

# SEVEN QUESTIONS WITH....

## DAVID PERFIELD, HEAD OF SCHOOL, OLDFIELDS SCHOOL



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

I will always remember orientation at Oldfields when students dumped a bucket of water on me in between activities. After getting past the initial shock of the water temperature and being thankful for my (not overly reactive) response, I felt the students' genuine acceptance and light-hearted welcome. That experience opened doors to establishing relationships with students—and also showed students and faculty that I will actively participate in culture-building activities... especially when they're fun!

### **Why did you decide on a career in education?**

I chose a career in education because I was determined to coach. Over time, I developed a deep appreciation for my experience in the classroom and was prepared to be a career teacher. Early in my boarding school career, I was supported by wonderful colleagues and administrators who inspired me to grow and experience other roles and responsibilities. Their encouragement and support, combined with my impactful relationships with students, inspired me to seek opportunities to be a head of school. Several years ago, I started encouraging my students and players to consider teaching at some point in their professional lives. I still echo this encouragement today. "If you can teach for at least one year, and you can influence one student for the rest of their life, you will find fulfillment and reap the benefits of that reward forever." My mentors are educators. I have been very fortunate to learn from their incredible guidance, and I aspire to hopefully have a similar influence on the students with whom I get to interact with every day.



Association of Independent  
Maryland & DC Schools

# SEVEN QUESTIONS WITH....

## **What experiences and preparation helped you become a head of school?**

I've been fortunate to gain vast experience since my boarding school career began in 2001. Being a classroom teacher for five years created a solid foundation for being a life-long educator. Although I made the shift from teaching biology, I was able to remain an advisor, a dorm parent, and a coach while taking on new responsibilities as an admissions representative. After two years in admissions and serving as a strategic planning sub-committee chair, I made the shift to development, when the school where I was working started a robust and ambitious capital campaign. Over the course of the next three years, I got married, started a family, and transitioned to another school and began a new chapter as director of development. As a first-time director of development, I worked alongside a dynamic head of school who "showed me the ropes." Not only did we launch an ambitious capital campaign, he provided me with opportunities that allowed me to lead and participate in Board activities. Over time, my scope of understanding across numerous intersections, coupled with the student relationships and experiences I had already gained, allowed me to serve as an assistant head of school—and then help to provide stability to the school community during a head of school transition. It's difficult to place a price tag on the value of that experience! With a rare moment to think without distraction, I take a step back and reflect on my personal and professional growth, and realize the deep appreciation for the different types of schools I have served. After being at a co-ed, grades 9-12 and post-graduate school for 10 years, then an all-boys, grades 6-9, junior boarding school for seven years, I am grateful for the opportunity to serve and lead Oldfields—an all-girls, grades 8-12 secondary school, especially now that I am a dad with two young daughters. This brings me to my last thought about experiences that helped me prepare to be a head of school. I think it would be challenging to support our students, and partner with families in a proactive and compassionate manner if I didn't have children of my own. I rely heavily on my parental skills to help navigate most conversations with students. And, in return, I rely on my experiences with students to help navigate the "teachable moments" with my own children. Have I mentioned how lucky I am to do this every day?!



Association of Independent  
Maryland & DC Schools

# SEVEN QUESTIONS WITH....

## **Who was your best teacher?**

My college baseball coach was, and still is, an incredible teacher. Tom Fay taught me numerous life lessons on and off the field while I played for him at St. Lawrence. Coach Fay had one rule for his teams, “Get It Right,” which in essence covers just about everything.

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

Cultivating authentic relationships with students and getting to know something that makes each one of them special. I love the moments when you can feel the growth a student is experiencing. I also love the moments when you realize the School’s mission is relevant and guiding a student’s experience. Although there are some pretty tough days, I cherish the moments when I can share a laugh with a student and/or colleague. The moments of laughter help me slow down and realize how grateful I am to be in this environment. It’s also a good reminder about humility and my deep appreciation for the choice I made several years ago that a career in boarding schools is actually a lifestyle.

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

I try to lead with compassion in every situation. Several years ago, when I was learning first-hand how to manage a large staff, I slowly came to realize that everyone brings a different type of “baggage” to campus every day. Ultimately, this “baggage” is going to affect their experience and productivity. We’d be sadly mistaken to think students don’t bring “baggage” too...and some days it’s overflowing. I care about clear communication with an emphasis on transparency and inclusivity. Students and faculty will hear me talk about the importance of modeling the behavior we expect of others and being disciplined to keep our priorities in order. For me, family always comes first, and healthy living comes from striking a mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual balance. As a head of school, time management is essential, especially when there are days when you feel like everyone wants your time because their needs and/or questions are the most important ones with which to deal. In response to that demand, I enjoy navigating the day-to-day needs of serving the School as CEO, educator, father figure, and mentor. In the end, I hope the people in our community feel valued and appreciated—and I am seen as approachable and trustworthy. After all, we have a wonderful opportunity to make a difference in our students’ lives and live the mission of our School!



Association of Independent  
Maryland & DC Schools

# SEVEN QUESTIONS WITH....

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

If I weren't serving as a head of school, I'm confident I would still be involved with schools. If not a classroom teacher, I would likely seek opportunities to coach football and/or baseball at the collegiate level. Luckily, I do get the honor and privilege of serving as the 11th head of Oldfields School.