matchett replied.

Spoken like a true superhero.

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Julie Ogden
The Pike School (MA)

In the early days our transition to Home Based Learning, our Director of Counseling Services invited teachers to send him their favorite inspirational quotes.

Julie's favorite quote:

***The candles in churches are out.
The lights have gone out in the sky.
Blow on the coal of the heart
And we'll see by and by...***

- Archibald MacLeish's play *J.B.*

I don't think any of us had any idea what he planned to do with them, but we were happy to participate in this communal effort and to reflect for a moment on what comforts and inspires us. A few weeks later, well into our newfound reality that Massachusetts schools would remain closed for the rest of the year, and at what was the end of a rainy weekend and cusp of another challenging week of remote teaching, he sent us a link to a video he had created. It turns out he had asked our students to recite our quotes, thoughtfully assigning individual teacher's quotes to students in their division. To see our students' faces, and to hear the earnestness and

hopefulness with which they delivered these inspirational words that mean so much to each of us, was an emotional and unifying boost that has continued to carry us.

Christopher Hayes
The Calverton School (MD)

With our traditional graduation in jeopardy, we've ordered personalized yard signs for home delivery to all members of the Class of 2020. For our students currently at home in the Caribbean, we've contacted local printers willing to produce and deliver. A collage of faculty notes in the school colors will accompany the yard signs. If we're fortunate enough to be able to hold some form of graduation on campus, we'll invite the seniors to line the driveway with their signs. (The printer in Bermuda liked the idea so much that he offered free delivery.)

A parent offered a challenge to all students to prepare a recipe new to them, sharing the recipe and a photo of the outcome. For each such photo posted on the school's social media, the family will donate \$50 to the annual fund. Grandma's favorite liver and onion recipe, anyone?



Phil Peck
The Holderness School (NH)

One area of joy is how all the area Lakes Region ISANNE boarding school heads meet twice a week on Zoom (of course) to share struggles, opportunities, and moments of joy. Without question, we always laugh. I am always inspired by my colleagues. One moment that was priceless was when Kents Hill head Chris Cheney took a challenge from the students and allowed himself to get a mohawk during a school Zoom assembly. Talk about servant leadership, not taking oneself too seriously, and having fun — Well done, Chris!

Ironically, during this virtual time, the overwhelming personal outreach from students, parents, board members, teachers, alumni, past parents, and administrators to prospective families/students during the admissions cycle resulted in our best yield ever. It's one of many takeaways from this time that we will definitely apply in future years.

Angela G. Garcia
Friends Community School (MD)

Our graduating 8th graders create morning video greetings for the school community. When the community logs on each school day, there is a video greeting students and their families. Each 8th grader offers a piece of advice. Starting the day with these videos makes me swell with pride, gives me hope, and brings a smile to my face.



I don't know if it is a problem-solving tool, but one thing I have found helpful is to set norms for the meetings I have with my administrative team. There is one group that has been tasked with planning for the reopening of school. Each meeting starts with the review of the norms: be raggedy (share incomplete, inarticulate ideas and thoughts), let go of traditions and the words "we have always done...", let go of restrictions of time and money, and consider what is possible and impossible.

Suzanne Walker Buck
Western Reserve Academy (OH)



My team and I have gotten in the habit of devoting time in many of our meetings for “idea factories.” While out of necessity much of our meeting time has to be dedicated to tactics, carving out a mini-session for generative thinking is incredibly refreshing. We use an “idea factory” to popcorn blue sky thinking around big topics and to encourage each other to think outside of the box. It was in one of these sessions focused on fostering community that the idea was shared to fill our chapel with the photographs of each student in his/her/their assigned seat. Printed in our Innovation Center, pasted to cardboard, our socially-distanced Executive Team used X-acto blades to cut out nearly 400 faces and affixed these to the pews. The team building was phenomenal, the video sent to our students was received with incredible joy, and the PR we have received is more than we could have ever imagined.

Look! We got the endorsement of John Krasinski and his *Some Good News*.

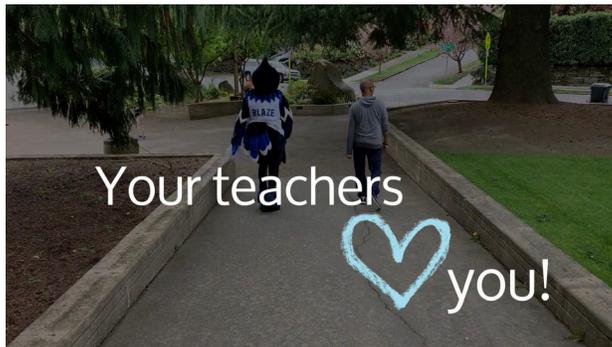
Michael Wirtz
Hackley School (NY)

People are realizing the value of the school in their lives and they are appreciating the incredible work of our faculty. I am simply blown away by how fast they moved into this world and how they are finding ways to improve it as we go along. I think how hard teachers work in a normal environment — the level of care and creativity they bring on a daily basis — gets lost in all the rush around a school. And yet in this moment, when we’ve stripped all else away, their efforts are shining through for everyone to see and appreciate. I can only hope this recognition and admiration lasts!



Percy Abram
The Bush School (WA)

On Thursday, April 30, thirty teachers and administrators traveled by car, bike, and foot throughout Seattle and the surrounding areas to deliver care packages for the class of 2020. Included in the packages were yard signs, school memorabilia, treats, and their caps and gowns. I was part of the caravan that delivered the packages along with glimmers of hope for the first time in weeks. Watching the students beam with pride, scream with excitement, and shed tears of gratitude for their teachers was a moment of joy in what has otherwise been a joyless few months.



- From our Communications Department we created [a video](#) featuring our faculty to the High School Musical song, “We’re all in This Together”.
- To celebrate Teacher Appreciation Week, we asked our families to create pictures, notes, and videos for faculty expressing their gratitude. We call it our [Wall of Gratitude](#).
- The best ideas, as you know, often come from our students. Started by an alumna, her peers, and her sister, [Together Tutoring](#) offers free tutoring to K-8 Students for Seattle Public Schools students during COVID-19.

Head of School Appointments

For JULY 2020

Academy High (IL), John Carpenter, Acting Head of School, Caribbean Academy

Ascension Academy (TX), Tim Oditt, Head of School, Grand River Academy

Beacon Academy (IL), Marja Brandon, Co-Curricular Consultant, Helios School

Bishop McNamara High School (MD), John Barnhardt, Director of School Design, KIPP DC

Broadwater Academy (VA), Francis Ryan, Director of Secondary School Placement, Rumsey Hall School

Charlotte Preparatory School (NC), Chris Marblo, Head of School, Campus School of Smith College

Colorado Springs School (CO), Tambi Tyler, Upper School Principal, Atlanta International School

Columbia Independent School (MO), Jeff Walkington, Special Assistant, University of Illinois in Urbana

Co-Op School (NY), Deanna Bocchetti, Assistant Head of School, Tatnall School

Davidson Day School (NC), Pete Moore, Head of Lower School, Lake Forest Country Day School

Derby Academy (MA) - Interim for 2020, Tom Reid, Interim Head of School, The Benjamin School

Foot School (CT), Aléwa Cooper, Head of Lower School, Greens Farms Academy

Gesher Jewish Day School (VA), Aviva Walls, Dean of Academic Affairs, Shalevet High School

High Meadows School (GA), Lisa Baker, Head of Upper School, Bancroft School

Jackson Hole Community School (WY), Manish Bhatt, Head of Upper School, Trinity Valley School

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Head of School Appointments

For JULY 2020 (continued from pg. 10)

- Jewish Community Day School (MA)**, Shira Deener, Director, Jewish Education Project, Facing History & Ourselves
- Killington Mountain School (VT)**, Claire Kershko, former Head Alpine Ski Coach, Clarkson University
- La Salle College Preparatory (CA)**, Perry Martin, President, Maryknoll Schools
- Marist High School (IL)**, Larry Tucker, Principal, Marist Chicago
- Montgomery School (PA)**, Tom McManus, CEO & Head of Mission, Revolution School
- New England Jewish Academy (CT)**, Naty Katz, former Head of School, Maimonides School
- Sacred Heart Greenwich (CT)**, Margaret Frazier, Headmistress, Marymount International
- Saddle River Day School (NJ)**, Jalaj Desai, Interim Head of School, Saddle River Day School
- Saint Joseph Academy (OH)**, Kathryn Purcell, Associate Head of School, Laurel School
- Saint Thomas Academy (MN)**, Kelby Woodard, President, Cristo Rey Dallas College Prep
- Saint Xavier High School (KY)**, Paul Colistra, President, West Catholic High School
- Sea Crest School (CA)**, Lauren Miller, Assistant Head of School, Presentation School
- Sharon Academy (VT)**, Mary Newman, Assistant Head of School, Sharon Academy
- Shrewsbury Montessori School (MA)**, Amy Shen, Search Consultant, Wickenden Associates
- Sinai Akiba Academy (CA)**, Marc Lindner, Associate Head of School, Charles E. Smith Jewish Day School
- St. Anne's School (MD)**, Andrea Weiss, Interim Head of School, Congressional School
- St. Anselm's Abbey School (DC)**, Jim Power, former Head of Schools, Culver Academies
- St. John's Episcopal School (MD)**, Margery Bank, Director, Tuscon Waldorf School
- St. Luke School (GA)**, Richard Green, Middle School Principal, Aaron Cohn Middle School
- St. Paul's Episcopal School (CA)**, Cheryl Ting, Assistant Head of School, Redwood Day School
- Sugar Bowl Academy (CA)**, Brian Krill, Executive Director, Jackson Hole Ski Club
- Swain School (PA)**, Armistead Webster, Lower School Head, Gilman School
- Swift School (GA)**, Chris Pomer, Executive Direction, The Dyslexia Resource
- Sacred Heart Schools (KY)**, Karen McNay, President, Ursuline Academy
- Trinity Presbyterian School (AL)**, Bill Shelnutt, Head of School, St. Luke School
- Vanguard School (FL)**, L. Shannon Graves, Head of School, Island School
- Westview School (TX)**, Bevan Koch, Director of Teaching & Learning, Sewickley Academy
- Webb School (TN)**, Ken Cheeseman, Head of School, Fort Worth Christian School