



Dear Albuquerque Academy Community,

I am writing to inform you that Head of School Andrew Watson has notified the Board of Trustees of his plans to retire on June 30, 2020. We are fortunate to have had Andy lead the Academy for 18 years, and we will continue to benefit from his tremendous knowledge and experience over the next 17 months. On behalf of the current and past Trustees, I express our gratitude to Andy for his outstanding service and dedication to the Academy and for his continued support of our school and its mission during the remainder of his tenure.

Andy's love for the Academy, Albuquerque, and the State of New Mexico is obvious to those who know him. He appreciates the Academy's transformational power in the lives of families. Building on the foundational work of Robert Bovinette, Head of School 1985-1996, Andy continued to prioritize student diversity. At the start of his tenure in 2001, the student body consisted of 37% students of color; today that number is 53%, with 61% students of color in the sixth grade. His commitment to greater diversity is reflected in the makeup of the faculty, staff, and Board of Trustees as well. He also introduced programs like the Community Academy lecture series, the Desert Oasis Teaching Garden, and the Community Builders community service program, which benefit the wider Albuquerque community.

It's likely no one person can comprehend the full extent of Andy's impact on the school. During his tenure, the Academy's national reputation grew significantly, bolstered in part by Andy's contributions to national organizations. He has served on the National Association of Independent Schools Board, the Educational Records Bureau Board, the National Merit Advisory Board, and the Harvard Principals Center Advisory Board. Under Andy's leadership, the Academy was one of ten world-class independent schools to found the Global Online Academy, which now boasts 945 students and more than 70 member schools in countries around the world; Andy has served on the GOA Board since its inception.

Andy diligently balanced his national leadership with his responsibilities as Head. Outsized student academic achievement continued throughout his tenure, evidenced by record standardized test scores, so many National Merit Scholar semifinalists that the Academy regularly ranks among the top ten nationally, and \$29 million in merit aid awarded to the Class of 2018.

Andy also recognizes the importance of cultivating a sense of belonging and inclusion. He instituted new traditions, like the convocation ceremony at which seniors walk new sixth graders up the path and featuring an inspirational alumni speaker in the graduation program. He was instrumental in the creation of a school song that he eagerly sings with students, despite occasional ribbing. Andy also established the Gage Award, which honors the fine teaching and long service of math teacher Darell Gage and is presented annually to an outstanding teacher.

Committed to modeling sustainable practices, Andy led key initiatives to reduce energy use, save water, shrink the school's carbon footprint, compost food waste, and incorporate renewable energy sources; many of these programs also reduced spending.

The financial crisis had an oversized impact on the Academy's endowment due to considerable holdings in real estate. When instructed by the Board to cut spending from the endowment year after year, Andy did so without compromising the program or the educational experience for the students. He has steered us toward a financially sustainable future where we expect to continue to make more financial assistance available.

Andy has also created stronger bonds between the Academy and its alumni. As part of his fundraising work, Andy has developed deep relationships with many alumni who graduated before his tenure, and he has instilled in more recent graduates a better appreciation for the needs of the Academy and the importance of giving back.

Andy's legacy will serve the Academy well as we find a new Head of School to build upon the culture he has fostered. The Board has begun the search for a new Head of School; more information will be provided soon. In the meantime, when you see him around campus, please join the Board in thanking Andy Watson for his commitment, dedication, leadership, and love of Albuquerque Academy. His unflinching optimism, even during the most challenging of times, will be missed.

Sincerely,

Thomas Smidt III
Chair, Albuquerque Academy Board of Trustees