

Getting to Know *Mike Barclay*

This summer, Nansemond-Suffolk Academy is excited to welcome Mike Barclay as he begins his tenure on July 1 as our next head of school. Mike has nearly three decades of experience in secondary education as an English teacher, admissions director, dean of students, assistant head of school and head of school. He most recently served as the head of school at Virginia Beach Friends School and is excited to remain in Hampton Roads, a place he and his family consider home. He and his wife, Kristin, have two children. Their daughter, Chase, will be attending the College of Charleston in the fall, while their son, Greer, is a rising junior and is excited to become a Saint.



Q: What inspired you to enter the field of education?

A: Growing up, my dad always wanted me to be a history teacher and football coach. These were his dream jobs. During my 18 years of living at home, my dad never stopped whispering in my ear, “Be a teacher.” It was a mantra my three older sisters and I all heard over and over.

At Muhlenberg College, I didn’t know what I wanted to do with my life, but I liked writing, wanted to be well read and saw the value in learning about communications beyond daily discourse. Being an English/communications major seemed like a reasonable area of study for an unknown future after graduation. During my four years of college, my dad’s mantra finally set in and became a question, “Why don’t you become a teacher?”

In the summer of 1989, I saw “Dead Poets Society,” and immediately connected with Robin Williams’ character, Mr. Keating, with his thoughtful charisma and passion for his students. If I was going to be a teacher, I wanted to be like Mr. Keating and work at an all-boys school. Fast forward to my senior year of college. By luck and circumstance, I was hired to serve as a resident prefect for the boarders at Georgetown Preparatory in Bethesda, Maryland, the oldest all-boys private boarding school in the country. My own “Dead Poets Society” experience! At “Prep,” as it’s called, my job was to chaperone students outside of the educational day by living in the dorms and accompanying them on weekend field trips. It was a great place for a recent college graduate.

Prep gave me a roof over my head, free food and time to figure out my life.

On the first day of moving into Prep, a man dressed in workout gear holding a football and wearing black cleats came barreling out of the door of Boland Hall (my dorm), nearly running over my parents and me. He introduced himself as Jim Power and then ran off as he was late to play two-hand touch football with students. After Jim vanished, my dad turned to me and said, “Who was that?” I said, “He’s the head of the school!” Next, my dad said the words that changed my life, “How do you get that job?”

For nearly 30 years in education, I’ve been working to be like Jim Power. A head of school who’s engaged with his students, faculty and community

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Brown School taught me how to have hard conversations. Quest Montessori showed me the pure bliss of what education should always be and gave me (and my kids) the gift of experiencing a joyous learning environment. And Friends School has shown me that the Quaker Testimonies of Simplicity, Peace, Integrity, Community, Equality and Stewardship are values all schools should and need to embrace.

All of these schools had a specific “Mike Barclay proudest moment.” They were all different, yet equally important that gratefully led me to NSA.

not just in the classroom and hallways but on the field or in the venues where everlasting school memories are made. While not a history teacher and football coach (I love history and have coached football), I think my dad would be proud. Plus, he convinced my sisters, too, all of whom work in education!

Q: What’s your proudest professional moment?

A: I had to sit on this question for quite some time, it’s truly hard to pinpoint a proudest moment. It’s all the moments and the totality of my decisions I am most proud of.

Prep helped me figure out what I wanted to be. Teaching high school English at Montgomery Blair H.S. made me understand how hard and important it is to be a teacher. Working at NYU in admissions made me miss being around kids. Working at Stuart Hall High School in San Francisco gave me a mentor in my former boss, who to this day is my best friend and the model for my leadership. Being the dean of students at Moses

Q: What attracted you to Nansemond-Suffolk Academy?

A: The community! In all my years of education, I have never experienced a community like NSA. The passion, the purpose and the commitment of the entire NSA community to foster a love of learning and simply help to create the best human beings possible is truly inspiring.

Q: What are you most looking forward to as you join the Saints family?

A: I’m most looking forward to my family joining the Saints family, not just me. I feel incredibly grateful for the opportunity to be NSA’s next head of

school and blessed that Greer will get to finish his junior and senior years as a Saint. His connection, our family’s connection, to the school will last a lifetime. This, to me, is magical!

Q: What hobbies do you enjoy?

A: My favorite hobby is snowboarding. I love it! When I was the head of school at Quest Montessori School in Rhode Island, on Thursday nights in the winter, I was in charge of the ski/snowboarding club. One season, I convinced Kristin to allow me to get a used snowboard. After a season of slamming (not falling), it all clicked one night. Learning something new in my 40s and not giving up on it has solidified my passion for the sport.

I also love movies! My favorite place to decompress is watching a summer blockbuster in an empty theater. This is bliss! I’m incredibly jealous of those who can act or have artistic talents of any kind (artists, musicians, actors, etc.) as I have none. I love the lens that they see the world through. In a second life, I think it would be cool to be an actor or a scriptwriter.

Q: What is something that you’d like us to know about you?

A: I think I’m funny, but most times kids think that I am not. I love humor! I love to make people laugh and smile. As much as I take my job seriously (and I’ll hold that line consistently), I try not to take myself too seriously. It’s important for me to foster trust at all levels and that to me involves showing my true character while leading, mentoring, empowering, course-correcting or simply connecting.