

October 17, 2024

Dear Cheshire Academy Community,

Over the past six months, the Head of School Search Committee has engaged in a comprehensive process to identify and select a new head of school.

We conducted a national search, and we were met with tremendous interest in the position. From this large, extremely diverse pool of applicants, our search committee identified a group of nine semifinalists that was ultimately narrowed down to three exceptionally qualified finalists. Each of those finalists visited CA for more than two days and during their visits, met with various constituent groups – students, faculty, staff, administrators, and the Board of Trustees.

From the beginning, we were clear in our objectives for the search and the qualities that our next head of school needed to possess. Our search focused, first and foremost, on finding someone who recognized, appreciated, and celebrated the special feeling and magic of our collective experiences at/with Cheshire Academy; to grow that history along with CA's commitment to developing responsible, global citizens – with a strong emphasis on strengthening the school's long-term viability by bolstering enrollment, building a more philanthropic culture, and ensuring a sustainable financial model for the future.

I am pleased to announce that we have found a highly respected career educator and seasoned head of school who has both the personal and professional qualities that were mandated in our search for our next head of school. Further, he has demonstrated the vision to lead CA into its next chapter. Upon the recommendation of the Search Committee and unanimous approval by the Board of Trustees, we have enthusiastically offered the position to J. Thomas (Tom) Woelper, most recently the founding head at New England Innovation Academy in Massachusetts. Tom accepted our offer with equal enthusiasm. Starting on January 1, 2025, he will assume the role of head of school at Cheshire Academy.

Tom has a prestigious educational background. He graduated from the Lawrenceville School and has an AB from Princeton University, where he was a scholar athlete and played Division I lacrosse. He then went on to earn a master's in history from the University of Connecticut and a master's in educational leadership, with a focus on private school education, from Teachers College, Columbia University.

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Tom has spent his adult life working in education predominantly in the boarding school world at such institutions as Taft, Groton, Lawrenceville, and Hotchkiss. Tom was a head of school at a K-9 boarding and day school in New Jersey and was the founding head of school at a cutting-edge start-up school, The New England Innovation Academy. Tom and his wife, Heidi, also lived abroad, where Tom was the head of school at the American Pacific International School, Thailand.

One comment offered after meeting Tom captures what so many had expressed in response to his visit: “Tom is humble yet confident, empathetic, a clear communicator, has strong and good values, is passionate about his work, has the right mindset about what a student's needs are for a good education, has extensive experience and solid, strategic ideas. He is a good listener, and he asks good questions. He knows how to build a business model. I could keep going. Tom is a great leader and a good human.”

This appointment marks an exciting chapter in the history of our school, and we believe that Tom will build upon the foundation laid by outgoing Head of School Julie Anderson. We are immensely grateful to Julie for her passionate leadership and care, especially through the very difficult COVID years, and will be honoring her in future communications and events.

In the months ahead, we will organize opportunities to say a proper goodbye to Julie and to meet and get to know Tom and his family. Our consultants from Educators Collaborative, will be assisting with the transition and first year of Tom's tenure. I would like to express my gratitude to our Search Committee Chair, Dr. James Kempton, who has worked tirelessly on behalf of the school in this effort. James chaired a very diverse committee consisting of current board members, alumni, past parents, and administrators. The committee was not only diverse in their titles but their genders and backgrounds. The Advisory Committee, faculty, staff, and students who actively participated in the search process have also been invaluable in making this important – and ultimately very gratifying – decision.

Thank you all for your continued support, dedication, and commitment to Cheshire Academy. I know that Tom will count on you as he joins the CA community. We all look forward to seeing Tom, his wife Heidi, and their sons, Alejo and Tomás on campus. We are excited for you to get to know and work alongside Tom and his family as together we continue our rich legacy and meet the future together.

Sincerely,



Jennifer Freedman P'15
Chair, Board of Trustees