



Announcements from The Head of School & Board of Trustees

January 11, 2021

Dear RCDS Community,

Over the past few years, I have had many opportunities to reflect on how independent schools have significantly impacted my life. In September 2018, RCDS alumnus Dennis Parker '73 was the keynote speaker who kicked off the School's 150th anniversary celebration. When Dennis pointed out that his RCDS career had started in 1969, nearly fifty years earlier, I was reminded that my own life's trajectory was similarly changed in 1969 when I was offered the opportunity to attend an independent school as a scholarship student coming from the Yonkers public schools. Then, this past fall while looking through some old files, I came across the 1992 prospectus for Rye Country Day's head of school search—the process that ultimately resulted in my opportunity to lead this wonderful school community for the past twenty-eight years.

The personal reflections stirred by these two events were spontaneous, but the special memories have lingered, perhaps spurred by nostalgia and the awareness of what has been changed by the current pandemic. Of course, we all hope that there will be a return to normalcy in a COVID-free world by next fall, and I have no doubt that Rye Country Day, despite the challenges of 2020, will be ready to take the next step into the future by building on its current and continuing successes. Thus, it is at this juncture—reassured by the knowledge of a successful path ahead and reminded of time's passing—that I have decided the 2021-22 academic year, my 43rd year of working in independent schools, will be my final year as head of RCDS. I have informed the Board of Trustees of this decision now to ensure plenty of time for a successful search process to identify Rye Country Day's next head of school.

The 1992 RCDS head search prospectus that first introduced me to the School described exciting opportunities ahead. In fact, the opportunities that have presented themselves over the past twenty-eight years far exceeded those mentioned in that prospectus: the School has grown exponentially; the community is more diverse; new teachers have brought their varied talents and experiences to all three divisions; the entire campus has been renovated and expanded; new programs and initiatives have been added; and the School's financial position has been strengthened.

There are many people I want to thank for their contributions to the successes during my tenure. First, I want to thank the trustees who were instrumental in that head of school search process that gave me, a fledgling head of school, the opportunity to lead RCDS—Michael Murr, Christy Mack, Ed Wachenheim, and Susan Berndt Mahoney '69. Thank you for believing in me.

During my tenure, I have worked with eleven board chairs who have devoted countless hours to leading and supporting the numerous board committees while working in partnership with me and the School's administration. Their dedication and commitment truly exemplify RCDS's motto, *Not for Self, but for Service*.

I also owe a huge debt of gratitude to the dozens of trustees who have served the School by generously volunteering their time and expertise to the work of various board committees. They often went above and beyond in their service to the School, and I have learned a great deal from them over the years. Their insight and wise counsel have helped guide the School and have also contributed immensely to the School's success.

The heart of Rye Country Day has always been its exceptional employees—the teachers, staff, and administrators—who work hard each day to support and deliver the School's mission. Teachers bring their expertise, passion, and care to their students each day, and they demonstrate a commitment to lifelong learning through their pursuit of professional development opportunities. Their flexibility and adaptability have been front and center during the School's shift to remote and hybrid-flex learning since last April.

Staff members ensure that the School operates safely and smoothly, support services meet students' needs, and communications are timely and clear. Administrators work tirelessly developing and leading their programs, managing complicated schedules, and providing unwavering support for their colleagues, while tending to the myriad details that ensure each student's success. As we have seen throughout the pandemic, RCDS employees continue to step up to do whatever needs to get done to maintain a safe environment while continuing to create engaging learning experiences through these challenging times.

I also want to offer special thanks to our parents, parents of alumni, grandparents, and alumni. The truly extraordinary generosity and support extended by our school community make so much possible. The School has been able to set goals, implement plans, and change in important ways thanks to the ongoing commitment of the RCDS community, and I trust this will continue to be the case as the School evolves. And I am especially proud of the 2,500 alumni who have graduated during my tenure. Their pursuit of excellence in all their endeavors is gratifying to us at RCDS and inspiring to those students about to join their ranks.

Finally, I want to thank our students, who bring their energy, curiosity, talents, and resilience to school each and every day as they strive to make the most of their RCDS education. Their achievements and contributions in the classroom, on the stage, in the athletic arena, and in service to the broader community are impressive. They are wonderful ambassadors for RCDS.

With eighteen months left in my tenure, there is no time to rest on past accomplishments. Instead, the Board and I are fully aware that there is still much work to do. Please rest assured that we will maintain our strong commitment to ensuring that the School continues to strengthen and improve as we move forward to fulfill the RCDS mission effectively for each and every student. This important work includes completing a post-pandemic strategic plan, implementing the comprehensive Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion plan, continuing to upgrade our technology infrastructure and STEAM offerings, and following up on the Thruway parcel and other property expansion possibilities. As this work progresses, Rye Country Day will be an even stronger, better school that will be well positioned to prepare students for continued success in the ever-changing 21st century world.

Gratefully and with thanks,

Scott A. Nelson
Head of School

Dear RCDS Community,

I am writing to you regarding Scott Nelson's decision to retire at the end of the 2021-2022 academic year. On behalf of the entire Board of Trustees, I want to thank Scott for his innumerable contributions to Rye Country Day School throughout his twenty-eight-year tenure. Over the next 18 months we look forward to Scott's continued leadership as he delivers on the School's mission while ensuring a smooth transition to his successor. Of course, we also will be planning events for the RCDS community to celebrate Scott's many achievements over his long and illustrious career.

Mr. Nelson has left an enduring mark on the School, leading RCDS to a position of national prominence, consistently ranked in recent years as one of the top K-12 schools in the country. His tireless dedication to inspiring and ensuring excellence has produced a long list of highly successful initiatives that have shaped the School into what it is today. Under his watch, RCDS has grown enrollment steadily, strengthened its financial position, significantly increased financial aid, completed major renovations to the campus facilities, and enhanced the diversity of our employee and student communities. Overall, Mr. Nelson raised the quality and value of an RCDS education exponentially, having married investments in physical infrastructure with the talented team of educators he recruited and mentored.

Scott achieved this success despite everyday hurdles such as rising costs and limited resources, as well as more monumental challenges ranging from the 9/11 terrorist attacks to the 2008 financial crisis, and more recently, the COVID-19 pandemic. Ever mindful of the critical work that remains, Mr. Nelson intends to make his last 18 months impactful. He has affirmed his steadfast commitment to deliver the highest quality educational experience for RCDS students while implementing the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Plan and related initiatives, and also finalizing the School's new five-year strategic plan, which will include investments in technology and STEAM offerings and continued evaluation of property expansion possibilities. We are confident these efforts will facilitate a seamless succession.

As we move forward, I am pleased to announce that parent trustee Patty Perez (Stronski) P'20, P'23, P'25, P'27 will act as Search Chair, charged with leading the process of finding a new Head of School. A lawyer with a background in mergers and acquisitions, as well as corporate restructuring, Ms. Perez has been a parent here since 2014 and has three children in the School, as well as a 2020 graduate now in college. Ms. Perez is committed to conducting an inclusive, deliberate, and thoughtful search, guided by the RCDS mission and informed by input from a broad cross section of the community. As a first step, she will evaluate and select a leading national search firm with relevant experience in the independent school arena, assisted in this effort by fellow trustees Sarah Dodds-Brown '91, P'25, P'28, P'31, Fernando Rivas P'24, P'25, Cindy Roskind '90, P'21, P'23, and Andrew Wallach P'24, P'27. Among other things, the selected firm will:

- make recommendations regarding the composition of the search committee and any advisory group;
- gather input from surveys and outreach discussions with members of the broader community;
- work with the search committee to prepare a prospectus on RCDS and specifications for the Head of School position;
- identify and recruit high quality candidates for consideration by the search committee; and
- guide the search committee throughout the interview and recruitment stages and ensure that both the candidates' and the search committee's need for information and diligence are met.

We expect to announce the search firm and the full search committee by this spring. Throughout the process, Ms. Perez will balance the desire for transparency with the need for confidentiality inherent in any high-level search, and we appreciate your understanding in this regard. Please stay tuned for periodic updates from Ms. Perez.

Together with all current and former trustees who have had the privilege of working with Scott, I offer my deep appreciation and gratitude for the profound contributions he has made to RCDS. While the transition from a long-serving head of school to a new leader can seem daunting, it also presents an opportunity to reflect on who we are as a school today and to be aspirational about what we can become. The Board of Trustees is optimistic that our community will embrace this opportunity to help identify a successor worthy of Mr. Nelson's legacy, one who will be well-positioned to lead Rye Country Day School to even greater heights in the future.

In advance, thank you for your support as we prepare for a successful transition to the next chapter in the history of RCDS.

Sincerely,

Eric Medow P'19, P'23
Chair of the Board of Trustees