

Robyn Williams converses with Taaj Saddler '25 during a break between class presentations.



MORE THAN A VEGETABLE:

How the Teaching Apprenticeship Program brought a Squash Coach and Created a Teacher

None of them knew how to play squash. Some didn't even know it was a sport. Before they joined then-teaching apprentice **Robyn Williams'** advisory, the nine sixth grade girls' feelings toward squash were best summed up by one of the advisees, **Mia Schroeder '18**: "Squash is a vegetable."

But Williams wanted to get to know her new advisees when she started at MICDS, so she took the girls out for a picnic and a day of teaching the sport she loves. The lessons were a huge success because now Schroeder and fellow advisory member **Constanza Gonzalez-Navarrine '18** are co-captains of the MICDS Girls Squash team, which just placed 2nd at nationals.

That success would not have been possible without the Teacher Apprenticeship Program that brought Williams, a young squash player fresh out of Trinity College, to MICDS to begin her teaching career seven years ago.

Williams grew up in Zimbabwe, playing squash, tennis and field hockey while hoping to come Stateside to continue her career in college. Eventually, she was recruited by Trinity to play all three

sports. While there, Williams realized that she loved coaching and working with kids, so she began looking for teaching positions post-graduation.

"When I was offered the apprentice teaching position here, I had been offered some positions on the East Coast too, [but] I thought to myself, 'Well I don't know anything about teaching,'" Williams said of her job search process. "It was the most obvious choice for me to come to MICDS and be paired with a mentor teacher and have a hands-on learning experience without the pressure of having to teach."

Williams spent her first year shadowing teachers **CB Pinkerton** and **Mark Duvall** in the Middle School, asking questions and taking notes. It wasn't until after winter break that Williams first taught a class of her own.

Through that observation, Williams learned, not only tangible skills like grading and putting extra attention toward students who may not pick up material as quickly, but also the intangibles necessary to make it through the year.

Quick Facts

The Teaching Apprentice program is one of two endowments that support Faculty Excellence and a key funding priority of our Bold Action Campaign

Gifts to the Teaching Apprentice Endowment support salaries, benefits, training, professional development and mentoring costs

The Teaching Apprentice program helps MICDS directly supports a priority of our current strategic plan: Great Teaching and Learning 2.0



“A lot of patience and a lot of humor and being flexible—if you have those things, then you’ll make it,” Williams recalls with a laugh.

Now in her seventh year at MICDS, Williams has been honored as a Chair of Distinguished Teaching at our School, a three-year appointment given to exemplary members of the faculty. Another recipient, **Marshall McCurties**, also came to MICDS through the Teacher Apprenticeship program.

Because of the success of Williams, McCurties and other program alums, Assistant Head of School **Brian Thomas** has begun thinking about how to expand the program. Currently, one teaching apprentice joins the school every other year, but in Thomas’ vision, a cohort of six to 10 apprentices could join the school every year. This potential program would last two years and give young aspiring teachers hands-on experience in the classroom as well as the opportunity to

earn a master’s degree in education from an institution of higher learning partner, like Washington University in St. Louis.

A program like that would allow young people to avoid the catch-22 of not having experience but needing it to get a job. It would also create a system of potential hires for MICDS to pull from should an opening become available. According to Thomas, “we’re always looking for talented people who might be able to fill a certain niche that we might have, whether it be teaching or non-teaching.”

But while Thomas’ vision waits to come to fruition, the Teaching Apprenticeship Program still creates excellent teachers for MICDS. Williams, for one, finds pride in her award, not just as a personal honor, but also as a way to express her gratitude to the school.

“It felt more like MICDS got a return on their investment,” Williams said. “They had taken a chance on me and given me that apprenticeship program, and then helped me grow into a teacher that they could be proud of.”

The true measure of a good teacher never comes from awards or honors though — it comes from the impact the teacher has on her students. And according to Mia Schroeder, no one has been more influential than Williams.

“When I think about my time here at MICDS and the teachers I most respect or had the most fun with or the learned the most from, it’s Ms. Williams,” Schroeder said. “I don’t know if I would be the same person that I am today without her.”

