

# DONNA OREM

— ANNOUNCES —

## HER 2023 RETIREMENT

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National Association  
of Independent Schools



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As Donna Orem approaches the remarkable milestone of 25 years at NAIS and 40 years working with independent schools, she has informed the board that she will retire from her position as president at the end of her contract on June 30, 2023. Donna will continue to lead us until that time, and we will work with her to ensure a smooth transition of leadership. As NAIS president, Donna has modeled empathy, commitment, hard work, and future-focused thinking. Our members have benefited from her visionary leadership, and our organization will continue to benefit from the strong foundation she has laid.

In a 2016 letter accepting the permanent position of NAIS president, Donna set out clearly what she intended to do: test new concepts; honor diversity and inclusion as central to success; develop leaders; use data and research to learn from the past and plan for the future; and above all, foster communities of mutual respect. Under her leadership, NAIS has made tremendous progress in all five of these key areas; in fact they are pillars of the new organizational vision that she championed in 2020, “All learners find pathways to success through the independence, innovation, and diversity of our schools, creating a more equitable world.” It was important to Donna that the vision speak to the greater purpose of independent schools and the need for continuous improvement. She herself exemplifies this broad view and continual commitment to growth; a lifelong learner, she continually introduces us to new research and approaches, challenging us to keep one eye on the horizon.

Donna’s impact on NAIS can be felt both internally and externally. Beyond building a strong staff, each year she presents at dozens of gatherings of schools and fields hundreds of calls supporting leaders with their challenges. She regularly shares her thoughtful, research-based reflections through blog posts, magazine articles, and monthly communiques. Further, she represents NAIS within the greater spheres of the education and nonprofit world, using what she learns in her work with NAIS schools. Donna’s overarching mindset—that it is through challenge that we find opportunity—is perhaps her greatest legacy to independent school leaders. In 2020, when the pandemic turned our world upside down, her futuristic focus guided NAIS to strengthen its service to schools, rolling out new responsive products and doubling down on critical areas like scenario planning and community well-being. In the face of growing divisions in our communities, Donna has brought us together, rising to the challenge posed by one of her favorite authors, Jamil Zaki: “Bring people together, and they’ll awaken to their common humanity.”

Donna has led NAIS with grit and grace, a true servant leader focused on the growth and well-being of the people in our community. In the coming year, I hope you will join me in honoring her many contributions to NAIS and wishing her well in all that lies ahead.

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**RANDALL DUNN**

*Board Chair of the National Association of Independent Schools*



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The Roman poet Virgil coined the phrase “fugit irreparabile tempus.” Translated, it means “it escapes, irretrievable time,” or, more familiarly, “time flies.” As I approach my 25<sup>th</sup> year at NAIS and 40<sup>th</sup> year in independent schools, I wonder where the time has gone. Although these years have been more fulfilling than one person deserves, I feel that it is time to pass the torch to another leader. I told NAIS Board Chair Randall Dunn this past fall that the 2022–2023 school year would be my last at NAIS. He and the board’s executive committee have been hard at work since then imagining the possibilities for NAIS in the decade ahead.

As I prepare to leave NAIS, there are so many people to thank. I have had the joy of working with four magnificent board chairs: Katherine Dinh, head of Marin Country Day School (California); Bernie Noe, head of Lakeside School (Washington); Randall Dunn, head of The Latin School of Chicago (Illinois); and Jack Creeden, head of Whitby School (Connecticut), who was such a support to me when I was NAIS’s Chief Operating Officer. I have learned so much from the dozens of NAIS trustees I have worked with over the years. And more than words can say, I admire the many independent school leaders I’ve known—including those I engaged with in my 15 years at the Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE)—for their focus on making this world a better place for children.

Finally, I am thankful for my NAIS colleagues, who have truly enriched my life. They work tirelessly to ensure schools are supported in this increasingly complex landscape, and I am grateful for their mission focus, hard work, and friendship. I am leaving NAIS on solid footing because of these colleagues and their strength as a team. I know they will continue to meet the challenges and opportunities of the day, support the needs of a diverse membership, and help schools stay ahead of change.

I have had the opportunity to be on the ground floor of so many new directions for NAIS, from the introduction of our trends work, to the creation of a research team, to the evolution of our statistical services from a print book to an online business intelligence system. I have had the pleasure of partnering with so many people and organizations to support our schools in diversifying and launching efforts to create communities of belonging. The opportunities to research and write at NAIS have been a gift, allowing me to feed my curiosity and be a lifelong learner. As proud as I am of these efforts, what I will cherish most about my time at NAIS is the relationships—the time spent meeting members in the field, the quiet moments ruminating about the future with colleagues, and the joy and laughter when we are together as a community.

I thank you, the NAIS community, for the time, years that have indeed flown by. I wish you nothing but peace and happiness in the years ahead.

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**DONNA OREM**

*President of the National Association of Independent Schools*



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1129 20th Street, NW, Suite 800  
Washington, DC 20036

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