

October 2021

Dear Board of Trustees, Staff, Families, and Friends of The Branch School,

These last fifteen plus years have been both the hardest and the most rewarding ever for me. My tenure as Head of this amazing school has been a huge adventure and the focus of my every waking hour (no exaggeration). The last year with a pandemic and my own family challenges has led me to conclude that it's time to turn over the reins to someone else. I've hesitated about that decision, but being away for seven weeks while my highly capable leadership team opened the school year with flying colors, has convinced me that the school can do exceedingly well without me. I know that my successor will be supported, as I have been, and that Branch will continue to graduate the best leaders for our world.

A committee has been formed to take on the task of searching for a new Head of School. Ann Hightower, our beloved Outdoor Classroom Teacher and Board of Trustees Chair, will lead the effort to find the best fit for Branch. Ann will continue as our exceptionally talented and dedicated Chair, and our fabulous Board members will continue to govern at their high level. I cannot thank them enough for supporting me all these years. With their support we have added a Middle School program, doubled our campus size, planned a series of projects to use the new space, and begun construction of a state of the art classroom and office building using innovative environmental standards. I'm excited to see the completion of that project before I leave. I'm also proud of our attaining accreditation in the most prestigious and rigorous school association in the Southwest, ISAS, and membership in the National Association of Independent Schools. Our academic program has been well vetted and our graduates are accepted into the best schools in the area. They quickly become leaders in their high schools and eventually their higher education and careers.

The students of the Branch are among the best of the best. There will be many tears on my part to leave them, as I will miss their energy, love, intelligence, and most of all their kindness. I will always remember the love that the older children express to the younger ones. Their parents are very special to me, and it's indeed very difficult to leave; however, I can assure each of you that your children will continue to thrive in this incredible environment.

Our teachers and staff are among the best of the best. The teachers are the most dedicated group of women and men I could imagine, always making sure that their students are loved and supported, and that they are learning at a high level. Our administrative team is extremely talented with a work ethic that always goes above and beyond. I am so proud of all my colleagues who shine so brightly in the important work of educating our children.

Though my last official day is June 30, 2022, I have promised to stay on a month to month basis, sometimes remotely, to make sure that the building project continues on course, that I can consult as needed, and that the transition of the new head is timed appropriately.

Meanwhile, a new adventure begins. My husband and I will be relocating to Renton, Washington, just outside of Seattle, where we will be near one of the grandsons. The other grandson and his family will visit whenever possible, and we'll certainly visit them. I plan also to continue my philanthropic volunteer work, especially in the field of education. All children deserve an education which prepares them to be successful leaders and contributors in the world, and my goal is to support their efforts.

As I take my leave after a very sweet 16 years, my heart is full of gratitude for all the good that I have witnessed and all the lessons I have learned while leading this wonderful community. As the sage philosopher Winnie the Pooh said, "How lucky I am to have something that makes saying goodbye so hard." (A. A. Milne, "Winnie the Pooh") I do indeed feel very fortunate. I hope to keep in touch with all of you, and see where your adventures take you!

With love and appreciation,



Emily Smith
Head of School