

May 21, 2026

Dear LaSalle-Backus Elementary School Community,

I hope that this letter finds each of you well. Serving as principal of LaSalle-Backus has been one of my greatest joys as an educator. So, it is with mixed feelings that I inform you that I will be transitioning to a new position within DC Public Schools (DCPS) and will not be returning as your principal for School Year 2026-2027.

Ten years ago, I joined the LaSalle-Backus community as Assistant Principal of Literacy, and I was immediately struck by the strength, resilience, and richness of this school. In those early years, we came together to define a shared mission and vision for our work. From that emerged our enduring motto: “We can! We will! ¡Podemos! ¡Lo haremos!”—a reflection of the “LaSalle Way” and our collective belief in every student’s potential.

When I became principal in 2019, we continued building our culture grounded in excellence in teaching and learning, one where every student feels a true sense of belonging. I think fondly of the traditions we built together—from Family Fellowships that brought students, families, and staff closer, to the ways we honored the important people in our students’ lives. These moments strengthened our community and, most importantly, supported our students in growing not only into strong learners but also into thoughtful, kind, and empathetic people.

My years leading LaSalle-Backus are filled with pride for our collaborative accomplishments. I want to highlight just a few of those points:

- Expanded learning opportunities by becoming a schoolwide computer science education program and ensuring 1:1 technology access for all students in kindergarten through fifth grade.
- Earning recognition from the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) as one of the top schools in the district for math growth.
- Achieving 98% on the Panorama survey for student sense of belonging, reflecting the strength of our school culture.
- Building a spirit of service through our Student Government Association.
- Celebrating our Leopard poet-athletes’ voices and talents during events like the DC SCORES Poetry Slam.
- Supporting countless families through our continued partnership with the Capital Area Food Bank.

While these are just a few reflections, what I will cherish most is the community we have built together. LaSalle-Backus has left a lasting imprint on my heart, and I will carry its spirit with me always.

In efforts to continue this progress, you will have the opportunity to engage in the selection process for a new principal. DCPS coordinates the selection and appointment of principals with great care and consideration. An important part of the school's contribution will be to form a Community Panel—a committee comprising parents, teachers, and community members to provide a diverse perspective on the decision-making process.

We will start with a virtual informational meeting on Wednesday, May 27, at 5:30 p.m., to learn about the next steps for selecting a new school leader. The DCPS School Leader Recruitment, Selection, and Development Team will lead the meeting along with Instructional Superintendent Katie Larkin and representatives from the district's Community Action Team. **More information on how to join that meeting is available on the attached flyer.**

As my time with our community comes to an end, I look forward to supporting a smooth leadership transition. I hope to have the chance to say farewell to as many of you as possible before I depart from LaSalle-Backus ES. Thank you for trusting me to be a part of your child's educational journey.

I leave with the message I share with our Leopards every morning as it reflects who we are as a community:

"We can! We will! We can and we will be nice and kind to ourselves and each other. We can, and we will listen, focus, and work hard. We can and we will be our best selves so we can reach our full potential and grow to be whatever we want to be. It is the LaSalle Way!"

With gratitude,

Shelly Gray
Principal, LaSalle-Backus Elementary School