



Dear Academy Community,

Earlier this year, I let Board Chair Thomas Smidt know that I would step down from my position at the end of the 2019-20 academic year, upon completion of my 19th year at the school. This timing feels right for me, my family, and the Academy.

How can I thank you all for the good things that have happened at the school, and in my life, since 2001? It starts with Academy students: they take your breath away when watching them in action, and then they melt your heart with their life stories and care for one another. Talking with these students, watching my daughters through their Academy years – it has been simply amazing. And then they graduate and go on to great success, never losing their curiosity, sense of humor, or New Mexican perspective.

It has been a blessing to work with the Academy's faculty and staff. Their talent, care, and effort propel the school forward. Each one is another piece of our history and vital to our growth to national prominence in independent education. I'm so proud to see these amazing men and women return to the Academy, year after year, drawn initially by our mission, excellence, and the beauty of New Mexico, and then staying because of their colleagues and our students.

I've had the pleasure of working with more than 50 Academy trustees over the years. They believe whole-heartedly in our mission, volunteer their time, donate generously to the school, and bring wise long-term perspective to the community. I thank them, individually and collectively, for their selfless support of our school.

Through the remainder of this academic year and next, I'll join with others to maintain our strength, support the head search process, and then welcome our next leader with open arms. I have been fortunate to engage with many schools and their inspiring leaders over the years. This experience reinforces my belief that the Academy's headship is an extraordinarily attractive position; there will be an impressive pool of applicants compelled to apply. Most of these prospective leaders know about our mission and success. Many have witnessed my joy in sharing Academy stories. They tease me about this, and my optimism, but they know my feelings are authentic, that I'm not putting on a show.

I will be getting nostalgic far in advance of my departure, but I know the work at hand will keep me grounded. In particular, I'm excited as we launch a new computer science department, complete the comprehensive Charged by Promise campaign, provide more leadership opportunities for faculty members, and take the final (I hope) steps towards a financially sustainable endowment spending rate.

Most importantly, I will remain energized by our students and families, faculty and staff, every day on campus. There truly is no place I would be rather be today, just as there would have been no place I would have preferred to be since 2001, through both celebrations and challenges. What a mission, what excellence from all corners of the school, what wonderful students walking the path each day – I don't take any of it for granted; none of us should. And we all should do our best, throughout our lives, to preserve this educational treasure, this beautiful and magical place.

Others have noticed that I'm often about the last person to leave Academy parties and gatherings. Sometimes I look up from an engaging conversation and wonder, "Where did everyone go?" This isn't head of school "duty" in action. It is the true pleasure I feel spending time with the Academy community. I don't want this to end and know it won't; we are all connected through our community for life, for all of our lives. But next year, as my work here ends, I know I'll stay engaged and in love with the Academy for the rest of my life. I won't be the "last one to leave," though, since all of you and so many yet to come will keep the Academy spirit alive forever.

Thank you, Chargers. Light the Way, Academy.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Andrew T. Watson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Andrew T. Watson
Head of School