

Dr. Ayesha Sitlani Convocation and Installation Remarks 2023

Good morning, everyone – on behalf of the Board of Trustees, I extend a warm welcome to students, faculty, staff, alumni, families, and friends, on this very special and momentous occasion. We are gathered here today to welcome students and their families on our first official day of school, and to celebrate the installation of Dr. Corinna Crafton as the new Head of School.

Whether you are a returning family or a new family, the first day of school brings up strong emotions for us. As we navigate the first few heady weeks of school filled with new experiences, change and transitions, we may lean on old relationships, and along the way build some new ones. Through this journey, take a moment to recognize and enjoy those relationships that are built on trust - that very personal and unique feeling that allows us to firmly believe in the reliability, truth, ability, or strength of someone. Trust is hard earned and takes time to build and maintain; however, it is truly the bedrock of our strongest relationships.

This leads me to introduce our trusted and beloved Dr. Corinna Crafton as the new Head of W+H School, and the first female to assume this position. Dr. Crafton is well known to our community as she has a long history with our school for almost 18 years. During this time, she has continued to foster strong bonds and partnerships and has earned the trust of students and their parents, faculty and staff, trustees, and alumni. At W+H she has served in increasing leadership capacities over the past several years, including most recently as Acting Head of School. Prior to that she served as Associate Head of School, Dean of Teaching and Learning for the Middle and Upper Schools, Middle School Head, Middle School Coordinator, Humanities Department Chair, and an English teacher in the Middle and Upper Schools. Dr. Crafton is a graduate of Rutgers University (Douglass College) with a B.A. in English, and earned her M.Ed. in Curriculum and Instruction from Pennsylvania State University and her Ed.D in Educational Leadership from the University of New England.

As previously communicated to the community, Dr. Crafton was selected and appointed as our new Head of School after an extensive and highly competitive international and national search process that was led by the W+H Board of Trustees. The selection process included outreach to community members who described Dr. Crafton as a “natural leader,” “compassionate and humble,” “a thoughtful listener,” “straightforward and genuine,” “open and collaborative,” “enthusiastic and fearless” and “experienced and trusted.” Dr. Crafton, who was selected from 12 semi-finalists and 4 finalists, clearly stood out as an innovative thinker and strategic leader open to building consensus, yet ready to and capable of making bold decisions to lead W+H in its next chapter.

In September of 2022, the selection process was completed, and the Board of Trustees voted to appoint Dr. Crafton as the new Head of School. I had the pleasure as President of the Board to announce this news to the faculty and staff in person at the Performing Arts Center, just a few moments prior to the news being broadly communicated to the community. I recall walking into the room filled with anxious faculty and staff watching my every move and listening carefully to what I was about to say, with anticipation that I was likely there to announce the next Head of W+H. As soon as I had barely finished announcing Dr. Crafton's name as the Board's selection, and before I finished my sentence, each person in that room stood up and leaped for joy with applause, hugs, happy tears, and screams. It was one of those special moments that will always be etched in my mind – it was then that I knew more than ever before how fortunate we are to have such an exceptional and trusted leader of our school.

On a personal note, I have known Corinna for the past 11 years since my daughter joined W+H as a kindergartner. Over the years I have interacted with her as a parent and more recently in my role as Board President. In each of these very different capacities, I have always been impressed by Corinna's warmth and compassionate nature, her integrity and ability to solve complex problems with calm and fairness, and her fearless leadership.

On behalf of the W+H Board of Trustees, I am honored and delighted to formally install Dr. Corinna Crafton as Head of The Wardlaw+Hartridge School. Please join me in wishing Corinna the very best in her role, and in celebrating this joyous occasion for her and the school community.