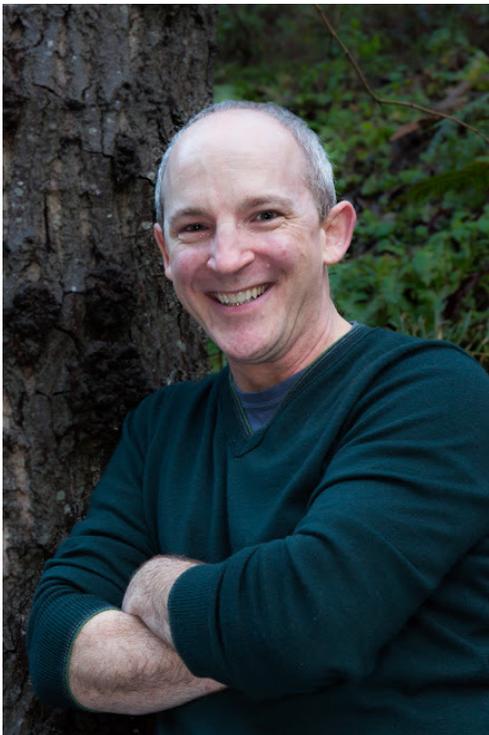


# SEVEN QUESTIONS WITH....

## JON KIDDER, M.ED. HEAD OF SCHOOL, BARRIE SCHOOL



**What experiences and preparation helped you become a Head of School?**

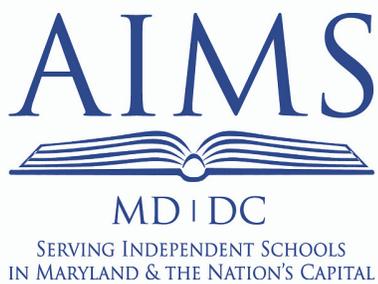
In terms of preparing to serve the community at Barrie, my most formative experience was being in the classroom for a dozen years and seeing first-hand what teachers need to do their most transformational work. As administrators, we have one essential job—to be of service to teachers and students. Everything else we do should be centered around this endeavor.

I feel deeply fortunate to be the Head of Barrie. I chose this school because of its progressive mission, student body diversity, profound commitment to Montessori education and project-based learning, and an amazing cohort of skilled and passionate educators.

In my ongoing professional development, I feel honored to have been mentored by the magic of other highly-skilled Heads of School—from Mike Babcock and Debbie Reed at the Polytechnic School, to Mark Brooks at the Center for Early Education, to our current NAIS Board Chair Katherine Dinh at Prospect Sierra in California. As leaders, we need all the help and inspiration we can get, and I am very lucky to have learned from the best.

**Who was your best teacher?**

I love this question and I have been blessed with many amazing mentors. I think of 5th grade teacher Jan Van Spronson, who inspired a love of reading, geography, and J.R.R. Tolkien. I remember John Lopez, my 8th grade United States History teacher, who had an



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infectious enthusiasm for critical thinking and a passion for classroom discussions. I will never forget 10th grade English teacher Kathryn Konoske, both formidable and intellectually inspiring for those who dared to love writing and literature. Finally, I named my son after the late John Reid, an intellectual giant who taught science at Hampshire College. With a twinkle in his eye and booming sense of humor, he was a wonderful friend and the single best classroom teacher I ever had the pleasure of knowing. Each day, I feel honored to walk in the footsteps of these giants.

## **What experiences as a school Head brought you the most joy?**

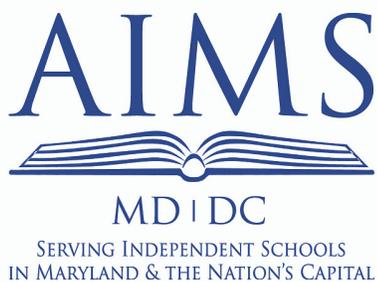
In these first six months Barrie, it has been very satisfying to get to know an amazing community of students, parents, and educators. In particular, it has been great fun to collaborate with faculty to expand arts offerings, launch a Maker-STEAM elementary program, and inaugurate new signature science courses in the upper school. These include a planetary science physics class where our students train to be astronauts at a NASA Space Academy, and a project-based marine biology course where our students study endangered sea life while living—and snorkeling—by a research station in Belize. The opportunity to work with teachers to develop formative experiences for students is why I love being a Head of School.

## **What parts of the work were the most difficult?**

We all have our challenging days at work, but the hardest part of the job is not being able to spend enough time with my family and missing precious moments of my kids growing up. I do feel lucky that my kids attend Barrie, where I get to see them thriving in their classrooms, fulfilled and happy as clams.

## **What lessons have you learned about leadership?**

I've heard many mentors I admire share that leadership is both lonely and humbling. I'm sure that every Head of School would smile at this phrase because we know that no one has all the answers and we will only succeed based on the strength of our teams.



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We may all have heard the axiom on leadership that “culture eats strategy for breakfast.” Over the course of my time as a Head of School, I have felt great admiration for colleagues around the country who are able to think strategically about transforming their school cultures in support of a larger vision. I think we all have a great deal to learn about how to do this successfully, myself included.

## **What do you think is the most important innovation that independent schools must adapt?**

Looking back at the last fifty years in independent school education, I would argue that our greatest innovations as an industry have not been about technology in the classroom or the advent of progressive pedagogy or even our expanding understanding of learning and brain. Our most transformational changes have been about demographics and democratic engagement. The rapid increase in financial assistance and, more recently, the intentionality around inclusion have made our schools stronger, better places.

One of my favorite poets once wrote that “Poetry, like bread, is for everyone”—and I believe that leaders in independent schools have a moral imperative to harness our efforts to increase access and equity. Our schools are in the early stages of becoming truly accessible and inclusive to all students. This innovation must continue not simply because our industry needs to adapt to survive in a demographically evolving country, but because embracing this work is the right choice for our kids and our future.

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

Easy question. I would be a teacher because with the right support, this can be the greatest job anywhere. Each day you get the opportunity for a fresh start with kids, each day you get to see joy on their faces and learn something profound and new by what they share, and each day you get to be humbled by how much we can improve in our craft as educators.

I became a Head so I could empower change on larger scale and to empower faculty to do this work—and a part of my heart will always tug toward the classroom. If I couldn't be a Head or a teacher, I wouldn't be too upset if I was offered the opportunity to be a professional outdoor enthusiast, spending my days hiking, diving, cycling, and mountaineering.