



October 2, 2026

Dear Valwood Community,

On behalf of the Board of Trustees and the Head of School Search Committee, we are excited to announce the unanimous selection of **Chelsy Beninate** as the next Head of School for Valwood School. She will begin on July 1, 2027.

Our search for Valwood's new Head of School began in early spring, after John Davis announced his intention to retire at the end of the 2026-27 school year. The Head of School Search Committee, formed by the Board of Trustees, led a comprehensive global search with the assistance of The Education Group, an educational recruiting firm. After reviewing many application files and conducting interviews with semi-finalists, the Committee invited three finalists to our campus for a rigorous two-day interview process. In addition to meetings with the Search Committee and the Board, each finalist visited with faculty and staff, parents, and students, who provided feedback directly to the Search Committee. We greatly appreciate the time and devotion so many of you gave to this community effort. This process culminated in our decision to extend an offer to Mrs. Beninate, which she has accepted.



Mrs. Beninate embodies Valwood's mission of academic excellence, strong character, and service to others, and she understands and embraces our culture and community. She is a collaborative leader who believes strong schools are built on relationships, and that was clear in how she connected with students, faculty, and parents on campus.

Mrs. Beninate has spent the past eight years at Fort Worth Country Day in Texas, where she currently serves as Assistant Head of School. During her tenure, she has also served as Director of Fine Arts, Director of the Center for International Studies, and Director of Special Projects. Her leadership experience spans nearly every aspect of independent school life, including academic and curricular innovation, strategic planning, campus operations, financial stewardship, school safety, and major capital projects. She has played an instrumental role in advancing institutional priorities, strengthening programs, and creating environments in which students and faculty can thrive.

Before joining Fort Worth Country Day, Mrs. Beninate served as an academic dean, assistant principal, and band director. A veteran of the United States Marine Corps, where she served as a musician, she brings a distinctive combination of discipline, creativity, and a deep commitment to service. She was selected for and completed the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS) 2023–24 Aspiring Heads Fellowship, reflecting her commitment to continued professional growth and school leadership.

At the heart of her leadership philosophy is a belief that exceptional schools are built on strong relationships, a shared sense of purpose, and a commitment to knowing and nurturing each student. She is a visible, approachable leader who values collaboration, embraces innovation, and honors a school's traditions while thoughtfully preparing it for the future. She has expressed to us that she feels honored and energized to join Valwood School as its next Head of School. During her visit, she was struck by the strength of this community and the clarity of its purpose.

Chelsy and her husband, Anthony, have four adult children and one grandchild. They look forward to becoming active members of the Valwood community and making Valdosta their home.

Please see below for Chelsy's letter to the Valwood community.

Sincerely,

Valwood Board of Trustees

Dear Valwood Community,

With tremendous joy and a grateful heart, I write to you as Valwood's next Head of School. I am deeply honored to have been entrusted with this opportunity and look forward to becoming part of a community that has already made Anthony and me feel so welcome.

From the moment we arrived on campus, we were struck by the genuine warmth and hospitality extended to us. A palpable sense of joy filled our visit, from the energy of the students to the pride of the faculty and staff and the deep commitment of the parents and trustees. What stood out most was not simply what people shared about Valwood, but the way they spoke about their school. Their love for this community was evident in every conversation, and it was clear that Valwood is a place where relationships matter and people genuinely care for one another.

Throughout my career, I have believed a school's strength lies in its people. Beautiful facilities and exceptional programs matter, but relationships, shared experiences, and daily interactions bring a school's mission to life. I see those qualities at Valwood, and I am excited to build on the strong foundation you have established while working together to imagine what is possible for the future.

As I prepare to join you, my first priority will be to listen and learn. I want to understand the traditions you cherish, celebrate the accomplishments that make you proud, and hear your hopes and aspirations for the years ahead. I believe meaningful leadership begins with understanding a community and that the most lasting progress comes from working together with a shared sense of purpose. Valwood's commitment to academic excellence, strong character, and service to others provides a wonderful foundation for that work.

I also want to express my sincere appreciation to John Davis for his leadership and years of service to Valwood. I look forward to working with him in the months ahead to ensure a thoughtful and seamless transition. My thanks also go to the Board of Trustees, the Search Committee, and everyone who invested their time and energy in the search process. I am grateful for the confidence you have placed in me.

On a personal note, Anthony and I are both looking forward to making Valdosta our home. We have spent time investing in school communities, and we know that being part of a school extends well beyond the classroom or the workday. We look forward to cheering from the sidelines, attending performances, celebrating traditions, and getting to know the families who make Valwood so special.

While July 1 marks the official beginning of my tenure, I suspect you will see us around well before then. In the meantime, we have a house to pack, a move to plan, and a few Texas goodbyes to make. I have a feeling that the song Georgia on My Mind will take on an entirely new meaning in the months ahead. Anthony and I are ready for this next adventure, and we couldn't be more excited that it leads us to Valwood.

With gratitude and excitement,



Chelsy Beninate
Incoming Head of School
Valwood School