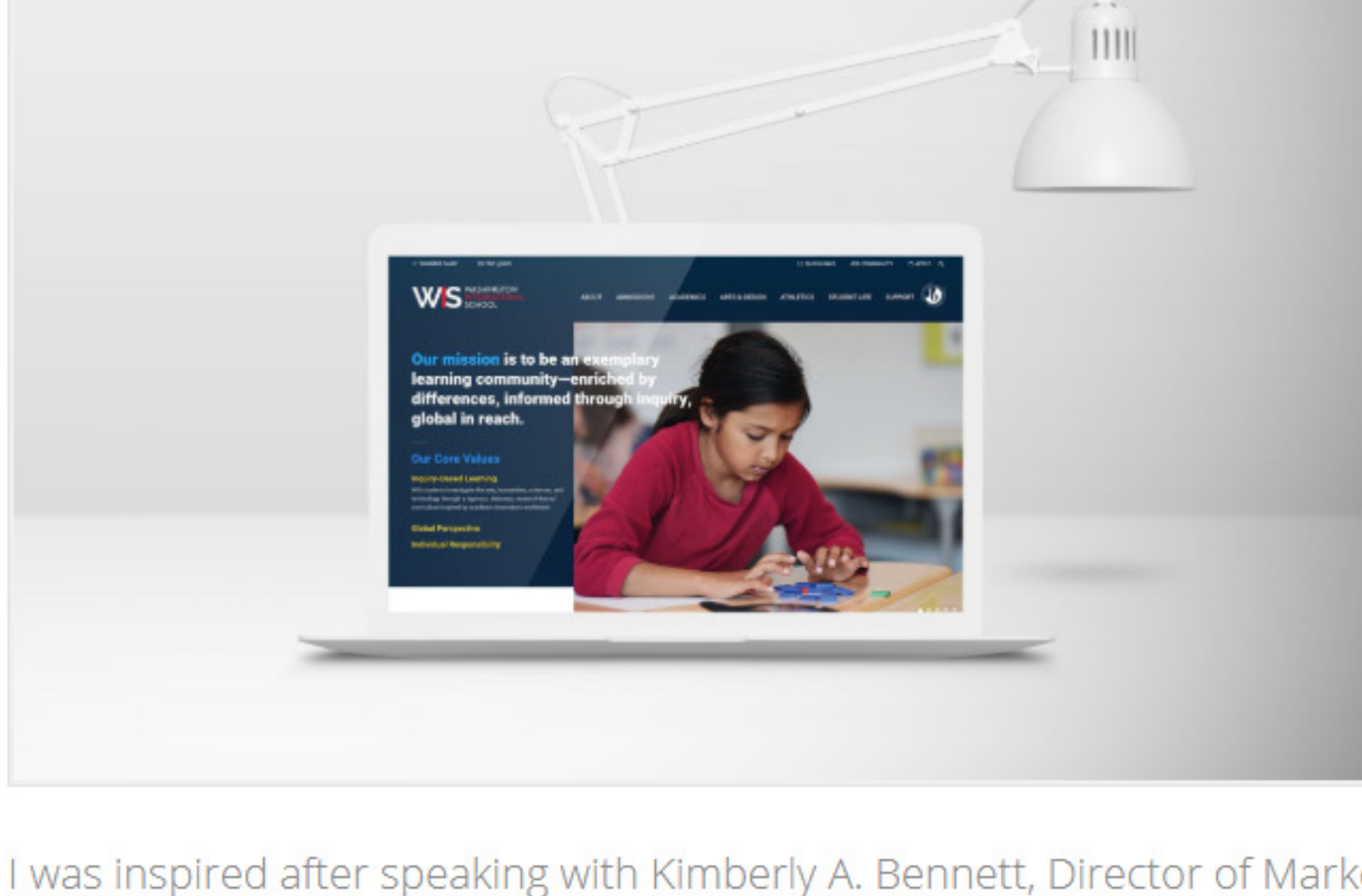


How Washington International School Launched Its Redesign in a Small Shop

When I think of the phrase "spring cleaning," I think of what it means to really start fresh — how to clear out what I don't need (from old emails to clothes I no longer wear in my closet) for something new.

As March turns into April, it may also be time for your very own "spring cleaning" of your website. But, just like how sometimes it feels good to empty out your entire wardrobe in preparation for something new, sometimes websites need a little more than some cleaning up, and the best answer of doing a complete refresh is a [redesign](#).



I was inspired after speaking with Kimberly A. Bennett, Director of Marketing and Communications at Washington International School, who completed their redesign earlier this school year. Kimberly leads the Marketing and Communications department, which maintains the majority of the content on the public-facing portion of the website.

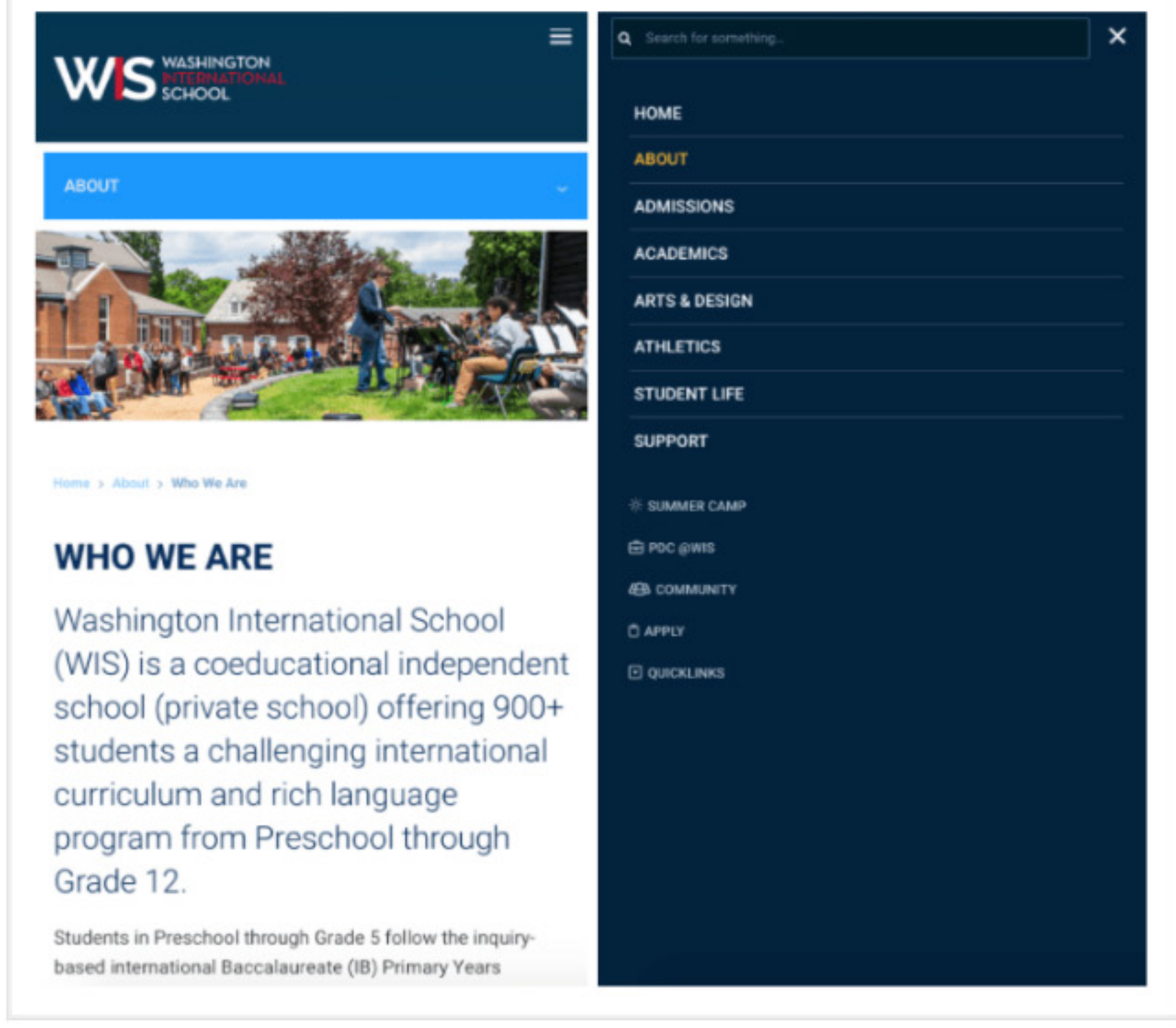
"We collaborate with staff on details regarding the content, but we do all the layout and most of the copywriting," said Kimberly. "The department is also responsible for all school publications, public relations, parent surveys and a list of other things far too long to mention. We have been a department of two only since October 2016; prior to that time it was (mostly) a one-person department."

As a [small shop](#), you can imagine the [redesign process](#) might seem overwhelming and it may be difficult to determine where to start. Here's how their team went through the process from start to finish with the help of Finalsite.

Three Influences of the Redesign

THE NEED FOR A MOBILE-FIRST WEBSITE

The redesign process was a long time coming, according to Kimberly. The old look was outdated and the site was not as optimized for mobile platforms, even though it was responsive," she said. "The old site had debuted in summer 2011; while we thought it was fabulous at that time, it definitely seemed a little tired by 2017."

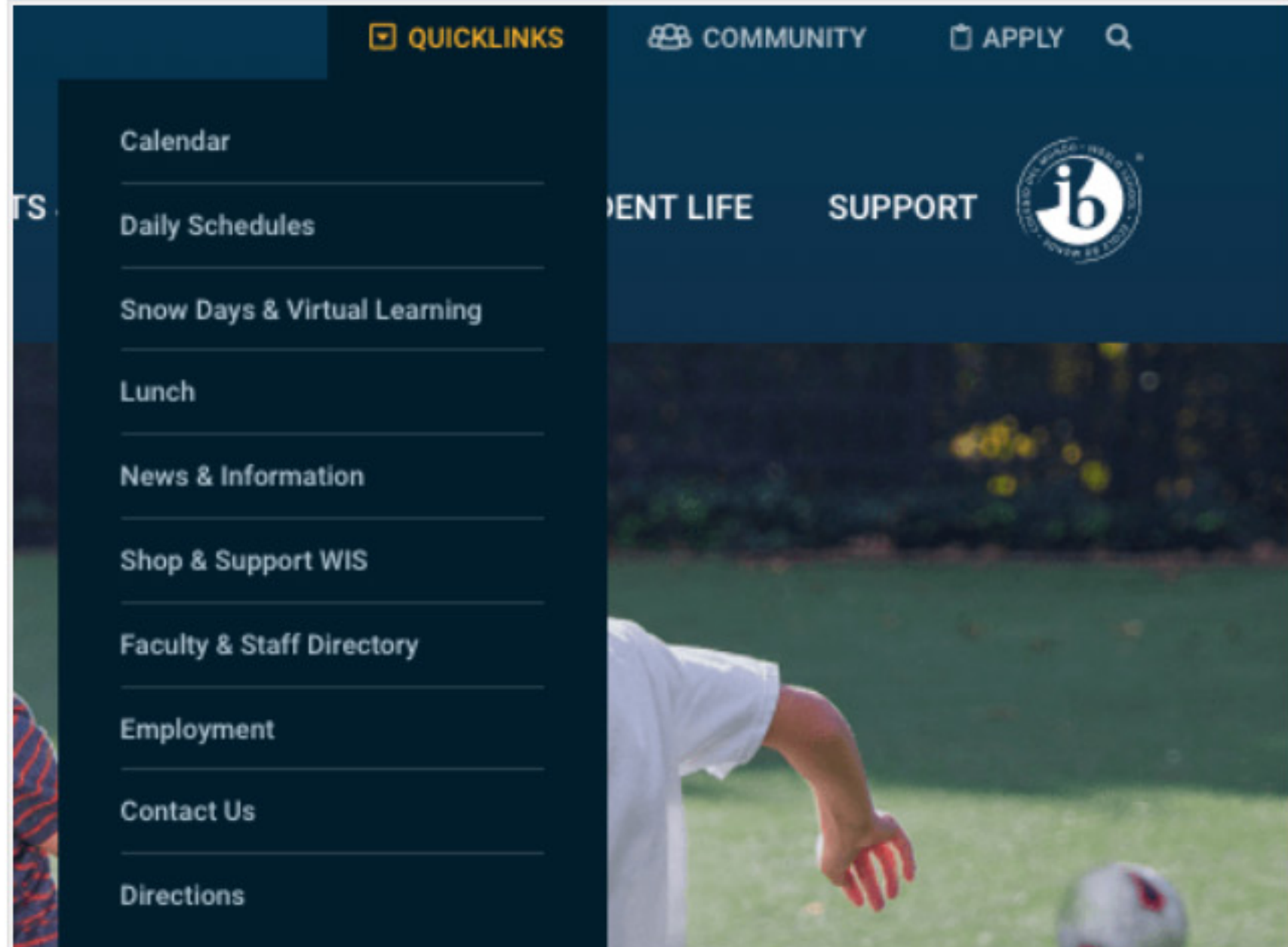


What's the difference between mobile-first design and responsive design? Of course, they both seem like they'd achieve the same thing: access to the website on a mobile device. But in fact, they are different. Responsive designs work on mobile devices by stacking content blocks on top of one another to scale down to different sizes, whereas mobile-first design takes into consideration the mobile experience, altering the way fonts, images, videos, and navigation are displayed.

Not only did they need a [mobile-first design](#), and to finally make the move from Page Manager to [Composer](#), they also wanted a look and feel that was more consistent with their new brand identity, which was introduced in summer 2017. "Basically we wanted a vibrant, modern feel for the new site," said Kimberly.

IMPROVE THE USER EXPERIENCE

There was also the concern of improving the overall user-experience for their current parent community through a [better navigation](#).



"While yearly surveys indicated that most parents were satisfied (or at least not dissatisfied with the old site) there has consistently been a small group that indicated they couldn't find what they wanted and that the parent portal was 'a nightmare,'" said Kimberly.

Part of the improvement involved putting as much content as possible in front of the login. Parents have limited time and, like all of us, dozens of login credentials to memorize. Accessing the information quickly without needing to sort through layers of pages will hopefully result in more satisfied parents when we conduct our 2018 survey.

There's still a fair amount of information behind the password, but extensive use of tabs and accordions means that parents don't need to sort through so many menus. And parents who have children in multiple divisions can navigate more easily between the information relevant to their children's experiences.

Adding the Quicklinks section was an attempt to locate key pages from disparate sections of the website all in one place. Our constituents are still adjusting to finding pages in different places than they did two months ago, but once I tell them where to find what they need, they seem to appreciate the organizational logic.

THEY WANTED TO TELL A BETTER STORY

An important goal for their new site was to feel warmer and more approachable. "I want the site to go a good job of conveying the WIS story and culture. There's still work to be done on this aspect," said Kimberly. "I hope to add more content highlighting kids: videos, quotes, etc. in advance of our next admissions season."

Your Website Is A Work In Progress Even After Launch

"I don't consider our process done, by the way," said Kimberly. "I'll be tweaking content for months." This echoes the importance of thinking of your website launch as just the beginning of the process, rather than the end. There is always going to be something that needs updating on your website, or something that may influence you to [redesign even sooner than you anticipated](#), for reasons like:

- You've recently rebranded your school and your website needs to match your new logo and other print materials
- Your website is hosted in-house or on open source, and your webmaster left
- There's a major update that needs to happen you didn't plan for on the last redesign — [such as website accessibility requirements](#)
- Updating or managing your website content is difficult
- Website traffic and conversions (AKA inquiries, enrollment, donations) are down

Once you launch your new website, it is important to ask for feedback. Reach out to your common website visitors, including current students and families.

She's already heard good things thus far from colleagues and parents on the new site, and has even noticed a much easier experience for not only herself as an admin but also their end users. "The new software allows us to concentrate a lot of information on one page, without looking too cluttered. This enabled me to create a parent portal landing page that has a lot of the information parents look for on a daily basis," said Kimberly.



A Collaborative Effort with School's Redesign Team and Finalsite

When you go into a redesign with Finalsite, you are in good hands and will know [what to expect](#). According to Kimberly, their redesign process was actually pretty straightforward.

"We had a very small group — the two of us in MarComm, our Head and our Director of Admissions — involved in approving the look of our new site," said Kimberly. "This is also the second redesign I've managed, (in addition to a third back-end site recreation when we moved from SchoolSuite to the Finalsite CMS). So I knew what to expect."

Timing is everything when it comes to a redesign. By choosing to launch outside of the peak admissions season, Kimberly is hoping to get some additional feedback from prospective families. "It will be interesting to hear how or if admitted families have anything to say about the new website," said Kimberly. "When they applied, they would have been looking at the old site; after they were admitted, if they returned to wis.edu they would have found an entire new look."

According to their Finalsite Project Manager Jaime Skerker, Kimberly helped lead the redesign process to go as smooth as possible. "She and her team had thought about what they wanted for their new website before we even began the project together, and she was able to dedicate time to the project throughout the entire process," said Jaime. "Designing and building a new website is a lot of work, especially when most folks wear multiple hats at their school. But those things allowed us to get on the same page and stay on the right track throughout the whole process."

"Our redesign process was nearly seamless from start to finish. The Finalsite team is knowledgeable, adept at anticipating and handling client questions, and great at keeping clients on track. Initial community feedback has been extremely positive. Thank you for everything!"