

# SEVEN QUESTIONS WITH....

## TRACEY FORD, HEAD OF SCHOOL, MARYVALE PREPARATORY SCHOOL



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

My first memory as Head of School takes me back more than eight years ago when I was asked to talk with Maryvale's faculty soon after I was hired. I was very aware that I would be the school's first lay Head and that a sense of comfort and security needed to be given to the faculty. I brought with me a stack of books which had influenced my life and career. I shared a bit about each and the impact it had made. I also shared a few of my favorite passages. I truly hoped that the bridges which are built by books would serve the same with this faculty who were new to me.

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

Before I was a Head of School, I was a daughter, a student, a wife, a mother and a friend. Those relationships, which changed over the decades, influence my daily interactions with girls, faculty and families. Professionally, I spent many years at two other independent schools and a public university. Each experience brought invaluable opportunities to interact with innovative teachers and administrators as well as countless young people. Much of my career was spent in advancement roles where I honed fundraising, communication, enrollment management and marketing skills - all areas which school heads must understand and support. Of particular value was my interaction with various Boards of Trustees, committees and Board Chairs. Understanding and maneuvering these vital relationships is so often the key to a Head's - and, in turn, a school's - success.

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

In my fourth year at the University of Virginia, I was enrolled in two classes taught by a long-tenured professor in the Communications Department. In his acerbic way, he illustrated the power of words, the consequence of rhetoric and the ultimate duty to tell the truth. His lessons have stuck with me throughout my career.

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

The girls, particularly the early September interactions with new sixth-graders! I adore their exuberance, their honesty and their sense of humor. They often have a French class across the hall from my office and they never hesitate to pop in if the door is open – or rattle the handle if it is closed. At last year's Graduation, I recognized the senior who, seven years before, had tentatively asked me to walk her to the Middle School on her first day of sixth grade. That little girl who held my hand all the way to her sixth-grade classroom was now a confident young woman heading off to a major university. That moment was pure joy!

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

Making hard decisions is always the most difficult, regardless of your role in a school. There just seem to be more of them in the Head's office. At those times, what makes the difficult work easier is a committed and involved Leadership Team, a responsive Board and a clear understanding that a Head must always be looking at what is in the best interest of the school, not a particular individual or program.



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## **6. How has the work of heading a school changed in your time?**

Over the past seven years, a few things have changed in my work and my sense is that any school Head might answer this question in a similar way. The impact of social media, the need for deeper inclusion, a pervasive lack of civility and an ongoing concern regarding campus security and potential off campus risks.

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

Because words and reading have always been so important to me, I would hope that I might have made my way in a career centered in journalism or communications.