Q&A with Head Select Stephen Dunn

1. What life experiences have shaped you as a person and professional?

There are so many positive experiences that have shaped me into the person I am. I point to four experiences that have had the most profound influence on who I have become, how I see the world, and how I view education.

The first is the experience of building the home in which I grew up. When I was in middle school, we moved to a farm in Texas where we spent most weekends and evenings working on our home, from foundation to finish work, we did it all. I learned that I liked to solve problems and I acquired the confidence that if I didn’t know how to do something, I could learn how to do it. I still enjoy the opportunity to work with my hands and more importantly, solve problems and learn. This experience has led me to the belief that our fundamental goal is to help students build the confidence they need to face any task head-on and to develop the interpersonal resources to solve any problem they face.

The second experience is getting my first computer in 1980. This is when I realized that I was a nerd at heart. It was rare to have access to a computer at that time and a turning point for me. I never looked back and continued to seek out opportunities to use computers throughout my life. I left education for a few years to enable Sheri to earn her doctorate and was employed in the tech industry. I was fortunate to combine my passion for technology with my passion for education when I joined an independent school as the Director of Technology. I still love to use technology to help solve hard problems and I continue to explore the ways that technology is changing our lives.
While in college, I became involved in clubs and organizations and discovered the importance of the co-curricular experience. I appreciated the ways it allowed me to apply the ideas I was learning in class, to the world around me. I found the experience to be so powerful that I changed my career path from business to education. I learned that education is more than just what is taught in the classroom and strongly believe that schools have an obligation to support the academic program with opportunities for students to explore, test, and hone their character.

Finally, becoming a father shaped me more than all of my previous experiences. I learned, at a deeper level, how to champion the learning and growth of another. We celebrated many great moments and struggled through some difficult times, growing stronger with each experience. I learned the hard way that some schools do a better job than others of caring for children and seeing them for who they really are. I am committed to the notion that nurturing the humanity of each child is central to the work of any school. Being a father has made me a better educator and a stronger partner for parents.

2. What excites you about joining Parker School and the Waimea community?

Parker School has captured my heart with joyful students, warm community, talented faculty and staff, and the unmistakable feeling of ‘ohana. Sheri and I were comfortable from the first moment we stepped on campus. While we had been on campus countless times as a visitor to the Waimea Town Market, it was experiencing the bustling energy within Kahilu Hall and the joyful sanctuary of learning in the lower school, that gave me a real sense of the character of the school. I am excited to help shape the future of Parker School by building on the strong academic and arts programs. The School has begun the process of creating a vision for the future and I am eager to join the conversation. During my visit to campus, Mr. Najita said “the best is yet to come”, and I am excited to see what we can create together.

While I have found a profoundly rewarding professional home at my current school, Nueva, the chance to lead a school on Hawaii Island is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Sheri and I have traveled to Hawaii for more than 25 years and we knew that someday it would be our home. Little did we know that time would arrive so soon. A few years ago we purchased land and began designing the home in which we would retire. In the last couple of years, however, as Sheri spent time caring for her aging parents on the island, our attraction to the island grew and we realized that “someday” is now. Sheri’s family has lived on Hawaii Island for more than 40 years so we feel connected and supported in our move. Parker School is just minutes away from our future home in Waikii Ranch, and we are excited about
the added bonus of watching our adorable one-year-old great niece grow up in Waimea and maybe someday attend Parker School.

3. Tell us a bit more about yourself personally. What hobbies do you enjoy?

I feel fortunate to have a variety of interests that can fill my spare time. I really enjoy working with my hands and building things. As I mentioned, building the home I grew up in left a lasting impression and I still like to make things. I have honed my carpentry skills over the years, remodeling our homes and working on projects. These days I spend more time in the Innovation Lab at our school working with high-tech tools than I do with hand tools. I am excited about our move to Hawaii where I plan to work toward completing the construction of our home.

When we are in Hawaii we love to explore the natural beauty of the island. We have found a few favorite places and trails and hope to discover many more when we arrive in July.

A few years ago I began riding motorcycles with my son, on and off-road. One of our favorite rides was around Mana Road and I hope to be able to do that ride again soon. I get a tremendous feeling of freedom and connection with the environment around me when I am riding.

Finally, we love to entertain our friends and share a great meal and laugh together. I am really happy when I can fire up the grill and prepare something special.