

Dear OES Community,

I wrote in my initial letter of interest that I have long been intrigued by OES—because of the quality of people connected to the school, the obvious joy of learning in the classrooms, and the remarkable commitment to mission. Throughout the process of interviewing over the last few months—multiple days, with an opportunity to talk at length with members of all constituencies—my intrigue has deepened into a true commitment to the school, the people, and its future.

In one of my final meetings, I was asked, “What has surprised you?” Here are a few surprises—all of which have contributed to the deepening of my connection to and belief in the school:

Innovative and progressive pedagogy: OES has the reputation of a highly successful, traditional, academic school. This is spot on except for the traditional qualifier. OES teachers are learners themselves and experiment with new ideas and techniques in the classroom—and they share them among each other, creating a progressive pedagogy and culture within the classroom. The consistency in practice within the school, of embracing student competencies such as performance, research, and creativity, is remarkable—and worth celebrating.

The E in OES: Until my visit, it wasn’t clear the role this plays in the daily life of the school. However, it became evident that the E has an enormous role, in particular because of the Episcopal tradition of inclusivity and welcome. Everyone is welcomed for who they are and there is clearly room at OES for a comfortable blend of faith traditions and perspectives. The school embraces our spiritual lives as part of our humanity and as a rich part of the school and community. The chaplaincy centers people and program on our power for good—a crucial consequence of the school’s Episcopal roots.

The spirit of the school: The students articulated this the most succinctly—this is a place that welcomes quirkiness (just look at the mascot!) and being oneself. Students feel comfortable being who they are, rather than feeling forced to conform to an expected cultural norm. This creates an incredibly healthy environment for young and adolescent children—as well as adults—as they develop intellectually, spiritually, and emotionally.

And finally, I am incredibly lucky to yet again be “standing on the shoulders of giants” as Sir Isaac Newton said. The faculty, board, and in particular, Kathy Layendecker, have held the school in trust during these 17 months of leadership transition. Kathy has not simply beautifully stewarded the school during this extended transition; she has moved the community forward on crucial initiatives including the fully realized and embraced vision, as well as the vision-inspired strategic plan. I am joining a school that has benefited from extraordinary leadership during uncertain times.

Though I will be focused on Saint George’s School through the rest of this school year, my heart is already with all of you in Portland. I wear my green proudly. Chris and I are looking forward to being part of the OES community and will see all of you in July.

Warmly, Mo