



# HEATHWOOD HALL

## 70 YEARS *of* EXCELLENCE

### **2021-2022 State of the School Address Delivered by Head of School Chris Hinchey**

Heathwood Hall - Smith-Shirley Campus Center

Thursday, February 24, 2022 at 12:00 p.m.

I am excited to welcome you to today's presentation, and during the next 20 minutes, I look forward to sharing some thoughts and observations about the state of Heathwood Hall. At the conclusion of my prepared remarks, there will be time to answer your questions.

As we recognize Heathwood's 70<sup>th</sup> year, there is much to celebrate, and as we look forward, there is much about which to be excited. In a word, the State of the School is strong.

While there is a natural desire to place Covid in the rear view mirror, it has impacted our lives in a multitude of ways. Over 300 members of our on-campus community have tested positive during these last two years, and that represents about 30% of our students and employees. This past week, though, we saw less than one positive case per day, and all data indicates that infection rates will continue to decrease in the months to come. In fact, at the conclusion of next week - March 4<sup>th</sup> - we will move to mask-optional safety protocols on campus.

Throughout the pandemic, I have been struck by the resilience of our community and overwhelmed by the support, empathy, and gratitude of parents, students, and extended members of the Heathwood family.

Our faculty have served our students well - beyond everyone's lofty expectations of professional excellence, and our educators and administrators kept students at the

forefront of their call to service. Additionally, our school nurses demonstrated the highest level of health care possible. Our students were well cared for.

The last two years have been incredibly trying for educators and families; however, in many ways Heathwood has shined. The expansive campus and raised buildings provided plenty of space to embrace the outdoors for lunch, class meetings, and special events.

Our small classes made the shift toward safety protocols easier, and our focus on relationships made meaningful and thoughtful communication between families and the School authentic and comfortable. Additionally, our athletic program, the PEAK program, and our Afternoon Express program were just some of the ways in which students benefited from Heathwood's robust programming surrounding physical activity. The value proposition of a Heathwood Hall education grew stronger these last two years.

Our Admissions Office was busy in the summer of 2020, following the stay-at-home order, and we had never seen so many prospective families during the summer months.

Despite capping enrollment to ensure safe social distance in every classroom, we opened the 2020 - 2021 school year with 730 students, and we finished that same school year with 755 students. Many of our new families - disproportionately from public school - shared strong recommendations about their Heathwood experience, thus extending our reach and encouraging others to explore Heathwood with their families.

Those positive stories about their experiences impacted the traffic in our admissions office during the spring of 2021, and this year we opened the school year with 830 students. We are on pace - even with the graduation of a large class in May - to open with an enrollment of 850 this coming August.

The increased admissions traffic and our visits with prospective families have been illuminating. Transparent communication, student-centric decision making, and a supportive and safe environment come up frequently as reasons for visiting and choosing Heathwood.

Additionally, quality academic and extracurricular programs, talented and caring teachers and coaches, and a college-like campus were identified as distinctive features of the Heathwood experience. The pandemic has validated the qualities of a Heathwood education that we have held dear for 70 years.

A significant number of our recently enrolled students are also new to Columbia, and we are yielding families moving into town at a high rate. We are excited about the geographic diversity on our campus, and we frequently hear that our program is comparable to independent schools located in some of the largest cities in the United States.

We've approached enrollment growth strategically, and it is distributed evenly across divisions and grades. The additional students are playing on teams, acting in plays, and populating enrichment classes, and school events are bursting at the seams with energy, engagement, and excitement. New students and families make the experience better for all. Heathwood's momentum is strong.

If we open this upcoming school year with 850 students, that will be a 30% increase in enrollment since 2015, and it will approach the historic high enrollment of the mid-2000s. Our new students are bright, engaged, and talented, and they bring a diversity of thought, cultures, and experiences. We look forward to their contributions as Heathwood continues to improve and evolve.

Our development and advancement efforts are reaching new heights, and the Annual Fund is at historically high numbers due to the generosity of this great community. Overall giving to the Annual Fund is up 31%, and our current parent participation is at 75% and climbing.

We hosted a record number of families and alumni at Homecoming, the Wild Game Dinner, and the Mingle Jingle alumni event. All three events were very successful, and we are all looking forward to the 2022 Heathwood Auction on March 26th.

Over the last two years, we have dedicated greater resources to our school advancement efforts and we have restructured the office. I am excited about the trajectory of our efforts in this arena, and it is clear that the Heathwood community is eager to support the growth of the school through greater engagement and philanthropy.

We have already surpassed our fundraising goal for this year, and we are excited to be supporting and enhancing our programs through these generous gifts. These gifts dramatically change the experience for our students, and they enable us to augment our programs, attract and retain the best teachers, develop our resources, and improve our facilities.

The Heathwood academic experience has more closely returned to normal, and with lower infection rates for much of the year - with the exception of January - and the increased availability of the vaccine, there have been fewer quarantines and more in-person learning.

In the Lower School, there have been some notable areas of growth and improvement. With the addition of Dr. Jamie Browder, the new Lower School Science Teacher, we have committed to better utilizing and incorporating the environmental assets - the greenhouse, the fruit garden, and the pond - available on campus into our Early Childhood and Lower School science curriculum. Additionally, we are investigating ways to update the greenhouse and better utilize this space.

We've extended our one-to-one iPad program into first and second grades, while also enhancing the curriculum in the library program by including more intentional instruction on research skills and exposure to a greater variety of books. And with the addition of our Lower School Guided Reading curriculum and the workshop approach to lessons in math, science, and social studies, we are better engaging our students in the learning process.

Middle School students are learning about responsible behavior and digital wellness on social media through The Social Institute program, and in the near future, students, with parental support, will participate in Guy-ology and Girl-ology to learn more about their developing bodies.

We also offer introductory religion classes for all middle school students and have developed new related arts classes, such as yoga, service learning, research skills, film studies, and personal finance.

The 8th grade DC trip this year will leave Columbia on March 7 and include 57 students traveling to our nation's capital. And with ever-relaxing safety protocols, the performing arts have returned to the Middle School. Just last month, the Middle School welcomed 20+ parents, alumni, and friends of Heathwood back to campus as part of our successful annual Career Day.

Recently, we announced that the Upper School College Counseling Office will grow next year. The new College Counseling Coordinator will organize group college trips and grade-specific programming, and this position will also assist with college representatives and applicants interested in intercollegiate athletics. We are also excited to utilize social media and traditional mediums for more communication from the College Office about the College process.

We are proud of the college counseling services built by Mary Beth Fry and Kenetta Dash, and with the addition of Mary Kay Deese as the new College Counseling Coordinator, we are eager to grow and develop the program to better meet the needs of a enlarging student body participating in a more complicated and nuanced college application process.

Winterim is scheduled to begin on March 7<sup>th</sup>, and we are excited that the Upper School is offering a robust menu of domestic travel. Some of the more notable experiences include trips to cities like Seattle, Miami, and New York City, and outdoor explorations of the White Mountains of New Hampshire and the Big Bend National Park in Texas.

The Upper School was also proud to learn that we had five seniors chosen as National Merit Scholarship Finalists, and, for the fourth year in a row, a member of the senior class was accepted to Yale University. Heathwood students are competitive at the

national level, and college admission has been particularly strong this year. We look forward to sharing a matriculation list later this spring.

Participation in interscholastic sports is at an all-time high: we had 303 students participating on a team in the fall and over 160 students on a team this winter. Though the spring season is just starting, we have over 15 teams with close to 350 students participating in grades 5 through 12.

In the last few years, first under our former Athletic Director, Jeff Whalen, and now under our current Athletic Director, Eva Greenberg, our athletic program has grown and developed. It is currently one of the most complex and expansive departments on campus, and we are finding broad success in interscholastic competition during all three seasons on both Middle and Upper School teams.

While we are seeing increased athletic participation in both the Middle and Upper Schools, the Middle School teams are thriving. There is an energy present that highlights the fun, the life lessons, and the pride in what it means to wear the Highlander uniform. With that in mind, we have committed resources to staffing sub-varsity teams, constructing age-appropriate schedules, and outfitting our younger students in quality practice gear and game uniforms.

This past fall, the girls' cross country team earned a state championship, and we continue to see a select group of our athletes earn the opportunity to compete at the Division I, II and III levels in college. This fall, we had 17 all-region athletes and 9 all-state athletes, which is a testament to the talent and work ethic of our student athletes and the wise and informed guidance they received from coaches.

I am incredibly proud of the head varsity coaches leading our programs. They are transforming the athletic experience for our student-athletes; however, moving forward, it will be important to update our facilities and provide our athletes and the coaches with more opportunities to pursue excellence.

The dramatic arts and the fine arts are thriving, and this past fall, Drama Teacher Jonathan Monk demonstrated his creativity and significant directing skills by producing a play outside on the lawn in front of the Goodall Bell Tower. Next week, the drama students who have been practicing for the last two months will perform a one-act play in the Rainey Belser Auditorium.

This spring, we have been keenly focused on growing the music program. Last year, Covid caused significant adjustments to our music program on campus, and we simultaneously saw a longstanding music teacher retire and our band teacher start a new leg of his educational journey.

Leadership transition often causes a pause - and when coupled with Covid adjustments, the challenges facing our music program were real. That said, our new band teacher,

Drew Mabry, made great strides this year as Covid restrictions have been lifted, and we are excited to be welcoming a newly hired chorus instructor to Heathwood this spring.

Heathwood's arts program remains an integral aspect of a student's journey, and we remain committed to supporting the growth and development of the music program so that it provides balance to the excellence in the dramatic arts and fine arts programs.

Technology plays a vital role in the current and future lives of our students, and the Technology Department has facilitated significant changes these past two years. Our students are learning to utilize their digital devices as work efficiency tools; however, today's world also requires them to find information, vet that information for reliability, understand data, and creatively present their thoughts.

They need to write well, with clear and concise language and often they need to collaborate digitally on a Google Document. Other times, they will be called to present their ideas in a visually engaging manner through digital tools that incorporate basic and complex graphic design apps. Their education should look different than our school experience.

The Technology Department - in conjunction with the division heads - has grown our educational technology resources in a variety of ways. We instituted a MacBook program - starting with this year's freshman class - and it will impact the entire Upper School by the start of the '24 - '25 school year. They have also expanded our one-to-one iPad programs into the 1st & 2nd grade, so that it now reaches from 1st grade to 8th grade.

They have provided all classroom teachers with a laptop and iPad, all associate teachers with an iPad, and provided Logitech Crayons to teachers and all students in Middle and Lower School, and they upgraded the school wireless network in order to improve its reliability and increase its reach.

And to give you some appreciation for the size of this operation, the Technology Department manages over 600 school-owned iPads and 265 computers, along with over 100 Apple TVs and 100 Digital Displays. You may even be surprised to learn that they support close to 75 printers.

Heathwood's use of technology will continue to grow and it will always be utilized to augment our curriculum, facilitate student engagement and learning, and prepare our graduates for their life journey.

Our Extended Learning program continues to grow, and it serves a growing percentage of our students in the Early Childhood, Lower School, and Middle School. We have an average of 150 students staying each day in Afternoon Express and The Thought Studio, and we have added 21 new enrichment classes this year, in which 75 students stay each day to participate.



Our Summer Program has 375 more reservations this summer than we did last year at the same time, and there are 10 more teachers facilitating summer camps this year than last year. Afternoon Express is truly an extension of our school day and our summer programs are truly an extension of the school year. There are not many days or nights when the campus is not buzzing with the energy of children.

Student wellness remains a top priority for our parents and a focus for Heathwood Hall. The challenges associated with Covid caused us to reflect on the service demands placed on our Health Center, so we moved to a model with two qualified and certified Health professionals.

Moving forward, we plan to continue supporting a Health Center with two nurses. This is also the first year that we've had three athletic trainers, allowing us to provide better care and oversight of our athletes.

Besides being one of the only independent schools in Columbia with 2 nurses, we are also the only independent school with a Deputy & School Resource Officer from the Richland County Sheriff's Department, and in addition to his vast personal experience and his professional relationship with Richland County and all their resources, Josh Albins works diligently to establish connections with students, while helping us manage a safe and secure community.

Deputy Albins has been instrumental in our efforts to constantly reevaluate our safety measures, train our adults, and update our protocols to meet ever-changing best practices.

Heathwood also has two school chaplains, who in addition to running our Chapel program and teaching a full offering of classes in the Middle and Upper School, provide pastoral care for students wishing to receive faith-based support from adults in our community.

When you consider our 2 school nurses, our School Resource Officer, our 2 school chaplains, our 3 school counselors and our 3 athletic trainers, our student support services are unique in the Midlands. The totality of this support for students, families, and faculty makes Heathwood an amazing place to teach and learn.

The student experience is one of the most defining aspects of an independent school, and therefore it was not surprising when last spring, as the Board of Trustees engaged in a retreat to discuss the strategic direction of the School, thoughts about improving the Student Experience became the focus of discussion.

While the Board retreat was focused on aspects of our strategic plan and the School's five-to-ten year goals, some of the most robust discussions centered on our core mission and those aspects of the student experience that differentiate Heathwood from other independent schools.

What are some of the defining characteristics of a Heathwood student's experience on campus?

I am currently working with the Board of Trustees to develop, supplement and improve the PEAK outdoor high ropes course and the two facilities connected to school spirituality: the Outdoor Chapel and the Chapel of the Epiphany.

Additionally, our Middle School and Lower School playgrounds are unique, and research confirms that play, being outdoors, and physical activity all improve student engagement and learning. We are currently in discussions about how to improve and update those two spaces.

Heathwood's extracurricular offerings - or co-curricular offerings - mainly arts and athletics, play an important role in the growth and development of our young people. Arts and athletics play an integral role in the life of a student as they often learn lessons about being a member of a team, pursuing excellence, and handling success and failure with grace and dignity.

With so many athletes competing during the three seasons of athletic competition - along with summer training - we are evaluating ways to develop our athletic facilities so that our students have the best opportunities, facilities, and experiences. Additionally, we are looking strategically at our performing arts spaces and determining how to best support a thriving arts program.

I hope you leave this call with the knowledge that Heathwood is in an amazing place of strength.

We are proud of the role we've played in transforming lives for the last 70 years, and we are grateful for our current successes. We continue to focus on curriculum, extra-curricular programming, our outdoor spaces, the student experience, and relationships.

Most importantly, we believe in supporting students through the development of programs that enable students to realize their potential, with adults committed to creating pathways for student success, and in an environment that nurtures the mind, body, and soul.

I am blessed to lead a school committed to knowing children, and I am grateful for the support of my colleagues and the parents who extend their trust to us each and every day. We strive for excellence in all we do, while remaining as a school with a soul. Thank you.