"What the live creature retains from the past and what it expects from the future operate as directions in the present."

John Dewey
An Introduction from Dan Frank

To say that this past year or more has been a time of transitions is more than an understatement.

As we all know, the world has been rocked by many tumultuous changes—the pandemic, the politics of a divided nation and international conflict, and the dangerous impact of significant global and regional climate shifts, to name a few.

Change comes in many forms—some gradual, some sudden. Change can be disruptive, which we might welcome or fear depending on our perspective. People respond to change, in whatever form it takes, in different ways: sometimes with feelings of loss, sometimes with a sense of gain, often with a mixture of anxiety and hope.

As we enter the third year of educating for citizenship and character during this pandemic, the coming year will provide us with opportunities to manage these transitions with attention to each individual’s needs, all with a commitment to the interests of the common good.

Yet, in the midst of the great discontinuities that shape our lives, Parker provides a steady line of continuity to guide us through the many transitions that are occurring. At Parker, we continue to meet the challenge of educating in a pandemic with creativity and perseverance that is deeply rooted in our school culture. We remain committed to making ongoing institutional improvement, as we work together to provide a healthy and safe way for students to learn and grow despite the hardships and constraints. This attitude informed the ways our teachers shifted their teaching methods, the new ways students learned to engage in their in-person and virtual classrooms and the new ways administrators and staff have devised to operate the school on a daily basis.

In the midst of the unusual transitions the pandemic necessitated, Parker also acknowledges the normative flow to community life, such as when longtime colleagues decide to retire and when new colleagues join our school community.

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I am grateful to the Parker community for its robust and coherent response to the challenges of transition, both gradual and sudden, with a sense of imagination, grace and respect for all in our community.
Navigating a Timeline of Transition

Transitions Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, Parker’s complete community has gone above and beyond to demonstrate its capacity to creatively and safely work together to manage change.

This past year, the school experienced major milestones adapting to the ever-evolving regulations related to the pandemic in an effort to keep the entire Parker community safe, while also maintaining educational excellence. From the initial technological changes associated with all-remote learning to reinventing daily operations with an eye for health and safety, from subdividing classrooms into smaller cohorts for purposes of contact tracing to reconfiguring the Upper School schedule multiple times to optimize the student experience, the Parker community consistently worked together to navigate the many changes this pandemic presented.

This journey required flexibility and resiliency and, in true Parker fashion, the community responded with empathy and courage. Students, faculty and staff offer their personal experiences throughout this timeline of changes and transitions.
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MARCH 2020
School community makes initial transition to all-remote learning

Kiran Mathew, junior, on going home in March: “It’s kind of a running joke between all of us that it felt like a two-week vacation. It’ll be two weeks and we’ll be back in school and everything will be normal. I remember we kept getting emails saying, this has been pushed back and now we’re not coming back until this day, and then, probably around May, we all realized, ‘Yeah, we’re not coming back.’ It felt very abrupt, and obviously we weren’t expecting to be remote for over a year and going through different schedules and all of that. This was definitely a new experience.”

Thea Mack, 3rd grader, on remote learning: “What I liked about it was that I could hang out with my pets and I could show off my pets, and my cat would always jump onto the camera and knock over my school iPad.”

APRIL 2020
Parker decides to continue all-remote learning for the remainder of the year

Nanci Moore, 5th grade teacher, on remote teaching: “Teaching remotely for the first time was like building an airplane while flying it. It forced me to combine the skill of teaching—which I have done for almost 20 years—with the anxiety-provoking addition of technology to my daily routine. Prior to the pandemic, I had never participated in a Zoom meeting. Learning how to have a successful morning meeting and teach a lesson whilst muting microphones and sharing screens was daunting task. When I look back at March 2020, there were many cringeworthy teaching moments, but I have learned so much.”

SEPTEMBER 2020
The academic year starts with all JK-8th grade students having the option to learn remotely or on campus; Upper School students all learn remotely

Vicki Lee, Upper School math teacher, on preparing for the 2020–21 year: “Like many teachers, I did a lot of classes that made me better at using NearPod, using Google Slideshows, recording and making asynchronous activities. I was using a lot of that stuff in the first semester.”

Layla Goin, 5th grader, on coming back to school: “That was fun! The first day was fun. I liked seeing all of my classmates from last year and seeing all of my friends because last year when we went on Zoom I didn’t get to talk to my friends because I usually get to talk to them at school.”

JANUARY 2021
Regular saliva screenings for all students and employees begin as another safety precaution

Kaela Rowe, Lower School counselor, on being vaccinated: “As a member of the Medical Subcommittee, I knew with certainty the school was doing everything within its power to provide the mitigation necessary to keep our community as safe as possible. Still, every morning, walking into school could feel like jumping off a cliff, trying to trust that these mitigations would keep me safe from infection and thus protect my family at home; most importantly my mother, who is part of our household. When the vaccines were approved and my eligibility approached, I was prepared to sit up all night pressing the REFRESH button to get a vaccination appointment as soon as possible. When I received the email that the school had arranged vaccinations for us, I beamend with relief and gratitude. Two weeks after my second shot, I hugged my mom for the first time since I’d been back in-person learning, and the cliff finally fell away.”
Upper School students return to on-campus learning via a hybrid schedule

Kiran Mathew, junior, on...to each other to navigate whatever changes may lie ahead.

It is clear that this pandemic was not easy; but the situation has improved. While everyone hopes for a more normal academic year for 2021–22, there is the reassurance of the community’s shared commitment to each other to navigate whatever changes may lie ahead.

Based on the shared experience of life at Parker since March 2020, there is much to celebrate.

Xiao Zhang, Upper School science teacher, on returning to on-campus teaching: "After teaching remotely from September until January, I felt I had finally made remote learning effective. So I was originally hesitant about getting back to teaching at school. And I was worried about students who would be staying remote. However, the excitement from the students who returned was infectious. The transition was both exciting and overwhelming.”

Brian Ifft, computer science teacher new to Parker in 2020–21, on a return to in-person learning in the Upper School: "Personally, remote teaching was kind of a nice little stepping stone for me because I felt a little less intimidated than being in the classroom with a bunch of students on the first day. I think I was really nervous switching to in-person because I had never had a classroom full of students where I was the only adult in the room, so that was really intimidating. But, I really, really enjoy it. It’s been really wonderful and I look forward to them coming in every day.”

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**MAY 2021**

Parker hosts a vaccination clinic in partnership with the 43rd ward

Amaleia Chronopoulos, 7th grader, on a new school year: “Readapting again probably, if we can with COVID and all, because a mass amount of us will be vaccinated for the next school year. We’ll probably be able to move between classrooms, which will be fun. … Learning about passing periods and stuff like that and adapting. Most looking forward to, honestly, passing periods. Hanging out with friends and going to different classes. I know that sounds weird, but it kind of makes me feel more adult.”

Anthony Shaker, 7th grade history teacher, on the upcoming year: “This year has given me a lot of empathy for all the transitions kids go through in the course of the day and how hard it can be to keep track of everything! All this is to say that I’m most excited to someday have my classroom as my home base again and to not have to travel throughout the school.”

Avi Grossman, 6th grader, on the transition from Intermediate to Middle School: “I think Middle School is going to be a bigger jump because there’s a lot of things different from the Intermediate and Lower Schools. I’m excited about the school part. I think if I can handle 5th grade homework and school work, I can probably handle 6th grade, I hope I can at least. I’m kind of excited, but kind of scared.”

**SEPTEMBER 2021**

Looking ahead to a new school year

Carter Wagner, class of ’21, on starting college: “I am super-excited about both social and academic aspects of college. Through social media, I have had the opportunity to meet, talk and create true friendships with my future classmates regardless of the physical distance between us. Academically, I am excited to take challenging courses that fit right into my niche. For example, a course that combines two of my interests is the politics of reality shows.”

Nsaia Pettis, senior, new to Parker in 2020–21: “During virtual learning, I constantly reminded myself that we are ALL (students and teachers at Parker) going through the pandemic together, which gave me an extra boost of confidence to go and break that awkward barrier of what to say to people because we haven’t had face-to-face conversations in over a year. I’m finally going to have the opportunity to develop platonic relationships that I was not given a fair chance to do during virtual school. I am also looking forward to inspiring more people with my story of coming in as a junior at a new school and running for office in Student Government. I want to be able to let students know that being yourself allows you to step into any room and find at least one friend no matter what the situation at hand is.”
Music Persists
By Kingsley Tang, Music Department Chair

Music persists.

This was my first thought when I watched the first in-person concert at Parker in more than a year on May 20, 2021. Through all the uncertainty, anxiety and challenges of the past year and a half, music persisted.

In times of great crisis, humans throughout history have created art. During the Holocaust, children created drawings in the Terezin Ghetto. During the height of segregation in America, African-American and Black artists created music, like "A Change Is Gonna Come," that became anthems of resistance and inspiration, and Thamsanga Mnyele created art expressing the devastating impact of apartheid in South Africa.

Although Winston Churchill was misquoted, when he supposedly responded to the idea of cutting arts budgets during World War II by stating, "Then what are we fighting for?"—the response is profound. Art is not simply a reflection of the human experience and the soul of a people; it is the driving force for empathy, equity, peace and love. It is an essential part of the human condition.

This past year and a half has been the most challenging time I have had at Parker. Assumptions that created the foundation for our music curriculum disappeared. We had to cancel musical traditions we once considered critical to our students' educational experiences. And we had to rethink every single thing we did as a Music Department.

It was never a question of “if” music would continue at Parker during the pandemic; it was a question of “how.” The unwavering support of the administrators, faculty, parents and students for music was remarkable and made this “how” a reality. The experience of teaching music during this pandemic has made its role in the school’s mission more present, more urgent and more vital than ever.

The story of how we got to that in-person performance is a story of teachers facing imagined challenges at the start of the pandemic, revisioning a music curriculum for the 2020–21 school year and adapting to medical mitigation practices that brought live music back to Parker. And it’s a story about the Joan W. Harris Visiting Music Scholar in Residence program that brought together the Parker community.

It’s a story of creativity, care and determination. A story uniquely and beautifully Parker.
Coming Together While Apart
There was no model.

When the school switched to remote learning in late March 2020, we didn’t know how to teach music remotely. I had never used Zoom or Google Meet. There were questions about the schedule, whether music class would be taught synchronously and how we would modify the music curriculum. In March, we didn’t know how long the school would be closed and if concerts would happen.

There were moments of great learning and discovery as educators. Music faculty learned how to make instructional videos for students, became familiar with powerful and effective e-learning tools for education and developed different teaching skills to make distance learning meaningful.

There were also times of challenge and frustration. Technology at times seemed to hinder learning more than it helped, and the uncertainty of the pandemic made it difficult to plan curriculum long-term.

Then there was the emotional challenge of coming to accept what we had lost. I will never forget hesitating before sending out the email canceling all the spring 2020 in-person performances. This was not a hard decision to make, but the finality of it, the harsh reality that we would not gather—as we had since the founding of this school—to share the beauty of music as a community, was something I finally had to accept. Sending that email was one of the saddest things I ever had to do at this school.
In the face of this reality, the Music Department, inspired by the students, moved forward. Lower and Intermediate School students experienced music class through videos created by faculty, who curated iPad work and online resources. The Middle and Upper School choir students created a website of student work, including videos of students singing and thoughtful reflections about music's important role in American history. Instrumental students put on a Zoom performance that welcomed family members from across the country who had never been to a Parker musical performance.

The students’ creativity didn’t stop when we canceled in-person performances. They assumed music would continue, and so it did. Provided with the “how” by the music faculty, Parker music students did what they do best: they created beauty, community and love through music.

Music Without
What do you do when the very thing that inspired you to become an educator is too risky and dangerous to do with your students? This is the question music teachers faced during the summer and at the beginning of the 2020–21 school year. The COVID-19 mitigation practices Parker introduced in the fall had a significant effect on all Parker teachers; for music teachers, this impact was all-encompassing.

JK–8th grade students started the year in small pods, staying in one classroom, preventing access to instruments in the music classroom. To address this, music teachers provided Lower School students with individual instrument bags and brought drums on carts to Intermediate School students.

Due to social distancing, movement and dancing activities were out. One of the most important ways for students to understand and interact with music is through movement, from walking to a beat to learning culturally authentic dances. So students danced at their desks and clapped their hands instead of moving around the room.

We couldn’t use wind instruments, like the recorder, so we had to drop one of the highlights of the 3rd grade year and a significant part of the 4th and 5th grade curriculum that helped students learn to read music and perform their chosen solos. We had to develop an entire curriculum to replace Middle School Band. But Upper School students, who started the year remotely, were able to continue instrumental music.
The lack of wind instruments was very difficult to process, but the inability to sing was heartbreaking.

News of a COVID-19 outbreak due to a Skagit Valley Chorale rehearsal on March 10, 2020 sent shockwaves worldwide and deeply affected music educators. The message was clear: singing was not safe. During the spring of 2020, while we were remote, we didn’t have to think about the dangers of singing as a group because we weren’t in school. When it became clear that all students except those in the Upper School would return in person in the fall, it also became clear that singing in person would not be part of music education at Parker.

For Lower and Intermediate School students, singing is the music curriculum’s foundational activity. Students learn to sing a song and about its cultural context and meaning. They may engage in a movement activity with the song and often learn to play instruments to either accompany the singing or play the song itself. Every single one of these activities centers first on the experience of singing a song.

It’s obvious how singing is central to the choral classroom experience in the Middle and Upper Schools, but it is also essential in band class. Audiation—the ability to hear a note, melody or rhythm in one’s head before playing it on an instrument—is essential to playing an instrument well.

A saxophone is not like a piano. With a piano, you press a key, and a note plays. You don’t have to hear it before you play it. If you don’t hear a note before you play the saxophone, it doesn’t matter what buttons you press; the note will not be in tune and likely have an ugly tone. Muscles in the lips, tongue and mouth and the speed of the airflow affect the instrument’s sound, so if you do not know what sounds you are trying to make, these adjustments have no direction or target. Audiation creates that target, and the way to learn audiation is to sing.

Small pods, social distancing, no wind instruments and no singing in person: this was our new normal. Approaching the fall of 2020, while we were sure of these mitigation practices, we were not sure how we would teach music. But we were determined to make music work. As Kobi Yamada writes in his book *What Do You Do with a Problem*, “Every problem has the opportunity for something good. You just have to look for it.”

Improvising

The moving pieces—the schedule, the classroom location, the COVID-19 mitigation practices—locked into place in late August 2020. After a summer of changes, anxiety and uncertainty, the first day of school was here. It was time for the real work to begin.

We started by doing what we could: listening to music, doing some movement and exploring percussion instruments. As we got comfortable moving from room to room and getting to know our students, the possibilities for something more, something different, became clearer.

The Lower and Intermediate School pods meant we could personalize the teaching. Students had more space to share their creativity and engage in exploring music. The
lack of singing gave space to explore other topics in deeper ways, like instruments, music reading and the different roles of music in society. Knowing that singing was essential, music teacher Maria Foustalieraki used recordings of her singing to help students learn and created lessons that allowed students to experience this part of the music. Her recordings were more than an instructional tool; they communicated her kindness, warmth and care as they filled the classroom with joy.

While the Lower and Intermediate Schools have a general music curriculum, the Middle School transitions to a band and choir curriculum. Without singing and wind instruments, it made more sense to create a new experience than try to replicate something we simply could not do with the COVID-19 mitigations.

We did what we always do when we need guidance: we looked to the mission. Choices are an expression of values, and values are expressed in our school’s mission; there, we found the path forward. Helping our students be productive and positive members of our democracy was more important in this past year than ever before, so we leaned in.

Music teacher Rob Denien shared his struggles to find choral music composed by people of color and led students’ exploration of diversity in choral music. Students learned drumming from different countries, including Brazil, Senegal and Ghana, providing a broader view of people around the world to help students better understand their roles as Americans in a global society.

Alec Synakowski helped students develop their authentic voices by using technology to compose, arrange and share music and bridge the
gap of misunderstanding that is so often the source of human conflict. He also challenged students to play with drumsticks on desks and chairs to exercise the muscle of creativity necessary in challenging times.

Student-teacher Meghan Andreachi led students in thinking critically about the categorization of music instruments. Students learned about the inadequacy of Eurocentric categories for instruments outside the Western music tradition and explored gender stereotypes that permeate music, limit creativity and unnecessarily exclude wonderful musicians.

Through a unit on “The Star-Spangled Banner,” students learned about the song’s complicated, racist history and how different interpretations and performances of this song intersected with racism, politics and historical events. Students discovered different American anthems, like “Lift Every Voice and Sing,” and some took on the challenge of writing new lyrics to “The Star-Spangled Banner” to reflect their views of what it means to be American.

Upper School music students continued creating music remotely. With the new challenge of producing a virtual music concert, students worked in earnest to learn parts and record themselves. The Parker Virtual Winter Musicale featured our Middle and Upper School choral students, Upper School Band students and the Upper School Orchestra. These students reminded us that the Parker community does not live in the bricks of a building but instead in our desire to experience life and create art as individuals and as a group.

The Journey Back

Outside, in gyms, spread out in the Heller Auditorium, wearing masks, Upper School music students brought in-person music back to campus in the spring. Much like other students who returned in the fall, learning how to create music with COVID-19 mitigation practices was a process, but one the faculty enthusiastically embraced. The students, happy to be back together, leaned into these challenges.

Even though we had great guidance from the Medical Advisory Committee, we weren’t sure how to do music class in person. How does choir work outside? What does it mean to wear a mask and play the trumpet? How do we re-engage with students after so much time apart? The faculty gave students no illusions. We had to work and learn together. Because Parker students have always been active partners with teachers in their education, not simply children who are lectured, they welcomed this challenge.

Upper School choir teacher Emma Castaldi envisioned a way for students to perform in person, so with less time to prepare than for any other performance in previous years, the planning began for the Upper School Spring Music Showcase.
The Medical Advisory Committee’s guidance and support were integral in creating a safe event for students to share music with their families. The event took place outside with a limited audience and performers wore masks and were spaced apart.

To make an outdoor evening event possible, the Music Department partnered with BlackOak Technical Productions, which provided amplification, sound design and lighting. Parker Theatre and Technical Manager Tom Moster coordinated the work with BlackOak and provided critical support.

The Upper School Spring Music Showcase featured the Upper School Orchestra, Upper School Jazz Band, Advanced Wind Ensemble and Advanced Choral Ensemble (Grape Jam).

Music persists in a time of crisis as love and hope persist. It is an essential communication tool that connects people in ways words fail. Music helps us better understand ourselves and each other. It creates the empathy that brings us closer to each other and the beauty that inspires us to move forward through dark times.

Parker’s Upper School music students have proved, even in the most challenging times, music matters. At the center of this feeling is the knowledge that students matter as musicians and people to our community.

The Vision
Teachers want to return to “normal.” That’s not going to happen this year, and that’s not necessarily a bad thing. “Normal” has its flaws, and our work is never about returning to the past but instead envisioning a better future.

One of the most important things we recognized, which helped us get through this pandemic, was our inability to replicate what we did before the pandemic. Accepting this impossibility was freeing. Similarly, we need to accept that what we lost in the past year and a half can’t be made up this year.

It was impossible to focus on singing technique and instrumental technique over Zoom in the same way you can in person. Students spent far less time learning how to harmonize and play with their peers, and in this respect, they will be behind students from previous years. Rising 7th graders will start band and choir, which they would have started in 6th grade in previous years. The lack of singing in Lower and Intermediate School will affect their vocal development.

There will be deficits we can measure in objective ways, and likely, students will perform less difficult music in the next couple of years. But that’s okay because a song’s level of difficulty has never been the measure of success for Parker music students. I understand the desire to “catch students up” on perceived learning loss, create some kind of “boot camp.” But there are more meaningful things we can do.
The economic effects of the pandemic have been devastating to music all around the world. Musicians have become unemployed, funding has been cut, many music organizations had to shut down, and many will not reopen. More than ever, music needs support in our culture, and so do our music students. What we do for our music students as educators is what we all should do for our country as citizens.

One way to help our students grow as musicians is to understand their craft and commitment and ways that music education can be integral to revitalizing music in our school community and beyond. It is in having a purpose that reflects the needs of society that our students will find the meaning and motivation to grow as musicians. And as they build themselves, they are rebuilding what we have lost.

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The in-person performance on May 20 resulted from the faculty’s determination and students’ commitment to music throughout the entire pandemic. This commitment to music was part of Parker’s commitment to democracy and the souls of our students. More than a reminder of what we have missed in the past year, the students made this event a beautiful vision of what we have to look forward to at Parker in the future.
The Westerlies

There was no hesitation. When I asked The Westerlies if they would be comfortable following through with being our Joan W. Harris Visiting Music Scholars in Residence in spring 2020, they were all in. Working with our school remotely, combined with a lack of clarity on how to collaborate during a pandemic, was not part of the agreement. The main reason they were so enthusiastically willing to make this partnership work was due to this: Who they are reflects who we are.

The Westerlies are a renowned brass quartet. More than that, they are individuals dedicated to celebrating diversity in music and creating inclusive and inspiring music. As their social equity statement reads: “The Westerlies are committed to dismantling racism, sexism and economic inequality in their field and aim to reflect their values of diversity and inclusion in the music they make and the spaces they occupy.” This statement reflects an essential part of our school’s mission.

Their work with students fostered creativity and community. The Westerlies laid the groundwork for norms of collective composition and establishing an improvisation practice. Student improvisation and composition work aimed to generate ideas in a non-judgmental space. All exercises focused on increasing mindfulness. A sense of play and openness to possibility allowed students to move beyond simple scale ideas into more colorful timbres on their brass instruments.

The Westerlies helped students explore the ways non-traditional notation systems can influence composition and performance. With the whiteboard technology enabled in Zoom, students could practice playing melodies corresponding to various shapes, doodles and cartoons drawn by The Westerlies band members. Using a student composition depicting a bike ride on a busy city street, each player (The Westerlies and Parker brass musicians) took a pass at drawing and performing how they thought said bike ride might sound. Students were encouraged to consider how the practice of transcribing their works and rotating them through graphic methods might enhance their understanding of effective communication methods.

The Westerlies created three wonderful Virtual Morning Ex (MX) videos that delved deep into their creative diversity and equity work. They shared aspects of their lives beyond being musicians and helped students see that embracing different facets of identity is essential to personal growth. Educational, entertaining and inspiring, these Virtual MX videos were a musical highlight of the year. View these experiences at fwparker.org/thewesterliesmxes.

For Parker and The Westerlies, the needs of society influence the work with students, and we need to revitalize music in this time of crisis.
Culminating this year’s Visiting Music Scholar program was a Zoom event The Westerlies presented to the Parker community featuring live performances of compositions, including students’ contributions, as well as videos and discussion. Although we could not come together in person, the event did allow something wonderful to happen: parents, alumni, parents emeriti, faculty, administrators, staff and students joined together online. This wide range of participants was a reminder of the essential nature of music to all parts of the Parker community. For it is these shared values that make us a community.

We were excited to invite The Westerlies to continue as the Visiting Music Scholars for the 2021–22 school year. We wanted to build on the significant work that took place and have the opportunity to come together in person. The Westerlies enthusiastically accepted our invitation, ready to engage further in the mission of our school.

When I talked to The Westerlies musician Willem de Koch about continuing our work, I shared that donor Joan Harris believed we had an incredible and important opportunity to use this initiative to educate about the effect of the pandemic on music and musicians. Willem felt this idea profoundly, and we both committed to bringing this into the work we would do together. For Parker and The Westerlies, the needs of society influence the work with students, and we need to revitalize music in this time of crisis. The Westerlies did just that at Parker this past school year, and we look forward to having them help empower our students to develop the tools to revitalize music in America when they reprise their role as Parker’s Joan W. Harris Visiting Music Scholars in Residence for the 2021–22 academic year. Their public performance is scheduled Wednesday, May 11, 2022. More information is available at fwparker.org/harris.

—Kingsley Tang
New Leadership Joins Parker

Transitions

As Parker begins a new academic year, the school welcomes three highly qualified and respected individuals to its leadership team: Head of Upper School Chris Arnold, Head of Intermediate and Middle Schools Vahn Phayprasert and Assistant Principal Priyanka Rupani. They share their thoughts below, and you can learn more about them by viewing their video introductions at fwparker.org/newleaders.

Chris Arnold

Head of Upper School

With 15 years of experience in education in several capacities, Chris Arnold was most recently assistant head of school at The Chicago Academy for the Arts, where he previously was Theatre Department chair. He also served as chair of the Creative Arts Department at Deer Path Middle School in Lake Forest, theatre program manager at the Old Town School of Folk Music and teacher of speech and drama, theatre and English at several area middle and high schools. He is certified as an educational specialist in administration and supervision from National Louis University, where he also earned an M.A. in teaching English (secondary education). He has an M.F.A. in directing from the University of Memphis and a B.S. in acting from Illinois State University.

Arnold talked about his commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion: “As a student of color, I didn’t have those mirrors or those windows, so I’m excited to be at a school that has it not only in theory, but in practice and very much makes it part of their mission statement.”

What appealed to you most about joining Parker as an administrative leader?

I’ve spent a lot of time finding and developing my voice as a teacher and administrator. My goal as an educator is to create compassionate thought leaders for a better tomorrow. Also, I want individuals with soft skills who will prevent computers from taking all the jobs from humans. I’ve found two guiding lights: The 4 C’s of 21st Century Education (Collaboration, Communication, Creativity and Critical Thinking) and DEI (Diversity, Equity and Inclusion). For years I’ve been working to incorporate these ideas into a school setting that supported them but was not fully equipped to embrace them. Parker is this school, and I’m excited to work with a community—teachers, students, families and administration—committed to progressive education with DEI at its center.
What do you think your background in education brings to the school?
I’ve had a variety of roles in a variety of schools. My career started at an independent school, The Chicago Academy for the Arts (CAA); I taught high school and middle school in large suburban schools and returned to CAA to work as a senior administrator. Through these roles, I’ve developed a foundation in social-emotional learning and restorative justice to help students navigate the challenges of adolescence and high school. I started as a theatre teacher. Arts education and progressive education walk a similar path.

Working in theatre is about building a community where people feel safe to be themselves and take risks. I use a similar approach when working with a school community.

What are you most excited about during your first year at Parker?
I cannot wait to see teachers in their element, students interacting with other students and Parker traditions I’ve only heard about in discussion. I’m ready to go back to school, and I’m thrilled to take this historic step into the new normal at a school that’s been on my “one day I hope to work there” list.

What do you foresee as your greatest challenge during your first year at Parker?
COVID is a moving target, and it’s going to keep me on my toes. I have the last year working in a school, but that’s—for the most part—the same experience everyone else has. I don’t know what I don’t know. More than logistics, I’m worried about the emotional and physical health of the teachers and students. Turnover in education is rampant right now, and one of my goals is to create a safe space where teachers can teach and students can learn.

What is your approach to addressing sensitive topics that may be controversial or provoke differences in opinions among the parent community itself or between the parent community and the administration?
I listen and seek perspectives from both sides of the challenge. I strive to have as much empathy as possible. Depending on the urgency, I give the situation its due diligence, so I feel confident that I thought it through properly and honestly act in the community’s best interest when I decide or guide a decision.

“As a student of color, I didn’t have those mirrors or those windows, so I’m excited to be at a school that has it not only in theory but in practice and very much makes it part of their mission statement.”
What appealed to you most about joining Parker as an administrative leader?
The responsibility and role of Division Head for grades 4–8 is an extremely important role; the leader sets the tone, they are essentially the architect for the social, emotional and intellectual growth of the division. The opportunity to engage with the many stakeholder groups to include Parker students—all of whom value and carry the mission of embracing diversity and inclusion—is exciting!

It’s an honor to have been selected for this role. I look at the position in high regard. A notable standout was the Mission Statement; not only is it posted on our walls, but I have witnessed our adult and student community model their best selves and genuinely care for one another.

What do you think your background in education brings to the school?
Throughout my professional journey and work with many families, I desire to see EVERY student succeed and flourish. My past experiences have taught me the importance of nurturing and uncovering the unique gifts and talents of each student. My hope is to instill confidence and help students make connections and ultimately be ready to embrace life beyond Parker’s doors. I’m passionate about it, and I strongly believe that students should be encouraged to develop resilience, have courage when faced with adversity and develop strong academic, social and emotional skills to enhance their well-being and sense of purpose in life.
“I’m driven by my desire to see every student succeed and flourish. Our world needs outstanding citizens who have the skills and desire to make a difference and bring about change locally, nationally and globally.”

My past experiences have taught me that exceptional education entails a passionate, dedicated and committed staff who values each other, as well as each individual student, and teaches not only the curriculum but beyond—looking at the whole child (my commitment is to foster and promote that culture). I’m also committed to setting a positive tone, a culture and climate of trust, care, inclusivity and intellectual growth. Last, it will always be my commitment to start and end with, “What is in the best interest of our students?”

What are you most excited about during your first year at Parker?
I look forward to getting to know all members of the Parker community: teachers, assistant teachers, support staff from the classroom to the Tech Department, parents, stakeholder groups and, most important, to meet and get to know each and every single student. During my short time, I’ve had a very warm welcome. It’s evident that there is a sense of community, connection, enthusiasm and passion. I look forward to the support of fellow administrators in the Lower and Upper Schools, as well as our Principal and Assistant Principal, in fulfilling our vision, mission and goals together. I look forward to building upon the successes of Parker School, including a history of high academic achievement, collegial campus practices and parent support and collaboration.

What do you foresee as your greatest challenge during your first year at Parker?
Although we have learned many lessons from the pandemic, I believe that the greatest challenge will be the unknown. From past administrative experiences and conversations with Parker administrators, I believe our hope is to thoughtfully plan for a great school opening, but there is always an unknown factor that surprises us. With the COVID-19 situation shifting and changing in terms of cases and medical guidelines, the unknown, I feel, will be the greatest challenge.

What is your approach to addressing sensitive topics that may be controversial or provoke differences in opinions among the parent community itself or between the parent community and the administration?
First and foremost, I believe in the importance of building strong relationships. A strong foundation, grounded in shared, core values and professional beliefs, allows discussion of crucial/sensitive topics to be meaningful and respectful. I also start with framing the idea that we all have our students’ best interests in mind, and when we begin with that positive intention, we then can embark on conversations and topics that may be controversial in nature. With that said, I think it’s important to listen to different perspectives, try to understand another point of view. This may be a one-on-one conversation or a carefully designed group conversation with clearly identified deliverables.
A focus on diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) highlights Priyanka Rupani’s background. She joins Parker after serving as director of diversity, equity and inclusion at the University of Chicago Laboratory Schools (also her alma mater) for three years. She was director of diversity, equity and social justice at the Friends School of Baltimore and has taught 9th grade African-American history and 9th grade math. She was co-chair of the National Association of Independent Schools People of Color Conference in 2020, serves as a faculty member for the Student Diversity Leadership Conference and consults for the Glasgow Group on DEI-related topics.

Identifying as a “progressive educator,” Priyanka said, “Parker’s mission, philosophy and all the values the school names as central to education were super-attractive. It’s wonderful to see a school name those things on external communication, then see them all in practice when I visited.”

What appealed to you most about joining Parker as an administrative leader?
I have admired Parker as a progressive school for a long time. In particular, I see Parker as a school that deeply values student voice and agency, which aligns with my personal educational values. To join this school in the role of Assistant Principal was particularly appealing because it felt like the perfect next step in my educational career, at a school that would both allow me to grow and allow itself to grow from me. I am humbled to be part of a school that truly feels like a community—one with rich traditions and a willingness to continue to innovate, grow and change.

What do you think your background in education brings to the school?
I bring a depth of knowledge and experience in DEI work. In particular, I have experience integrating DEI work into the fabric of schools to deeply connect the work to the day-to-day experience of students, faculty, staff and families. Through my work in independent schools and as a consultant, I have been able to empower students to lead DEI workshops for their peers and faculty/staff, steward faculty and staff professional development in areas of DEI and social-emotional learning (SEL), co-create curriculum with teachers that is identity-affirming and design programs and processes that allow for equity work to take hold in systemic ways in schools. I also bring a passion for teaching and learning, a skillset in community building and the lived experience of being a student of color in independent schools.
What are you most excited about during your first year at Parker?
I’m excited to connect with all members of the Parker community. I believe deeply in the power and importance of relationships, so I’m looking forward to cultivating and nurturing genuine connections with faculty, staff, students, families, alumni and other community members. I believe in the power of story-sharing and vulnerability as important tools for connection and trust-building. I look forward to becoming immersed in the Parker community by listening and learning as much as I can. I am also excited to help plan our series of DEI-focused conferences that bring together students and adults from around the city and nation.

What do you foresee as your greatest challenge during your first year at Parker?
Collectively, I think one of our biggest challenges is continuing to navigate school during a pandemic. We have all experienced the pain and loss of the last year and a half, so I hope we can work together to prioritize wellness and self-care for our community this year. Also, in transitioning into any new school, there is so much information to learn about the nuances of Parker. I am hopeful I can strike a healthy balance between listening and learning as much as I can and contributing to the growth and development of the school during a year that is still full of unknowns.

What is your approach to addressing sensitive topics that may be controversial or provoke differences in opinions among the parent community itself or between the parent community and the administration?
As I mentioned in my video, I lead with love. The work of schools can be beautifully messy, and engaging in conversations about topics that elicit a variety of opinions is a perfect example of that. Because of my background as a DEI practitioner, I am equipped with many dialogue-facilitation tools that can allow for community members to both share authentically and listen deeply to others. My approach to addressing these topics starts with returning to a foundation of our mission and values and a belief that healthy conflict can be a necessary experience for meaningful learning.

“I believe deeply in the power and importance of relationships, so I’m looking forward to cultivating and nurturing genuine connections with faculty, staff, students, families, alumni and other community members.”
A Fond Farewell to Three Longtime Parker Faculty and Staff

Transitions At the close of the 2020–21 academic year, Parker paid tribute to three well-known and highly respected members of the faculty and staff: Junior Kindergarten Grade Head Lisa Nielsen, Physical Education teacher Pat Pagnucco and The Joan Feitler ’49 Director of College Counseling Susan Weingartner. Here’s a look back at—and from—each of these accomplished individuals, who will always be part of the Francis W. Parker School legacy.

Lisa Nielsen came to Parker as a Senior Kindergarten Grade Head in fall 2004 and shifted to Junior Kindergarten in 2011, where she remained through this past year. Her other roles have included Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Coordinator, Diversity Support Coordinator, SEED Facilitator and advisor to the Students of Color Affinity group.

Favorite memories: It’s difficult to pinpoint one or two special memories because each day, there are so many moments that are special: seeing the joy on the face of a child who suddenly realizes the accomplishments he/she has made—the “I did it!” moments are so wonderful. I learned so much from my “honey bunnies” each day. I guess if I had to reflect upon one special moment with my students, it would be the hatching of ducks. Each spring, as a part of our science unit of life cycles, we hatched mallard ducks. So many life lessons as well as curricular subjects were included within this process, such as math, science and literacy. But the most valuable lesson experienced during this 28-day process was patience. I always looked forward to ordering the eggs, setting up the incubator and taking this life cycle journey with the children. The anticipation and finally the exuberance the children experienced while watching the first hatching is priceless. Well, the cleaning of the duck container wasn’t exciting, but part of the process.

How Parker has changed: During the years I’ve been at Parker, a deliberate effort has been made to allow for conversations related to diversity, equity and inclusion. These conversations, as difficult as they may be for some, were instrumental in setting goals in place for the Parker community. Professional development opportunities for faculty and staff
members were available throughout each year as well as opportunities for families to become engaged in this process. It’s not a one-and-done lesson. This is a daily journey and a commitment each of us must embrace for obvious reasons. The effort to become more diverse as it relates to families of color has changed during my years at Parker, and it is my hope that our reality and purpose remain steadfast. I love the quote by Maya Angelou, “It is time for parents to teach young people early on that in diversity, there is beauty, and there is strength.”

**Retirement plans:**
I’m still trying to figure this out! After 45 years of teaching, it’s going to be an adjustment. Of course, my general response would be to travel, purge and organize my home, catch up with friends, movies, books, etc., but one immediate goal has been to journal this next chapter of my life. I’m not certain what the next chapter will be, but I will have 45 wonderful years of teaching memories to last a lifetime.

**Pat Pagnucco** taught Physical Education (PE) at Parker for more than 40 years, beginning in fall 1978. She was also Athletics Director from fall 1993 through spring 2011 and coached numerous sports during her tenure. She advised the Social Committee for 18 years, served on the 9th grade Community Connections team and spent many summers teaching as part of the Parker Summers program.

**Favorite memories:**
I think most of my best memories have to be with my field hockey teams. Winning conference titles is high on my list; in 1999, we won the conference title again, but we also qualified for the Illinois High School Field Hockey Association State Final Four. It was truly a wonderful experience that I will never forget. No other field hockey team has made it to the finals since 1999. I had a picture of that team in my office, and I always remember that year fondly.
How Parker has changed:
Parker has changed mainly because of the increased enrollment. I used to know every car in the parking lot, we knew every faculty and staff member, and, honestly, I knew most every student. The school was more intimate, you had a full understanding of community and supporting each other.

Retirement plans:
My retirement will be split between Chicago and Palm Desert, California. My husband is also retired, so we will enjoy the winters in the desert and Chicago when it is 120 degrees in the desert. We also love to travel. I think our first trip will be back to New Zealand and Australia; we have an airline ticket on New Zealand Air that we need to use by 2022 since we missed our trip in July 2020.

Susan Weingartner led Parker’s College Counseling Office for 25 years, with her position endowed as The Joan Feitler ’49 Director of College Counseling in 2017. She served on the Educational Council for her entire tenure and established relationships with those outside her field, something she truly enjoyed. She sponsored an art club with art teacher Debbie Cole during the lunch period, assisted with the senior retreat, chaperoned the prom and joined a 9th grade service trip to help build houses.

Favorite memories:
There were many “ah ha” moments when I learned something, and naturally, hundreds of happy memories of students heading off to colleges that felt just right for them. But it is the daily occurrences that have brought me the most joy all of these years: those times when I could just feel a student become comfortable enough to reveal their authentic self and begin to understand why it matters; finding little Post-it notes from them: “We appreciate you, we love you, no stress today”; and every
One of the earlier goals was to expand the number of colleges our students knew about and the number of colleges who knew about our students. I reached out to hundreds of colleges that first year, encouraging them to visit Parker to see for themselves how incredible our students were. And they did.

With a major expansion of the school building, I was able to make decisions regarding the arrangement of the College Counseling “suite” to provide a more welcoming space for the students and the large number of college visitors (and even the expanding number of college banners!). We hosted nearly all of the college rep visits within our space, showed college videos (yes, VHS tapes on our VCR!) and had desktops for students to work on. Remember, everything was printed back then: all college viewbooks, catalogs and applications. Each application was typed or handwritten, addressed and mailed—an average of four or five per student. As the class sizes increased, the number of applications doubled, and policies and procedures continued to change and become more complicated. Thankfully we have evolved into a Parker College Counseling Team, not an individual—and, the best one in the country, if I do say so myself, with the best students in the country, which hasn’t changed in my 25 years!

Retirement plans:
I want to be a more available grandma, wife, mother, daughter, sister, friend, mentor—and a more active artist and activist—particularly in the areas of equity and access to education.
New Members, New Roles for Alumni Association Leadership

Transitions  In this year of transitions, Parker’s Alumni Association is welcoming the next generation of leadership, as new, younger members join the Alumni Association Board or take on new roles. Several of them share their reasons for deepening their involvement in Parker’s alumni outreach efforts.

Anzetta Cherry ’15, who serves as Alumni Association Secretary, also chaired her class’s five-year reunion. She lives in Chicago and is starting her third year on the Parker PM staff this fall. “I joined the Alumni Association for several reasons, one being that I saw that there wasn’t a lot of representation from recent graduating classes. I wanted to make sure, as Parker alumni, we had a place/person who represented newer graduating classes. I also saw there was a lack of diversity, and my goal when I came back to Parker was to make sure there was representation for all. As an alumna who returned to Parker right after graduating, I also felt I held a unique perspective that I wanted to share with other alumni.”

Nicolae Florin Dorlea ’13 is co-chairing the Alumni Giving Committee. He is a project manager for Capria Edge, a platform for investment fund managers. “I started to think about Parker’s Alumni Association during a pandemic-induced reflection, which I’m sure a lot of people went through when they started to ask questions about what’s important to them. A recurring theme for me was community. The Parker community is strong and growing in numbers each year the senior class graduates, and I believe it can be strengthened further by the activities of the Alumni Association.

“The Alumni Giving Committee position is an awesome responsibility because a) my current responsibilities include fundraising for Capria Fund II, a Global South VC Tech Fund, and b) it involves getting to know our community and the values our alumni are willing to support. I hope to get to know the Parker alumni community and to create a venue for the community to get to know each other. It’s only natural that we all live independent lives, but our journeys are intertwined, and I would like to find synergies between alumni and connect those who have similar passions and aspirations. Fundraising is not about the dollar amount; it’s about participation. Our alumni should feel confident and proud to support their younger peers in their K–12 journeys.”

Blair Fischer ’11, previously Alumni Association Secretary, is now Vice President and chaired her class’s five- and 10-year reunions. She is director of national partnerships for Westwood One, the largest audio network in America. “I have been involved in the Alumni Association pretty much from the time I graduated from the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 2015. I always knew I wanted to stay involved with Parker, given how much I loved my four years in the Upper School. Between the friends
I made for life and teachers I have stayed close to, I wanted to feel like I still had a connection to the school post-graduation. As VP, I hope to help grow the involvement and activity on FWParker Connect [Parker’s networking website]. I think the network the Parker community offers is unique and so powerful, and all alumni should feel they can take advantage of making connections within it. I’ve always been passionate about helping plan reunions because I love when our grade comes back together. It’s always so much fun to see what people are up to this many years later, so I plan to stay super-involved in that process."

Carolina Schwartz ’14 is co-chair of the Events Committee, after serving as a committee member last year. She is program assistant for Student Transition Services at Northeastern Illinois University. “I decided to become part of the Alumni Association because I wanted to give back to the school. I felt that Parker provided me with such wonderful opportunities, and I wanted to be able to show my gratitude.”

“The Alumni Office is thrilled to see younger alumni giving back by getting involved and taking on leadership roles in the Alumni Association,” said Assistant Director of the Alumni Office Maggi Valdes Steib ’84. “Given my ongoing work with the Alumni Association DEI Committee and Alumni of Color group, I feel especially proud and excited to see such a diverse group of alumni working on behalf of the alumni community.

“I encourage alumni of all ages and backgrounds to get involved. Please visit fwparker.org/alumni-association to learn more.”
Many Parker students, when considering their primary influences early in life, will mention a beloved teacher or counselor. But it’s impressive to think that Parker alumni who graduated more than 70 years ago still talk about the impact of teacher (and later principal) Jack Ellison.

Joining Parker’s faculty in 1937, Ellison taught social studies and English, was the freshman Grade Head, served as dean of faculty from 1963 to 1967 and led the school as its fifth principal from 1967 to 1972. In the late 1940s, he introduced a course in Cultural Anthropology, the first of its kind in a U.S. high school. In his 1961 syllabus for the course, he wrote, “At the same time that the students learn to respect the ways of life of other and quite different peoples, they must also move forward in developing and respecting a value system of their own.”*  

Ellison met his wife, Emily Whipple, when she joined Parker’s English Department faculty in 1946. Their children were Parker students: David graduated in the class of 1970, and Jane attended through her sophomore year in the class of 1971.  

In 2005, shortly after Ellison’s death, the class of 1955 established The Jack Ellison Scholarship Fund to provide financial assistance to Parker families who need support. This class held one of the first reunions that shifted from in-person to virtual events in fall 2020, and their reunion gifts went to the Ellison Scholarship Fund. The classes of 1950 and 1951 held virtual reunions the following spring, as did the class of 1970, and alumni in each class made contributions to the Fund.

“At the same time that the students learn to respect the ways of life of other and quite different peoples, they must also move forward in developing and respecting a value system of their own.”*
“At these events, the alumni reflected on their experiences since Parker, and they’ve remained lifelong learners,” said Assistant Director of the Alumni Office Maggi Valdes Steib ’84. “They’re nearly 90 years old and taking classes, participating in book clubs, writing plays. And Jack Ellison’s name kept coming up, as did Emily’s. He touched a lot of lives.”

**Linda Horween Blumberg ’50 recalled her time at Parker and Ellison’s impact:**

In those days Parker was a very small school in the old building, and our class was never more than about 34 students, all of us taught by a group of what has to have been the greatest group of teachers ever. And Mr. Ellison was among them.

That first year Mr. Ellison taught the first Anthropology class in any high school, as far as we knew, and it was fascinating. And I remember lots of questions and discussions about whether there is such a thing as human nature and what are common human needs. We also studied Egypt, and some years later, I told the Ellisons about my glorious trip to Egypt, which I had waited all those years to experience after our study.

In our senior year, when the faculty was always looking for ways to keep graduating students engaged, Mr. Ellison initiated a program that involved visits to Chicago settlement houses. We were divided into small groups and my group went to the Chicago Commons. We were driven around the neighborhood by the director and learned about the makeup of the community, and then we visited the Commons. I think this was the beginning of my interest in becoming a social worker. Some of us volunteered there after this experience.

I could go on and on about this man of enormous integrity, imagination and teaching skills. Jack and Emily became lifelong friends and mentors. In later years, we traded stories about our children and talked about the books we were reading and the political and social issues of our times. I miss them, but they are so much a part of me and my family.

**Blumberg’s sister, Katherine Horween Burkman ’51, expressed equally profound sentiments:** Jack Ellison so influenced me and had such impact on my life that I have to think of him not just as a fine teacher, but also as a second father. In [his Anthropology course] we learned how different cultures evolved, we saw how different religions developed, and we debated about how different values could be relative or universal. We also learned how to see through advertising pitches to what might be behind them. And of course, he had the good sense to marry Emily, who, as a second mother, took care of the rest! Smart, kind and delightful, Jack Ellison was one special teacher and one special dude.

To make a contribution to The Jack Ellison Scholarship Fund, or another fund of your choosing, visit fwparker.org/makeagift.

*From an interview with Ellison in Parker Magazine, Spring 2002. To read the whole article, visit fwparker.org/ellisoninterview.*
Kindergarteners Lead Peaceful March
After learning what social justice looks like in the world around us, JK students participated in a peaceful march on campus complete with colorful and creative signage depicting people, places and things that were meaningful to each of them.

Celebrating the 100th Day of School
To celebrate the 100th day of school, each JK student made a chain link of 10 circles of paper. Then all 10 kids in each pod combined their chains to make one with 100 links. As a culminating activity, all three JK classes of two pods each connected 600 chain links to see how far it stretched across the field.

Roller Coaster Engineers in 8th Grade
To introduce students to the concepts of energy, potential and kinetic, and the conservation of energy, 8th grade science teachers challenged them to create the longest marble roller coaster they could.

Sixth Graders Establish First Seed Library
As a component of their studies related to climate change and renewable energy, 6th grade students potted more than 100 basil and tomato seedlings as part of establishing the school’s first perpetual seed library.
Middle School Flowers of Gratitude
As part of an outreach activity, 6th grade students assembled and delivered custom floral arrangements to members of the school community to demonstrate their gratitude.

A Hybrid Introduction to the Letter “O”
SK teachers Dana O’Brien and Nanci Moore used their tech skills to orchestrate some dynamic hands-on learning when teaching students about the letter O, using curriculum involving a real octopus. Students first viewed videos and read books to learn more about the octopus. Their teachers used Zoom to connect their classrooms in exploring a real octopus before inviting small groups of students to gather in person with their specimen.

Sixth Graders Create Turbine
As part of the 6th grade study of climate change, students created a wind turbine using a water bottle with simple materials and demonstrated that motion alone actually is capable of producing enough power to operate a device.

Student Scientists Scrutinize the Brain
Seventh grade scientists had some hands-on experience with the three-dimensional structure of sheep brains in a recent lab involving the time-tested scientific process of dissection.
Students Launch Diversity Conference

Recent graduates Leila Griffin, Olivia Hanley, Aziza Mabrey-Wakefield and Asha Wright worked together since last summer with their peers from Loyola Academy to plan and orchestrate the inaugural Young Women of Color (YWOC) Symposium, which provided a virtual space for nearly 200 young women of color from more than 20 schools around the city and country to explore and celebrate their identities.

Window Painting Tradition Continues

Ninth grade students and parents had a chance to participate in the school’s time-honored tradition of painting windows around campus in April this year and celebrated the Parker community, including the class of 2021, front-line workers and school employees.

Upper School Scholastic Bowl Secures Regional Title

In its fourth season, members of the Upper School Scholastic Bowl team clinched the program’s first-ever IHSA Class 1A regional title, qualifying two teams at the Small School Nationals with one appearance at the tournament playoff.

ROV Team Sees International Competition

In its third year of existence and second year in competition (due to COVID restrictions last year), Parker’s ROV (Remotely Operated Vehicles) or Underwater Robotics team won the regional competition hosted by the Shedd Aquarium and advanced to international competition in Tennessee in August.
Earth Day
In observation of Earth Day, Upper School students in Ryan Zaremba's Climate Science class cleaned up the streets of Lincoln Park surrounding campus to enhance the neighborhood.

Musical Performance Returns to Campus
Working closely with the school’s Medical Subcommittee, the Music Department hosted its first live, in-person music event in more than a year. The Upper School Spring Music Showcase featured the Upper School Orchestra, Upper School Jazz Band, Advanced Wind Ensemble and Advanced Choral Ensemble (Grape Jam).

Faculty Filmmakers’ Second Movie Premieres at Local Festival
After collaborating on their first film, Last Believer, Upper School art teacher Travis Chandler and Upper School history teacher Dan Greenstone have released their second film, Far Out West, which premiered at The Blue Whiskey Independent Film Festival in July 2021.
Nick Saracino

In talking with Nick Saracino about Parker as the right school for his children, it’s close to impossible to separate that perspective from his 20 years as the school’s director of communications. He has been so embedded in the life of the school—well before his children were born—that there clearly was no other place he would choose to send Sophia (7th grade) and Francesca (4th grade) when they came along.

“When I was working here as a non-parent, I felt this was the type of place that could make me want to have kids,” he said.

Saracino grew up in Berkley, a suburb of Detroit, and attended private religious schools. “My father, who was a dentist, still lives in my childhood home, near his Catholic grade school, which was also my Catholic grade school,” he described. “When I go home to visit, I actually sleep in my childhood bed!”

His religious education continued at the all-boys University of Detroit Jesuit High School and later Marquette University in Milwaukee. “I thought I wanted to be a doctor so I went there for the sciences, but I realized what I actually loved was the way my high school taught science,” he said. “The big seminars, impersonal labs and lack of opportunity to ask questions of teachers—I didn’t feel I was mastering anything. So my dad said, ‘You need to do something you feel good at, something creative.’” Marquette had a marketing and communications department, so he double majored in business and communications.

“I could not believe how alive with activity this school was after hours. That’s what made me want to work here. I so looked forward to coming to Parker after my work at IQ ended for the day.”

Saracino started as an intern at an advertising agency in Milwaukee, then moved to Chicago to join The Grand Group as an assistant account executive. “I got the job because I hit it off with a kid in science classes at Marquette whose aunt was a partner in the firm,” he said. “I drove down from Milwaukee for what I thought was a simple career conversation, and within 10 minutes of being there, I was sold.” In this role, he developed his abilities as an account executive and was part of a movement within the company charged with embracing emerging digital trends and technologies in the industry. “When I first began, the creative studio was filled with technical artists illustrating, painting and shooting real film. It wasn’t long before many conventional artists were replaced with computers—a difficult transition to be a part of.”
After an international firm bought out The Grand Group, the company swelled in size and the culture began to change. Saracino began moonlighting with a former Grand creative director who started his own firm. “He was a fun, creative guy but knew nothing about a spreadsheet, a budget, a timeline. As his clients grew, he offered me a commission on the work and hired a creative, so that became IQ Creative Communications.”

One of IQ’s pro bono clients was Parker. Saracino worked with his predecessor at Parker, Alex Stewart, for almost two years. “I could not believe how alive with activity this school was after hours. That’s what made me want to work here. I so looked forward to coming to Parker after my work at IQ ended for the day.” The realities of client-based agency work were also wearing on him. “Working with Parker people was refreshing,” he related. “They were invested in the projects we were working on in a more deep and meaningful way than my other clients, and the work just felt good.”

When Stewart left the school, Saracino did his homework and investigated the communications resources available at other area independent schools and worked with then-Head of Upper School Dan Frank to lobby then-Principal Don Monroe for the job. “I needed a change; I thought that even a not-so-good day here would be better than what I was doing. I had just bought my first property, and all I wanted was to be able to afford it. When Dr. Monroe agreed to my terms, he predicted I wouldn’t last here more than a year. But—20 years later, here I am!”
Within a year or two of Saracino joining the Parker staff, his childhood sweetheart, Susie, who had come with him to Chicago to study at the School of the Art Institute, began working in Parker PM. And Parker was a factor in the timing of his wedding proposal. “The school asked me to chaperone the prom, and I proposed to Susie along the way,” he recalled. “I had told the kids I was going to do it, and I knew they’d spill the beans if I didn’t do it before we arrived. So after we parked, I got down on one knee and proposed in front of Buckingham Fountain.”

At first, both Saracinos agreed that they did not want children. “We were Goth kids of the 90s,” he said. “My wife and I did not enjoy our own educational upbringing because of the environments we were in—very rigid, restrictive and not at all expansive in terms of the types of things we learned or the types of people and experiences we were exposed to. Coming from a divorced household was a big deal at a Catholic school.”

But as they settled into their work at Parker, they started to imagine a future with children. “I realized this was an institution with a lot of integrity. It’s OK to admit mistakes. And it’s OK to say no; as Dr. Monroe used to say, ‘A no today is not a no tomorrow.’ It was such a nice no! I saw all those things and thought, ‘Maybe having children wouldn’t be so scary.’”

Having Parker as an option made them even more confident. “As we got more established, we started to imagine a future with children and wanted them to have access to an education and a place like this,” Saracino said. “I wanted my children not to have the same experience my wife and I had. We’re principled and spiritual but not religious; the idea of community, the diversity of perspectives and people, really appealed to us. And when the school started including staff in the tuition remission benefit, that made a difference.”

“I realized this was an institution with a lot of integrity. It’s OK to admit mistakes. And it’s OK to say no; as Dr. Monroe used to say, ‘A no today is not a no tomorrow.’ It was such a nice no! I saw all those things and thought, ‘Maybe having children wouldn’t be so scary.’”

Saracino felt he had an advantage working at the school and learning what the place was all about. “In my early years, I realized this was an educational environment that reflects the world around us. I was in the trenches—I remember my first Mexican Fiesta in 1st grade, Japanese Tea Room in 2nd grade, Woodland People Day in 3rd grade, Greek play in 4th grade and more—I was blown away. I learned about progressive education and what that looks like. It was so different from the way I learned: ‘read, write and repeat.’ Yeah, I wanted this for my kids. You learn how to articulate for yourself, you learn how to learn. I had learned not to ask why. But here, kids are encouraged to question as a way of learning, as a way of understanding what the teachers are trying to teach. People learn through experience—learning by doing! As a parent and an employee, I get to see it work.”
The experience his daughters have had at Parker have validated his (and Susie’s) decision. “I am fortunate to have two wonderful kids who are very different,” he shared. “Both my girls learned remotely all year because there’s immuno-compromise in our household. As more students returned to the classroom, Francesca remained the only 3rd grader learning remotely until she returned to campus for the last two weeks of school. The school has done everything it possibly can for my kids this past year. My older daughter wants only remote instruction from this point forward, she’s a self-starter. My younger daughter struggled during the past year, and the school has been involved every step of the way. I felt so cared for by her graderoom teacher; Ms. Przygoda is amazing. She was all-remote so my daughter had exclusive time with her and got the best individualized instruction any learner could ask for. And it’s not because I work here, it’s because of the circumstances from this year and what the school would have provided for any family in a similar situation.”

With every passing year, Saracino develops more perspective on the school’s value personally and professionally. “Twenty years later, the sense of community means even more to me now—and in a pandemic this past year and a half, this school has been like my church. I get choked up when I talk about this—it’s given me a reason to wake up, a sense of responsibility, the learning opportunities as well as the celebrations. At Parker I’ve gone through 9/11, school shootings and the pandemic, and there is no better place to be when something happens, whether it’s local or global. It’s not a perfect place, but it’s a human place, and even when we couldn’t be together, I still felt connected to my people.”

He stated, “I don’t give to my grade school, my high school or my college, but I give to Parker. It’s a place that has given me so much: first it gave me a job that didn’t give me anxiety (I used to get stress hives!), and, as a parent I feel like the school has done everything they could for my family and continues to do so.”
Mike Mahany

A Community of Learners: Faculty/Staff

Although he’s a lifelong Chicagoan, Upper School English teacher Mike Mahany was not familiar with Francis W. Parker School when he was growing up. “I had a friend who went to Latin, and I went to Lincoln Park Zoo throughout my childhood, but it stuns me that I had never heard of Parker,” he noted with a chuckle. Yet, in one of life’s ironic twists, he is starting his 32nd year as a Parker faculty member.

Mahany was born in the Uptown neighborhood and grew up in Edgewater, graduating from St. Ignatius College Prep. After a year at the University of Illinois, he transferred to Loyola University intending to become a priest. “But by the time I graduated, I decided that wasn’t going to happen,” he said.

Although many of his classmates who had made a similar choice opted to teach instead, Mahany took a job at the McCormick Boys & Girls Club in Uptown—then changed course. “I loved literature, which was my major at Loyola, and I loved working with kids, which was my job at McCormick, so I realized I could combine the two by teaching.”

During his years at Parker, Mahany has participated in the evolution of the English curriculum. “We’ve talked a lot during the last few years about diversity and voices. As a department, we’ve gotten better at providing a range of protagonists and authors.”

He first taught at St. Pius Elementary School, at 18th Street and Ashland Avenue, where he spent two years “teaching religion, science, history, grammar—everything but English.” In addition to gaining some valuable all-around experience, he met his wife, RoseMary, at St. Pius. He next spent nine years teaching English at Quigley South High School. When the all-boys high school closed in 1990, Mahany was on the hunt for his next teaching position.

 “[Sixth grade science teacher] Peg Zerega, who I knew from college, called to tell me there was an opening in 8th grade at Parker,” Mahany recalled. “I observed a class, and right away I loved the informality—there were tables, not desks, the discussion was lively, not sterile. The relationships I formed with my students at Quigley was important to me, and I could tell that was a thing here. I loved it immediately.”

Mahany spent 12 years teaching 8th grade. When Upper School English teacher Bill Duffy passed away during the 2001–02 year, there was an opportunity. But Mahany was torn. “I had taught high school at Quigley and wanted to do it again, but I also loved teaching 8th grade. I love the age—the kids were playful but also insightful, they could talk about literature in deep ways, but also be silly. I saw the kids all day long, and it was nice having those relationships, plus I loved the 8th grade teaching team. But the variety involved in teaching Upper School English ultimately drew me to the position.” He taught sophomores and seniors during his first year, adding juniors the following year.
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the English curriculum. “We’ve talked a lot during the last few years about
diversity and voices. As a department, we’ve gotten better at providing a range of
protagonists and authors.”

He continued, “I like that I can make curricular choices. The American Lit
team teaches a few core texts together, and I teach four or five others. I have a
lot of freedom in text choice, so we read things that are not read in other places,
like Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye*, which has some difficult scenes. It’s nice to
have that freedom; I also appreciate the trust the parents and the school give me
so I can have that kind of independence.” Among other texts he has particularly
enjoyed sharing with students are Morrison’s *Beloved*, *How Much of These Hills
Is Gold* by C Pam Zhang—“an interesting perspective on a Western”—and *Home
Fire* by Kamila Shamsie.

“I love the relationships I build with my advisees, and I love that
they’re not all in one grade. I understand why it might be fun
to see kids through four years, but I like it this way. Advisory
brings the most variety to my day. After we came back to school
in person in the spring, we had our advisories for lunch every
day, which was wonderful.”

Not every choice is a success, Mahany admits. “One year, the sophomores
read *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Gabriel Garcia Marquez. It’s a long dense
book that has 37 characters with the same name. So I decided to teach excerpts,
but that made it worse. I ended up thinking it was a beautiful book, and people
should read it, but maybe not sophomores. There have been other books that
didn’t click, but all it takes is one or two kids to either love or hate a book to spur
the others. That’s another great thing about Parker: The kids have opinions and
are willing to say what they think.”

One change Mahany has noticed in students is in attention span. “They still
read and generally enjoy reading, but I try to assign books where more happens,
things have to move,” he commented.

Being an advisor is a responsibility Mahany views as a pleasure. “I love the
relationships I build with my advisees, and I love that they’re not all in one grade. I
understand why it might be fun to see kids through four years, but I like it this way.
Advisory brings the most variety to my day. After we came back to school in person
in the spring, we had our Advisories for lunch every day, which was wonderful.”
In addition to feeling separated from his advisees, Mahany found other challenges when teaching was completely remote during the pandemic. “I’m technologically skilled enough to make it work, but everyone was watching me during every tech mistake I made online. It was hard not having kids in the room, but it went better than I thought. Shifting to the hybrid format [some in person, some remote] was harder. The first day we were back in school in person, I had kids in front of me—I hadn’t been in a group of people in a year—and kids on the screen. It’s hard to do both well at the same time, but it was so great seeing the kids!”

Mahany hopes there might have been some silver linings for his students during the pandemic. “I hope they’ve learned some patience, some resilience, maybe discovered something they were good at or interested in that they didn’t realize before.”

Though he has no plans to retire in the near future, he has thought about it. “I’m worried about retirement because I don’t do all the things people do when they retire. But I love to read, I love to walk, bike and hang out with my grandchildren—three boys and three girls ages 2 to 11, the children of my two sons. They all live here, and I was so happy to see them this summer after the long absence.”
Megan Nakano ’93

Megan Nakano is a community engagement consultant with more than 20 years of experience developing strategic partnerships among the public, private and nonprofit sectors. After earning a B.A. in political science from Northwestern University, she served as director of the Asian American Small Business Development Center providing pro bono consulting services to minority entrepreneurs. After some work in community banking, she returned to nonprofit work as director of marketing for the Chicago Minority Supplier Development Council, counseling Fortune 500 corporate members to help grow and promote their supplier diversity programs through personal introductions to certified Minority Business Enterprises, customized matchmaking events and targeted communications. She is the treasurer and a past president of the Chicago Chapter of the Japanese American Citizens League, the oldest and largest Asian-American civil rights organization in the United States. She is also on the board of Heiwa Terrace, a 200-unit facility providing affordable housing and culturally competent services for seniors and disabled persons, and is a board member and past president of the Asian American Coalition of Chicago. Most recently, she co-founded the newly established Asian American Chamber of Commerce of Illinois and serves as its executive director.

Both of my parents were interned during WWII. My father’s family was evacuated from Alameda, California in 1942 and sent to the Gila River War Relocation Center in Arizona when he was two years old. My mother was born in 1943 at the East Lillooet Internment Site in British Columbia, Canada. After the war, Japanese Americans and Japanese Canadians faced brutal discrimination and were forced to rebuild their lives among people who viewed them as the enemy. Those who looked Japanese were refused housing, loans, even burial plots, so they were forced to rely on each other for support and survival.

At first, out of necessity, and later, out of loyalty, my parents always patronized Japanese-American-owned businesses and volunteered with organizations serving the Japanese-American community. The injustice of the Japanese-American experience instilled an appreciation for the fragility of civil liberties in times of crisis and the importance of protecting them in periods of war and peace.

The primacy of the community and the value of cooperation over competition were reinforced at Parker and also through my study of Buddhism, which emphasizes the concept of interdependence—whereby nothing happens in a vacuum and all of one’s actions, big or small, have a rippling effect throughout the universe for years to come.
I remember starting off each year at Parker with the Principal reading from Corinthians: “Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. If the foot should say, ‘Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,’ it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body…” I also often think of the quote from Col. Parker over the stage in the Auditorium that reads, “A school should be a model home, a complete community, an embryonic democracy,” and that one senior class prank was rearranging the letters to say something about a “yummy condom.” (If anyone remembers what it said, please contact me!)

I am excited to be launching the Asian American Chamber of Commerce of Illinois (AACCIL), which comes at a critical time for Asian-American business owners but feels like the natural outgrowth of decades of organizing and relationship-building.

The AACCIL will increase access to capital, resources and contract opportunities for Asian-American and other minority-owned businesses through advocacy, educational development and public-private partnerships. It will serve as a resource to Asian-owned firms and those seeking to do businesses with them. By encouraging communication, solidarity and civic participation amongst Asian-American entrepreneurs, we strive to elevate the voices of our underrepresented communities. Our programming will identify and address the diverse concerns of Asian-American business owners across Illinois and facilitate systemic solutions.

Most opportunities throughout my career have come from the relationships I’ve built in the community starting from a very early age. Growing up, my mother stressed our indebtedness to the community and encouraged me to volunteer at fundraising events and participate in youth programming—which I did, reluctantly at first, but usually came to appreciate by the end.

As a teen, I participated in retreats, essay and speech contests, internships and scholarship programs, which expanded my network, acclimated me to the sponsoring organizations and put me on their radars so that when I came of age, and they were seeking fresh perspectives, they thought to invite me onto their boards.

Recognizing the power of this type of programming, it has become a goal of mine to increase access to opportunities for those who have been historically excluded from them in this country.

Serving on the boards of nonprofit organizations has afforded me invaluable leadership experience. In larger corporate organizations, it's possible to get siloed and told to “stay in your lane.” But in a smaller organization, you find yourself wearing many hats and having a wider range of responsibilities. Board work taught me how to negotiate, build consensus and balance the needs of different constituencies.

Nakano with brother Matt Nakano ’03 and their mother, May Nakano.
My mother had a stroke in 2019, and I left my position at the Council to care for her along with my brother, Matt Nakano (class of ’03). It has been a difficult adjustment for all of us, but it has certainly increased my awareness of challenges faced by people living with disabilities and their caregivers. I’m hopeful the lessons from working in the COVID era will translate into lasting flexibility and accommodations for the individualized needs of all employees, including parents, caregivers and those with disabilities.

During this time, I have been working on developing the AACCIL and launching my community engagement consultancy helping corporations and government agencies recruit and adapt to working with diverse employees, suppliers and community partners. Through strategic partnerships and collaborative programming aimed at inclusivity, businesses can attract diverse talent, broaden their customer base and develop more innovative products and services.

Parker teaches you to think critically, challenge assumptions and value cooperation over competition. The school always emphasized responsible citizenship and one’s duty to give back through community service. I am influenced by these ideals every day. Also, I think Parker kids are very good at talking about their feelings and examining the root causes of their actions, which in turn makes them better listeners and communicators and generally more empathetic.
My favorite memories of Parker are definitely of the relationships I formed with the students, teachers and staff, many of which I maintain today. The best class I’ve ever taken at Parker, or anywhere else, was Psychoanalysis of History taught by Bernard Markwell, Ph.D. We studied one book, *Life Against Death*, a Freudian critique of civilization and the human condition by Norman O. Brown. Markwell made some really outlandish concepts accessible and entertaining to a bunch of second-semester seniors who may have otherwise completely checked out.

Helping to plan class reunions throughout the years has been a great excuse to keep in touch with my classmates and stay connected to the school. I’m also excited to serve on the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion committee, which I hope will find ways to improve the Parker experience for students of all backgrounds, identities and abilities.

I love catching up with friends any chance I get. If anyone is interested in connecting, you can reach me through my website at megannakano.com or email me at megan@megannakano.com.

My brother, Matt ’03, is working at Urban Kayaks on the Riverwalk and Monroe Harbor, which is owned by fellow Parker alumni Aaron Gershenzon ’04, Asher Gershenzon ’06 and James Morro ’04. They recruited Matt last year to help open and operate TacoRio, their soon-to-be sister business right next door. Due to 2020, they had to push back the opening of the margarita and taco bar, but construction is set to begin in September. Opening date TBD.

Nakano (C) with Kim Klutznick ’93 (L) and her daughter, Stevie, and Annie Ashe (nee Meyers) ’93 and her son, Braiden.
Alumni Reconnect

Class of 2020 Gathering
A little more than one year after the class of 2020 Commencement ceremony, which the school orchestrated virtually due to COVID restrictions, graduates and their families returned to campus for a belated celebration of their graduation experience.

Class of 1989 Courtyard Photo Gathering
With hope for the spring, current parent Rachel Sullivan ’89 (seventh from L) reached out to the administration early in 2021 to propose an idea of gathering all current parents from Parker’s class of 1989 with their current Parker students for a group photo in the courtyard.
Career Week Goes Virtual

Upper School students had multiple opportunities to learn from and connect with members of the Parker community who are leaders in their respective industries as part of the 2021 Career Week. The keynote address by Ian Freed ’81 highlighted the importance of the people, projects and principles that positively affected him as a Parker student and throughout his career as a technologist.

Alumni Activist Shares with Students

Prexy Nesbitt ’62 spoke via Zoom about his career, his relationships with leaders such as Nelson Mandela and his work to end apartheid in South Africa with Upper School students in history teacher Andy Bigelow’s Civil Rights Movement class.

Learning about World War II from an Alum

History enthusiast Michael Grant ’62 joined Upper School history students for a Zoom class to speak about one of his specialties, World War II.

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Class Notes

Parker alumni: Please send your class notes to Assistant Director of the Alumni Office Maggi Steib, msteib@fwparker.org.

Disclaimer: The views, thoughts and opinions expressed in these Class Notes are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent or reflect the views or opinions of Francis W. Parker School and its wider community.

1955
George Basch writes, “I founded the Himalayan Stove Project in 2010 to provide clean burning, fuel efficient cookstoves to families in the remote areas of Nepal. In 2020, COVID disrupted our supply chain, and we had to close the project, but in the decade, we impacted the lives of more than 50,000 people (Wrigley Field’s seating capacity is 41,649). In October 2020, inspired and frightened by David Attenborough’s film and book, A Life on Our Planet, which addressed the looming climate catastrophe, I recognized that a missing part of the effort to forestall it was what individuals and families can do to live a more sustainable lifestyle. I have founded Champions of the Planet (championsoftheplanet.org) to address that. Our website is a resource, a place to find information that will guide you towards actionable steps you can take to help fight climate change. We want to ‘spread the word’ and encourage people to take personal action, at whatever level they can, because small acts, when multiplied by millions of people, can transform the world.”

1961
Larry Levin and Hera Levin write, “Our three grandchildren continue to excel: Noa (12 years old) played Gavroche in a local production of Les Misérables; Ivy (10 years old) was awarded an orange belt in karate; Asher (10 years old) is the starting catcher on his Northbrook (Illinois) traveling baseball team. Asher’s head coach is his father, Adam, and Asher’s assistant coach is his grandfather, Larry.”
1966

Peter Logan writes, “Like most everyone, I’m excited about the reopening and resumption of playing music, socializing, baseball and not wearing a mask. I recently had a nice dinner with classmate Cathy Fishbain Brown and her husband, Tom. I’ve been working with Bonnie Kustner and others on our 55th reunion (yup, 5-5!) and hosted a Zoom call in May with over 20 classmates to help get the ball rolling.”


1969

Mark Anderson shares a video master class he participated in (first half): youtube.com/watch?v=uZlSjw4MxIE.

Joe Flynn writes, “This past month, May 2021, my wife Catherine and I had our hearts broken. Our only child, Caitie (aka Cat) Flynn, died of the breast cancer she’d been diagnosed with in 2015 at age 24. Cat was amazing: a fighter, a brilliant scholar (magna cum laude grad at Cornell University), trilingual, an intuitive teacher, my most discerning proofreader and the inspiration for the character of Caitie McGill in my Jim McGill novels. In Cat’s honor, we’re working to establish a scholarship endowment in her name at North Carolina State University where she did her grad work and taught. If you’d like to contribute to the endowment fund—no amount is too small or too big—visit gofund.me/cc7dfe67.”
Janet Zoe Barsy writes, “In 2015, at age 61, I retired from the Office of the General Counsel of the U.S. Department of Energy. I worked there for 20 years, before that in private practice for eight years. Time was flying by faster and faster and work was becoming less satisfying. I wanted to use resources that I have acquired through luck and hard work to try to directly contribute more to the public good. Soon my activities became broadly divided into three categories of activities to support in Arlington, VA, my home for 35 years: mental health, immigration and electing Democratic candidates.

“Two or three days a week I answer calls to the HelpLine for the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), a mental health advocacy group. The HelpLine provides national resources related to mental health and steers callers to NAMI state offices for local resources, emotional support talk lines and support groups. While the number of callers seeking mental health support increased during the worst of the COVID-19 crisis, most of my calls continued to be from relatives and friends of people with serious mental health issues. Often a caller's first words are: 'I need help and don't know where to start.'

“For five years, I have served on the board of directors of the Literacy Council of Northern Virginia. When COVID-19 shut down in-person classes, LCNV quickly pivoted to provide online classes to as many students as possible. I also support Homes Not Borders, an organization that assists the refugee, Special Immigrant Visa and asylum-seeking population in the Northern Virginia area.

“Since retirement, and especially in 2020 when it became clear that the Presidential election and other key electoral races could test the survival of our democracy, I have supported Democratic local and national candidates by canvassing, phone banking, writing postcards and donating money. Last April, I hosted a Zoom Meet & Greet for a Virginia Democratic primary gubernatorial candidate. In 2021, Virginia will elect a Governor, Lt. Governor and Attorney General. All 100 seats in the House of Delegates are up for election. I intend to work hard to keep the top three offices and House held by Democrats. I am extremely concerned about the refusal of so many Republicans to acknowledge the legitimacy of the Presidential election and voter suppression laws passed by Republican State legislatures under the guise of voter protection.

“The COVID crisis was a reminder that I didn't need of my good life. When the national and local lockdowns started, I was able to take daily walks around my lovely and historic neighborhood. I did not worry for myself, family or friends having enough money or food; I increased contributions to those less fortunate. I lived compatibly in my house with my partner of 35 years, Larry Altman. Zoom, email, old-fashioned phone calls and socially distanced lunches, dinners and cocktail hours in my backyard reflected and strengthened valued relationships for both of us, with family and longtime friends—for me, 30, 40 and 50 years, for Larry (age 84) even longer. With a few bumps here and there, we and those we care about are healthy. Tennis three–four times a week and visits to our YMCA gym help to run off calories from wine and any form of chocolate.
“Looking forward, this summer we will visit Larry’s family in Lenox, MA and enjoy concerts at Tanglewood. In August, we hope to make our usual annual visit to Sun Valley, ID and then go on to the Seattle area to see my sister, Kate ’78, and her family.

“Over the past several years, it has been nice to touch base with several classmates. I stayed with Betsy Bergan Barrett when I visited Chicago to see my brother, Bob ’73, and Larry and I had lunch with Betsy and her husband, Peter, when they visited Washington, D.C. Kate Markin Coleman and her husband, Steve, hosted a lovely brunch for us in Boston. On another Boston visit, Susan Fried and I enjoyed lunch and shopping. Recently, I FaceTimed with Jill Ratner—I have long supported the environmental programs offered by her excellent Rose Foundation. I look forward to catching up with other classmates in October and hearing about their lives 50 years after graduation.”

Bill Marks continues his work as business partner, strategist and advisor to attorney Ben Crump and advocating on behalf of the families of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery and, he writes, “too many other hashtag names cut down in the prime of their lives. The work is extremely painful, but we are optimists and happy warriors in the battle for change.”

1975
Jonathan Alter writes, “John Eisendrath ’77—one of the top television writers in Hollywood—and I are co-writing and co-producing a limited series based on my recent book, His Very Best: Jimmy Carter, a Life. And I’ve launched a newsletter where I post a written conversation a week with a compelling person of wisdom and experience. Three Illinoisans so far. It can be found at Oldgoats.substack.com. My mascot is a bumper goat—a prized possession—by legendary Chicago sculptor and Parker parent, Jack Kearney. Jill Kearney and Dan Kearney ’73 approve!”

1977
Rebecca Lieb ’77 writes, “I spent lockdown writing my doctoral thesis and was just awarded a Ph.D. in digital marketing. Mrs. Stone would be so proud!”
1999
Chas Lacailisse writes, “Moved to Austin, TX in January of 2021 and would
be happy to connect with FWP alumni. Email: chas@bottlerocketmanagement.com.”

2003
Jordan Frazes writes, “The Times of Israel and
Jewish Week named me on their annual ‘36
Under 36’ list: fwparker.org/frazes03.

2006
Jerome Simmons writes, “On June 10, my wife
(Eunice) and I welcomed our daughter into the
world. Her name is Emery Jinjoo Simmons.”

In Memoriam
Parker alumni: Please send news regarding an alumnus’s passing, along with any
personal memories you wish to share, to Assistant Director of the Alumni Office
Maggi Steib, msteib@fwparker.org. We will obtain consent from the family to
share an obituary or send notification to classmates.

Don Monroe, former Parker principal
As current principal Dan Frank shared with the Parker community: “Don was
Parker’s Principal from 1995 to 2002 and led the school in important ways that
we all continue to benefit from today, including overseeing the Campaign for
Parker, which funded the renovation of much of our current school’s campus.
These campus-based educational improvements included: renovating of all
JK–8 classrooms, which allowed for increasing the number of sections in
those grades while also decreasing student-teacher ratios; creating the entire
third and fourth floor Upper School west wing; building a new Little School
with bridges connecting it to the main school building; and constructing
Jabodon Hall, which contains the Draft Gym, Kovler Library, Upper School
math classrooms and the Harris Center. Don also professionalized many of
the school’s operations, including creating a distinct Middle School with its
own administrative division head as well as enhancing structures to support
Development, Communications and Admissions/Financial Aid. Don also
created the role of Associate Principal.

“Don had a clear moral compass and was a strong advocate for the
profession of teaching and the importance of Parker’s role as a leader in
progressive education, which led him to help create the Urban Suburban Public
Private Consortium, a collaboration among educators from public schools,
Parker and Northwestern University.”
From an obituary in the *Chicago Tribune*:
“Don Monroe was born in Jamaica Queens, New York in 1939 to Stuart Alexander Monroe and Margaret Monroe. His family moved to the Chicago area in the 1950s. He was a graduate of New Trier High School in Winnetka and earned a bachelor’s degree in English from Lake Forest College, a Master’s in the Art of Teaching from Northwestern University and a Doctorate in Educational Administration from the University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana.

“Monroe enjoyed a long and distinguished career as an educational leader in the Chicago area and nationally. He began his career as an English teacher at Chicago’s Roosevelt High School and then at Wheaton High School. Monroe later held the position of Assistant Superintendent in the Arlington Heights Public School District and then served as the Principal/Superintendent of the Joseph Sears School in Kenilworth. For nearly 20 years he led the Winnetka Public Schools as its Superintendent. After his career in public education, Monroe worked as the Principal at the Francis Parker School in Chicago, the Executive Director of the Catherine Cook School in Chicago and the Executive Director of the Baker Demonstration School in Evanston.

“A widely respected and recognized leader in progressive education, Monroe served on numerous boards and launched many educational initiatives. He was the founding board member of the Winnetka Early Education Alliance, the Wolcott School, The Northwestern Urban/Suburban Coalition, Lincoln Hall, The Hubbard Woods/Hendricks School Partnership, the Namaste Charter School and the Winnetka Teacher Institute.

“Throughout his career, and in his personal life, Don lived out the highest standards of personal integrity, devotion to family and an undying belief in equity, equality and the critical importance of access to a quality education for each and every child. He could match wits with any high powered academic but was most comfortable in the company of those who shared his down-to-earth, egalitarian ethic. Though born in the New York area, Monroe was a Chicagoan through and through and reveled in the city’s diverse, broad-shouldered culture and working-class roots. A lifelong athlete and sports fan, he followed and rooted on the Bears, the Bulls, the Northwestern Wildcats and his beloved Cubs to his dying day.”
20-Year Employees

Despite the pandemic, the normative flow of life at Parker continues. During the 2019–20 and 2020–21 academic years, a number of employees celebrated their 20th year at the school. Since we could not honor them in person, we are doing so here to allow the entire community to celebrate their commitment to their careers and Francis W. Parker School.

James Audrain
Science teacher, Lower and Intermediate Schools

Sarah Beebe
Educational Technology Integration Specialist, Lower and Intermediate Schools

Steven Dahlin
Help Desk technician

Terry Davis
Physical Education teacher