Walnut Hill School for the Arts
Head of School Search Committee
An Overview

Purpose

The Head of School Search Committee is charged with guiding a thoughtful, inclusive, and confidential search process that reflects Walnut Hill's mission, values, and aspirations for the future.

Working in partnership with the search consultants and the Board of Trustees, the Committee will help shape the leadership profile for Walnut Hill's next Head of School, participate in candidate evaluation and interviews, and recommend a finalist to the Board for approval.

The Committee serves in an advisory capacity to the Board of Trustees, which retains final responsibility for hiring Walnut Hill's Head of School.

Duties & Expectations

Committee members are expected to:

- Participate actively and consistently throughout the search process
- Help shape and refine the leadership profile for the next Head of School
- Participate in candidate recruitment, screening, interviews, and finalist evaluation
- Participate in reference outreach and assessment, as appropriate
- Work collaboratively to identify and recommend finalists to the Board of Trustees
- Support consultant-led information gathering and community engagement efforts
- Help articulate Walnut Hill's mission, culture, and aspirations to candidates
- Serve as thoughtful ambassadors for the school throughout the process
- Maintain absolute confidentiality and discretion
- Approach the work thoughtfully, respectfully, and without personal agenda
- Engage constructively with differing perspectives and work toward consensus
- Keep the best interests of the school and its future at the center of the process

Selection & Composition

The Committee reflects a broad cross-section of the Walnut Hill community and brings a diversity of perspectives, experiences, disciplines, and relationships to the school. Its composition is intentionally designed to balance broad community representation with a size that supports effective and confidential work.

Selection was guided by:

- Commitment to Walnut Hill and an "all-school" mindset
- Trustee leadership
- Faculty and staff representation
- Alumni and parent voices
- Representation across artistic and academic disciplines
- Diversity of backgrounds, experiences, and viewpoints
- Longstanding and newer community connections
- Domestic and international perspectives
- Experience in education, governance, strategy, innovation, finance, wellness, and institutional management
- Balance of deep institutional knowledge and outside experience
- Individuals who are viewed as collaborative, thoughtful, credible, and respected across the community

Membership

Nicole Gakidis '81, P'18 (Co-Chair)
Amy Wheeler (Co-Chair)
Evangeline Delgado '11
Jennifer Elowitch
Eric Herbst '09
Bill Hughes P'13
Deborah Mankiw P'18
Michael Micucci
Erika Picciotto Zanussi
John Williams P'05
Bethany Zaheer '00

Meet the Search Committee

The Walnut Hill Head of School Search Committee reflects a broad range of experiences, relationships, perspectives, and expertise across the school community. The following biographies introduce the members of the Committee and the backgrounds they bring to this important work.

Evangeline Delgado ’11

Evangeline is Associate Director of Student Life for READY at Emma Willard School and founder READY, a program focused on health and wellness. A Walnut Hill Writing & Publishing alum, she has remained actively involved with the school through roles including Director of Summer Student Life and service on the Alumni Association Executive Committee.

Evangeline joined the Walnut Hill School Board in 2021, co-chairs the Community and Belonging Committee, and serves on the Governance Committee. She holds a BA from Barnard College and an EdM from Harvard Graduate School of Education.

Nicole Gakidis ’81, P’18 (Co-Chair)

Nicole is the Founding President of Exceptional Executive Search, a firm that provides executive recruitment and strategic transition support across education, healthcare, and nonprofit sectors. Prior to launching this consultancy, she served as Vice President of Corporate Communications at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center and held senior public affairs roles in education and healthcare, including Chief Information and Public Affairs Officer for the Vermont Department of Education.

A Walnut Hill alum and parent of a theater graduate, Nicole has remained closely connected to the school through volunteer and board service for more than 40 years. She joined the WHS Board in 2018 and has served on the Executive and Development Committees and chaired the Governance Committee. She brings extensive experience in executive search, governance, and candidate assessment processes. Nicole holds a BS from Emerson College.

Jennifer Elowitch

Jenny is Director of Music at Walnut Hill, a position she has held for nearly 12 years. She is a three-time recipient of the E.E. Ford Faculty Award for Exceptional Merit. In addition to her work at Walnut Hill, she is Co-Founder and Artistic Director Emerita of the Portland Chamber Music Festival and has performed with the Boston Pops Esplanade Orchestra, Boston Symphony Orchestra, and Emmanuel Chamber Orchestra.

A respected educator and musician, Jenny has taught at the Longy School of Music, New England Conservatory Preparatory School, and the University of New Hampshire and has presented masterclasses at conservatories and universities nationwide. She is a graduate of the New England Conservatory Preparatory School and holds a BM from Eastman School of Music and an MM from Yale School of Music.

Eric Herbst ’09

Eric is a business leader and certified executive coach. As Managing Director of The Elliot Group, a premier executive search and human capital firm, Eric is sought out for his leadership on strategic initiatives and talent services. Prior to his current position, Eric was an award-winning television news producer and correspondent.

A Walnut Hill theater alum, Eric graduated from New York University’s Gallatin School of Individualized Study. He joined the WHS Board in 2021, co-chairs the Community and Belonging Committee, and serves on the Executive and Governance Committees. He brings experience in leadership assessment, communications, and organizational culture, as well as an international perspective through his work and residence in Stockholm, Sweden.

Bill Hughes P’13

Bill is an education technology leader, innovator, and strategist who most recently served as President and CEO of Education Design Lab, a national nonprofit advancing economic opportunity through partnerships among colleges, employers, and regions.

Bill founded and led JobReady, a digital learning platform for career-aligned credentials, and held senior leadership roles with Learning Objects, Pearson, Sapient, Mercer, and the Cambridge Innovation Center. A Walnut Hill past parent, he also served for many years as a dorm parent alongside his late wife, Linda Lifsey Hughes, Walnut Hill’s inaugural head of DEIB. He joined the WHS Board in 2025, chairs the Enrollment & Alternative Revenue Task Force, and serves on the Finance Committee. Bill holds an AB from Harvard University and an SM from MIT.

Deborah Mankiw P’18

Deb joined the Walnut Hill School Board in 2020 following service on the Ambassadors Circle. She currently serves as Vice Chair and as a member of the Executive, Finance, Investment, and Development Committees. Her professional background includes leadership roles in the nonprofit, research, and government sectors, most recently serving as Director of Budget and Management for the National Bureau of Economic Research, where she oversaw financial planning, operations, and organizational administration.

Deb has held volunteer leadership roles with several academic institutions, including Vice Chair of the Chapel Hill–Chauncy Hall School Board and Rhode Island School of Design. She brings significant experience in governance, finance, strategic planning, and institutional leadership. Deb holds a bachelor’s degree from Duke University and a master’s degree from Harvard Kennedy School.

Search Committee Bios, continued

Michael Micucci

Mike has been working at Walnut Hill School for the Arts as a Designer and Teacher for over 25 years. He recently took on the role of Director of Events and Production, and leads a team that provides all design and technical services for events on and off campus.

Over the course of his tenure, Mike has designed more than 100 productions at Walnut Hill, and has helped integrate evolving stage technologies into the school's performance facilities. He holds a BA from Florida Southern College and an MFA from the University of Arkansas.

Amy Wheeler (Co-Chair)

Amy is co-founder of Learning Courage, a nonprofit that works with independent schools on student wellbeing, healthy relationships, sexual misconduct prevention and response, and institutional culture. An experienced independent school educator and administrator with 30+ years of teaching and school leadership, she has held senior leadership roles at Lawrence Academy, The Sage School, Beaver Country Day School, and The Ethel Walker School, with expertise spanning student support, school wellness and culture, admissions, and governance. She is also a founding board member of the Tremont School.

Amy has longstanding ties to Walnut Hill (her mother served as Board Chair), having served for years on the former Board of Visitors. She joined the Board of Trustees in 2018, co-chairing its inaugural committee on Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging, and serving on the Head Support and Evaluation Ad Hoc Committee. She is an active member of the Community and Belonging and Governance Committees. Amy holds a BA from Connecticut College and an MEd in Educational Leadership from Boston College.

John Williams P'05

John is Chair and CEO of Williams, Blanchet & Associates, a strategic advisory firm serving senior leaders and boards. His career has spanned higher education, strategy consulting, entrepreneurship, and organizational advisory work, including serving as President of Muhlenberg College and holding leadership roles at Bain & Company, Bridgespan Group, American Express, and Eduventures.

John has served on numerous educational and nonprofit boards, including Amherst College, Kent School, and the Harvard Business School Association of Boston, and brings extensive experience in governance, institutional strategy, and organizational management. He joined the WHS Board in 2020 and is the proud parent of Walnut Hill Theater alumna Ashley Blanchet '05. John holds a BA from Amherst College, an MBA from Harvard Business School, and a JD from Harvard Law School.

Bethany Zaheer '00

Bethany is the founder of PAZ Group, a New York-based creative development firm. Her career is rooted in the arts and driven by a deep commitment to creative innovation and impact. With a multi-disciplinary background spanning architecture, interior design, experiential design, and real estate development, Bethany has held leadership roles in some of the world's most forward-thinking design and hospitality firms, including Equinox Hotels and Related Group.

A Walnut Hill dance alum, Bethany joined the Walnut Hill Board of Trustees in 2025 after serving on the Campus Master Planning Committee. She is a member of the Development and Buildings and Grounds Committees. Bethany holds a BA from the University of Southern California and a degree in interior design from Parsons School of Design. She completed the Stanford LEAD Business Program, where she focused on executive leadership and innovation.

Erika Picciotto Zanussi

Erika is Head of Walnut Hill's World Languages, having previously served as an ELL teacher and program coordinator. She also served on Walnut Hill's strategic planning committee. In addition to working closely with the school's student affinity groups, Erika is Bishop Dorm Head with her husband Nick, a member of the Science faculty and Senior Class Dean.

Prior to joining Walnut Hill in 2018, Erika taught Mandarin and ELL for 10 years at Suffield Academy, and middle school English, Math, Science, and Art in Namibia. She holds a BA from the University of Michigan and MA from the School for International Training (SIT) Graduate Institute.