



SAINT ANN'S SCHOOL

Vincent Tompkins
Head of School

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Dear Saint Ann's Community,

Twelve years ago, at about this time of year, I was contacted by a search firm who wanted to know if I would be interested in leading a school in Brooklyn that described itself as a “sublime circus.” My family and I were happily settled in Massachusetts, I was thriving in higher education, and I had never worked in a K-12 school of any kind. So I resisted, uncertain that my skills and experience suited me for such a role at such a school. But as my knowledge of Saint Ann's deepened, so did my excitement at the prospect of joining a community of teachers, staff, students and parents unlike any I had encountered or even imagined. And so, in the spring of 2010, I said yes.

Today I am writing to let you know that the 2022-23 school year will be my last as head of school at Saint Ann's. Just as getting to “yes” a dozen years ago took much soul-searching, so too did this decision. It deserved and required no less. I love this school and I am grateful for all that it has meant to me and to my family. As the parents of three Saint Ann's alumni, Alison and I have experienced the truth of what I have promised countless other parents on admissions tours: an education beyond excellence, one that transforms the lives of its students and graduates. I have been renewed and rejuvenated time and again by the children of Saint Ann's, whether they are three or nine or eighteen: joyful in their discoveries of new knowledge, skills, and ways of seeing the world, vulnerable yet buoyant in the face of disruption and even tragedy, reveling in their talent and the talent all around them. I am constantly and continually humbled by the extraordinary abilities and fierce dedication of our teachers, administrators and staff: to work with them is a privilege. Saint Ann's asks parents to entrust us with their children, and I have been moved by their willingness to do so, to join us in seeing education not as preparation for what is next but as a celebration of what is now. Since my very first months as head of school I have witnessed the commitment and steadfastness of parents, grandparents, alumni, teachers, staff, and administrators who have given generously in support of Saint Ann's—in moments of great need and when inspired by a vision of a promising future. This has proven time and again to be a magical place.

I know that news like this is almost inevitably greeted these days by the question “What happened?” My decision is not a response to any specific personal or professional challenge. Our school is in good health, and I am sound in mind and body (all things considered!). Instead, I simply began to ask myself over the past few months: what is in the best interest of Saint Ann's? As we began to emerge from the experiences of the past twenty months—which undeniably included some of the most difficult circumstances I have faced in my career—I saw an opportunity to partner with the board of trustees in a thoughtful leadership transition, one that affords the school the time and space to recruit a visionary leader as my successor. The board and I re-engaged the task of long-term planning this fall, and I saw strategic decisions forming that have the potential to impact the school for a decade or more. It became clear to me that a decade or more of continuing in my present role was not how I envisioned my own future and was unlikely to be in the best interest of the school.



And so, my decision about my own future was made in partnership with the board of trustees and in the best interest of Saint Ann's.

It is my hope to create the most positive possible context for my successor so that they might “dwell in possibility” as I have been so fortunate to do. Our mission statement speaks of the “fierce pursuit of knowledge, skill and artistry,” and I see that today in every classroom and laboratory and studio I visit, every play or dance in the theater, every game in our gym, every kindergarten poetry book and literary magazine. These define our center ring, and they are a testament to the joyful engagement of our students and the passionate commitment of our teachers and staff.

This is a school that has always been about people: those who choose to entrust their children to us, those who commit their lives to the education and support of those children, and the children themselves—most centrally and enduringly. Nearly two-thirds of our current faculty and staff have been hired under my leadership. Our current seniors were in first grade when I arrived, and many of our students and families have known no other head of school. Nearly three-quarters of our trustees—those tasked with the long-term stewardship of the school and my partners in every major decision of the past decade—joined our board since I began. I know that my successor will be, as I have been, lucky to be in this company. Finally, our school has never been as racially diverse as it is today, and Saint Ann's has made significant strides towards becoming a more fully inclusive and equitable community. Our shared embrace of this mission-critical work can and must continue into the future.

The school is in a strong financial position, which means that decisions about how best to allocate resources can be made in ways that reflect our most important values, priorities and needs. Because of our robust scholarship program (which has grown from \$2.5 million at the start of my tenure to \$9 million this year), Saint Ann's is opening its doors to ever more talented students whose families cannot pay full tuition. As a first-generation college student whose life-transforming education was made possible by access, generous scholarships and the sweat of my parents' brows, few things have meant as much to me as this. When I began a decade ago, teacher salaries were in the bottom quartile of New York City independent schools. Today they are on par with other schools. Many of our physical spaces are better and safer than they were a decade ago, but the coming decade will bring opportunities to shape spaces for teaching and learning and undertake important work to achieve environmental sustainability.

There is much to be done in the coming eighteen months. You will shortly receive a letter from Mino Capossela, our board president, sharing his perspective on what lies ahead and the board's framework for the search for a new head of school. I remain fully committed to our school through the end of the 2022-23 school year, focused on ensuring that Saint Ann's will endure and thrive.

To repurpose a phrase I heard one of our third graders say this fall, our school—our sublime circus on Pierrepoint Street and Willow Place and Henry Street—is and I hope will always be “improbable but not impossible.”

Love,