



January 11, 2022

Dear Avery Coonley School Community,

Today is a great day to be a Fightin' Seahorse!

On behalf of the Board of Trustees, it is my incredible honor to announce that Dr. Kirsty Montgomery will be our next head of school. After a comprehensive and deliberate search process, the Board of Trustees unanimously agreed that she is an outstanding fit for ACS and selected Kirsty to lead us into our next chapter. We are thrilled to welcome Dr. Montgomery to our community, and along with senior leadership, we look forward to working with her in the coming months in preparation for her arrival.

Dr. Montgomery will bring an unparalleled background and experience to our home on Maple Avenue. Currently, she is the Head of School at Lakeview Academy in Georgia, a pre-K-12 independent school with class sizes similar to ACS. At Lakeview, she also teaches AP Comparative Government and Politics. A few of her key accomplishments while at Lakeview include laying the foundations for strategic growth and reimagining and reorganizing fundraising, resulting in a 25% increase in annual giving in her first year. In addition, she stewarded record financial strength for the school. Dr. Montgomery oversaw the investment in and strengthening of academic, technology, and athletic offerings. In the fine arts, she increased instrumental music program offerings resulting in the creation of Lakeview's first brass & wind ensemble, and Brazilian percussion group. Finally, with health and safety as her highest priority, she created new campus security and risk management protocols and spearheaded Lakeview's COVID-19 taskforce, receiving a 96% satisfaction rating from Lakeview parents for her handling of the school's pandemic response.

Kirsty's education and professional roots, however, began here in the Chicago area. After receiving her B.Phil. magna cum laude in political science from Northwestern University, she went on to receive two master's degrees from the University of Chicago in the social sciences and history, before receiving her Ph.D. in history also from the University of Chicago. She taught children English and college prep at Omniscope Academy (serving students 3rd through 12th grades) and has also taught at Oakton Community College, Northwestern University (Center for Talent Development), and the University of Chicago. Kirsty was a faculty member at the Illinois Math and Science Academy (IMSA) in Aurora for three years where she developed innovative history and political science curricula for gifted students. For five years following IMSA, Dr. Montgomery was the Director of the Osher Institute at Northwestern University – a program for over 1,500 highly educated students, over 75% with a master's degree. It was after Northwestern University that Kirsty became the present head of school at Lakeview.



Beyond her vast educational background, Kirsty will be bringing an international flavor to Downers Grove. She was born in London, lived overseas for 31 years, and holds UK, US, and Irish passports. She has delivered scholarly presentations in Europe, India, and Jordan. She is also proficient in French and Arabic (written). Kirsty and her husband Chris have six children who mostly reside in the Chicago area. And of greatest importance, Kirsty is an enthusiast of the game the Brits call “football” and a huge Cubs fan.

From our many interactions with Dr. Montgomery, it is obvious to the Search Committee and Board of Trustees that she not only genuinely appreciates and understands our mission to provide a dynamic gifted academic learning experience but also embodies the nurturing environment that our faculty strive to create each day for our students. It is clear to us through her words and demonstrated actions at her previous institutions that Dr. Montgomery has a committed desire to honor our beloved ACS school culture and the diverse learning styles of our students while building upon the Strategic Plan to further strengthen ACS as we continue in our long-upheld tradition of onward and upward. We are confident that these qualities, coupled with her exceptional educational and professional experiences, will serve the community well as our next head of school.

I would like to thank our partners at Russell Reynolds Associates and the Search Committee, especially our faculty members – Jennifer Marvel-Gillono and Sunshine Echevarria – for all their work in conducting an in-depth, inclusive, and thoughtful process. After a six-month nationwide search led by Vice-Chair Prasad Veluchamy, the Board is overwhelmingly excited and optimistic for the future of ACS. And I would like to express my gratitude to our community – trustees, faculty, and staff, parents, and students – who offered input through surveys and focus groups that informed our decision to select Dr. Montgomery. Your collaborative participation and dedication allowed us to find the candidate best suited to be our next head of school.

The Board of Trustees invites you to join us in warmly welcoming Dr. Montgomery and her family to our community.

Sincerely,

Brendan Sheehy
Chair, ACS Board of Trustees