

McLean School Newsletter

SCHOOL NEWS, INFORMATION & EVENTS

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The Wild Mustangs Among Us

Unapologetically Mustangs.

Wild, untamed, and fiercely independent. The wild Mustang? Possibly, but perhaps not so different from the adolescent sitting in our classroom, at your dinner table, or walking the hallways of our School.

Like Mustangs, they crave freedom, are spirited, and driven by a hunger to explore their world on their own terms. They resist fences, kick at the gates, and push back when reins are pulled too tightly. They don't rebel to be difficult or for the sake of rebellion, but have an instinctive urge to do everything on their own, to grow, stretch, and become themselves.

They don't like to be broken. They respond to trust, to patience, to someone who takes the time to understand them. Adolescents and Mustangs are quite similar. You cannot force growth or demand maturity on your timetable. You guide it. You nurture it. You walk beside it.

Like Mustangs, young people are discovering their strength—and it's breathtaking to watch. But they're also vulnerable. Adolescents are vulnerable . . . to isolation, to pressure, to the fear of not belonging. They are searching not only for independence but for identity, connection, and meaning.

And just like with Mustangs, there is beauty in their wildness. The creativity, the curiosity, the passion—all part of their power. We don't need to tame them. We need to protect their spirit while helping them find direction.

So the next time an adolescent challenges you, questions you, or even frustrates you, remember the wild Mustang. See beyond the behavior. See the strength. See the potential. See the soul running free, not from you, but toward something greater.

And know that your role is not to break them, but to walk with them

until they find their path, purpose, and place in the world.

Next time you're on campus, stop by and visit our beloved bronze Mustang—Big Mac—nestled among the trees on Lochinver Lane. Named by our students, Big Mac stands as a symbol of strength and spirit. Give his nose a gentle rub—it just might lead you toward something greater.



Barry L. Davis
Head of School





Building Continuity and Community:

David Roth Readies for New, Expanded Role

Beginning next fall, David Roth will assume a full-time leadership role as Associate Head of School for Educational Programs. It's familiar territory for the current Head of Middle School, whose job in recent years has grown to include overseeing K-12 educational programs, as well. Here, David shares his thoughts on this new position and plans for the future, as well as what makes McLean School a leader when it comes to building a strong curriculum, faculty, and students.

A Toolbox for Every Teacher

This is a role I've been thinking about, and doing in part, for a while now, but I'm excited for the chance to focus my efforts specifically on creating continuity and consistency with K-12 programming; how to improve it but also make sure things that work well become even better. I think it's a lot about collaboration and communication and giving our educators what they need to do excellent work, which includes setting aside time and resources to connect with each other and share information and ideas. McLean's Strategic Plan has five main pillars, one of which is lifting up great teachers and teaching. That's what I've done most of my career and what I love to do. My goal moving forward is to facilitate that in and across all our divisions and strengthen our already strong faculty. We serve really bright children, but they can be complicated and require a range of strategies and skills. I want the toolbox for every teacher here to be as full as possible.

"A Better Way of Doing School" Made Even Better

After Covid, many schools had

to figure out how to support a range of struggling students to get up to speed in certain areas. At McLean, we've been doing this work for 70 years—helping students with their challenges—so we already have many structures integrated to support them. For example, helping students build metacognition—an awareness of their own thought process—to understand assignments, task initiate and plan, complete and turn in their work. We were already set up with small classes, teams of specialists, and with the way we teach. The social aspect of learning, which was always part of our program, became even more of an area of focus, especially for our youngest students, who missed out on key years of socialization.

Again, because of how we're set up and our low teacher-student ratios, we have the resources, time, space, and expertise to focus on the things that are key to learning and school success. When children come to us with negative feelings about school, and we can turn that around, it's life-changing for them and their families. Helping our students understand

themselves and shift their internal narratives isn't always easy or possible, but it happens here at McLean; we're helping children re-write their stories in real-time.

Who, What, and How We Teach

One of the most underrated things in schools is teachers seeing other teachers in action, observing but also giving feedback. McLean's Teacher Training Institute, going into its third year, is a chance for faculty to come together for a full week dedicated to best teaching practices as well as sharing insights with one another. I'd love to grow this program. Whether they do the Teacher Training Institute or not, all new faculty come together in the summer to focus on the McLean Method—our way of ensuring engaging and rigorous pedagogy.

The curriculum is another area we continue to do work in, interrogating what we teach and how we teach it; for example, as the world changes, what books do we pick and why? This past year, one of our history teachers shifted his course from being chronological, the more traditional way the subject is taught, to being thematic.

Looking at topics such as race in America or geography and exploring them as a whole versus a year at a time. What he is finding is that it's just so much more useful and interesting for students to learn history as a context in addition to a timeline. Another example is how we've fine-tuned the Orton-Gillingham reading methodology for our students to make it more accessible and useful. We want our teachers to try new things, whether it's something like that or our ungraded math class in the Middle School, which students have responded to very well—you take away the pressure of the grade, creating a different experience. Ultimately, we're trying to move away from the old-school model of children as vessels that need to be filled with information for information's sake and toward a model where students are the center of learning in relevant, engaging, and enjoyable ways.

Ability to Adapt

McLean will continue to change as the world changes. With the rise of Artificial Intelligence, for example—figuring out what that means to education is fun right now. I'm interested in talking with external and internal thought leaders to consider where we're going as a School, field, and world. What does and can education look like?

Schools are typically slow change agents, but an ability to adapt comes naturally to McLean; we've been doing it all along. Things our students tend to be good at, like creative problem solving and having a high EQ and human connection, will serve them particularly well in terms of how the world is going. Information is

ubiquitous now—you can get it on your phone in an instant—so the fill-the-vessel model I mentioned becomes less important, and McLean's focus on not just information but how you use it is increasingly valuable. Rather than spend time filling up the vessel, we get to work on adapting the pedagogy in fun ways for us and our students and create a rigorous learning environment for them. For so long, rigor was defined by the number of hours you studied, words you memorized, or facts you could recite. But today, rigor is more about engagement, and passion, and critical thinking, and depth of learning, and perspectives. When you pivot to this type of teaching and learning, which McLean does so well, there's a lot of potential for growth.

Looking to the Future

We have some great programmatic initiatives on the horizon. One big in all schools right now is fostering a sense of belonging, making sure children feel like their identities are supported, and building connections to people and places. McLean has long been focused on inclusivity and diversity and respect, but there's always more to be done, in the classroom especially, around anti-bias, anti-racist work—creating the windows-and-mirrors experience where you see others like yourself and develop insight into those who may be different.

McLean started Restorative Practices last year, which has advanced our community—and relationship-building skills—being able to understand when you do harm, what that looks like, and how to work through it. It's been great getting people

together to talk candidly about these experiences and how to acknowledge that even if it's not your intent, here's the impact. Having those conversations is important, as is creating a space where we can make mistakes but also learn and grow from them.

I'm also thinking a lot about capacity building. I look forward to supporting our two new Division Heads, Kymberli Rivers and Kristen Vogel, and putting two new positions in place, including K-12 curriculum and instruction leaders for math and literacy. We're looking at how we all work together across grades and divisions; with two campuses now, too, there's even more intentionality regarding how we come together to share what we're doing, how, and why. I'll continue to collaborate with our department chairs to ensure curriculum continuity from kindergarten through grade 12 and also to look at athletics as an opportunity for fostering leadership and mentoring opportunities among coaches and athletes alike.

McLean has grown quickly, and with this kind of growth comes the need to create structures and connections to support it, which is a lot of the work we've done and will continue to do. We are guided by an Abilities Model® that supports students in areas of strength as well as areas of challenge. Many schools focus on one or the other, but most human beings are not really good at everything or struggle with everything, right? Most human beings are a mix, and McLean is set up to help students succeed in a full range of areas, now and in the future. And it's a future that I'm excited to be part of. ■

Denise Picarelli & Paul van der Wey

Thanks to the generosity of Denise Picarelli and Paul van der Wey, parents of Carter '27, McLean – specifically the School's College Counseling Program – is increasingly well-positioned to support students in pursuing and preparing for post-secondary options. The Picarelli Family Memorial Gift of \$100K supports additional resources and skill-building when it comes to readiness for college and other higher-ed pathways. We spoke with Denise about what inspired her family's transformational gift and its impact moving forward.

How the Gift Came to Be

"For us, it was about giving in a way that will impact McLean students of today and tomorrow. We were looking for a way to honor my parents and sister after they passed away. Education has always been important to our family, and they would be so pleased to know how much McLean has given Carter and other children like him who receive the support they need to do well academically and otherwise to set them up for success. That success may or may not be about going to a traditional four-year institution—we appreciate students who want to further their education in whatever way makes sense for them, and support McLean in supporting everyone."

A Focus on Readiness

"However a child chooses to further their education, they need to be able to build the independence necessary ready for that next step. There's a lot a school can do to help students prepare, and McLean is already doing a lot of it in terms of helping them build organizational skills and study habits, self-advocacy skills, and other things that will serve them well when they go into the world."

Resources and Relationships

"One thing we are excited about is developing McLean as a "reach-back" resource for graduates

who might need some insight or input or advice from someone other than their parents. McLean is already set up for this given their focus on relationship building and connection and we are thrilled that our support can help make this program happen. Another area we support is leveling the playing field for students when it comes to the academic testing that is still required by a lot of colleges and universities, even though it's not necessarily the best measure of what students are capable of. We appreciate McLean's work in this area to help children have as many options as possible."

What "College Prep" Means to Us

"McLean is a school that prioritizes getting to know each child and what they need to succeed. They know when and how to push appropriately and what each child is capable of; we experienced this first-hand in terms of how the school worked with us to build Carter's academic schedule this year. This level of understanding and support for students is what will help them become independent and the best versions of themselves moving forward. Whatever a student's next step is—college, trade School, gap year—McLean is helping them grow and develop and be ready for the journey. We're so happy to be able to support the School and honor my family members—Al, Judy, and Janice—in this way." ■



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Alum Profile

Sam Lebow '04

Making A World of Difference: Sam Lebow '04 reflects on experience at McLean and beyond

A McLean School “Lifer” – student from kindergarten through graduation – Sam Lebow '04 credits the School with providing the support and opportunities for success, that made him who he is today.

“Knowing what I know about myself, I can’t imagine how I would have survived in a more traditional setting,” says the man who went on to college, graduate school, and a career helping young people from around the world find academic opportunities and success of their own.

Growing up in Chevy Chase, DC, Sam’s parents planned to enroll him in the local public school for kindergarten. Right around that time, however, he showed some signs that led to testing and a diagnosis of Tourette’s and ADHD—and they decided Sam would benefit from a smaller environment and a more personal education. For the boy who once forgot his raincoat in a hurricane, McLean proved to be a port in a storm.

“What I remember most about McLean are the teachers—their kindness and willingness to help me tap into my strengths and support me through my struggles,” says Sam. He cites his meaningful bond with grade one

teacher, Janice Genter; Brenda Crawley, who helped develop Sam’s love of music and singing; Roberta Schneider, who introduced him to the joys of creative writing; Kim Horworth, who recognized Sam’s aptitude for history and geography; and John Neal who encouraged him to take AP US History as a junior. “I had so many great teachers who helped develop things back then that are assets for me today,” he says—assets that include strong writing skills, interest in other cultures around the world, and ability to put himself out there (including a competitive karaoke league!).

McLean also helped Sam persist through challenges with math and science. “Nobody ever made me feel bad about that,” he says, “which helped me to admit and accept what’s hard for me.” All the more reason he finds it interesting, if ironic, to be an advisor for high-achieving higher-ed students with STEM-based scholarships through a program run by the Institute of International Education (IIE). It’s a position Sam has held for the past five years in a field that’s been an interest of his for a long time.

Sam earned a BA in Political Economy in 2008 at Evergreen State College in Olympia, WA, where he had a positive

study abroad experience he was eager to replicate. He taught at a Montessori kindergarten in China, volunteered at a school in the Republic of Georgia, and completed a Master’s in International and Comparative Education in 2014 through the School for International Training. After then working more than four years at the Washington Center as an Academic Program Advisor and Instructor, Sam took the job at IIE.

In addition to a connection with international students, Sam loves the structure his current position provides and the ability to work from home in Kensington, Maryland, which he shares with his wife, Meghan, and their two-year-old daughter, Stella (and Australian Cattle Dog Callie). As life allows, Sam enjoys family outings, live music, and travel, most recently a trip to Paris for the 2024 Olympics.

“School was never great for me, but as I get older, I’ve developed a more positive association with it,” Sam says. “Sometimes I look back and wish I’d worked a little harder, but that’s just hindsight. The truth is, I was supported in being exactly who I am by people who were invested in me no matter what”—an experience that has meant the world. ■



Community Education: Cecily's Conference 2025

Empowering Futures

15 Years of Advocacy & Innovation

In its 15th Year! Many parents, professionals, and community members came to learn, laugh, and connect on Saturday, March 15. Parent Coach, Columnist for *The Washington Post*, and Author of *Parenting Outside the Lines*, Meghan Leahy, delivered a fantastic keynote on connection. The Workshops presented by therapist and mind-body medicine practitioner, Dr. Sabrina N'Diaye, therapist Amye Fried (Oliver '27), and Associate Director of College Counseling, Sally O'Rourke, were insightful and full of practical tools participants could use immediately. Save the date for next year's Cecily's Conference on Saturday, February 21.

Thanks to the Parents Association Committee, Fran Brown (Benjamin '31), Joan Brierton (Ryan '28), Rodnika Murphy (Nomar '35), Melissa Hurwitz (Rebecca '32), Jill Tender (Ethan '26), and Allison Carle (Jacob '30). ■



K-12 Grandparents & Friends Day

Grandparents and Friends Day was a vibrant reminder of the many hands and hearts that shape our community. The Campus was alive with the joy of generations coming together—students beaming with pride as they shared their classrooms, projects, and traditions with their guests. From the heartfelt performances to the lively conversations, the day was filled with meaningful connections and moments of genuine warmth. We're so grateful to everyone who took the time to be part of this special celebration—it truly enriched our School family. ■



McLean School

Transformative.

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