

Leadership Journeys



Pamela Olson, Assistant Headmaster Irving Lower School

Initially drawn to Great Hearts as a parent seeking a classical education for her children, Pamela Olson learned through a family friend about a new Great Hearts campus opening in Dallas. “My husband and I decided to put our older three children on the waitlist, and the opportunity for them to attend Great Hearts Irving ultimately became the catalyst for our decision to move to Texas in 2015,” she shared.



Formerly an elementary teacher in California’s public schools, Ms. Olson had not been formally trained in classical education. After four years as a Great Hearts Irving parent, she saw the perfect opportunity to return to teaching alongside her youngest child’s entrance to kindergarten. “I knew there was no better place to teach than Great Hearts. The training and seminar discussions on truth, goodness, and beauty were transformative for me—my heart felt full, and I knew I had found my professional home.”

She began as an Apprentice Teacher (AT) in kindergarten, and although she had a teaching certificate and years of experience in public schools, her exposure to classical curriculum had been limited to what she had taught her own children. “Being an apprentice provided me with the perfect opportunity to immerse myself in the rigorous, rich curriculum and pedagogy of Great Hearts, while learning the ins and outs of classical education from experienced mentors.”

She subsequently stepped into the role of 2nd Grade Lead Teacher and 2nd Grade Team Lead, before moving into an administrative and leadership role as the 504/MTSS Coordinator and Dean of Academics. “Each step of my journey at Great Hearts has deepened my love for the mission and the transformative power of classical education,” she reflected, “and not only for students but for educators as well. I feel incredibly privileged to be part of a community that shares this deep commitment to intellectual and moral formation.”

Ms. Olson credits much to her former headmaster Marcy Finn, reflecting, “She saw potential in me that I didn’t even recognize in myself. As someone who tends to gravitate toward the comfortable and familiar, I found myself hesitant to step outside of what I knew. After my first year as an Apprentice Teacher in kindergarten, I felt ready to take on a leadership role, but I could only imagine teaching in kindergarten. It was Ms. Finn who suggested I consider second grade, a move that felt out of my comfort zone at the time. But I trusted her vision, and I am so grateful I followed her guidance.”

Now in the role of Assistant Headmaster, she finds fulfillment in shaping the broader educational experience for both students and faculty. “As Assistant Headmaster alongside Ms. Roberts,” she noted, “I now bear greater responsibility, and I do not take that lightly. Great Hearts Irving has undergone significant transitions, and as someone who has been part of this school since its doors first opened, I feel deeply invested in helping guide its direction. This responsibility is not only academic but also centered around fostering a thriving, vibrant community. The relationships I’ve built with students, faculty, and families are a source of great joy—whether it’s witnessing a student’s intellectual and moral growth, supporting a teacher’s professional development, or helping families engage more fully with the school’s culture.”

Her personal growth goal for this year? She acknowledged, “Interestingly, the personal growth goal I set for myself this year—before taking on the role of Assistant Headmaster—was to seek balance! Many people refer to it as work-life balance, and that was my focus for this year. However, as often happens, life has a way of presenting challenges we can’t foresee, and I’ve found that achieving balance has become even more difficult than I anticipated. The changes we’ve faced this year have tested my capacity in ways I hadn’t expected, but I am confident that the goal I set for myself was not a mistake. If anything, it has become something of a barometer—a compass needle reminding me of my center and purpose.”

Ms. Olson has the privilege of overseeing the campus announcements each week, which includes reading a quote or wise saying that might inspire thoughtful conversations with students. Recently, she shared a quote on the announcements by Ralph Waldo Emerson: *“What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us.”*

She noted, “This idea echoes what we teach our students—that the heart, mind, and soul are what must be attended to—above all else.”