

June 2018

Dear CGS Family,

I want to thank the four school divisions, students, Governing Board members, central administration, building principals, teachers, staff, and parents for all of their support and collaboration during my eight years as Director of The Commonwealth Governor's School. When I accepted this position in 2010, I had no idea how unique, challenging, and rewarding this administrative position would become in my life. Because of its many stakeholders and size, I realized early on I would have to look at myself more as a matriarch of four families rather than simply as an administrator. Each family (King George, Caroline, Spotsylvania, and Stafford) possesses exceptional characteristics that have to be considered daily. Like differences in family members, each had different instructional calendars/schedules, policies, objectives, operational procedures, demographics, facilities, and strengths. In spite of the differences and challenges that go with operating a regional program, I have found this experience to be intellectually rewarding as a leader, and as an educator.

The students in CGS are incredibly gifted, motivated, and driven beyond their teenage years. Every day when I ventured into classrooms, I was in awe by their focus, their academic discourse, their sense of humor in and outside of the classroom setting, and their passion for learning. You should be proud of your kids because they are representing your counties well. Furthermore, you should be proud of the families in your community who are raising such amazing individuals as well as all of the teachers who influenced them as small children, and as young adults.

Behind every amazing student in CGS are phenomenal teachers and supportive parents. I truly believe 99% of the 20-year success of the CGS program is due to the dedication, compassion, and cognitive strength of the CGS teachers. CGS is blessed to have so many experienced teachers who devote countless hours toward the advancement of CGS students. I believe that is why many of our students call CGS a family because the teachers know them well, attend many of their activities, and provide moral and academic support even after they leave high school.

The CGS parents are unlike any I have ever worked with in high schools. They are eager to chaperone trips, dances, and socials. If you need a dozen cookies baked for an event, they will donate 3 dozen. Finally, they are CGS' biggest fans, and are fiercely protective of this program because for some of their children, CGS is the only time when their son or daughter ever felt validated or comfortable in school. I will miss the friendships I have experienced that span all four counties, and so appreciated their support while I was Director.

I am grateful for the opportunity to work beside the CGS Program Manager, Donna Welch, and Technical Engineer, Kevin Ramsey. Donna is the institutional foundation of CGS. She is incredibly organized, articulate, thorough, and a budgetary wiz. Most importantly, Donna

is a valuable sounding board to anyone who has been the Director because of her compassion for the students, and her desire to make this program successful. Her commitment to CGS never waivers, and her level of service to its students, families, and teachers never ends when she leaves the office each day. Not only does she keep CGS in the “black” financially, but she will always be my friend.

I describe Kevin Ramsey as a cross between Steve Jobs, Bill Gates, Mark Zuckerberg, and a cyber security agent. Kevin’s proactive approach to instructional technology, his technological vision, common sense to cyber security, and “can do” execution of our strategic plan has enabled CGS to continue as a cutting edge academic program without compromising students’ privacy, CGS’ academic integrity, and the program budget.

Leaving The Commonwealth Governor’s School was a difficult decision to make because of the professional relationships I have made in the region, the wonderful friendships I have in the school divisions, and the autonomy you gave me as Director. CGS and your stewardship have made me become a better listener, educator, and servant leader. I cannot thank you enough for this opportunity and wish you all a wonderful summer!

Most Sincerely,

Merri Kae VanderPloeg