



INTRODUCING
MIDDLESEX'S NEXT HEAD OF SCHOOL

Elizabeth "Bessie" Speers

*With the unanimous vote of the Middlesex Board of Trustees in June,
a much-anticipated decision became official.*

Veteran educator Elizabeth “Bessie” Speers will begin her tenure as head of school on July 1, 2023.

To her new post she will bring more than 30 years of experience in independent schools, with half of that time spent leading as a head, first at The Ethel Walker School in Simsbury, Connecticut, and currently at Tower Hill School in Wilmington, Delaware. Those appointments came after having served in many different capacities—as a teacher, coach, dorm parent, advisor, and administrator—and amply fulfilled all the qualifications that Middlesex sought.

“What we heard was that the community wanted someone with a deep passion for education,” says Board President Jason Robart ’83, who headed the search committee that reviewed hundreds of online survey responses and conducted numerous listening sessions with Middlesex constituencies. “Hearing firsthand what the community saw as priorities for the School and what experiences and skills people valued in our next head of school was incredibly helpful as we went through the process. We wanted someone with broad experience in schools—in teaching, admissions, alumni relations, financial management, and strategic planning—who both appreciated the strength of the Middlesex community and was committed to further building that community.”

The seeds of this kind of understanding and passion started early for Bessie as a student at The Bryn Mawr School. “I loved school,” she confirms. “I was very fortunate to have wonderful teachers, coaches, and mentors who mattered in my life, and I see that as a hallmark of an independent school.”

Right after graduating with a B.A. in English from Middlebury College—where she is now a trustee—Bessie first worked for the National Association of Independent Schools. “I saw the industry more broadly and said, ‘I want to work in one of these places,’” she remembers. Starting out as an associate director in the Loomis Chaffee School’s Admissions Office, she enjoyed the interconnection of her advising, coaching, and dorm duties there. The following year, Bessie returned to Bryn Mawr to serve as director of admissions and financial aid, additionally teaching English, advising, and coaching—and earning her M.L.A.

at Johns Hopkins University. Eight years later, she took on the role of director of placement and strategic planning at Baltimore's Calvert School for three years, followed by four years at Episcopal Academy near Philadelphia, where she served as the dean of faculty and assistant head of school.

In 2007, Bessie became the head of the residential, all-girls' Ethel Walker School, where she oversaw several transformational building projects and a judicious financial planning process. Since 2015, she has led Tower Hill School, enjoying the different challenges of this nationally renowned, coed day school for grades K-12.

"Bessie's experience in a number of different environments and roles gives her broad perspective," Jason observes. "That perspective will be instrumental as she helps chart the future for Middlesex."

Key to her approach is first learning about and appreciating the history, culture, and nuances that characterize an institution. "I love getting to know school communities and figuring out how to make each school stronger," Bessie affirms. "Middlesex has a distinguishing sense of place that is powerful. My husband Tom and I also really believe in the residential experience, where you can lean into a more global kind of education, drawing kids from all over the world to live together."

An added advantage for Bessie is that Tom is a Middlesex alumnus who enrolled in the last year of the all-boys' school and then graduated with the first coeducational class in 1976. "Tom loved going to Middlesex," she says, marveling at how he and his friends "just pick up right where they left off" at get-togethers.

"They are both people who care deeply about families and having a great place for students to go to school," sums up Trustee Johanna Boynton, who served on the search committee not only as a board member and current parent but also as a former Middlesex faculty member. "Bessie demonstrates that warmth and understanding, and she knows that great schools need a leader to make decisions and be clear about why they are in the best interest of the school. She garners respect and has clarity of vision."

Once she begins in earnest, Bessie recognizes, "There's a lot of listening and learning to do. I really value everybody's insights, perspectives, hopes, and dreams—and I couldn't be more honored to be joining the community." In turn, Middlesex looks forward to welcoming the Speers family to campus, including Bessie and Tom's grown children, Nellie and Guthrie, and their dog Nola. ■



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