



National Association
of *Independent* Schools

ARTICLE

School News: Schools With the Same Name Become Pen Pals

Winter 2026

This article appeared as "Linked by Letters" in the Winter 2026 issue of Independent School.

When the heads of two schools with nearly identical names first met at the NAIS Institute for New Heads in July 2024, they had no idea that a stuffed moose would lead to an ongoing partnership.

Susanna Waters, head of Fay School (MA), brought the small stuffed version of her school mascot to the event, which sparked a conversation with Morgan Scoville, head of The Fay School (TX), about school spirit and mascots—something both schools are passionate about. By the end of that conversation, they'd hatched a plan for their schools' mascots to become pen pals. "It's really an NAIS-school love story," Waters says.

The Pen Pal Project, which began in spring 2025, engaged second graders from both schools already immersed in a letter-writing curriculum. Students at each school worked together on group letters, written from the perspective of their mascots Mortimer the Moose (MA) and Ernie the Alligator (TX). The students brainstormed ideas and shared stories about their schools, traditions, and daily lives.

“They had idea after idea. ‘Oh, we have to tell them about this, and we have to tell them about that,’” Katie Knuppel, primary school head at Fay School, recalls. The letters became a window into each other’s worlds, with students marveling at differences such as outdoor lunches in Texas and snowy Massachusetts winters.

The project’s impact extended beyond writing skills. Students researched their pen pals’ school, explored new geography, and discovered unexpected connections—like a Fay School teacher who had grown up near the Texas school. “It really highlighted the regional, the geographic differences that show up in one’s everyday life as a young person,” Waters says.

The schools hope to expand the project, now in its second year, to possibly include individual pen pal pairings and more interactive elements, like sending the stuffed animal version of their mascots to each other’s school for an exchange program and asking students to keep a daily journal. At its core, the project is about more than just letters—it’s building bridges and showing students that, despite the miles and the differences between them, they have much to share and learn from one another.



Fay School second graders and their mascot Mortimer the Moose.

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