Perspectives

Context, insights, and analysis



DAVID DEGNER

Member Voices

Greg Schneider

Ronald M. Druker '62
Head of School
Belmont Hill School
Belmont, Massachusetts

This is an excerpt from the NAIS *Member Voices* podcast.

Can you walk us through your path to headship?

I began independent school in seventh grade, and it was transformative. I quickly found mentors, developed a love of a well-rounded education, and carried that commitment to crossing boundaries—intellectual, academic, artistic, athletic—through college. My first teaching job was at a prep school on the Big Island of Hawaii.

I went to graduate school and had an internship in admissions

at Phillips Exeter Academy (NH). Afterward, I worked in admissions, taught English, and coached at Rye Country Day School (NY) before becoming head at Berwick Academy (ME), and finally Belmont Hill (MA). Along the way, I benefited from having key mentors—an essential support for anyone aspiring to school leadership.

What drew you to a boys' school?

I sometimes feel like I live a double life as the father of three girls. What drew me to Belmont Hill—more than it being a boys' school—was its extraordinary focus on character. I've long believed that character education, though hard to measure, is the most important work we do in shaping good people. This role makes you think a lot about society's definition of masculinity. What does it mean to offer boys a positive vision of manhood in a world saturated with negative messages? I firmly believe that if we don't define it for them, they'll find a definition elsewhere—and we may not like what they find. We're also preparing students for a coeducational world, so we think carefully about shared intellectual partnerships with girls' schools—and about both the strengths and the limitations of being a single-sex school. The data show that most families don't choose Belmont Hill because it's a boys' school. But our graduates would say it becomes one of the most meaningful parts of their experience.

What programs are particularly designed for boys?

When I think about Belmont Hill, I picture boys in coats and ties and our strong Latin program—it's easy to label us "traditional." But much of our teaching is hands-on and experiential, always grounded in what works best for boys. In physics, for example, students learn about friction by building toboggans and racing them in Maine. They build boats, too, and get out on the water. Our teachers have deep experience teaching boys. It's not uncommon, in a class of squirrelly seventh graders, for a teacher to say, "You're not focused—go take a lap around the chapel and come back ready to try again." I'm not sure you would see that approach in a coed school.

What guides your approach to recruiting administrators and faculty?

Our culture is deeply rooted in character. We have brilliant teachers with real depth in their disciplines, but when I'm hiring, I'm far more interested in how they talk about character. Everything we do comes back to this ongoing conversation about what it means to be a good person—so candidates have to care about that and be able to articulate why they love working with boys. Research from the International Boys' Schools Coalition (IBSC) shows that boys are profoundly relational learners. They're often less focused on the content than on whether the adult in front of them knows them, sees them, and has their back. When that connection is made, it's remarkable what boys will do—and that capacity for relationship is something I always look for when hiring.

What have you learned leading a boys' school that might be useful to coed schools?

There may be opportunities for coed schools to be more intentional about how they group certain experiences. At Belmont Hill, for example, on our senior leadership trip, we ask boys to reflect on what it will mean to leave their families—a profound moment as they prepare for college. I remember my first trip eight years ago, seeing boys with their arms around one another, openly emotional. That sense of brotherhood and mutual support felt fundamentally different from anything I'd experienced in a coed setting—and I don't think it's easily replicated.

What keeps you up at night?

When I think about our industry, I worry about where the next generation of great teachers will come from. We need to rethink how we market the profession, especially as remote work reshapes expectations. Teaching was once seen as a quality-of-life profession—compatible with family life and summers—but now we're competing with jobs that pay more and allow people to work from home much of the week. At the same time, we're asking teachers to be here not five but six days a week to fully participate in community. We can't assume that the next generation will see that as an

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obvious choice. NAIS and IBSC can help us articulate the rewards of this work because, while the financial models aren't changing dramatically, the meaning and purpose of the profession still matter deeply.

Another challenge is the housing market. Teachers today are in a fundamentally different place than they were 20 years ago when it comes to building a life and raising a family, especially in major cities. At a school committed to the teacher-coach model, that often means living farther and farther from campus—a real challenge we're actively grappling with.

What inspires you? I'm a reader and a jazz musician, and I've got other things that keep me balanced and sane, like exercise and golf, but what truly inspires me is these boys. At Belmont Hill, we host affinity dinners: a Lunar New Year dinner with our Asian community, a Shabbat dinner with our Jewish community, and this year, a Muslim community dinner celebrating Ramadan. A senior organized it, hoping to educate families about his culture. It was powerful to see some of our Orthodox Jewish families attend in a spirit of learning and sharing. One mother told me how moved she was when the student thanked her for coming and shared how excited he was to attend the Shabbat dinner to learn more about her culture. This is what the world needs. When you work with students like this, it fills you with hope. And when we talk about marketing the profession, this is our opportunity to inspire leaders who want to help make the world a better place. We need that now more than ever.



Episode 115: Leading a School for Boys with Greg Schneider, Belmont Hill School (MA)

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Greg Schneider, head of Belmont Hill School (MA), joins guest host Link Nicoll to discuss the unique challenges and opportunities of running a school for boys—including the importance of mentorship, the nuances of masculinity, and insights on approaching character development and mental health. Schneider also highlights the significance of faculty recruitment and the role of governance at his school.