

SEVEN QUESTIONS WITH....

STEVE BUETTNER, HEAD OF THE BALTIMORE LAB SCHOOL

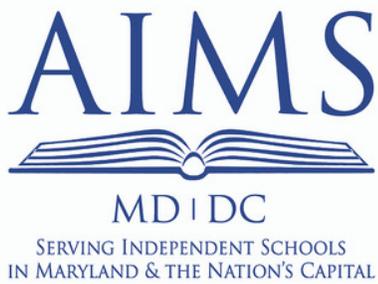


Tell us how you first got involved in with AIMS?

I worked in public schools for the first 22 years of my career. Once I became Head of Baltimore Lab School in 2015, I was introduced to AIMS. From the very beginning, Peter Bailey was extraordinarily different than the types of organizational leaders I was exposed to in my other experiences. Peter is very passionate, and it is clear that he wants to advance the organization with a focus on collaboration and professionalism. From that point, I began taking several workshops, and I have been very impressed by the depth and breadth of offerings to help all AIMS schools focus on continuous growth and improvement through responsiveness to families, foundations, and any partners.

What's your first memory of being a Head of School?

My first memory of being a Head of School was feeling this untethered freedom to do innovative programming at my school. Coming from a school system, there are many obstacles that must be overcome because of teacher unions, and state/federal mandates. I was motivated and thoroughly enjoyed my experiences in my other schools, but at Baltimore Lab School, I feel a synergy of ideas that become action. At Baltimore Lab School, our tagline is "The Difference is Extraordinary!" Well, let me tell you, this is not just a tagline. It is a planning and delivery ethic. I invite everyone to see this difference. It is actually a joyous place to be! I love coming to work each day!



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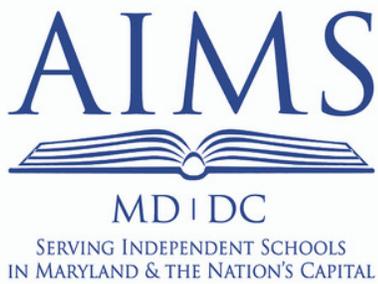
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What has surprised you most about working with schools and or students?

At Baltimore Lab School, I was most surprised at how committed the teachers are. I have worked with hundreds of teachers in my career, but the teachers at Baltimore Lab have a tranquil, quiet competence that exudes in their extraordinary work with their students and their families on a daily basis. When working with students who learn differently, patience is a virtue. My teachers, related service providers, and all staff are TOTALLY committed to our students, and the growth in our students is quite gratifying to see each year.

What do you find most challenging about independent education?

Admittedly, the biggest challenge for me as a previous public school administrator is development. With changes in demographics, marketing, and the economy, development can be an uphill battle. However, the story at Baltimore Lab is so compelling and so transformative, telling our story is very easy, and we are seeing development initiatives meeting or exceeding our strategic plan expectations.



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If you could change one thing about independent schools, what would it be?

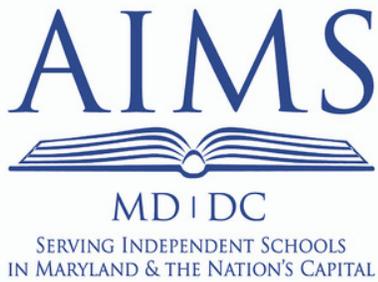
I love the freedom, innovation, and entrepreneurial spirit of independent schools. I cannot fathom changing anything.

What do you wish other people knew about AIMS?

Two years ago, I knew nothing about AIMS. As I have gained substantive experience with AIMS, I wish people knew how expansive and responsive it is as an organization. I encourage and sometimes require my staff to use AIMS workshops to achieve their two professional goals each year. I have found AIMS workshops to be very valuable in focusing myself and my staff on continuous growth and improvement.

Tell us about someone who has influenced your work.

The Founder of Baltimore Lab School, Sally L. Smith, influenced my work before I became the Head of Baltimore Lab. Sally was an innovator and a visionary in how to educate children with learning differences. Her work was so ahead of its time! We are just now seeing it confirmed with current advances in brain research even though Sally believed in these methods 50 years ago. Sally L. Smith influenced me as a teacher because I believe in her hands-on, minds-on methods. Sally totally influences me now, as the Head of one of her schools, because I see the transformative power of her work on a daily basis.



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What might AIMS Members be surprised to know about you?

As one of the newest Heads in AIMS, I think almost anything would be a surprise, but to answer this question, I am a huge fan of Baltimore's infamous auteur, John Waters, and I may or may not have moved to his neighborhood in order to feel more like his movies make me feel: It is ok to be different and to act different. Differences are valued in his movies. In many ways, John Waters' movies show the underdog winning. I am an underdog. I serve students who, at one time or another, may have felt like underdogs. Just as John's movies show the underdog embracing their differences and winning, Baltimore Lab School allows students to celebrate their differences, embrace their differences, and succeed while being different.

If you weren't serving as a Head of School, what would you be doing instead, or what would your life be like?

This is an easy question. I'd be a teacher in an AIMS school because I love teaching in an innovative environment.