



June 7, 2023

Dear UCDS Community,

Few, if any of us, have ever known UCDS without Paula Smith. After 27 years as the UCDS Head of School, Paula has communicated her intent to retire in June 2024 and assured us that the school she so thoughtfully built and nurtured has the leadership necessary to carry her life's work forward.

UCDS was a much different place when Paula arrived as a teacher in 1988. How did that small, quirky UW lab school grow to become a guiding beacon in the early elementary education space? In a word, Paula!

A quick scan of today's higher education landscape would have you believe that the future of education lies in collaborative teaching, risk taking and experiential learning. Sound familiar? Well, it should — it's the very system Paula and her team have been building, running and iterating on for 30+ years.

Paula assumed the reins as Head of School in 1996, passionately committed to the notion that young minds can have big thoughts! In the ensuing years, Paula has driven the systematic development of a curriculum way ahead of its time, anchored in an annual theme that connects everything from the daily Math Vitamin to class readings to the projects of art, library, Spanish, technology, science and music specialists.

Such a curriculum allocates plenty of attention to EVERY student. To keep student to teacher ratios low, Paula instituted the Resident Program which also infuses the program with new energy every year. She gave us the Labyrinth to amplify the curriculum through creative use of space. To keep the best teachers at UCDS and to allow for more families to afford the education, Paula drove the buildout of an endowment when that simply wasn't done in early elementary education. She's added an Infant-Toddler program to professionalize the childcare space and to keep talented teachers at UCDS as they have families of their own. Several years back, she launched a graduate school to give her teachers outlet for their curriculum and experience, as well as a continuous feedback loop. She even inspired a sister school in Mumbai, India!

To fully understand the breadth of Paula's work at UCDS would take more space than this letter affords us. Fret not — we'll have an entire year to celebrate Paula and further illuminate her life's work. For now, please join us and all those in her wide sphere of influence in thanking Paula for the impact she has had on our children, on thousands before them and on thousands more to come via the incredible educational ecosystem she has built.

In celebration of Paula,

The UCDS Board of Trustees