



**WASHINGTON LATIN** Public Charter School

# NEWS

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## Washington Latin PCS Announces Academic Leadership Transition

**Diana Smith, Principal, will step down at the end of this school year after 13 years as the academic leader of Washington Latin. James Kelly, currently our Assistant Principal and Director of the Middle School, will serve as Principal beginning on July 1, 2021.**

December 2, 2020

*Dear Friends of Washington Latin,*

It is with mixed emotions that I share twin announcements about the academic leadership of Washington Latin. Each of these merits its own moment, though I share them together here as they are intrinsically related. The news of Diana Smith stepping down at the end of this year fills me with both sadness and gratitude for her many years of service. We will all miss her leadership of our academic program and team. Please read on for my thoughts on her legacy, as well as a letter to the community from Diana herself.

At the same time, I am delighted to announce Jimmy Kelly as our next principal. His dedication to Washington Latin and our classical mission, combined with his experience as an educator and skill as an administrator, make him a natural choice as Latin's next principal. I am very pleased about this announcement and the opportunity to introduce him to our extended community.

### **The Legacy of Diana Smith at Latin**

All educators have an impact through their work, but Diana Smith leaves an exceptional legacy at Latin. She joined the faculty in 2008, when the school was in its infancy. With nearly three decades of experience in school leadership, and strong credentials both as a master teacher and a classicist, I strongly suspect the Fates themselves submitted her application letter. Working with the previous Head of School, Martha Cutts, she built out the academic program: developing the curriculum and instructional model, creating the Upper School, hiring and developing faculty, and crafting myriad policies, practices, and traditions that have shaped Latin's culture. So many essential elements of this school reflect her handiwork.

Handiwork – the term itself embodies Diana's hands-on, hard-working approach to leadership. She is engaged with school life in all its forms: teaching (sometimes in the MS, sometimes in the US, sometimes in both divisions), developing schedules and course offerings, participating in celebrations, performances, and student clubs (did you know she was a juggler?), and working one-on-one with students in academic support sessions. Throughout the spring and summer, she has worked tirelessly to spearhead our responses to all the 2020 challenges. Over the years, Diana has demonstrated a rare ability to move nimbly between the lofty ideals of education and day-to-day practicalities of running a school, ensuring that Latin's core values are woven through the fabric of daily school life.

And what are those values? The list is likely familiar to anyone who knows our school: Know each student as an individual. Believe in the right to a broad, liberal arts education. Offer students the opportunity to fall in love with timeless ideals of truth, beauty, and goodness. Foster their autonomy with a combination of high expectations and trust. Respect the faculty and cultivate their intellectual life as well as their professional growth. Encourage all to work hard and contribute daily to our shared purpose. Read as much as possible. Discipline liberates us. Words matter. Civility matters. Contribute to the community. Celebrate both our differences and our shared humanity.

Diana has been a wonderful colleague and partner at Latin. While I will continue to lean on her as a friend and colleague, I will miss the work ethic, deep commitment to the ideas and people of this school, intellect, and wit that she has brought to our community as our principal. While Latin will be different, the school has a bright future, thanks in no small part to her many contributions.

Perhaps one of the most important aspects of Diana's legacy is embodied in the young leaders she has mentored, including the current members of her extraordinary academic team. Latin's faculty is exceptionally skilled, dedicated, and stable, with a longer average tenure than most charter schools. We value this stability and work to retain great teachers and give them leadership opportunities.

On this note, I am delighted to share our second announcement, a joyous one that turns us towards the future: *James Kelly, Assistant Principal and Director of the Middle School, will step into the role of Principal beginning in July 2021.*

There are many reasons to celebrate this news. Jimmy is both a rising star and a proven commodity. Many of you know his work as Director of the Middle School, where he has distinguished himself as a thoughtful and caring leader, an innovator deeply committed to ensuring equity within our diversity, and a skilled and efficient administrator. In this role, he has introduced some key initiatives that reflect his commitment to finding practical ways to push for systemic change, such as the Dialogues Across Difference, expanded academic interventions and support, and the YES Program for social-emotional learning. At the same time, he has worked behind the scenes to manage some of the most important and complex school-wide issues, such as overseeing all testing (PARCC, SAT, and AP), student enrollment and data, and scheduling. And of course, in keeping with our view of all administrators staying close to students and the classroom, he continues to teach Honors Geometry and sponsors a MS student club.

Due to the pandemic, we have faced novel and often challenging circumstances. Jimmy has proven again and again that he is able respond quickly to changing demands and offer practical solutions – without losing sight of our mission. His contributions to our distance learning model have been invaluable and reflect his thoughtful-yet-practical approach. While he did not begin his career at Latin, we consider Jimmy to be just the kind of “homegrown” leader we seek to develop. I am proud to announce his appointment and delighted to know we will work together even more closely than ever. I believe we will accomplish a great deal together and am excited about this future.

Over the coming months, we will have opportunities for you to learn more about Jimmy – his background, values, and vision as principal – as well as opportunities to celebrate Diana. In the meantime, I hope you will reach out to me, Diana or Jimmy with your thoughts and questions about this leadership transition.

**Sincerely,**

*Peter*

Peter Anderson, Head of School