



## **Succession Plan**

APPROVED: December 1, 2022

Recognizing that school leadership is one of the essential factors in the success of a school, and that the succession after the long tenure of a school founder is a particularly challenging transition, the Thomas MacLaren Board of Directors has created this plan. Our school is not in crisis—on the contrary, MacLaren is thriving. This is the best time, therefore, to think through such a transition, looking to best practices both in the education and non-profit sectors.

This plan is written both with general best practices regarding succession in mind as well as the understanding that the first succession will be critical. This document should be revised as appropriate after the first succession occurs.

### **Historical Leadership Development Plan:**

After receiving its charter, the Board engaged in a national search for a Head of School. A prospective Head was selected from this search, but he declined the position. A second search began; however, no Head of School was found. The Board turned to the founders, asking Mary Faith Hall to lead the school. Mrs. Hall had been the operational founder for the past year, writing the bulk of the charter as well as writing all of the startup grants, including the Title V Start-Up Grant (\$773,560) and The Walton Family Foundation Grant (\$250,000). Mrs. Hall was also a founding member of Get Smart Schools, a leadership training program for charter school leaders. She attended on behalf of the school, even though the school did not have a leader selected yet. Mrs. Hall led the hiring team for our founding faculty and became the founding Head of School in June 2009, just weeks before school opened.

From the founding of the school the position of School leader has been much more than an administrative position. The school leader is called to be the head of the community of learners, demanding fluency in the academic program and the ability to lead and train faculty in its implementation. As a charter public school, however, the administrative demands are unrelenting. In the early years of rapid growth, it became clear that the administrative duties of running a charter school were overwhelming for one person. With this in mind, the creation of a leadership pipeline has been a top priority for Mrs. Hall since the founding. In 2011, there was an initial search for an Assistant Head of School; a candidate was found, but the candidate declined the position. In 2016-17, Mr. Nico Alvarado was asked to found the Lower School and act as its founding Head. Meanwhile, in 2018 an Assistant Head for the Upper School was finally appointed: Mr. Benjamin LaBadie.

Since 2017, the organizational chart has expanded each year to allow for increased leadership opportunities:

- Multiple Assistant Heads
- Deans of Faculty
- Academic Coordinators
- Additional Curricular Leads
- Director of Operations
- Director of Personnel

Finally, in 2020-2021, Mrs. Hall handed over leadership of the Upper School to Mr. LaBadie, allowing her to be the Executive Director (ED) of the K-12 campus. The role of Executive Director oversees the academic, cultural, and operational life of the school.

### **Considerations in an Executive Director:**

The attributes of a school leader include the following:

- A deep commitment to our mission as a liberal-arts school grounded in the western tradition
- An understanding of the unique culture we have established in support of this mission
- The ability to supervise the Heads of Upper and Lower School
  - This likely means that this person is a proven leader in the curriculum itself – in one of the areas of the curriculum, from Humanities to the Sciences
  - A thorough understanding of the K-12 program
  - The criteria established in our document *Profile of a Great MacLaren Teacher*, including intellectual humility, professionalism, and a commitment to lifelong learning.
- The ability to supervise the operational, financial, and personnel teams of the school
  - The ability to understand and keep updated on the many compliance areas in the school: academic, organizational, and financial
  - Proven managerial experience in a K-12 school setting, preferably managing other team leads
- The interpersonal skills required to lead the staff and faculty of the school
- The characteristics articulated in the job description, *attached*

### **Timeline for Transition:**

The following is taken primarily from a study done on succession planning directed towards Independent Schools.<sup>1</sup> This is offered solely as a template to guide planning in the case of actual transition.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://c.ymcdn.com/sites/www.sais.org/resource/resmgr/imported/SAIS\\_Succession.pdf](http://c.ymcdn.com/sites/www.sais.org/resource/resmgr/imported/SAIS_Succession.pdf)

Ideally, the outgoing ED shares her retirement plans with the Board Chair 14-18 months in advance of retirement.

#### For the Board

- Board assesses viability of internal candidates.
- Board establishes a search committee and a transition committee.

#### Search Committee

- The Board chair appoints a Search Committee chair from Board of Directors, outlines evaluation process of candidates, determines communication timeline to community. If any of the following are applying for the position, he or she should be recused and should work with the Board Chair on finding a suitable replacement.
  - The Heads of Upper and Lower School
  - Director of Personnel
  - Founding faculty (anyone still at the school who was part of the faculty in 2009-2011)
  - Founders (In the case of replacing the founding ED, Eric Hall should not be on the committee)
  - Two Board members (the Board chair and one other Board member)
  - While the ED is not a formal member of the Search Committee, she should be consulted on any candidates as part of the process.
  - Other key staff and stakeholders should be consulted as appropriate, also as part of the reference process, depending on the candidate. For example, the Director of Operations, Director of Finance, and the Assistant Heads will have important insights on internal candidates.
- Search committee must follow framework stated in the Open Meetings Law, C.R.S. § 24-6-402(3.5).
- Pro bono HR and legal advice available from Eric Hall for logistical advice, but he should not be on the selection committee.
- Search committee acts in an advisory role, narrowing candidates to top two or three finalists who will be interviewed by entire Board. The Board hires the Executive Director.

### **Transition Committee**

- Transition committee: develops 1- to 2-year plan to assist incoming ED's acculturation into community (if not an internal hire).

### **Incoming ED Transition Plan**

#### *Phase One (Initial appointment – once hired; ideally one year prior to succession)*

- As a courtesy, the outgoing ED should hear the selection of the new ED before the rest of the faculty and staff. The hiring should be kept confidential until other candidates and each stakeholder group has been notified. Board, ED, and newly hired ED should work on a timeline for announcing to the following:
  - Announce new ED to faculty, staff, students, and parents
  - Announce new ED to authorizer, the Charter School Institute
  - Announce new ED to Academy Project
  - Announcement to media and membership organizations (such as the Colorado League of Charter Schools) via press release
- Plan opportunities for new ED to meet with Board and leadership team, and to greet faculty, staff, students, and parents.
- Ideally, if an internal candidate and announced a year in advance, the incoming ED attends meetings, trainings, etc., at the side of the current ED, allowing for a seamless transition.

#### *Phase Two (June – July)*

Provide hospitality assistance: if moving to take job, help with move, dinners, babysitters, housekeeping, and landscape services. Make community connections with leadership groups, other school heads, and cultural attractions. Provide ED with cultivated materials helpful in educating about the school community: board by-laws, board minutes from past meetings, school financial plan, master plan, admission statistics, organizational chart, leadership team job descriptions including professional growth plan, school emergency operation plan, employee handbook, current yearbook, and family directory.

#### *Phase Three (First two years)*

Develop comprehensive induction/support program. Engage in ongoing board training. Continue acculturation process for ED and family.

### For the New ED

The new ED should meet with as many staff and faculty members as possible to listen and learn; Best practices include engaging with the following teams:

- Engage the leadership team and an advisory team composed of faculty and staff.
- Engage with administrative team to review and discuss individual professional growth plans.
- Establish a mentoring relationship with retired or present school leaders. Mentorship should be mandated by the Board; however, there should be flexibility in what it looks like.
- The new ED is also expected to develop a relationship with Academy Project.

### Outgoing ED Transition

Best practices note that it is important for the outgoing ED to say goodbye, and then not to get involved in future school decisions, and avoid making judgments about what the school is doing. The ED and Board should establish a date by which the new ED officially assumes responsibility. It is critical that a new ED not be—or seem to be—undermined in his or her authority to lead the school. If the new ED is an internal hire on good terms with the outgoing ED, it might be appropriate to keep the outgoing ED in some position of consultation, or even as an ambassador for the school, say, in the Development Office, but this would be at the sole discretion of the incoming ED.