

May 26, 2021

Dear Whitfield School Community:

On behalf of the Board of Trustees, I am pleased to announce that Chris Cunningham has accepted our invitation to serve as the next Head of Whitfield School, effective July 1, 2022. As you know, John Delautre will be retiring at the end of the 2021-2022 academic year after 10 years of outstanding service to our School, and we will enjoy his leadership for the next fourteen months, thus ensuring a smooth transition.

Beginning in January 2021, the Search Committee, chaired by Karen Myers, worked with search consultants Nat Conard and Deirdre Ling of Educators' Collaborative, and reviewed the credentials of candidates from throughout the U.S. and abroad. The Committee narrowed the pool of candidates to eight individuals who were invited for a confidential round of virtual interviews. Subsequently, four finalists and spouses/partners visited the campus for comprehensive two-day interviews. On May 20, the Search Committee selected Chris Cunningham as its nominee to the Board of Trustees to serve as the next Head of School. The Trustees unanimously ratified this recommendation at a Board meeting on May 25.

Chris has spent the past twenty-five years in independent school education. Receiving a bachelor's degree in Modern Thought and Literature from Stanford University in 1989, he graduated Phi Beta Kappa with Distinction and Honors. He went on to complete a Ph.D. in English from Duke University in 1996. Beginning his independent school teaching career as a 9th and 11th grade English teacher at Montclair Kimberley Academy, Chris later taught at Stuart Country Day School of the Sacred Heart and Princeton Day School before joining the faculty at The Lawrenceville School in Lawrenceville, NJ, where he is currently the Assistant Head of School and Dean of Faculty, having served since 2003 as English teacher, Head of House, Advisor, and Varsity Coach. The Lawrenceville School, founded more than 200 years ago, is ranked among the top boarding and day schools in the country with an enrollment of 817 boys and girls in grades 9-12, including postgraduates.

Our community was impressed with Chris' experience and personal philosophy about education and child development that match and complement Whitfield's exceptionally well. He will preserve all the things that are great about Whitfield today and will take our School to the next level of excellence.

Described by his references as a galvanizing although gentle leader with a phenomenal capacity to listen and respect the opinions of others, Chris leads with intentionality and builds consensus. An excellent public speaker and gifted writer, he is also an incredibly talented teacher who is beloved by his students. A strong proponent of social justice, Chris led diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts at Lawrenceville, including the hiring and recruitment and training for faculty and senior staff. During his tenure as dean of faculty and assistant head of school, Chris has led initiatives in faculty compensation, evaluation, and feedback; student and faculty pace and quality of life; social and emotional learning; re-writing the

School's mission statement; and fostering a diverse and inclusive faculty community; as well as improving the quality and consistency of Harkness teaching across the School.

During his time on Whitfield's campus, those with whom Chris met described him as authentic, warm, and approachable, and as grounded, stable, and experienced. One faculty member described him as "an incredibly effective communicator who seems confident in his decision making," and a parent commented that "he was warm, personable, and seemed willing to grow and learn beside and with our community." Perhaps most telling, however, was a student's observation that he "seemed super passionate about students but equally as passionate about faculty and alumni; he emphasized in his educational leadership letter that teachers should encourage students to think for themselves and create their own ideas, which is something Whitfield does well daily."

"I am honored to accept the board's offer to be Whitfield's next head of school. In my visit to campus earlier this spring, I was inspired by the students I met and by the community of adults committed to their learning and well-being. From the members of the board to the teachers, parents, and administrative team, I was impressed by the sense of community and moved by the commitment to changing children's lives. After 25 years of working in independent schools, I am inspired by Whitfield's commitment to progressive education—to teaching for depth rather than breadth, to aligning academic rigor and strength of character, and to caring for students' social and emotional well-being. As the next head of school, I will keep forefront the values that animate me as a school leader—community, integrity and fairness, diversity and inclusion, student-centered learning."

Chris is the recipient of several honors and awards, including the Ritter Award for academic nurturing, the John F. Hotchkis, '50 Chair in English for Distinguished Teaching, the Christina-Seix Dow Chair in Harkness Teaching, the Trenton Times All-Prep Cross-Country Coach of the Year (2011), and a University of Chicago Outstanding Educator Award.

Chris will be joined by his wife, Helena, herself a product of independent schools and a long-time educator. Helena has taught French at Lawrenceville since 1988, and has served in a variety of roles, including Language Department Chair, Head of House, Varsity Coach, Senior Grade Dean, and Director of the School's Theatre Costume Shop. Their daughter Libby graduated from Stanford with a degree in Human Biology, and their son Ben is a rising senior at Brown University, where he is majoring in English and Music. An accomplished poet, Chris is the author of two poetry collections (unpublished), and his poems, criticism, and book reviews have appeared nationally in numerous literary magazines. An avid reader, he enjoys running, hiking, and scuba diving.

The selection of the Head of School is one of the greatest responsibilities of trusteeship, and all of us in the Whitfield School family can be proud not only that Chris has accepted the appointment, but also that the Whitfield community was so invested throughout an extensive national search process. Each of our finalists commented positively on the warm welcome he received, and our Educators' Collaborative consultants cited that the School's engagement well exceeded what is normally seen in a search process. We are delighted with the outcome and look forward to welcoming Chris and Helena to the school community. We are also confident that each of you will, in your own way, extend a warm welcome to our new head of school. A transition plan will be created to include several opportunities for the community and Chris to become better acquainted during the 2021-2022 academic year.

On behalf of the Board, I want to express my deep appreciation to Search Committee Chair Karen Myers for her tireless efforts on behalf of Whitfield, as well to the members of the Search Committee: Kinyetta Alexander, Andy Bryan, Ron Fox '74, Michele Holton, Corey Jones, Phil Levy, Steve Nordlund, Melissa Howe O'Connor '08 and David Ressler, who devoted countless hours and great care to the search process to ensure its successful outcome. They, along with the Advisory Committee, and, indeed every stakeholder who took the time to participate in the process, deserve our heartfelt gratitude.

With the prospect of exciting new leadership after another year of superb stewardship on the part of our Head of School John Delautre, and the continuing dedication of our faculty and staff, the Board of Trustees looks forward to a bright future for Whitfield School.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paul Minorini". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end.

Paul Minorini
Chair, Whitfield School Board of Trustees