An Important Announcement from the NWAIS Board of Governors and Executive Director
Dear NWAIS Community,

Recently, Mark Crotty, our NWAIS Executive Director, informed the Board of Governors of his decision that the 2024-2025 school year would be his last with the Association. Mark assumed the role and moved to Seattle from Dallas during the onset and peak of the COVID-19 pandemic when community engagement, connectivity, and systems needed to be reimagined and redesigned on the fly. His work to preserve the culture and collegiality of the NWAIS association should be noted as a hallmark success of his tenure. Mark and the NWAIS staff have also done great work on our new non-discrimination policy and related membership processes and successfully navigated the ICAISA accreditation process for the Association. Further, the Association has nimbly developed responsive programming for the membership, while also creating new systems and personally supporting leadership at all levels during his tenure.

Importantly, Mark has made a difference for NWAIS through a challenging period because of the sincerely humble and generous person he has proven to be. As one Governor noted, some people are generous because they know they should be. Mark is just generous. He has proven to be generous with resources, ideas, and questions, but he has also been a generous listener, empathizer, and collaborator. He continuously focuses on the human element at the heart of our schools, challenges, and opportunities, while always demonstrating a deep care for the individuals involved. Mark has quietly supported the association’s individual schools and school leaders, and mediated our occasional differences and disagreements, while persistently, gently, and firmly advocating for our collective advancement. He has done steadfast work in honoring multiple perspectives, while helping us in big and small ways to find common ground around shared values. NWAIS has long been known as a humble, innovative, and collegial association, and Mark has certainly modeled those characteristics as our ED.

Over the next 10 months, we will be conducting a search for our next Executive Director. A search committee, chaired by Brenda Leaks, has been established and a RFP process to select a search firm to assist us in this endeavor is underway. We intend to finalize the selection of our next ED by our NWAIS Fall Heads’ Meetings in ‘24, with an anticipated start date of July ‘25. We will be asking for your input at several points throughout the process. Please look for information from the committee on how to engage, as well as timelines and more, in the near future.

Mark and the Board are committed to continuing the good and collective work of the Association over the next 17 months, and we will have a chance to celebrate Mark at Alderbrook in the spring of ‘25. In the meantime, please join me and the NWAIS Board in thanking Mark for his great work to date and in supporting him in his continued efforts on all of our behalf.

Sincerely,

Ben Pettit on behalf of and with many contributions from the NWAIS Board of Governors
Dear NWAIS Board of Governors,

I try to live per one of my favorite expressions: “Leap, and the net shall appear.” I don’t embrace this philosophy with a rash, reckless sense of YOLO. Instead, I leap only after the necessary assessment and preparation have affirmed my initial optimism. In June 2025 I will be taking my next giant leap, when I step down from my role as Executive Director of NWAIS.

Despite encouragement from some key colleagues, I almost didn’t apply for the NWAIS Executive Director position. Other than a vacation in Jackson Hole, neither my wife, Sallie, nor I had visited the Pacific Northwest. We had scant personal or professional connections in the region. It was quite far away. For 25 years Dallas had been our home, with deep roots and many long-time friends. Fortunately, I ignored the small doubts and listened to those other voices. The whole family came on my initial interview visit, and we felt enchanted. As my daughter remarked to Sallie that first day, “I can really see you and Dad here.” Meanwhile, I clicked with everyone I met. The process unfolded; I did my research; and when NWAIS honored me with an offer, Sallie and I decided to soar into the largely unknown.

The net certainly appeared. Of the finest quality, it’s artfully crafted from strong, durable materials. Its cords are intricately woven and knotted, strengthened in key places by shared values, mutual respect, and human connections. It can support a much greater burden than the heft of its individual parts. It is not your typical association. NWAIS is much more. NWAIS shows how a community thrives.

Since assuming my role in July 2019, I’ve strived to channel this ethos in ways that enhance NWAIS and serve you as members. I’m also acutely aware my leadership has depended greatly on an amazing staff and dedicated people throughout our schools. The list of people to thank would scroll for pages. Some highlights? The conversations that led to tightening our non-discrimination requirements. Leading tailored workshops for many boards while seeing our regular governance training attract booming enrollment. The expansion and responsiveness of our professional development offerings, often led by NWAIS members. The pilot program for rookie heads to receive executive coaching at a reasonable rate. Watching schools grow through the accreditation process. Reviewing our standards and the ongoing reimagination of our self-study process. Committees and task forces reviewed our values and dues structures, added an annual report, piloted different membership criteria, and improved our succession planning. We shifted to a new technology platform before the old one toppled. Meanwhile, we cradled each other through a global pandemic. Through it all, our connections have grown stronger. That is the power of community.

As proud as I am of that work, what really stands out to me are things that happened behind the scenes, including having been to a majority of our schools. Whether on visits or via Zoom or on the phone, I remember hearing about your struggles and your victories, your worries and your dreams. Nothing gratifies me like seeing you, your leadership, and your schools flourish.

While Sallie and I love everything about our life here in the PNW, we feel the magnetic pull of family and friends. As a confidante put it to me, we crave greater proximity to other key parts of our lives. In due time the professional nets will appear. Until then, I will revel in being part of the NWAIS community. It has been the most special time of my career.

Sincerely,

Mark Crotty