

MODUS VIVENDI

A WAY OF LIFE



COMMENCEMENT 2026

FACULTY PROFILE:
KIM HIGLEY

BEHIND THE SCENES
OF CINDERELLA

THE BEAR CREEK
SCHOOL
MAGAZINE

SUMMER 2026



MODUS VIVENDI

Summer 2026

Modus Vivendi is translated as "a way of life" or "a manner of living." The Bear Creek School seeks to develop individuals for whom the classical ideals of excellence in all things, love of learning, spiritual commitment, and self-discipline have become a way of life.

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The mission of The Bear Creek School is to provide a high-quality, Christian liberal arts education in a nurturing environment that will enable each student to become the individual God intends.

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BLOG

For an in-depth view into the happenings at Bear Creek, read our blog at **tbcs.org/blog**. To receive alerts when new articles are posted, subscribe to the blog by clicking the bell icon at the top of the page.

THE BEAR FACTS

Each Friday during the school year, *The Bear Facts*, Bear Creek's weekly newsletter, is emailed to current parents, faculty, and staff. *The Bear Facts* contains news and announcements from each of the school's divisions and from the Athletics Department.

MyBC

Parents can find a complete list of role-specific resources, including the Family Handbook, on our website. See **MyBC** at the top of any page on **tbcs.org** and log in.

ON THE COVER

Matt Sorensen '26, Tate Hartshorn '27, and Temi Adekanmbi '28 in Bear Creek's production of *Rodgers + Hammerstein's Cinderella*. To read more about the spring musical, both onstage and behind the scenes, see pages 38 – 43.

Photo by Janeen Sorensen

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COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS FROM THE HEADMASTER

By Patrick Carruth

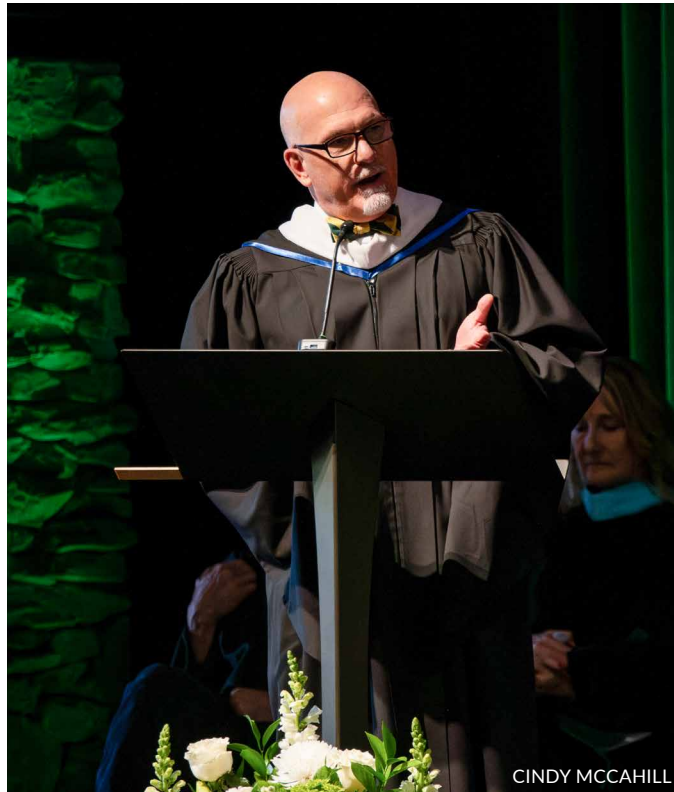
AN ANCIENT QUESTION FOR AN “ARTIFICIAL” AGE

In Act Two, Scene Two of *Hamlet*, the title character poses an ancient question as he tries to reconcile his disappointment and depression, having just lost his father and lost trust in his mother.

What a piece of work is a man! How noble in reason, how infinite in faculty! In form and moving how express and admirable! In action how like an angel, in apprehension how like a god! The beauty of the world, the paragon of animals! And yet, to me, what is this quintessence of dust? Man delights not me.

Hamlet is doing two things at once. On the one hand, he is wrestling with the beauty of humanity, and on the other hand, the baseness of humanity. Of course, he isn't asking about the impact of AI or technology on humanity, but a similar question is being asked today, in a digital culture, that echoes the language of human dignity but has forgotten its foundation.

You are graduating today into an amazing world that has trained machines to write code, pass



the bar exam, launch rockets, solve medical mysteries, and create poetry. Ironically, this same world often defines your humanity as merely a complex processing system driven by chemical reactions to material stimuli.

Notice what is happening. Our artificial age is also doing two things at once: re-classifying human beings as analog neural networks, while regarding digital neural networks as human beings.

So, today's question is similar to Hamlet's: Are you "like a god" or simply a "quintessence of dust?"

Modernity is an inheritance from the Enlightenment, and much of it is built on a materialist frame. Materialism posits that all that was and is and is to come is matter. Everything is dust. In 1903, Bertrand Russell, British philosopher, logician, mathematician, and among the most famous atheists of the 20th century, wrote in *A Free Man's Worship*:

Man is the product of causes which had no prevision of the end they were achieving; that his origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and his beliefs,



are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms.

Similarly, Fredrich Nietzsche, 19th century German philosopher and philology professor, proclaimed the death of God, and prophesied the crisis that would follow if reality was purely material. He writes:

The madman jumped into their midst and pierced them with his eyes. "Whither is God?" he cried; "I will tell you. We have killed him—you and I. All of us are his murderers ... Is there still any up or down? Are we not straying, as through an infinite nothing? ... God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him."

Nietzsche understood that an entirely material foundation unmoors the very fabric of reality itself, and Russell applied that understanding to humanity. In such a world, we are left with only expressions of power. Nietzsche again, this time from his essay *Antichrist*, writes:

What is good?—Whatever augments the feeling of power, the will to power, power itself, in man.

What is evil?—Whatever springs from weakness.

What is happiness?—The feeling that power increases—that resistance is overcome.

You see, once God is dead, truth becomes subjective. Once God is dead, goodness equals power. Once God is dead, beauty dies. And it is then easy to reduce us humans into cogs in the material machine to be engineered, used, optimized, and discarded. It is difficult to kill God and maintain our humanity; we are left with only "will to power."

But such notions are old and outdated today, right? In the modern technological world, we have moved beyond them, haven't we?

Nobel Prize-winning scientist Francis Crick, one of the co-discoverers of the molecular structure of DNA,

wrote this in *The Astonishing Hypothesis*:

You, your joys and your sorrows, your memories and your ambitions, your sense of personal identity and free will, are in fact no more than the behavior of a vast assembly of nerve cells and their associated molecules.

And more recently, historian and bestselling author of *Sapiens* and *Homo Deus*, Yuval Harari, widely read in Silicon Valley, argues that organisms—including humans—are algorithms.

This sounds a lot like the same idea in a new format.

Which brings us back to Hamlet's predicament. If thinking is just pattern and prediction, then a machine that patterns and predicts must be a person. If you are an algorithm, then your loves, longings, hopes, fears, inspirations, sacrifices, and devotions are simply computations. And a world that believes you are an algorithm will certainly treat you like one.

Now, don't hear what I am not saying. Modern machines, including artificial intelligence, are marvels. Some of you will build them, and you should build them well, and that is part of the point. The definition of "well" is grounded in something outside yourself. But a program is not a person. And the temptation of our time will be to forget that difference.

The distinction is important.

The 19th century English poet Christina Rossetti, a contemporary of Nietzsche, highlights the distinction. In her last years, dying of cancer, she wrote the following in "None Other Lamb:"

*... My faith burns low, my hope burns low;
Only my heart's desire cries out in me
By the deep thunder of its want and woe,
Cries out to Thee.*

*Lord, Thou art Life, though I be dead;
Love's Fire Thou art, however cold I be:
Nor heaven have I, nor place to lay my head,
Nor home, but Thee.*

Rossetti's want and woe is for God. And this is not

a bug; it is a feature. It is a clue. The scriptures tell us we were made *imago dei*—in God's image—and that our dignity is conferred by God in His creative act. As such, we reflect elements of His nature that cannot be replicated through processing speed. We create. We lament. We love. We are also fallen, which separates us from God; so, we wonder and we long. It is all part of what it means to be human.

A language model trained on every word ever written does not lie awake at night wondering: *Who am I? Why am I here? For what?* But we do.

CHARGE TO THE CLASS OF 2026

I have been reading Joseph Laconte's *The War for Middle Earth*, a book about the friendship of C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien. They were in their twenties when their generation's worldview collapsed around them into the First, then Second, World War. They saw the consequences of materialism on humanity in real time. In the midst of unimaginable death and desolation, they mirrored "the image" by creating. They created stories of the True, of the Good, and of the Beautiful—stories that rekindled the *imagination* toward restoring a "vision of human dignity that had been stolen away."

May you do the same.

You are more than an algorithm. You are more than a machine. Use your life to demonstrate the same wisdom, compassion, and courage in an increasingly artificial age.

Your time is different from other times, but not much different. And you have been equipped with the answer to Hamlet's question:

When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him? Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. Psalm 8:3 – 5 (ESV)

Congratulations, Class of 2026.

CONGRATULATIONS TO THE CLASS OF 2026

Raphael Tania Bennett‡*
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Carnegie Mellon University

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Zicheng (Jason) Zhou***
Georgia Institute of Technology

Sarah Zhu**
Carnegie Mellon University

‡LEGACY HONORS (BEAR CREEK STUDENT
FROM KINDERGARTEN THROUGH GRADE 12)

***SUMMA CUM LAUDE (3.9 - 4.0 GPA)

** MAGNA CUM LAUDE (3.75 - 3.89 GPA)

*CUM LAUDE (3.5 - 3.749 GPA)

FACULTY COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS

By Ryan Summers



CINDY MCCAILL

What are the three most important Christian virtues?

Let me give you a minute—just think your answers. Got your ideas? When someone asked St. Augustine this question, he said, “first, humility; second, humility; and third, humility.”

In Isaiah 66:2, the Lord says, “This is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word.” I

hear this and I wonder, “What if God looked to me? What if God confided in me? What if I was ‘in’ with the Omniscient One? Wouldn’t that change my life?”

This verse from Isaiah says that it is the humble, those who know and confess their sins, those who revere the speech of the Lord—they are the one in cahoots with God. This gives us an epistemological principle: If I want to know truth, reality, the perspective of God—well, He reveals it to the humble. Psalm 25:9 says, “God

leads the humble in what is right and teaches them his way.”

In contrast, Proverbs 12:15 says, “The way of a fool seems right to him.” God teaches the humble His way, but a fool sees no need to be taught the way. When I am wise in my own eyes, I do not see God because I am looking in the mirror; I cannot hear God because I am listening to my own voice. The fool is not humble, contrite, nor in awe of God’s voice. He does not see the need to be in the confidence of God. The fool says, “I got this. I know the way.”

Contemporary author Kathryn Schulz says, “A whole lot of us go through life assuming that we are basically right, basically all the time, about basically everything: about our political and intellectual convictions, our religious and moral beliefs, our

assessment of other people, our memories, our grasp of facts. As absurd as it sounds, when we stop to think about it, our steady state seems to be one of unconsciously assuming that we are very close to omniscient.”

The reason this quote is funny is because it is so relatable—not to us personally, of course. It is just that we all know *someone* who thinks they are very close to omniscient. You can see it in their eyes.

In Proverbs 6:16 – 18, the writer tells us that,

“There are six things that the Lord hates, seven that are an abomination to him.” Now that will get your attention. The verse goes on to list these seven abominations that the actually *Omniscient One* hates. I will give you one guess as to the first thing on the list. Got your answer? Anyone say “haughty eyes”? This uses one of our literary terms, synecdoche, to describe what the King James translation puts simply as “a proud look.”

And because pride is not just a look in our eyes but also a well in our hearts, Proverbs 16:5 can echo: “Everyone who is arrogant in heart is an abomination to the Lord.” Putting it all together, acting omniscient in front of the One who is actually omniscient is not a good look.

Have you ever seen those shows where a pro athlete goes undercover as a new recruit at a high school or college tryout? There is always some dude on an alpha trip who tries to put the undercover pro in his place or coach him. “Hey, Eli Manning, let me show you how to throw a pass.” Acting like a pro in front of an actual pro is, well, would an “abomination” be too strong a word? The fool is wise in his own eyes.

There is an interesting theological connection in the undercover pro example, since the Omniscient One really did suit up as an amateur to run some plays with us here on the practice field. He told us what omniscience would say and showed us how things were done in the big leagues.

One of the things Christ said was that it is the poor in spirit who will be blessed and who will inherit the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:3). The poor in spirit will play under the big lights—the meek, the gentle, the teachable, the repentant. And the wisest man who ever lived, if we believe the story, was Solomon, who said, “It is better to be of a lowly spirit with the poor than to divide the spoil with the proud” (Proverbs 16:19). Illuminating connections. It is



CINDY MCCAILL

better to throw your lot in with those who are humble, even if they are poor, than to join with the proud, even if they are rich.

Now, we all know humble rich folks and proud poor folks—I do not think Solomon is saying that wealth inevitably makes us arrogant any more than poverty must make us humble. But can I ask you, if you could be given all the material goods wealth could buy, but the cost was a proud heart, would you take them? “Of course not,” we all affirm. But it is too easy when asked that way, isn’t it? The reality is that we are all actually answering that question every day. Our priorities answer that question. Did I value today, in my daily habits, the humility of Christ as much as the wealth

of the world? Did I interact with people today like someone who was poor in spirit—lowly in spirit—slow, gentle, meek, tender? Or was I wise in my own eyes?

Does your *life* affirm that humility is more valuable than money? That seems to be God’s perspective. Which makes sense, because money does not draw us close to God, ensure healthy relationships, or make us virtuous people. But being led in humility by God and being taught by His ways (Psalm 25:9)—that does make us people who know Him, resemble Him, and love others. Humility, then, brings us what money cannot: the riches of godliness.

And all this connects to today’s celebration of educational success, because we often tell



graduates, “Your education has enabled you to know a lot, and at college you will get to know even more.” But what if that just makes you feel nearly omniscient?

We tell graduates, “With the power of your knowledge, you will gain influence and prestige and self-respect.” But what if that just makes you wise in your own eyes?

We say, “With your qualifications and expertise, you will get to work at a world-changing organization.” But what if that simply allows you to divide the spoil with the proud?

Do you see the danger inherent in success if it overtakes lowliness of spirit? It is entirely possible that the educational success we today

celebrate can foster in you haughty eyes and a proud heart instead of a contrite spirit and a humble walk.

I am glad you are academically equipped; thank you for reading great books with me this year. I do want you to succeed and even to be great. But when your careers are completed, when your houses are paid off, when there is time, finally, for you to sit and watch the sun’s westering footprints pool into blues and purples—when you come to know for sure that love was why you were here—what, then, will greatness consist of? Christ, the Omniscient One, has told us, “Whoever humbles himself like a child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 18:4).

REFLECTIONS FROM

The sun streamed down on the rickety seesaw and dull yellow tire swing at Valley Campus, but Ethan, Grayson, Alex, Skyler, and I weren't enjoying the weather. Our round, six-year-old faces were tense. I don't know about them, but it was my first time to the principal's office. Mrs. Gephart kindly explained why we could no longer dogpile at recess and why we must write apologies to the boy upon whom we dogpiled. Of the school rules, "be kind and be safe," we had violated both. (Valley Campus recesses could get a little wild—we tested the boundaries of being safe playing "hot lava monster" or "flyer's up.") Mrs. Gephart wasn't telling us not to take risks or have fun. Rather, she encouraged being thoughtful about the choices we make. Her nurturing created a safe environment for

us to see our mistakes and grow from them. In the weather-exposed Valley campus breezeways, I began learning what it meant to be unsafe, safely. I learned how to take risks thoughtfully with people who supported me.

Some might say it is risky to be the only girl to sign up for Mrs. Wyner's summer flag football camp. But part of risk-taking is embracing challenge. Using sports, Mrs. Wyner shaped our character and ensured we belonged; any student could learn to throw a tight spiral and have a rewarding, post-camp Otter Pop. Mrs. Wyner's relentless positivity and reminder to "always honor God above the game" gave us tiny athletes strong foundations. These foundations would be tested.

Enter, Middle School. Everyone remembers the typical trials of Middle School, but imagine that during COVID. Those struggles speak for themselves.

Freshman year started with a setback. I took the risk to stand before my classmates and give a pitch to become an ASB class representative. Then, Hanna Vinkemulder went up, sucked helium from a balloon, and gave her pitch in a chipmunk voice. I had no chance. At the time, I wanted to be on ASB because my siblings were, and honestly, I liked being in charge. It took this failure and Mr. Urban's wisdom to learn that leadership is not about the title, but about service. Eventually, I did earn a spot on ASB, and through Mr. Urban's cultivation of a Christ-centered environment, we learned how to lead with humility and step out of our comfort zones. Even if that means shaving your head, right Jack?



CINDY MCCAILL

Calyse
Parker

THE CLASS OF 2026

I quickly learned that the charge to “be kind and be safe” is no less important in high school. Teachers empowered us to take risks and supported us through struggles. Some of which included two broken legs, a fractured collarbone, a punctured lip, broken fingers, two torn ACLs, three stress fractures, rolled ankles, a dislocated kneecap, and a broken nose. Don’t worry, not all those injuries were mine. Wesley Feight sacrificed his leg to win a rough-housing match. Dr. Mills taught us in a sling after his unfortunate skiing slip. Rachel Brown endured 24 months of recovery to play her senior soccer season. Injuries taught us, painfully, how much we were willing to put on the line for something we love. Bear Creek’s supportive environment taught us how to care deeply without fear and embody sacrificial love.

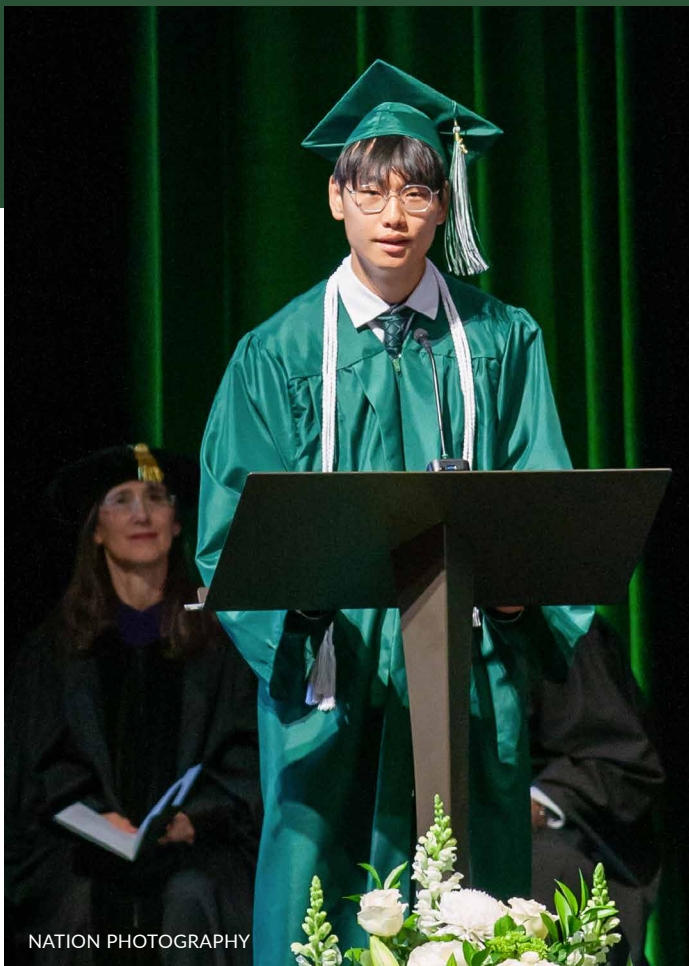
My own back injury solidified this. Before I could even consider quitting sports, Mr. Pohlman, Coach Mendo, and Coach Nate stepped in, teaching me to lead beyond the court. And Trainer Caitlin? She met my frustrations with persistent hope. Anyone who experienced pain, visible or not, can point out a Bear Creek faculty member who helped them through it. That is what makes Bear Creek special. As students, we are encouraged to grow but supported when life takes unexpected turns. Burdens are shared. Hardships are overcome, together.

This mentorship is not only visible in the hallways and on the court, but also in the classroom. Some of my classmates took multi-variable calculus for fun, whereas my high school plan prioritized taking as

few math classes as possible. Mrs. Jackson altered my opinion of math so much that I voluntarily took Calculus. Mrs. Jackson often got the question, “When will we *ever* do this in real life?” She kept her answer honest. “Most of you won’t,” she said, “but my goal is to help you handle complex things, stretch your developing minds, and understand God’s intricate and orderly world.” I have been lucky enough to have Mrs. Jackson as a teacher for three years, and her teaching goes beyond math. She frames her class as a growth opportunity. Math is hard, but isn’t that the point? Deep learning happens through struggle—a hard equation or difficult discussion both produce satisfying results, if taught how to handle them.

All of us have had difficult moments at Bear Creek. But I believe these are intentionally placed hardships to reflect on with gratitude, to see God’s work in our lives. Trials showed us how we’ve been shaped and who we’ve been shaped by. Setbacks gave us our mentors and best friends. Fragility revealed our strong community. Taking risks built our confidence. Bear Creek allowed us to feel comfortable doing hard things. Because, regardless of failure or success, our value remained unchanged.

So, Class of 2026, as we head into our next four years of uncertainty and adversity, I encourage us to “be kind and be unsafe, safely.”



Daniel Hwang

two, the mastery of flavor and cooking techniques; three, the personality of the chef in his cuisine; four, the value for money; and five, the consistency between my visits.

I have come to dine at this restaurant five days a week, occasionally six—and maybe sometimes only three. But the fact remains that I frequent this institution week after week as if some mystical force was dragging me into going there. Four years ago, I wasn't so sure what it was. But looking back now, I am.

The Bear Creek School has a variety of courses you can order, each prepared by a very special chef who accompanies you on a very special journey—a journey you were never meant to take alone.

Let's take Chef Summers, for example. First off, the ingredients he uses are simply fantastic: a salted *Community*, a buttery *Dignity*, an umami *Relationship*, and a crispy *Identity*. These grand ideas are scattered across the many dishes he has to offer, with interpretations that vary from sous chef to sous chef—like Hurston, Orwell, and Shelley.

It all sounds complicated on paper, but once you wrap your curious little tastebuds around these pieces of art, you realize you are taken to a world where they unite under the grand picture of the human experience. You begin to understand that we live the reality of these greater things, and we live for them.

A cooking technique I found interesting was that of Chef Shipley. An expert in the mathematics cuisine (known to have a bit of a mundane taste), Chef Shipley's passionate way of cooking and presenting her dishes often captivated me and my colleagues. Once in a while, she would engage her customers with a history lesson behind her dishes, a mechanical breakdown of her dishes, and, most

Ladies and gentlemen, my name is Daniel Hwang, and what I have come to announce to you today is from the one and only *MICHELIN Guide*. For those of you unfamiliar with the poetic utensils of the culinary arts, I must inform you beforehand that the *MICHELIN Guide* is the most distinguished of food review publications, its fabled three stars sought after by the most skillful of culinary artists. Such honor, of course, is up to the likes of me—simple men who love to eat. In the 1900s, we were heralds to the tongues of France. But now, in 2026, we are here in the sacred hills of Redmond to give our final verdict on The Bear Creek School.

For the past four very short years, I have been a regular customer at The Bear Creek School. And during that time, without revealing my true identity, I have observed closely and carefully taken note of the five elemental criteria by which we evaluate our restaurants: one, the quality of the ingredients used;



commonly, where you might see her dishes later on in the real world. Her passion captivated me, and I couldn't help but be more excited about eating. I doubt many chefs I encounter in the future will share the same mastery as her in loving their craft.

The list could go on and on: Chef Hill, Chef Gardiner, Chef "insert track and field coach," Chef Bell, Chef Kim (who actually works in the kitchen—thank you so much for your delicious honey butter chicken sandwiches and for always reserving some spam musubi for me), and *et cetera*. But the more I ate, I realized something: It wasn't just about presentation and taste, but rather the central substances of the dishes, which the chefs orchestrated in harmony to enrich the souls of their customers. I was being fed the carbs of resilience, the vitamins of inquisitiveness, the fibers of finding joy, and most importantly, the protein of a faithful life.

Now, not as a food critic but as a regular Bear Creek student, I came into this place seeking knowledge and relationships. Four years later, I think I can say

that I got what I came here for. But what I didn't expect was this: a Christ-centered community that truly wished for their students to strive for something greater than the accomplishment in college and career; a group of teachers who were desperate to share their joy for understanding the things that both can and cannot be empirically studied; a sports program that had its ups and downs but still provided me space for relationships and building grit. Most importantly, though, I was able to make friends. To those who laughed at my jokes, to those who dapped me up in the hallway, to those who sang with me, to those who patted my back, and to those who sat down and ate with me—thank you. You guys made the food taste a lot better.

Therefore, I, Daniel Hwang, proud member of the *MICHELIN Guide*, for the restaurant's remarkable excellence across all five categories, award the Bear Creek experience with the highest honor I can bestow: **Three stars.** ❀❀❀

Tatum Jackson



CINDY MCCAHERILL

success comes naturally. It's much harder, and much more important, to keep going when things feel uncertain or challenging.

At Bear Creek, we have all experienced challenges in some way. Maybe it was a class that pushed you further than you expected—I know I had a few of those. Maybe it was balancing school with sports, jobs, or responsibilities outside of campus. Maybe it was something more personal, something that no one else saw. Whatever it was, those experiences didn't just test us; they changed us.

One thing Bear Creek teachers consistently tell us is to focus on learning and growing rather than chasing a grade. They remind us that our identity isn't defined by a single success or failure. Instead, we are shaped over time by the choices we make every day.

This growth isn't just personal; it's also spiritual. We are asked, "Who am I becoming in relation to something greater than myself?" That question doesn't always have an easy answer. In fact, most of us are still trying to figure it out. Maybe that's the point.

Becoming the individual God intends doesn't mean having everything perfectly planned. It doesn't mean never making mistakes or always knowing the right path. It means being willing to grow. It means being open to change. It means trusting that, even in uncertainty, there is purpose.

The biggest moments of growth I've experienced happened in the smallest moments—moments when I chose to keep going instead of giving up, like studying for twelve hours over three days for a subject I struggled with. Moments when I stepped outside my comfort zone, like speaking during oral exams or participating in group discussions. I chose to work on my confidence as a speaker, and I have

Good afternoon faculty, families, friends, and my fellow graduates.

If you had asked me freshman year what it meant to "become the individual God intends," I would have given a simple answer. I might have said it means being kind, working hard, and making good choices. While those are true, my time at Bear Creek has shown me that becoming who you are meant to be is more complex than that. Becoming isn't a straightforward path; it doesn't happen all at once.

When I think back on my time here, I don't just remember the highlights, like our girls soccer team succeeding or achieving the grades I worked for. I also remember the moments that didn't go as planned—days when soccer consumed my schedule and schoolwork kept me up past my bedtime. Those moments are uncomfortable. No one wants hardship or struggle, but those are the moments that shaped me most. It's easy to feel confident when things are going well. It's easy to believe in yourself when



grown immensely because of the effort I put in, even when I was uncomfortable.

Those moments didn't always feel significant at the time, but they added up. They shaped my character, my perspective, and who I am.

That is what we take with us as we leave this place—not just knowledge of Kant or the unit circle, but a foundation: a foundation of perseverance, faith, and community.

In this place, I've learned that we don't grow alone. We grow alongside each other and alongside God—through friendships, challenges, and shared experiences that connect us in ways we often don't realize until later.

As we move forward, we will face new challenges, new environments, and new expectations. We will find ourselves in situations where we don't have

everything figured out. However, we will carry the understanding that uncertainty isn't something to fear. It is something that shapes us. We will remember the resilience we have built through every challenge we faced, and we will remember that becoming is a lifelong process.

Class of 2026, wherever we go next, we don't need to have all the answers. We just need to keep growing.

Thank you.

BOARD OF TRUSTEE PROFILE: KEVIN KEITH

BY THERESA LARSEN

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT



Trustee Kevin Keith often jokes that his relationship with Bear Creek did not begin with instant enthusiasm.

When his wife, Kathy, first sent him the school's website years ago, he remembers seeing images of bell towers and uniforms and thinking it felt a little cold and formal. He and Kathy both came from public school backgrounds and, at the time, fully expected to follow that same path with their own children. Private school was not an obvious choice, and a classical Christian school was not something they had spent much time thinking about. Still, they were curious enough to attend an information session, and that

single visit changed everything.

Connor '21, the Keiths' oldest child, joined Bear Creek as a kindergartener in 2008. The family had recently moved to Kirkland and, after Connor's early preschool years elsewhere, Kevin and Kathy were weighing their options carefully. That information session, led by Karen Blankenbeckler, left a lasting impression. Kevin recalls being struck not by a sales pitch, but by the clarity and intentionality behind everything Bear Creek was trying to do. The combination of rigorous academics, a classical liberal arts foundation, and a Christian worldview resonated deeply. By the time the session ended, Kevin walked out convinced that

this place was something special. The decision, once crystallized, felt surprisingly easy.

Connor's first teacher was Mrs. Renee Matson, a name that has since been woven tightly into the Keith family's story. She would go on to teach both Connor and his younger sister, Ainsley '26, and she remains illustrative of what Kevin and Kathy have valued most about Bear Creek over the years: teachers who are deeply invested, deeply relational, and committed to walking with students over time. Additionally, classmates from those early years quickly blossomed into long-lasting friendships for both children. Many of Connor's kindergarten classmates remained his close friends through graduation, and even now, years after leaving Bear Creek, those relationships endure.

For Kevin, what stands out most when he looks back is not only the academic formation, though he values that highly. It is the community that grew up around his family. Bear Creek, he says, is a place where families often come for one reason yet leave with something more. Parents become friends. Families walk through

years of life together. Shared experiences, both ordinary and extraordinary, bind people in ways that extend well beyond the classroom.

Some of Kevin's favorite memories reflect that sense of shared life. He thinks back to a grade 6 trip Connor took to Mount St. Helens, where students and parents camped together for several days. Sleeping in tents, exploring the outdoors, and learning side by side created memories that still stand out to him more than a decade later. Athletics also played a major role in both Connor's and Ainsley's Bear Creek experiences. Both children played basketball, and Ainsley also spent time on the volleyball court. Kevin remembers trips to State tournaments, packed gyms full of familiar faces, and the excitement of watching students grow not just as athletes, but as teammates and leaders.

Another meaningful tradition for Kevin was joining a group of Bear Creek fathers and daughters on an annual trip to Camp Orkila on Whidbey Island. Those weekends, filled with camp activities, time on the water, and unhurried conversations, became treasured



COURTESY PHOTO



moments in his relationship with Ainsley and with other Bear Creek families. Those kinds of experiences, Kevin believes, represent something unique about the school: a culture that makes space for meaningful connection across generations.

Kevin's formal involvement with Bear Creek grew alongside the children's years at the school. Early volunteering opened the door to more formal involvement as he joined the Advancement Committee, contributing during a pivotal time when the school was preparing for the capital campaign that would lead to the construction of the Upper School building. In 2014, he joined the Board of Trustees, drawn by the desire to give back to a school that had already given his family so much. Over his years on the board, Kevin has served in several roles. He began in Advancement, then spent time on a small advisory group that met regularly with President and Headmaster Patrick Carruth, serving as a sounding board and partner in strategic thinking. More recently, he has taken on the leadership of the Audit Committee, working closely with the finance team and auditors to ensure strong financial stewardship. Each role has offered a different

vantage point into the school, but all have reinforced Kevin's belief in thoughtful, mission-driven leadership. He was motivated both by gratitude and by a sense of responsibility to help steward the mission for future families.

Kathy's path of service mirrors that progression of commitment. She began as a volunteer Room Parent, deeply engaged in classroom life. As Connor and Ainsley moved into athletics, Kathy found her way into leadership through the Grizzlies Booster Club, eventually serving as Vice President and then President during her children's high school years. Her love for the community and belief in the mission ultimately led her to a professional role at the school, where she now serves as Senior Director of Enrollment Management.

For the Keith family, Bear Creek has not just been a school their children attended, but a place where their gifts and energies have been invested over the long term. Kevin speaks about stewardship not as obligation, but as privilege. Participating fully in initiatives like the Annual Fund, Gratitude Gala, and capital campaigns allows the Keith family to support projects they care deeply about, sometimes even ones

that were not initially on their radar. He recalls being struck by improvements such as the Lower School and Middle School libraries and the locker room remodel, spaces that benefit students long after his own children have moved on. For Kevin, a well-rounded education includes academics, athletics, the arts, and facilities that reflect the school's high standards across every dimension.

When asked about the projects he is most proud of, Kevin is quick to acknowledge that none of the credit belongs to any one person. Still, he points to a few initiatives that reflect the board's collective priorities. The Upper School building stands as the most visible example, a transformative expansion that has shaped Bear Creek's identity and reach. Equally important, though less obvious day-to-day, has been the board's commitment to improving teacher compensation and benefits. Moving faculty pay from around the 50th percentile to the 75th percentile has helped ensure that Bear Creek attracts and retains excellent teachers who are able to build sustainable lives in the region. Enrollment growth has been another key focus, allowing more students to experience the school's mission at a time when faith-based education faces increasing cultural headwinds.

Professionally, Kevin brings a background shaped by years at Amazon, where he now leads the Kindle, tablet, and kids' device businesses. While he began his career in marketing, his current role centers on product leadership, scaling organizations, and navigating rapid technological change. That perspective has informed his service as a trustee, particularly in areas related to growth, systems, and the role technology plays in students' lives. He has found it valuable to bring lessons from the private sector into conversations about how the school can grow thoughtfully without losing its core identity.

Despite his professional focus on innovation and scale, Kevin sees strong parallels between Bear Creek and the organizations he works with outside the school.

At its best, he says, Bear Creek embodies a culture of intellectual curiosity—a willingness to learn, to experiment, and to ask how things can be done better—all while remaining anchored to a clear mission. That balance of conviction and openness is something he deeply values.

Those skills became especially relevant during the COVID-19 pandemic, when the board shifted into near-constant communication. Kevin recalls weekly, and sometimes daily, conversations as trustees and school leaders shared information, compared approaches across sectors, and made decisions in real time. It was a challenging season, but one that highlighted the strength of Bear Creek's leadership and community. Kevin believes the school navigated that period well

precisely because of the collaboration and trust that had been built over many years.

In 2014, he joined the Board of Trustees, drawn by the desire to give back to a school that had already given his family so much.

When reflecting on what Bear Creek ultimately means to him, Kevin does not point to a single defining moment. Instead, he tells a story that spans years and generations. Every Christmas season, the Keiths open their home to their children's Bear Creek friends and families. Connor graduated five years ago and Ainsley last year; yet each year, the gathering grows, with 15 or more families returning again and again. The enthusiasm has not faded. If anything, it has deepened. These are friendships that persist long after diplomas are handed out.

As he looks back on nearly two decades connected to the school, Kevin keeps returning to the same themes: extraordinary teachers, intentional leadership, and a community that shows up for one another year after year. Watching students grow and then return as young adults, seeing beloved teachers still investing in new generations, and sharing Bear Creek's story with new families has been deeply meaningful. For Kevin Keith, serving as a trustee is not just about governance or strategy. It is an expression of gratitude for a community that shaped his family's life and continues to shape the lives of so many others.



FACULTY PROFILE:
KIM HIGLEY

JANEEN SORENSEN



OUR BELOVED GRADE 2 TEACHER KIM HIGLEY HAS BEEN A PART OF THE BEAR CREEK COMMUNITY SINCE 2003, SERVING OUR SCHOOL IN VARIOUS ROLES INCLUDING PE TEACHER, PART-TIME ADMIN, AND LOWER SCHOOL TEACHER ACROSS MULTIPLE GRADES.

In that time, she earned her master's degree, became a mother, and flourished as an educator. *Modus Vivendi* sat down with Kim to hear from her directly about the impact of Bear Creek on her life and how she has come to be who she is today.

MV: WHERE DID YOU GROW UP?

KH: I was born in Montana, and we lived there until I was going into third grade. Then we moved out to Kirkland for my dad's work, and we've been here ever since.

MV: TELL US ABOUT YOUR OWN SCHOOL EXPERIENCE.

KH: I remember being a pretty shy kid, definitely not the one to raise my hand and offer an answer. I always thought to myself, it just takes me a long time to feel settled. It takes a long time to feel like I belong in a place. That eventually drew me to be a teacher.

When I tell my students that it was actually quite hard for me as a kid, they're like, "No, that's not possible. That couldn't be true about you. You talk in front of us all day long, every day!" And I tell them, "It's taken a lot of practice to get there. It's okay if it doesn't come naturally."

MV: WHERE DID YOU GO TO COLLEGE?

KH: I'm a Husky. I went to the University of Washington. It was a big to-do because as I was applying to colleges, I happened to be dating the man who is now my husband [Phil Higley]. I wasn't sure if I wanted to go away to college, and I was possibly going to Gonzaga. Then, at the last minute, I decided, no, I'm going to stay close. It all worked out because it was meant to be, and we got married. We were

doing college, plus being newlyweds, and figuring out life together.

I received an interdisciplinary arts degree in society, ethics, and human behavior with a minor in early childhood development because I knew I was going to be a teacher. Then, I did another year for my teaching program to get certified in the state of Washington, all through UW.

MV: WHO INSPIRED YOU TO BECOME A TEACHER?

KH: I have been inspired by many people along the way, but one of the bigger inspirations would be my sixth-grade teacher, Ken Ellsworth, from Thoreau Elementary, not too far from here. There was something about the community he made in class, and being the shy student that I was, he made me feel like I could be myself a little bit more with my peers.

Years after sixth grade, I would walk home from high school and sometimes decide, "You know what? I'm just going to swing back and say hi to Mr. Ellsworth," and I would pop in. He came to our wedding. He is a good guy and inspired me to pursue a career in education.

MV: WHAT WAS YOUR FAVORITE SUBJECT IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL? AND DOES IT INFLUENCE HOW YOU TEACH TODAY?

KH: I'll flip the question. My least favorite subject was math—so much so that even my parents would not help me with my math homework. My older brother had to help me. I think learning how to navigate math gave me a love for its precision and its predictability and its order. But, it took some time for me to fall in love with it.

On the teaching side of it, having the perspective that math was something I had to work really hard for and seeing students have those frustrating moments of, "This isn't coming quickly or in the way that I wanted it to," helps me support them. Helping them lean into perseverance in that topic—to know that it's going to be short-term pain for them to get that muscle built



COURTESY PHOTO

Kim celebrates the end of the school year with two of her grade 4 students.

up (because I had to do it, too)—is rewarding.

On the other side, I think English was a favorite of mine just because I always loved to read. Being able to be articulate in written form has always been a favorite of mine, too. I think my love of reading has been the other side of that—we want our kids to be good readers, and I want them to love it, too.

MV: WHEN AND WHY DID YOU BEGIN TEACHING AT BEAR CREEK?

KH: I started teaching for the first time at Bear Creek in 2003, and that has a fun backstory.

My husband worked at a gym, and that is where we met all those years ago. He was living with some friends from the gym in their little downstairs apartment, one of whom turned out to be Lena Whitlock, who is a grade 4 teacher at Bear Creek.

I got to know the Whitlocks while he was living with them. We hung out with them and played card games on Saturday nights. Lena told me, “Hey, there is a PE position open at Bear Creek. Would you maybe

be interested in teaching kindergarten through third grade PE?”

I thought that sounded really fun, so I interviewed and came on to teach PE [this was at the Woodinville Campus, then located at the Bear Creek Community Church]. I taught PE in the sanctuary, and there was a shed outside with all my equipment. We purchased the Valley Campus while I was a PE teacher, so I helped move everything in the dead of winter. We had to pack it all up around all the spider webs in my shed! Valley Campus used to have horse stalls, and everything had been converted to classrooms. All the transition has been fun to watch.

After three or four years, I took a little break because I was getting my teaching certificate and had to complete a year of student teaching. When I came back, I taught grade 4, and all those kindergartners I had in PE were now fourth graders. I remember on the first day they asked, “Are we going to do PE every day?” And I said, “Well, good news and bad news—you still get PE, but we are going to learn a lot more here!”

MV: WHAT IS UNIQUE ABOUT TEACHING GRADE 2?

KH: The joy of a second grader is something that can't be beat. I joke all the time with parents, "I happen to have the best job in the world because of these little people. They come in, and it feels like we are on a play date every day." We're playing when we're doing math. We're playing when we're doing science. We're playing when we're doing history. It's all a play date to them. Sure, my job is to make sure that they have great academic learning and their character is getting formed, but I learn so much from them all the time, too.

And they are right. We do need to play more! And I think that's a really sweet spot in second grade. If we can capture that way of learning for as long as possible, that's beautiful.

The other bit of second grade that I love so much is that students are in this unique developmental space where their hearts are open to being molded and shaped into the individuals that God intended them to be. They are hearing you and really absorbing those character-formation pieces. They are open to it. They are so willing to be vulnerable. There are no secrets in second grade. They don't hold back; they are willing to put it all on the line. And, getting to partner with the families to encourage and shape them for this little, tiny space of time that I have been given is a pretty awesome gift.

MV: WHAT ABOUT THE OTHER CLASSES YOU HAVE TAUGHT?

KH: Fourth grade is so cool with how much students

grow in their independence and responsibility, as well as the big questions that they start asking. You can go deeper with them. They are really figuring out who they are as individuals, what that means in their faith journey, and how they are going to take the reins in their own learning.

The beauty of Bear Creek is, when a family stays, I get to see students grow through the years. Like, "Oh look, I see you're still loving drama and performing in plays, and I get to cheer you on." Or, "Oh look, you're in a forensics competition and you're playing golf." I get to see them thrive in all these ways that they're growing.

I have even had students that I have taught in the past come work alongside me at Bear Creek. Right now, there's a wonderful classroom assistant on campus whom I taught in Lower School. These full-circle moments are fun; I get to see people not only grow at Bear Creek but then see them come back in a professional setting.

MV: WHAT DO YOU HOPE STUDENTS REMEMBER FROM YOUR CLASS YEARS IN THE FUTURE?

KH: I hope they remember that they were seen and known by me, that I enjoyed them, and that they got what they needed to be successful.

MV: HOW DO YOU INCORPORATE FAITH INTO THE CLASSROOM AND HOW DO YOU HELP STUDENTS LIVE OUT THEIR FAITH?

KH: It is so important for children to see that what we are learning is connected to our faith. All their



HOWARD CAMPBELL

social learning, such as being a good friend and caring for one another, is part of their faith in action. We get to have the full answer of “why.”

Why are you a good friend? We can say it is the right thing to do, but we keep asking “why?” The answer continues to drive us back to our Creator and how He made us. We are all made in God’s image. We are all valued and treasures of His, and we need to treat each other that way. We have the bigger answer to “why,” and we get to share that with the kids.

Students have these big feelings and emotions because they see faith reflected in everything we do. They bring it up just as often as I do because it is so integrated, and they don’t see a separation of it—which is such a beautiful gift that they get to see all their educational pieces tied together.

MV: HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR TEACHING STYLE IN THREE WORDS?

KH: I would say energetic, organized, thoughtful.

MV: WHAT ARE YOU MOST PROUD OF IN YOUR LIFE?

KH: Well, I think of my family—my husband and my daughter. I am just proud of the family that we get to be together and the love that we get to share with one another.

My husband works as a teacher in the Middle School. My daughter is about to be in grade 4 at Bear Creek.

So, obviously, we think Bear Creek’s great—we have put ourselves all in this space. The gift to be able to see each other throughout the day and to really be integrated in community together is super important to us. I think just being able to live daily life together is one of those things I am most thankful for.

MV: TELL ME ABOUT YOUR FAITH JOURNEY.

KH: My family was pretty nominally Christian growing up. We went to church occasionally. I don’t have memories of this, but my family would tell me that “little baby Kimmy” demanded we go to church. So, we went to church off and on as a family, as I demanded it, which is hilarious.

As I grew up, I only started attending church more in middle school because of a friend. I went to her youth group sometimes and noticed the relationships there. Relationships are what motivate me and draw me in. I saw that, at her youth group, they just knew each other and they had this time together that was special.

In high school, socially, there was a transition of friend groups for me. People were making choices I didn’t agree with, and I didn’t really know why. I just knew I couldn’t go along with them. Youth group became bigger for me because it felt like a more like-minded group of people. But again, I did not know the “why” yet: Why do I want to be around these people? Why does this feel like I belong here? I didn’t have that answer yet.

I do remember a youth group meeting at the beginning of my sophomore year where they were sharing a salvation message. They talked about laying





KELSEY FAUCETT

Accompanied by parents of her grade 2 students, Kim sports a frog onesie and a red tutu during a classroom Christmas party.

everything at the foot of the cross, and when they said that prayer, I felt my burden fall at that moment. It was an experience I wasn't expecting, but I felt a shift and a change in my body and my heart. I gave my life to Jesus my sophomore year of high school and have been pursuing Him ever since.

MV: WHO ARE YOUR HEROES?

I really do think, day in and day out, my coworkers are my heroes. Seeing how much they put into their job and how much they care for their students and families is really inspirational.

As a teacher, you go home and you lose sleep over other people's children because you care about them. And I see my coworkers just striving to glorify God, striving to honor Him, and striving to do good by the children who are in their classrooms. That inspires me. So, I would say, my peers are my heroes.

MV: WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE MEMORY AT BEAR CREEK?

KH: The friends I have made along the way in my career here will be with me forever because we are

teaching and bonding and growing together.

And then, I would also say tutus! Any color, the rainbow, one that lights up—I have them all, stashed and shoved in my closet. It is a tradition that started about 15 years ago. I ran a half marathon with a coworker at Disneyland, and we wore tutus. After that, we just kept wearing them for spirit days, dress-up days, any occasion we could. Tutus need to be everywhere!

MV: WHAT DO YOU MOST VALUE ABOUT BEING PART OF THE BEAR CREEK COMMUNITY?

KH: I think we just get to live life together. It's more than a job. We care for each other, my teaching cohort and my peers. We talk about our families, we pray for each other, we celebrate together, and we support each other when things are hard.

That's what makes Bear Creek unique. It is more than just a classroom. It's a part of our whole selves—mind, body, and soul—and we encourage each other in a unique way of living life well together.



Who is Bear Bear?

BY RACHAEL URBAN

PHOTO BY CINDY MCCAHILL



MEGAN HOOKS PHOTOGRAPHY

IF YOU HAVE NOT MET BEAR BEAR, HE STANDS ABOUT A FOOT AND A HALF TALL AND HAS FUZZY BROWN HAIR AND SPARKLY BROWN EYES. He shows up faithfully at the Preschool each morning and, as his supervisor, I would give him an A+ for predictability! He always wears a smile and has a sunny, cheerful disposition on his squishable little face. Preschool students often ask Bear Bear for a hug at the gate, and he is happy to oblige. Sometimes, they even insist that their parents need hugs, too. Bear Bear is truly a Bear Creek Preschool staple!

Now, as you have probably already realized, Bear Bear is not a real person. He got his name because, well, he is a teddy bear, so “Bear Bear” seemed like the most logical thing to call him (said twice for clarity and cuteness). He is a real stuffed animal who helps build community at the Preschool, creating a sense of

safety for our young students.

We first introduce Bear Bear to new families at Parent Welcome and Orientation. We explain that even though Titus is the official mascot of The Bear Creek School, Bear Bear is a close friend who is there to help bring comfort and friendship to young children as they enter the Preschool gate each morning.

We do this in part because when your preschool is called Bear Creek Preschool, you simply *have* to have a fun-loving bear with the word “Bear” in his name! But we also do it because Bear Bear helps students relate to something they are already good at: having imaginary stuffed animal friends.

Preschoolers know all about stuffies, as many of them have one of their own at home. Quite a few of those stuffies visit our Preschool campus from time to time, including Hammy and Goliath, a pair of round



CINDY MCCAILL



COURTESY PHOTO

Bear Bear helps with Chapel lessons. His most recent Chapel role was David from the Old Testament as he fought Goliath—and yes, he defeated Goliath!

Bear Bear welcomed a friend from the city of Redmond for Letter "D" Week and had so much fun with our preschoolers exploring a real dump truck.



CHEN EU

Bear Bear enjoys running laps at our Little Grizzly Fun Run, and he even puts on his special tennis shoes for the occasion.



COURTESY PHOTO

Bear Bear had lots of fun helping Mr. Douglas on our facilities team plow the parking lot on a snowy day.

little hamsters, Bun Bun, a floppy-eared rabbit, and Pug Puppy, a beloved baby pug. With friends like these, Bear Bear fits right into the imaginations of our preschoolers.

Bear Bear is always around, and he helps preschoolers with many things at school. He visits classrooms at the beginning of the year to help teach safety drills. He does an excellent job demonstrating what happens during an earthquake. When the ground goes “shaka, shaka, shaka,” preschoolers go under their desks and put their paws (hands) over their heads.

Most importantly, Bear Bear is a great comfort when children arrive feeling sad and need a little extra support. He can be a special friend to our preschoolers until they feel ready to start their day.

Years from now, I hope our students will look back on their time at Bear Creek Preschool as a joyful

beginning to their Bear Creek journey. As they walk across the graduation stage one day, diplomas in hand, we hope their hearts will be filled with memories of running through bubbles, receiving smiley face stickers, and the comfort of Bear Bear waiting to greet them at the gate.

Preschool was the place where they first grew in independence, where their confidence began to flourish, and where they were nurtured to become the individuals God created them to be. More than anything, we hope our preschoolers remember how it felt to be here—truly known, deeply loved, and fully seen.

JANTERM 2026

LEARNING, CREATING, AND SERVING

BY MORGAN JAMIESON

NOW IN ITS 15TH YEAR, JanTerm 2026 engaged 381 students, 37 faculty and staff members, and 13 volunteer instructors in 70 different hands-on learning experiences.

Where do students begin to recognize the value of their own gifts if not in a community that shows them how to use those gifts in service of others? For two weeks every January, Middle School and Upper School classrooms transform into studios, kitchens, and workshops as students in grades

7 – 12 explore topics from across the arts, trades, sciences, languages, culinary fields, music, and many other creative and practical disciplines. Parents, grandparents, alumni, and friends generously share their time and experience to create courses that extend learning beyond the traditional academic program.

These courses give students in grades 7 – 12 the opportunity to see how passions and gifts develop over a lifetime.



In Annyeong Hankook: An Immersion into South Korean Language and Culture with Middle School teacher Hana Lee, students engaged in introductory language skills alongside cultural study rooted in food, music, fashion, and art.

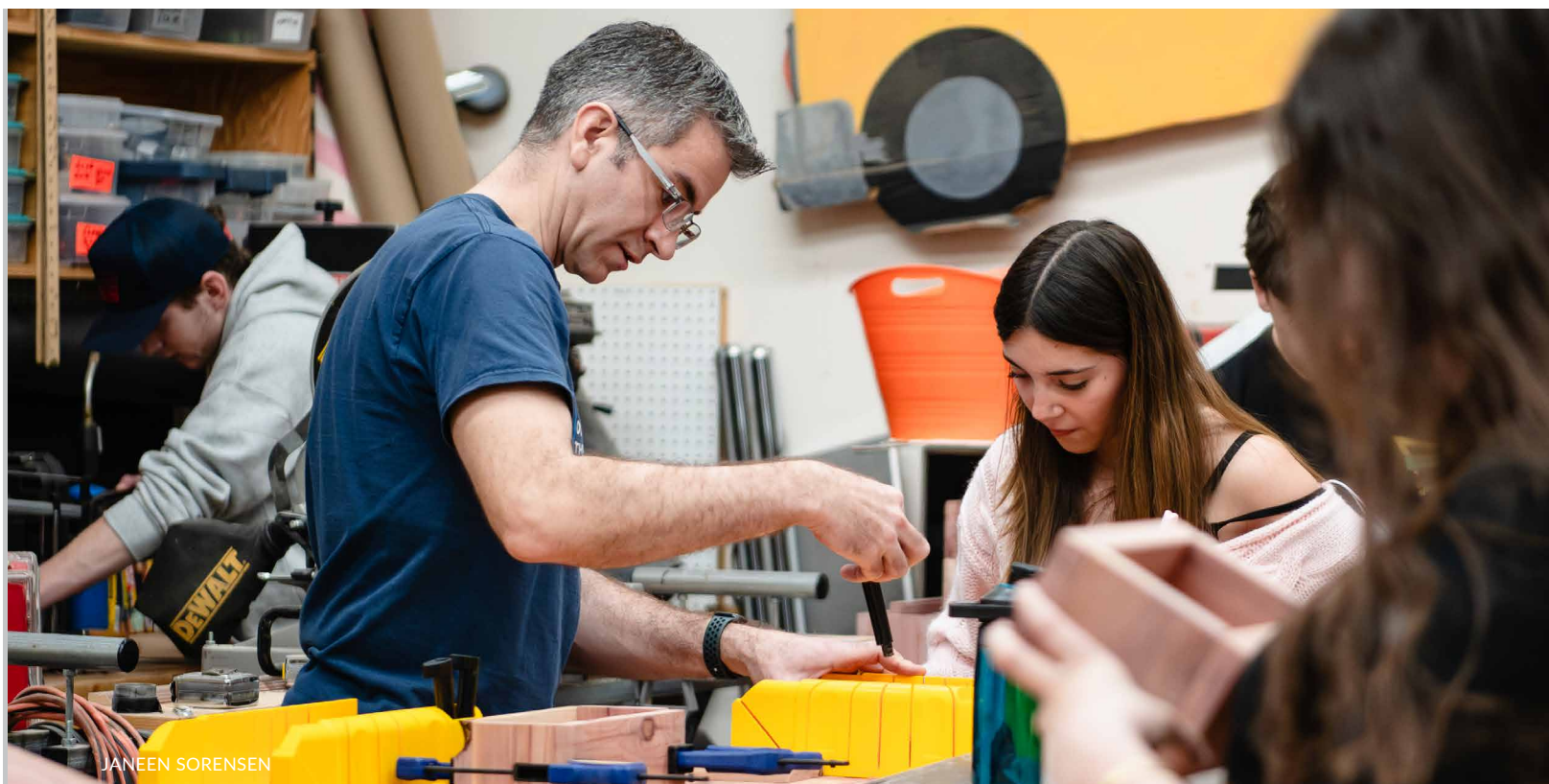


Bear Creek parent Katy Park led Seoulful Strokes: Korean Calligraphy and Arts, introducing students to traditional calligraphy and its influence on modern visual design.



BEKAH BLANCHARD

In *Fiber Crafting*, Bear Creek grandparent Terry Betts introduced knitting and crochet, guiding students through foundational techniques while emphasizing patience, focus, and the satisfaction of creating something by hand.



JANEEN SORENSEN

In *Woodshop 101: A Practical Introduction to Woodworking*, Bear Creek dads Eric Gruber and Carl Russell introduced students to foundational woodworking techniques as they carved wooden spoons and built keepsake boxes.



BEKAH BLANCHARD

Science and culinary technique came together in *Me Like Fire! The Art and Science of Grilling* with Upper School teacher Mike Faris, culminating in a shared meal prepared for families of participating students.



CATHERINE GARDINER

In *Puzzled Minds: The 2,000-Piece Challenge*, with Upper School teacher Catherine Gardiner, students worked over the course of JanTerm to complete a collaborative, complex puzzle.



BEKAH BLANCHARD

In *From Chaos to Creation: Metal Sculpture Art*, Middle School teacher Kelly Cross challenged students to use creativity, problem-solving skills, and collaboration to design and assemble sculptures from metal components.



CATHERINE GARDINER

Language learning came alive in *Españooooooooo! An Introduction to Spanish* with storytelling, culture, and cooking, also led by Gardiner.

JanTerm is made possible in large part by volunteers from within the broader Bear Creek community. If you have an idea for a JanTerm course and are interested in volunteering this winter, please visit tbcs.org/janterm to learn more about the process, expectations, timelines, and see examples of previous courses. Whether leading a course or supporting one already in development, volunteers help shape an experience that remains a meaningful and lasting part of many students' Bear Creek experience.

Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms.

1 Peter 4:10

Rodgers + Hammerstein's

Cinderella





Coming around just once every three years, musicals are among the most anticipated events at The Bear Creek School! They bring our community together like nothing else on our calendar, uniting students from Preschool through



Upper School and highlighting how the different departments work together to make an amazing production for everyone in the Bear Creek community to enjoy. This year, we staged *Rodgers + Hammerstein's Cinderella*, a timeless tale of unlikely romance, sibling rivalry, and undeserved kindness.

The work began in the Upper School's Fine Arts Department, where students from the band, choir, drama, and technical theater classes formed the cast, pit orchestra, and tech crew. Additionally, students in the digital arts class designed the promotional artwork.

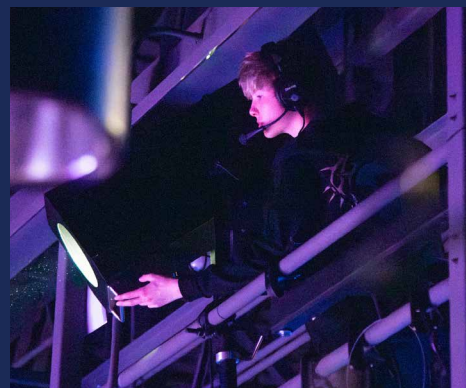
In total, this year's production of *Rodgers + Hammerstein's Cinderella* involved 119 Upper School students!

The anticipation for the musical was felt outside Upper School as well. Lower School students,



accompanied by several Upper School actors, performed a song from the musical at the fairytale-themed Mothers Tea. Preschool and Lower School classes also enjoyed special visits from cast members in costume, where our littlest Grizzlies could try on crowns and get photos with their favorite characters.

Behind the scenes, students were hard at work building set pieces, designing costumes, learning music, and fine-tuning the lights. It takes a village!

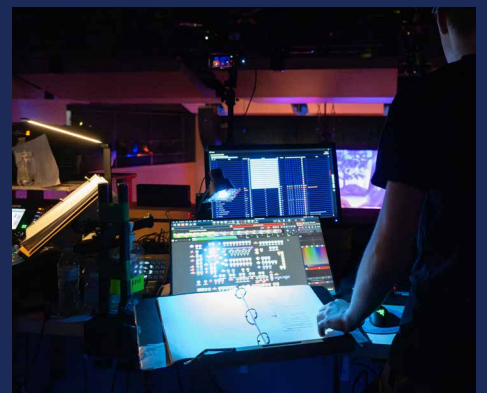




Special Thanks

Jared Mack, Director
 Laura Piña, Music Director
 Kelsey Thompson, Conductor
 Peter McDonough, Technical Director
 Katy Tabb, Choreographer
 Julann Faris, Rehearsal Accompanist
 Peggy Roth, Director of Special Events

Photography by Cindy
 McCahill, Janeen Sorensen,
 Bekah Blanchard, and
 Brittany Meyer



THE LENS BEHIND THE CURTAIN

What happens when students are seen and known by their teachers and given opportunities that feed their creative interests?

BY BEKAH BLANCHARD

Leading up to the opening of *Rodgers + Hammerstein's Cinderella*, senior Jason Zhou was working double time. Alongside preparing for his part in the musical as Jean-Michel—an earnest and enthusiastic revolutionary—Jason was spending countless hours photographing the cast and creating vlogs, promotional videos, and candid behind-the-scenes footage to document his final theater production at Bear Creek. His results show how the seldom-documented teamwork, growth, shared purpose, and fun that unfolds offstage is often just as powerful for students as the theater performance itself.

Creating videos is not new for Jason. In grade 7, when Bear Creek was adapting to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, Jason took a mini-elective taught by then-choir teacher Emily Huston '15 in which he started scoring films and making beats on Soundtrap, an online music-creation platform. The

next year, Jason took several courses in which the teachers encouraged him to incorporate videos as part of larger academic projects, and for a final in his English class, Jason went into his backyard, set up a GoPro camera, put on a wig and a hat, and acted out a scene from an Edgar Allan Poe poem.

"It was the perfect opportunity to try something new," he remembers. "In that moment, when we watched my video together as a class, that was the start of my falling in love with film—because of the human connection." That was only the beginning of Jason's love for film and the way it draws people together.

Jason continued making movies as opportunities arose in his academic classes. At every turn, he was encouraged by faculty to learn through experimentation and creativity. In his sophomore year, Jason founded the Makers of Movies Studios club (MOMS) with his friend and classmate Daniel



Hwang '26, and the following year, he won the Blackmagic Design Pitch Competition for a short film. He produced the short film with help from members of the MOMS, and in a full-circle moment, Jason and many of the MOMS saw the short film play in Times Square during the Performing Arts Trip to New York City. All the while, Jason continued making films for classes and Bear Creek's Associated Student Body (ASB) as well as participating in and documenting the many Upper School theater productions, such as *The Government Inspector*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and of course *Rodgers + Hammerstein's Cinderella*.

As a senior, Jason felt the weight of documenting his final theater production at Bear Creek. "I've been with these people for four years, and if I don't document them soon, I'm going to lose them ... It's nice to make a time capsule for when we're older," he reflects. Encouraged by Fine and Performing Arts Department Chair Jared Mack, Jason began filming pieces of rehearsals, focusing on capturing the human connection felt in a theater when a story comes to life and connects everybody in the room: the actors to each other and the audience to the actors.

"I feel this electricity, this human connection, that draws people to the theatrical arts. I want to bring that feeling to people [with my films] and make it look beautiful." The videos Jason created show everything from quirky, lighthearted moments between running scenes to the more serious work that went into making the production happen, like choreography repetition, music rehearsals, and time lapses of hours-long rehearsals before the opening weekend.

On a deeper level, they reveal the camaraderie and community that forms during the production of a musical and how our students are shaped into communicative, confident, and supportive teammates.

In addition to creating videos for academic projects and student activities, Jason has also entered numerous film competitions with impressive results. Earlier this year, he entered the Breakthrough Junior Challenge, a global competition in which applicants take a complex scientific concept and explain it with clarity and creativity in a video under two minutes. Out of over 2,300 submissions, Jason's video explaining the physics of autotune made it into the top 30. Separately, two videos produced by the MOMS and written and directed by Jason were nominated for awards from the National Academy of Television Arts & Sciences, Northwest Chapter—also known as the High School Northwest Emmys—and won in the Music Video category.

Across his years as a Bear Creek student, Jason felt supported by his teachers and consistently encouraged to pursue his creative passions, saying, "Bear Creek provides a safe space, then opportunities to play and explore." Jason's work, impressive in its own right, is an example of how the Bear Creek community encourages students' passions by giving them space to explore, create, and share meaningful work with others.



To view Jason's videos and cast portraits, visit tbcs.org/cinderella.



MORE THAN A GAME

How Middle School athletics help students grow in commitment, confidence, and community

BY BEKAH BLANCHARD

THE PROCESS OF LEARNING TAKES MANY FORMS. It never happens exclusively inside the walls of the classroom where the pencil meets the paper. When students drop their backpacks to pick up a basketball or practice drills on the field, they are learning crucial skills like goal setting, perseverance, collaboration, and leadership—skills that influence the trajectory of their lives and continue to shape them far beyond their school years. At The Bear Creek School, where 75% of our Middle School and Upper School students participate in school sports, the athletics programs play a huge role in developing students into the individuals God intends them to be. But beyond the personal growth occurring in each student-athlete, sports contribute to our school identity and provide

a rallying point around which our community thrives. To understand the impact of sports on our students and families, and how it is a crucial point of connection and integration into the Bear Creek experience, we have to start at the beginning—or, more accurately, the middle.

Many things are vying for the time and attention of a Middle School student. They are taking new and exciting classes that require more dedicated homework time, their social circles are expanding, and many have identified hobbies outside of academics that they enjoy. It comes as no surprise, then, that once students reach grade 6 and decide to pick up a sport at Bear Creek, one of the first major lessons they learn is how to manage their time.





COURTESY PHOTO



COURTESY PHOTO



COURTESY PHOTO



COURTESY PHOTO

Middle School Athletics Director Nathan Campbell says commitment is the first of three guiding pillars of his program. “As student-athletes, they really have to understand the commitment piece. There isn’t really an option to not show up for your teammates, and they are starting to realize, ‘If I don’t manage my time, I’m not going to be able to go to practice because I have too much homework.’” On the other hand, he says, the program is built to support our Middle School students, not stress them out. “We are looking at them as a whole person, as well-rounded kids who are all learning and growing together.”

So, what does a season look like?

When grade 6 students arrive at their first practice, they often show up both shy and excited. Many have never played a sport before, or if they have, the stakes were low and they were naturally less involved. As they get older, the program must meet them where they are and offer them opportunities for growth—the second guiding pillar. The Middle School athletics program is tailored to the age,

abilities, and needs of our Middle School students. The seasons, regardless of sport, are intentionally designed to be shorter and more developmental than those in Upper School, focusing on growing fundamentals like technique, coordination, and game strategy.

At the same time, coaches must find a competitive balance, says Campbell. “We still want to win games and be competitive ... but we try to balance it with developing them in their skill sets and getting them excited about their sport and playing for their school with their friends.”

A unique factor of the Bear Creek athletics program is our no-cut policy. Each Middle School athlete is placed on a team that matches his or her skill level, something not all schools can guarantee. When young athletes are part of a team that pushes them to the right degree, they can build both technical skills *and* confidence. According to Campbell, “We want everyone to walk away from practices and games saying, ‘That was a great experience.’”



COURTESY PHOTO

Every child who wants to be a Grizzly athlete gets to try out a sport, figure out what God-given affinities he or she may have, and grow as a person and athlete. “We find a spot for every kid,” says Campbell. Additionally, the league works to find the best team match ups so games are neither too hard nor too easy. For example, a beginner basketball team made up of sixth graders who have never played before will play against a similar beginner team of sixth graders.

The third and final pillar guiding the Middle School athletics program is *fun*. Our students are *excited* to play sports and begin their journey in Bear Creek athletics. They are joining a community where they are supported, encouraged, and cheered on by their coaches, peers, teachers, and families—and Middle School is just the beginning! Upper School coaches and athletes consistently show up to Middle School practices and games, showing our younger athletes that they are invested in their progress and encouraging them to stick to it and join an Upper School team when they reach grade 9. Not

only does this inspire our Middle School students to keep playing, but it forges mentorships between divisions, instilling in our students a sense of legacy, responsibility, ownership, and school pride.

Over the course of their three years in Middle School sports, students transform from wide-eyed, eager youngsters, who may have never practiced a sport, into young student-athletes who are taking charge, helping others, leading their peers, and leaving a legacy themselves. And just as our students are noticeably changed by Middle School sports, our families are, too. Parents meet each other at games and practices, building connection and camaraderie that directly shape our school culture. During back-to-back games, the stands are filled with parents cheering—even for the game their child is not playing in. This is the kind of community we build at Bear Creek: one where all students are offered the opportunity to try new things, are encouraged to grow and seek truth through challenge, and are supported by their peers, coaches, and families.

Night at the Disco

Gratitude Gala



"The whole school was engaged, and the joy was contagious. Teachers and staff were singing and having fun, parents were laughing and clearly enjoying themselves, and even students jumped in to help and share in the joy."

Kristine Shields,
Board of Trustees



WE ARE GRATEFUL FOR THE GENEROSITY of our community who helped us raise more than \$860,000 to strengthen our campus spaces for today's students and future generations.

With your support, we are expanding our Lower School facilities to better care for our teachers and students while accommodating all our Lower School classes and creating more opportunities for students' potential to flourish.

At Redmond Campus, we are

PHOTOS BY BEKAH BLANCHARD



“It was such a treat and wonderful surprise to have the teachers perform their amazing a cappella renditions of 70s classics! Their talents impressed everyone and set the mood for such a wonderful night!”

Heather Woolridge,
Gala Committee



exploring ways to improve traffic flow and are adding dedicated support staff during peak traffic times to facilitate calm and orderly drop-off and pick-up. Additionally, we are upgrading our camera systems and door technology at both campuses to better monitor daily movement and strengthen the entry points to our school.

Finally, replacing the dated Preschool play structure supports our youngest learners, whose early childhood is a time of wonder, growth, and joy.





BEKAH BLANCHARD

SAY YES TO BELONGING

BY KAREN FIRMINGER

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR FOR PARENT ENGAGEMENT

Upon entering any Bear Creek campus, one encounters a unified learning community that is mission driven, intentional, and innovative. Students, faculty, and staff lead this vibrant work, while volunteers are warmly embraced as fellow contributors whose service enriches and strengthens the mission with goodness and beauty.

Each day, willing parents like Jamie Brown-Sinha (pictured right) and Michelle Martin (pictured left) check in to serve and contribute. In fact, both Jamie and Michelle check in every day because they embrace volunteering as both a calling and a privilege. What began as a simple “yes” has grown into years of faithful involvement, meaningful relationships, and a deep investment in Bear Creek.

I had the privilege of spending time with these women to learn more about their journeys within the Bear Creek community.

WHEN DID YOU AND YOUR FAMILY FIRST BECOME PART OF THE BEAR CREEK COMMUNITY, AND WHERE WERE YOUR CHILDREN IN THEIR SCHOOL JOURNEY AT THAT POINT?

JAMIE: We moved to Washington in August of 2018 and were able to do a mid-year transfer for our son, Kiran '25, who was in sixth grade. Our daughter, Ella '27, who was in fifth grade, joined the following year, along with our youngest son, Shay '32, who began kindergarten.

MICHELLE: We joined the Bear Creek community

in 2020 when our oldest daughter, Sydney '35, started in P3 at the Valley Campus. Since then, we have welcomed our youngest daughter, Georgia '40, who just started P3 this last school year.

WHAT INITIALLY DREW YOUR FAMILY TO BEAR CREEK, AND WHAT CONFIRMED IT WAS THE RIGHT FIT?

JAMIE: Our children attended private school in Michigan before our move, and we hoped the public school system in Washington would be a good fit. Within a few weeks, however, I realized we needed to make a change. Bear Creek was one of the only nearby options.

Not long after Kiran started sixth grade, I received an email from our Parent Rep, Jill Jani, inviting families to a parent coffee. The immediate warmth and inclusion I felt from that group of moms was unlike anything I had experienced before. I knew shortly after that we would be applying for our other two children to join Bear Creek the following year.

MICHELLE: Bear Creek wasn't even on our radar at first. During COVID, our childcare situation changed, and we struggled to find a place that was both a good fit and had availability after the school year had already begun.

Shortly after we inquired at Bear Creek, we learned that a single spot had just opened. Sydney started the very next week. It felt incredibly timely—like a door had been opened just for us. From the moment we joined, the warmth, thoughtfulness, and care of the community affirmed that this was exactly where we were meant to be. We truly believe God had a hand in leading us here.

WHAT DO YOU VALUE MOST ABOUT BEAR CREEK AS A SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY?

JAMIE: I love that Bear Creek doesn't just allow volunteering—it encourages it. As an introvert, I am more comfortable connecting with others when I am working alongside them. Volunteering has helped me form friendships across grade levels, understand the inner workings of the school, and get to know the

men and women who speak truth into my children.

One of the things I value most is having a network of people I can call when I am running late to pick up my kids, need guidance through their teenage years, or just need a moment of encouragement from a familiar voice.

MICHELLE: Bear Creek is a place where every child is known, seen, and supported—not just by faculty and staff but by families and students across all grade levels. There is genuine care for one another that you feel right away.

We also deeply appreciate the intentionality behind everything the school does. Whether in academics, extracurriculars, or community events, decisions are made thoughtfully, with a clear purpose, and a focus on what is best for students and families. Parents are actively included in that process, which gives us a real voice and makes us feel like true partners in our children's education.

HOW DID YOU FIRST BECOME INVOLVED AS A VOLUNTEER?

JAMIE: My first volunteering opportunity was sending in party supplies for my sixth grader, and that quickly rolled into many other volunteer roles.

MICHELLE: I jumped into a Room Parent role within my first two weeks, with zero experience, and never looked back!

IN WHAT WAYS HAVE YOU VOLUNTEERED OVER THE YEARS?

JAMIE: I have served as a Room Parent, chaperone, poem and verse tester, Parent Mentor, Parent Rep, and PTF board member.

MICHELLE: I have done a little of everything—from dropping off juice boxes to helping run full-day events. If there is a sign-up sheet, I have probably put my name on it!

What is fun, yet surprising, is how each small “yes” turns into bigger opportunities. Whether encouraging a student during poem and verse testing

or keeping spirits high on a long bus ride home from a field trip, those short moments often become deeply meaningful.

IN WHICH AREAS DID YOU SERVE THIS PAST YEAR, AND WHAT BRINGS YOU THE MOST JOY?

JAMIE: I served as a grade 6 Room Parent, grade 11 Parent Rep, and PTF President. I find the most joy in the quiet moments connecting with parents I might not otherwise meet, learning their stories and building community. I also love interacting with faculty and staff and hearing stories about my children that go beyond their academic achievements.

MICHELLE: This past school year, I served as a Room Parent for P3, grade 3 Parent Rep, and PTF Vice President. These roles allowed me to be involved at different layers of the school, from my children's classrooms to the broader community. Each offers a new perspective and meaningful connection, all contributing to a strong sense of purpose and belonging.

AS OUR TIME TOGETHER CAME TO AN END, I asked them to share a memorable experience from their PTF roles this past year. Jamie and Michelle laughed as they recalled being talked into wearing inflatable gingerbread costumes to promote baking Christmas cookies for faculty and staff. When Michelle's costume began to deflate before the event, panic, laughter, and chaos quickly followed.

While volunteering brings joy, and often laughter, it also comes with challenges, particularly when balancing busy schedules. Jamie and Michelle offer a final encouragement to parents: Start small. Say "yes" once and see where it leads.

Whether through a cookie donation, a leadership role, or even a gingerbread costume, volunteering at Bear Creek invites parents to step into something joyful, meaningful, and impactful.



BUILDING A LASTING FOUNDATION:

JASON JIN AND SHAN WANG

BY THERESA LARSEN
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF
DEVELOPMENT



PARENTS JASON JIN AND SHAN WANG MADE THEIR SCHOOL DECISION AT A MOMENT WHEN MUCH OF LIFE FELT UNCERTAIN. In 2020, as the COVID-19 pandemic reshaped daily routines and created new concerns for families, they were also preparing for their daughter Paige '35 to begin preschool. What could have been a simple choice quickly became something more intentional. They were not just looking for a school; they were looking for a place that would help form their children's character, faith, and sense of identity.

From the beginning of their search, their priorities were clear. They wanted a school with strong Christian foundations and a genuine sense of community. As Shan shared, "Christian values come first, and then the community." Those two elements mattered most to them, and they believed that if those were in place, everything else would follow naturally. While they briefly considered another school near their home, Bear Creek distinguished

itself in our commitment to integrating faith into every aspect of school life.

Their decision was also informed by personal experience. Jason grew up attending public schools in Northern California, and those years influenced how he thinks about education today. Looking back, he reflects that the environment and influences were not what he would have chosen for his own children. That experience shaped his commitment to finding a school where values would be consistently reinforced and where children would be supported in becoming grounded individuals.

Shan brought a global perspective to their shared decision. She grew up in China before attending an international high school and later moving to Canada for college. Her education exposed her to a variety of systems and cultures, giving her a broad view of how different environments shape students. Together, she and Jason found common ground in their belief that education should nurture both the mind and the heart.



BEKAH BLANCHARD

Paige '35 reads to Jason during the grade 3 Author Celebration.

Practical considerations also played a role during that unusual season. Shan and Jason were preparing for the birth of their second child, Paxton '38, and the uncertainty of COVID-19 made flexibility especially important for their family. Bear Creek's ability to offer remote learning created a sense of stability at a time when many schools could not. When a spot unexpectedly opened in the P3 program, it felt like confirmation that they were in the right place at the right time. Paige began her Bear Creek journey that fall, marking the start of what has now become nearly seven years with the school.

As their family has grown within the community, so has their appreciation for the school's overall approach. When Shan and Jason talk about what they value most, they return once again to faith and community. As Jason put it, "If those two are very solid, other parts couldn't go wrong." They notice how teachers and staff invest deeply in students not only academically, but emotionally and spiritually as well. It is common for teachers to go above and beyond, offering encouragement, sharing thoughtful feedback, and taking a genuine interest in each child's growth.

For Jason and Shan, one of the most meaningful aspects of the Bear Creek environment is how it reinforces what they are teaching their children at



CHEN LIU

Shan and Paxton '38 on a Kindergarten field trip to Oxbow Farms & Conservation Center in Carnation.

home and in church. "We want everything aligned," Shan explained, noting how consistency between home, school, and church helps children better understand who they are. This alignment builds confidence, self-respect, and a sense of purpose rooted in faith.

They also appreciate the school's intentional focus on character. From a young age, students are encouraged to practice kindness, compassion, and wisdom. These values are woven into daily life, not just taught in isolation. Over time, Jason and Shan have seen how these lessons take root, shaping how their children interact with others and how they approach challenges.

As a family, their connection to the Bear Creek community has deepened as they increase their involvement in the life of the school. Shan began by volunteering in the classroom and gradually expanded her participation to include helping at school-wide events hosted by the PTF. Through these experiences, she has gained a broader view of how much care and effort goes into creating a vibrant and supportive environment for students. She has seen how volunteers contribute to experiences that bring joy and connection, from special events to everyday moments that make school life memorable. Reflecting on those experiences, she shared, "I feel



Shan volunteers at PTF's Upper School Sips & Sweets, treating students to LeTAO sweets.

like I am part of the community," a sentiment that has only grown stronger over time.

Jason supports this involvement in both visible and behind-the-scenes ways. Whether stepping in to volunteer when needed or taking on responsibilities at home to make space for Shan's commitments, he sees this partnership as an important part of their family's engagement. Together, they model for their children what it looks like to give time and energy in service of a larger community. As Jason noted, "Another reason I volunteer is to show the kids it's not about what you get back. It's about giving."

That sense of giving extends to how they choose to invest in the school's mission. For Jason and Shan, this is closely tied to what Bear Creek represents. They see their giving as a way to strengthen the student experience and support the broader impact of the school. Supporting initiatives such as the Annual Fund allows them to play a role in enhancing programs, spaces, and opportunities that benefit every child. At the same time, they are thoughtful about how these efforts can serve a larger purpose.

They recognize that while many families are drawn to Bear Creek for its strong academics and welcoming campus, those same families are often introduced to something deeper over time.

Through their children's experiences, they began encountering the message of faith in meaningful ways. Jason and Shan have seen this firsthand among friends who initially chose the school for educational reasons and later became curious about its spiritual foundation. In some cases, that curiosity led to church involvement and lasting life changes. "The school is a really good way for people to get to know God," Shan shared. For them, contributing to the life of the school is not only about enhancing what happens on campus but also about supporting a mission that reaches beyond it.

In their own parenting, they emphasize leading by example. As Jason explained, "It's not about money. It's about the love to give back." Whether volunteering at school, supporting the school philanthropically, or serving in their church community, they want their children to see that giving is an expression of love and gratitude. Over time, they have watched Paige begin to take initiative in her own ways, stepping into opportunities to serve and contribute with enthusiasm.

Their encouragement to other families is simple: Be present. Show up. When parents invest their time, resources, and attention, it communicates care not only to their own children but to the entire community. It helps children feel supported and confident, and it strengthens the relationships that make a school community thrive.

After seven years at Bear Creek, Jason and Shan are still confident in the choice they made years ago during such an uncertain time. They see a school that listens, partners with families, and consistently seeks to nurture both character and faith. "It's a partnership," Jason reflected. As they look ahead, their family remains grateful for a community that continues helping their children flourish in lasting ways.

LOWER SCHOOL GRANDPARENTS DAY



In Spring 2026, we honored the special bond between grandparents and our students in grades K – 4. This was a wonderful opportunity to celebrate the love, wisdom, and faith of our grandparents while inviting them to experience the school life of their grandchildren. Visiting grandparents enjoyed breakfast and a musical performance before visiting their grandchildren's classrooms.

Photos by Bekah Blanchard,
Janeen Sorensen, and Jessie
Schubert-Hall



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Legacy giving is a powerful way to make an impact on tomorrow's world through the education of future Christian leaders—individuals prepared to engage the world with wisdom, compassion, and courage. Your thoughtful planning to advance the mission of The Bear Creek School will make a difference in the world your children, grandchildren, and even great-grandchildren will inherit.

If you have already made a provision for The Bear Creek School in your will or estate plan, please let us know so we may say thank you and recognize your generosity by welcoming you into our Legacy Circle of like-minded donors.

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ALUMNI PROFILE: THE MCCAHLILLS COME FULL CIRCLE

BY CLAIRE DAVIS

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF CAPITAL CAMPAIGN

For Will and Brittanie (néé Vander Weide) McCahill '09, Bear Creek is more than the place where they met and earned their high school diplomas. It is the setting where lifelong values took root, where a friendship grew into a family, and where the next generation now walks the halls. The two met in grade 8, and after graduating from Bear Creek in 2009, they took parallel but distinctly different paths.

Brittanie enrolled at the University of Washington, completing her undergraduate degree a year early before heading to Gonzaga University in Spokane to earn a master's degree in marriage and family counseling. Will attended Gonzaga from the start for his undergraduate years, taking what he describes as "the more traditional four-year route with majors in accounting, finance, and management information systems." For the McCahills, those years were defined by long distance. After Brittanie graduated from UW, they became engaged, marrying shortly after Will completed his degree. Their first year of marriage brought another long-distance chapter,



with Will beginning a contract role at Microsoft in Redmond while Brittanie finished graduate school in Spokane before they reunited on the Eastside.

Will's career took a satisfying turn when he spent several years helping revive beloved Xbox games such as *Age of Empires* and *Flight Simulator*. Today, he runs the business team for a game studio at Xbox in a role that allows him to, in his words, "live out my childhood dream of making my parents second-guess their one-hour limit on screen

time." Meanwhile, Brittanie made a professional pivot into software, taking database development courses. She joined a small tech firm in Bellevue where she worked for several years before the birth of their daughter, Maeve '37.

Despite their years away from Bear Creek, which included several moves, career changes, and a growing family life, the couple remained close to the Bear Creek community. "We love to exchange Christmas cards and have maintained contact with many of our favorite teachers, mentors, and

faculty.” They continue, “As more alumni bring their children to Bear Creek, we’ve had the pleasure of reconnecting with old friends as well as forging new bonds through our shared history.”

That sense of shared history extends into how they have approached marriage and parenting. Having had a close friendship long before they began dating, they entered their relationship thoughtfully. “We approached it with an excessive amount of gravity,” the two admit. They read books, sought counsel from people they respected, and had intentional conversations about values and priorities. Brittanie’s background in family systems played a formative role in the development of their relationship, and Will is quick to acknowledge the outcomes, joking he “lost a number of household discussions” to psychologists Brittanie studied. “Nothing quite like getting beat on empirical grounds.”

When it comes to the values they hope to pass on to their children, Brittanie points to qualities of character, specifically “personal responsibility, emotional intelligence, critical thinking, servant leadership, and a love for learning.” Will adds, “I pray that they will become readers because they see that books are a currency in our home. I pray they plan wisely for the future but enjoy the present. I pray they seek meaning instead of just minimizing suffering. I pray they allow mercy to conquer justice.”

Choosing Bear Creek for their own children felt almost inevitable, shaped by both family history and personal experience. “Bear Creek provided the standard of education that we compared other potential schools to,” the McCahills explain. As Will and Brittanie considered career opportunities and even out-of-state moves, their children’s education played a central role in every decision. Ultimately, the school’s liberal arts foundation, leadership, and community drew them back. “We found ourselves coming to the same conclusion our parents reached: We wanted to partner with Bear Creek to guide our children’s education and growth.”

Seeing the school now through their children’s eyes has been both meaningful and amusing. “We’ve reached a point where our oldest is more familiar with the Lower School hallways than we are,” they laugh. Early on, familiar faculty remembered the couple as students, reminiscing about shared history. But now, “Four years in, Maeve and Joseph ‘40 lead the conversations,” the parents reflect. “They know more of the faculty than we do. *They* introduce *us*, and it is their school now.” And yet, while many faces have changed, the essence of Bear Creek has not. “The teachers who work with our children every day are just as incredible as the ones who taught us,” they note.

Being both alumni and parents is a special, and sometimes funny, position to be in. “Walking in the halls when school is in session still feels like we’re breaking the rules” they joke. But beneath that humor is gratitude. “It’s more than just where we met; it’s where we formed our worldview. It’s where teachers spent endless hours helping us meet the big questions of life and struggle through them. Now it is doing the same for our kids.”

Looking back, the McCahills believe Bear Creek’s greatest gift extended far beyond academics. When they began attending Bear Creek, Will and Brittanie were both just kids. “Kids learn justice and morality early; nuance and mercy come later. Brittanie and I were, in our own way, uncompromising to a fault. Bear Creek helped us shape that earnest pursuit into something more mercy-laden,” reflects Will. “It wasn’t the weekly memory verses,” he explains, “it was my first-grade teacher quietly pulling me aside to pray for peace as my grandmother passed away, and Dr. Early Nelson extending his office hours to explain Nietzsche. Those mission-fit teachers helped us shape and define our faith in a more honest light.”

Now, as their children take their own steps into that same community, Will and Brittanie see Bear Creek not only as a place from their past, but as a partner in their family’s present and future.



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*"At Bear Creek, I found
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Anna S. – Class of 2026



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