

aHead



Q&A with Danny O'Brien, Putney's Next Head of School

What books that you've read in the last year have impacted you deeply? I found *The Smash Up* by Ali Benjamin both entertaining and very thoughtful in representing the complexities of the current cultural moment. *The Warmth of Other Suns* by Isabel Wilkerson placed me in the shoes of Black Americans struggling with systemic and individual racism to achieve the fullness of their dreams during and after the Great Migration. I don't know how it could not inspire people to fight for change.

How do you decompress? I love to take off on a run through the woods. Camping with my family is (mostly) a joy. I find myself cooking more-complicated-than-is-really-necessary meals on most weekends. I keep my phone out of my bedroom, and have learned not to check email until we have had breakfast and the kids are on their way to school in the morning!

What are you most proud of from HMI? 1) A couple of years ago, I received an email from an alum who had attended several years prior. She was a first generation Latina who shared the ways in which she thrived at HMI and the ways in which we had fallen short of meeting her needs. As I read her email, I realized we had already addressed the specific facets of our program that she articulated as needing improvement. This does not mean HMI is perfect; I know this student and others from historically marginalized identities have had other experiences with us that were unacceptably harmful. It was nonetheless affirming to reply to this student sharing how we have made changes to address many different issues rather than simply talking about the need to do so. And 2) We expanded financial aid packages to include not only wilderness gear and airline tickets for students, but also transportation for parents/guardians/caregivers to attend our Family Weekend. It was important for us that every student see a loved one in the crowd on this important day.

What surprised you about Putney when you visited? The number of students who cared enough about the school to show up for my optional, after school Q&A session during my candidate visit shocked and impressed me. I don't know if you'd see this anywhere else.

What is something that people wouldn't know about you by looking at you? I am the product of incredibly diverse, under-resourced public schools in Providence, Rhode Island. I am grateful for all of my experiences in these environments; they shape my aspirations for education today.