



THE PAIDEIA LETTER

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D. Bruce Lockerbie, Chairman/CEO/Editor

A FEW THOUGHTS ON *RETAINED EXECUTIVE SEARCH* AFTER SIX DECADES OF SERVICE

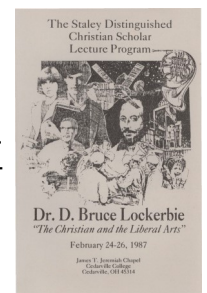
A very long time ago (actually 60+ years), I was still a novice classroom teacher of English in an all-boys college preparatory school. I was learning on the job, observing a master teacher named Pierson Curtis (**photo right**), grandson of the acclaimed Bible teacher A. T. Pierson and a graduate of **Chefoo School** in China, **Mount Hermon School**, and **Princeton University**. Curtis taught much of his curriculum from memory (that is, without a copy of the text in hand because he knew it by heart!). Intimidating to any rookie! Nonetheless, I aspired without shame to emulate him. I wanted to become the best teacher my own students could remember!



By the mid-1960s, word had seeped out that Lockerbie was pretty good in the classroom—which in those primitive days of independent and Christian schooling was misinterpreted to suggest that I might also qualify to head a school myself. I remember the first such offer from an upscale school in the wealthiest suburbs of New Jersey (the school shut down for two weeks in February for a Swiss ski trip!). Another offer from a 100+ year old boarding-and-day school near Chicago, whose board chairman and another trustee actually

DBL in 1965 showed up by surprise in my classroom, having requested permission from my headmaster, to observe me in action. How my teaching boys to read and appreciate a poem or write a compelling argument themselves equipped me to lead their school was never explained.

Thank God, I had the savvy to decline those opportunities, as well as others that followed. At that stage of my inexperience, I much preferred teaching and coaching to the duties of hiring and overseeing others—helped by my headmaster Frank E. Gaebelein, who taught me to avoid the flattery of promotion. Still, the offers kept arriving, especially after I received some professional notice as an officer of a prominent committee on the **National Council of Teachers of English**, then as **The College Board**'s first consultant on its new **Advanced Placement Program**, followed by a similar designation by **International Baccalaureate**; then as president of **The School and College Conference on English**; by 1972, as one of the **Thomas F. Staley Foundation**'s "**Distinguished Christian Scholars**"—although one of my young students humbled me by asking, "**How did you get to be an Extinguished Christian Scholar?**"



From these roles I was able to advance to establishing my own consulting business and soon awoke to the possibility of not just rejecting politely a college appointment but adding that I might be able to help that board find someone else to fill the office. So I backed into the business of "**retained executive search**" as part of my burgeoning consulting portfolio. My two earliest higher ed clients were a Baptist college in Michigan and a Presbyterian college in Pennsylvania, both of which paid me to help them appoint somebody else to their respective presidencies. Serving as a member of the faculty at the first summer seminar on "**faith and learning**" sponsored by the **Christian College Consortium**, then a decade later as Visiting Lecturer at all thirteen member-colleges, helped convince me that my secondary teaching level suited me better than navigating the intrigue of college faculty politics—even veiled by professed Christian purpose.

PAIDEIA, Inc.

Making Excellence Possible

When, in the mid-1980s, PAIDEIA, Inc. began holding annual national conferences, our emphasis on helping schools achieve measurable excellence compelled me to develop our executive search services for K-12 schools in particular. Our focus was

the leadership of Christian elementary and secondary schools, although we also served a few secular independent schools. I began constructing a method of conducting such a process, which carefully discerns the providential will of God in identifying prospects who become nominees for appointment as Head of School—and I lead all searches myself. PAIDEIA, Inc. is not an employment agency, does not guarantee employment, and charges no fee to applicants.



Over the intervening decades, PAIDEIA, Inc. has now placed scores of men and women in a variety of schools, some of which we have also been instrumental in founding (**Oaks Christian School, CA (photo left); Providence School, CA; Brook Hill School, TX; Covenant School, VA; Whitefield Academy, GA,** among others). In all those years, we have suffered only two disappointing early departures because of a “**poor fit.**” Most of our

placements have exceeded the typical length of a head’s term in office. In numerous instances, PAIDEIA, Inc. has been called back to serve a second—and even third—time as the heads we placed determined it was time to move on. We have celebrated with some of our clients as the person we recommended reached milestones of more than twenty years at his or her present location.



Our most recent appointment is **Kimberlee Gill (photo left)**, named by the board of **Maranatha Christian Academy**, Shawnee, KS, this week to be Head of School, effective July 1, 2024. Dr. Gill returns from Colorado to the Kansas City area, where she previously served at **Summit Christian Academy**. We wish her God’s blessings in this new office, and we are grateful to all other candidates who entered the process, wishing them well wherever they continue to serve.



What have I learned during sixty years of executive searches that still pertains in 2024?

- My most significant contribution to Christian schooling is to encourage and enable strong leaders to serve as HOS in as many schools as possible throughout the world—which is why I take responsibility for all our searches.
- The God in whom I believe has already providentially ordained the next person to serve as HOS. My task is to help the client’s school board identify among those who apply the characteristics and qualifications of that person.
- The Christian K-12 HOS has duties similar to those of a college president: To be the face and voice of the school in its own community and beyond and to cultivate/ask for/receive substantial gift support of the school’s mission.
- Boards with long-term membership attract a more permanent HOS than boards with short-term turnover.
- Instances of “wrongful termination” still occur (new board chair or major donor demands new HOS), making risky any appointment, especially in an “at will” state where no reason for dismissal is necessary.
- The spouse of a “wrongfully dismissed” HOS is a strong influencer against applying for another similar position.
- No school board is willing to teach its new HOS how to raise gift support; boards want a HOS who already knows!
- An independent Christian school with a self-perpetuating board is preferable to either a church-sponsored or parent-governed school for these reasons:
 - senior pastor and executive pastor are often at odds with the HOS over finances;
 - youth pastor is seldom an advocate of the church’s K-12 school;
 - at a parent-governed school, board members seldom vote as fiduciaries but as parents with their own concerns.
- Few HOS applicants with only public school experience qualify because they have never done what the board rightly expects of them: (1) raise gift support and (2) lead Christian teachers in exemplifying a biblical worldview.
- No matter how loyal and respected an administrator (grade-level principal/other officer) may be, few qualify as HOS because they have never been given an opportunity to raise significant gift support or gain other leadership skills.
- HOS salaries have risen dramatically, (see our nationwide studies, *From Candy Sales to Committed Donors*, 1996, revised 2016). Median salary for HOS at 3,200+ Christian K-12 schools shows \$27,500 (1996) rising to \$108,000 (2016); now approaching \$150,000+ in 2023-2024, reflecting increasing awareness of job-market realities.

More recent (post-COVID) observations include:

- Swelling enrollment because parents became dissatisfied with public schooling have temporarily improved finances at many Christian schools, thereby reducing incentives for HOS to move elsewhere.
- At the same time, the pressures of leading a school during the stressful years of COVID infection have created many more wearied retirements than usual, resulting in many more open HOS offices to be filled.
- Inflation-driven mortgage rates make unattractive the prospect of selling the present home and purchasing a new home elsewhere, creating a deterrent to considering a move to another school.
- More boards are developing a succession plan by requiring the current HOS to mentor and prepare a favored administrator to advance upon the retirement of that HOS, thereby creating a smooth transition without a search process.

If your school faces the prospect or necessity of a change in HOS leadership, I invite you to ask for PAIDEIA, Inc./DBL to submit a *Proposal for Services*.

D. Bruce Lockerbie, Chairman/CEO/Editor



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1. For information about PAIDEIA, Inc.'s executive or administrative search process, see stub below.
2. If you are a current Head of School considering a move and wish to become an inquirer/applicant for a PAIDEIA, Inc. search, here are documents you will be asked to submit to compile your dossier:
 - Cover letter and current professional resume with no gaps in employment history;
 - Three brief statements: Personal faith in Jesus Christ, philosophy of Christian schooling, and philosophy of leadership and team building in a Christian school;
 - Four current letters of reference: Current supervisor, professional colleague, pastor or spiritual mentor, and someone to attest your ability to ask for and receive major financial gifts;
 - Copies of undergraduate and graduate transcripts;
 - Any additional documents, publications, awards, certificates, et al. to enhance your application.
3. PAIDEIA, Inc. offers a school board and its Head of School mentoring services and a performance review to assess and strengthen the professional relationship between the board and its sole employee. For information, see stub below.
4. If you are an occasional reader of *THE PAIDEIA LETTER* but not a current paid subscriber, you are invited to change your status and become a subscriber through July 31, 2024 (the end of this current publishing year). For a reduced rate of \$100.00 payable by check only (no credit card), you can subscribe to all remaining issues in all four formats. **THIS OFFER EXPIRES ON JANUARY 31, 2024.** See stub below.
5. PAIDEIA, Inc. also offers counsel on a full range of institutional and operational matters of concern to board members, Head of School, and current or prospective donors. For specific information, see stub below.

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- YES, please send information about PAIDEIA, Inc.'s executive/administrative search services.
- YES, I am considering a change of office and will be sending my letter and resume to PAIDEIA, Inc.
- YES, please send information about PAIDEIA, Inc.'s mentoring/HOS performance review services.
- YES, I want to subscribe to *THE PAIDEIA LETTER*. Enclosed is a check for \$100.00, payable to PAIDEIA, Inc. to receive the publication through July 31, 2024.
- YES, please send information about PAIDEIA, Inc.'s full range of counsel, especially this concern:

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