

## **Statement of Educational Leadership**

### **Dennis Bisgaard**

My approach to leadership has always been facilitative and inclusive, wrapping my arms, mind, and heart around the learning organizations I have been fortunate to be part of. Most importantly, you must care deeply about people, their agency and voice, always aiming to be aspirational and fully aligned with mission, vision, and core values. I believe firmly in surrounding myself with as much talent and wisdom as possible, am a curious life-long learner and explorer, positive and optimistic, yet possess the patience, flexibility, and courage to make difficult decisions always with an eye on what is in the best interest of students and the school. High EQ, building trust through transparency, cultural competency, and a sincere commitment to equity, justice, and inclusion are critically important and dear to my heart. In the end, you must strive to lead more than a school community, ensuring that the overall impact stretches well beyond the borders of the school - a private school with a public and loftier purpose, embracing ethical citizenry, excellence, and the larger good.

I have helped organizations diversify, broadening perspectives for the past twenty-five plus years, demonstrating along the way the richness and advantages of a diverse workforce and school community. An innovative spirit, entrepreneurship, and the pursuit of excellence are essential to ensure that schools remain relevant, dynamic, and engaging in today's fast-paced, ever-changing, unpredictable environment. Honoring the past while shaping the future is an important balancing act we must pay close attention to. Allowing both students and adults to experience, discover, and understand their own strengths, talents, and opportunities to contribute have always filled me with anticipation and excitement. Running leadership institutes have allowed me to witness talent develop and emerge into authentic and profound leadership. I am proud to have served even a small role as many individuals who began their individual leadership journey and maturation in one of my institutes or schools have persevered and ultimately landed a headship or another senior administrative position. Identifying and cultivating talent is vitally important.

When I began my twelve-year tenure as head of Kingswood Oxford School, the school could not crack the 14% ceiling of students of color. When I left the school, the student body was well beyond 30%; the school had the most diverse senior administrative team in New England; and the school's Leadership Institute for Educators of Color became the model other programs across the country emulated. Successful fundraising allowed the campus to be physically transformed and enhanced in significant ways (a Gold-Lead-certified Math, Science, and Technology Center; a state-of-the-art athletic fieldhouse and fitness center; an admissions and college advising office suite; a synthetic athletic field; major renovation of the 650-seat theater; and the expansion of the dining hall, among others.)

I also helped steward, solicit, and secure the single largest gift to the school towards financial aid; and the curriculum and co-curricular programs were enriched, expanded, and adapted along the way, without losing the core academic pillars that have served the school so well. As the founding head of school, I helped breathe life into an incredible educational vision, hired and helped onboard everyone to shape the educational setting for our inaugural student body of 185, the most diverse in Washington DC. The same held true for the faculty and administration. Most recently as interim head in Seattle, Washington and currently in Baltimore, Maryland, I have helped heal and stabilize two school communities experiencing complexities and transition woes during the global pandemic and accompanying politically charged environment. You must listen and understand the heartbeat of an organization, and your work and focus must ebb and flow accordingly. Sometimes you observe movements and dynamics from "the balcony;" at other times you must step right onto the "dance floor" below.

I am currently leading my fifth institution as head of school, granted two as a year-long interim. I have worked in single-sex pre-K-12; co-ed; day, day-boarding, international; parochial; progressive elementary; grade 6 through 12 schools – and in the process within a wide range of cultures, traditions, challenges, and opportunities. I have personally experienced and been part of the educational systems in Germany, Denmark, Canada, and the US. My siblings and their families – both adoptive and birth – are spread across multiple continents, and thus my global understanding, resiliency, and adapting along the way have grounded and helped me as I get to know my new school community. At this stage in my career, I am looking for a special school, firmly grounded in and committed to an aspirational mission that not only places students in the enviable position to become thought leaders and change agents succeeding in life but who will also become individuals with a keen interest in doing their part to shape a positive future in whatever field they choose. With the right values instilled, those same individuals with poise and self-confidence will embrace their personal responsibility to help ensure environmental sustainability, a better tomorrow, and cultural competency to navigate the global complexity, ambiguity, and uncertainty they will inevitably face.

The significant time I have spent within the independent school universe has allowed me to gain increasingly deeper perspective, insights, and invaluable lessons. I realize that you do not always have to be the expert in the room. Often listening carefully and attentively, allowing others the freedom and confidence to contribute is just as important as speaking up or offering your own insights and advice. And to be clear, many decisions do not have to be made by the head of school. I have learned that you can indeed implement change, ask the essential question, help shape a community of excellence, kindness, and genuine caring, while ensuring that a light always shines on mission, core values, ethical citizenry, and doing the right thing even when no one is looking.

I look forward to embracing my next school community, to listen and learn, to point out strengths, joys, and potential while also asking critical questions and offering observations regarding growing edges, always focusing on improvement and excellence – yet at a pace that deliberately contemplates capacity, timing, and thus fits the school. In the almost post-pandemic era, mental health, pace and balance are more important than ever before. We must tap into lessons learned during the past two years to help shape and identify the best traits and strategies of our new normal. My life journey from a poor, biracial, homeless, orphan in Hamburg, Germany to head of independent schools in America may be unlikely. Yet, education has always been my own anchor and I know the power that we continuously must help nourish and unleash to as many within our schools and beyond.