

July 31, 2021

Dear Beloved GMS Community,

With a heavy heart, I am writing to let you know I will not be returning to GMS as Head of School in the summer of 2022 after my extended leave of absence.

As many of you know, my daughter, Anna Sandell (GMS Class of 2014), suffered a catastrophic traumatic brain injury in January of this year. I dropped everything to be by Anna's side in New Hampshire, leaving the school under the capable leadership of Laura Reeve as Acting Head of School.

As it became clear that Anna would likely survive, we learned that the best chance of her having a meaningful recovery would require long and intensive care and that the best place to receive that care was Boston. It also became clear that we would not have a clear sense of Anna's prognosis for about a year after the accident. I decided that I needed and wanted to be at her side for a year seeking the best care possible for her, cheering her on, and simply holding her hand each day. The GMS Board of Trustees kindly extended my leave of absence and hired Tesha McCord Poe as Interim Head of School for the 2021-2022 school year.

With my life turned upside down, I reflected seriously on the wisdom of returning to GMS in the summer of 2022 and concluded that it was best for the school to move forward under new leadership and for me to be open to crafting a new life perhaps centered more in Boston.

This year was my eighth year as Head of School of GMS. It has been the highest privilege of my professional life to work at GMS. I am proud of the school's accomplishments during those eight years, among which I count sharpening our focus on our founding mission and ideals, refining our progressive pedagogy, improving the compensation of our extraordinary faculty and staff, expanding and deepening the reach of the Bennett Scholars Program, strengthening the financial position of the school, and building a Board of Trustees worthy of the great school that GMS has always been. I hope to remain involved as a volunteer to help the school achieve its yet unrealized goal of securing a permanent home.

I also want to note that GMS managed the Covid-19 pandemic with determination and flexibility. This was an extraordinarily difficult year for students, parents, teachers, staff, and administrators. I will forever be in awe of how our school pulled together to keep everyone safe while delivering the best

education possible in difficult circumstances. As a school, we should never lose sight of the many extra hours that teachers, staff, and administrators devoted to GMS during the pandemic.

While far more sudden than I would have wished, I close out my tenure as Head of School with undiminished passion for GMS's important mission, deepest admiration for the faculty, staff, and administrators with whom I have had the privilege to work, faith in the capable leadership of our stalwart trustees, gratitude to the generous donors who enable the school to thrive, and love for the GMS community of students and their families past and present.

Fondly,

Jennifer Ayer