



January 14, 2025

Dear Acera Community,

I am delighted that after the incredible 16 years we have invested in founding and growing Acera School, we have found an exceptional educational leader for the next chapter of Acera's journey! As you have heard from our Chairperson Holly Whittemore, Dr. Heather Pinedo-Burns will be Acera's next Head of School. Most importantly for all of us, Heather deeply believes in and shares Acera's mission to serve gifted students in ways which honor the interests and capacities of each student without limits, and lives our core values of community, integrity, curiosity, innovation, and leadership. As our next Head of School, Heather will be an inspiring leader for our entire community, championing all the elements that make Acera extraordinary.

Heather's career has been strongly rooted in gifted education and its evidence-based, best-in-class pedagogy. Heather earned her doctorate in education at Columbia Teachers College, where she also taught future educators how to differentiate instruction and support gifted students. Earlier in her career, Heather was director of a lab school at Teacher's College before becoming Director of Lower School at the Speyer School for gifted students in New York City, then finally joining us as our Assistant Head of School. She boldly moved, purchased a home in the area, enrolled both of her own gifted children as students here. As part of our community, her entire family now sees firsthand the unique ways we truly, deeply, serve each child –creating a special environment where teachers collaborate seamlessly and share joyful stories about students' growth and achievements.

For my part, I truly feel like we all – together – "picked" Heather, and I am so glad she picked us back! When I see Heather, I see a leader who listens and cares deeply, one who respects those around her and collaborates with authenticity, and who demonstrates unwavering commitment to do what is right even if it is difficult. Extraordinary professionalism and judgement are key to the job, and she has those in spades. With her unique credentials specializing in gifted education, Heather is also perfectly positioned to both nurture our culture of growth and innovation, and elevate Acera's reputation across New England as the premier school for gifted students.

In August 2009, I founded a school out of thin air, with no money, no teachers, and no advocates, amid a climate of skepticism that such a thing was possible. Now 16 years into this journey, I am eager to open a new chapter for myself, in which I hand over the

responsibility of running our amazing school to Heather, and transition to an ambassador role focused on outreach. Anything that our school leaders ask of me I will help with whether it's as an admissions ambassador, to support fundraising, strengthen Alumni engagement, or evangelize how Acera is a microcosm of what is possible for all schools. I am also eager to support AceraEI, our public school outreach arm. So, I am not 'going away' but rather transitioning into a new chapter in which I hope to help change the conversation nationally about how we, as a society, define the purpose of education for all students. Lofty? Yes. But no matter what, I will continue to help Acera from near and from afar in the years to come!

We welcome everyone to spend time with Heather in the coming months. There will be many opportunities to do so including open dialogue 'get-to-know-Heather' sessions at our Friday morning coffees and in open Zoom sessions. Additionally, Heather will lead three presentations on education and giftedness this spring; you are invited to join and invite others to come too! As a former Columbia faculty and an international presenter, Heather has a wide array of topics she can share! We hope to see you all there.

Our first time to gather will be this Friday, January 17, 2025, for Coffee with Admin, from 8:45-9:45 am in Room 9. Heather will be presenting on what's ahead in the future for Acera. We hope you'll join us.

Please join me in congratulating Heather as we look forward to the next chapter of Acera!

With gratitude and thanks to all,



Courtney E. Dickinson
Founder