

Meet Rob Phillips

Read Rob's online bio [here](#). For a deeper dive and insights into his background and leadership approach, see the Q&A below.

What are some experiences growing up that shaped who you are as an educator?

The first is growing up in a family of educators, which meant that I was surrounded by people at home—and whoever was at the kitchen table—who loved learning, asking questions, and listening to each other's answers. And while my parents had beliefs and values that were rooted in faith traditions and faith communities, they wanted me to establish my own identity and values. I was encouraged to ask questions from a spirit of curiosity, to listen carefully, to speak up for my values, and to be ready to back that up with reason and action.

A second formative experience occurred in my early 20's when I moved to Alaska to live at the homestead where my aunt and uncle lived with their three daughters. It was immediately apparent I was inept at everything necessary to survive and contribute in that environment. (Turns out playing a ton of soccer and reading thousands of pages of novels didn't translate to living on an Alaskan homestead!). My nieces—the oldest of whom was 13—quickly jumped in to teach me how to use a chainsaw, tow logs behind a boat, and keep the fire in the salmon smoker going on a slow burn. All great lessons in humility, adaptability, experience, and growth.

Who have been key mentors to you in your growth as a leader?

As I mentioned above, parents and family. At school, my 10th grade English teacher, Mr Ulstein, who brought me face-to-face with Henry David Thoreau, Zora Neale Hurston, and the *Iliad*, and who awakened in me a love of language, appreciation for the power of stories, and a lifelong love of ideas.

At SAAS, Jean Orvis and Joe Puggelli, the first two Heads of School at SAAS, who framed every decision in the lens of "*Know the Kid*, and focus on their needs." Melinda Mueller, who intertwined *Know the Kid* with challenge and engagement in the classroom. Mike Haykin, who founded the Learning Support Program at SAAS, and who maintained a sense of compassion and flexibility when dealing with tricky situations and problems that were eluding obvious solutions.

And perhaps most of all my own kids, who remind me that our kids can surprise us in the best possible ways IF we can find the right balance of providing guidance, helping them find their own path, and letting them establish a sense of healthy independence.

Why SAAS? What do you love about leadership in this community?

I noted in the first question that I moved away from the faith tradition of my family. Interesting, then, to find at SAAS others with that as a shared experience, and who drew from that upbringing a sense of purpose, calling, and community.

A second thing I love about SAAS is our embrace of an entrepreneurial mindset, as embodied in the mission words of "question, imagine, and create." These words deeply resonate with how I believe we best serve kids for their future and the future of our communities.

And the third: in the words of Joe Puggelli, "if you want to graduate students who are creative, collaborative, and action-oriented, you need to hire and support faculty and staff who are creative, collaborative, and action-oriented." What a cool privilege to get to work with colleagues and kids in an environment that embraces that.