



## Head of School Announcement

Dear Beacon Community,

On behalf of the Board of Trustees, I am happy to announce **Marja Brandon** as Beacon Academy's next Head of School, effective July 1, 2020.

A lifelong learner with a B.A. from Wellesley College, a M.Ed from Harvard University, and a Fellowship from Columbia University, Marja has devoted her career to implementing innovative curricula and anti-bias education aimed at supporting the development of the whole person, based on the latest neuroscience research. She has profound expertise in a wide array of educational approaches, gained from her role as founding Head of Seattle Girls' School to her current position at Helios School for gifted students. To hear her share her thoughts on education, one would think she has been at Beacon Academy since inception. We are confident that she will uphold the mission we hold dear as we continue to realize our Montessori vision of preparing young adults to "meaningfully contribute to a complex and diverse world with compassion and confidence."

Throughout the interview process, Marja demonstrated adaptability and embraced creative problem solving when she quickly pivoted to accommodate the hurdles of completing the interview process under unprecedented circumstances. Her experience with schools in various stages from start-up to sustainability prepared her well to take on this new and important role at Beacon Academy, and for the challenging times we are living in.

Thank you to everyone who participated in the search process and provided feedback that guided the Board in making its final decision. We extend special thanks to our Search Chair Devin Mathews for his outstanding leadership of the process, and to the Search Committee: Stef Bator, Anita Harvey-Dixon, Jim Masterson, Britt Nerad, Audrey Perrott, Renee Ruffing, Susan Sattell, Chris Swan, and Greg White.

In the months ahead, we will all have opportunities to get to know Marja, and I know you will join me in welcoming her and sharing with her what makes Beacon Academy special.

Sincerely,

Patty Abrams  
Chair, Board of Trustees

Dear Beacon Community,



I am so thrilled and honored to be selected as the next Head of School for Beacon Academy. I was sold on Beacon as soon as I read the mission and values Beacon holds dear. I was in search of a school that would align with my values around inclusion, giving students agency in their own learning, and of course, innovative curriculum. I was smitten as I read Beacon's approach to learning and to supporting the growth of truly great, proactive human beings as well as scholars. I am delighted to take this opportunity to introduce myself.

Dreams really can come true even in the middle of a pandemic. Becoming a Head of School at an innovative, truly collaborative school like Beacon Academy has been a dream of mine, but I have to admit, it wasn't always. In fact, there was a time when I wouldn't have been expected to go very far at all. I wasn't a great student — I struggled to learn how to read and focus. Unlike my two very academic older brothers, nothing came easily for me. By the time I was diagnosed with dyslexia, ADD, and dysgraphia during my first year at college, there were already many layers of scar tissue and strategy built up. But being diagnosed was wonderful: it unlocked my world and a whole new me was now able to emerge.

Understanding my own learning differences also led me to one of my passions, the study of the brain. I wanted to know why my brain was different. If mine was, then likely so was everyone else's. This passion to truly understand our brains and help all students and their parents understand their brains has guided my educational journey.

My career has been based on the belief that all children are capable of achieving incredible heights if only nurtured and supported to do so. I have observed that unless students are at the center of their own learning, invested, motivated, and empowered to be in charge and understand that they have agency over their learning and their future, then their education won't really work, or at least not for long. I have seen this approach succeed in each of the very different schools I have had the honor of working in. In my thirty-plus year career I have been an educational consultant, a teacher, a dean, a curriculum director, an admissions officer, and a head of school at three very different schools — a girls' school, a school for the Deaf, and a school in the heart of Silicon Valley. The common denominator in all those roles is my love of working with kids and school communities.

I am also the parent of four delightful and quite different children (well, I guess it would be fair now to say adults). Three of my children are African American and adopted, one is biological, and even looks rather like me. Of the four, three have learning differences and one has special needs beyond that. My husband is completely Deaf, so we all know and use American Sign Language. Our family is amazing and I hope you get to meet at least some of them, since we all tend to get involved in our school communities. In all of my children I see everyone else's children, and in everyone else's children, I see my own. I started caring at a young age about issues of differences and oppression, and my family has only reinforced my conviction of its importance. These issues are close to my heart. I don't bring work home with me, I bring home to work.

I very much look forward to meeting you, working with you, and growing this community together. Most of all, I look forward to seeing what kind of magic we can make together for your children and for the world.

Thank you for helping to make this dream of mine a reality.

Take care,

Marja Brandon

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