

July 15, 2010

Dear Lower School Families,

Greetings and welcome to a new school year. The campus is alive with summer program students but relatively quiet compared to previous years when we seemed to have endless construction of one kind or another. It is that time in the summer when I personally have to switch from reflection mode of the year past to preview of the year to come. A few days at the beach taking long walks and afternoon naps have prepared me well for this transition.

It is never easy saying good-bye to the year but it is inevitable. Some of last year's fifth graders are testing out the MS waters by attending the Sixth Grade Transition camps this summer. They still give me hugs when I run into them in the MS hallways; I know this is a short-lived proposition. Three of our teachers made major moves to new classrooms and are here collaborating with their new partners or teaching summer school. And we are busy moving everyone's file up a grade. "Good seasons start with good beginnings."

My summer began with a three-day workshop called "Teaching All Kinds of Minds," which I attended with seven Lower School teachers. We looked at the Neuro-Developmental Constructs as explained by Mel Levine author of The Mind that is Mine and Teaching All Kinds of Minds. After reviewing the constructs, we evaluated assignments and projects for their appropriateness and relevance for students with relative strengths and weaknesses in the various constructs. Our assignment is to design a project for a class with specific students' strengths and challenges in mind. We hope to share what we learned by presenting our projects to the LS faculty with our instructor at Lower School Division Meeting early in the school year.

I have just returned from a two-day workshop at the "Edible Schoolyard Academy" at MLK Middle School in Berkeley. I attended with our new garden teacher, Dave Levin. Dave, who is also one of our Systems Administrators, has extensive vegetable garden experience as a volunteer and employee of a local organic vegetable farm. We spent time examining all the elements of a school garden including fund raising, budget, use of the greenhouse, planting seeds, turning in soil amendments and everything in between. Our plan is to further develop the integration of the School Garden into our Lower School curriculum. Their garden is 14 years old, ours is only three. The workshop was both humbling and inspiring.

I will send the ERB test scores out to 4th and 5th grade parents when they arrive. A pamphlet explaining how to read the scores will be included. If you have questions you may call me or talk to your child's teacher during October conferences.

Looking ahead to next year the faculty is choosing to read one of the following books which we will discuss in cross divisional groups on Friday, Aug. 27th.

This Will Change Everything: Ideas That Will Shape the Future by John Brockman
Drive by Dan Pink
Disrupting Class by Clayton Christenson, Curtis Johnson and Michael Horn
As The Future Catches You by Juan Enriquez

This year's theme for Faculty Workweek is Digital and Media Learning with opening speaker Ewan McIntosh. Ewan is one of Europe's foremost experts in digital media for public services, particularly education. The week before school begins the LS teachers will also be meeting to discuss our Language Arts Program and recess rules and guidelines. Our LS goals include an ambitious plan to conduct a full evaluation of our Language Arts Program K-5. We would like to look at the scope and sequence for developing proficient, confident writers and readers and how we might improve, update and enrich the program.

There are a lot exciting events planned for our first semester, beginning with the annual Walk-a-thon and All School Picnic on September 12. We are also planning a Garden Festival in September. November is the popular Book Fair, with all the activities that come with it: author talks, all day reads and class visits to the book fair. In keeping with our mission to further green the school, Debra Harper has been named Sustainability Coordinator for the entire school. Be sure to support our Green Scene days when students are urged to find alternative, green modes of transportation to school. Also in the works are plans for the Fourth and Fifth Grade overnight trips, which will be 2 nights; a sure way for students to bond, and spend time learning and problem solving outside of the classroom.

In September we welcome 38 new kindergarten students, (the class of 2023) and twelve new students in the elementary grades. As I mentioned in the spring, Kathrina Weekes will be the lead teacher in kindergarten while April Avila Ford moves to first grade. Priscilla Hine will join Carol Kennedy in third grade and Leslie Powell will move up to fourth with Lea Van Ness. We welcome returning interns Melissa Gale '01, Akilah Harris, Julius Hampton and Sonja Pinto, while also welcoming intern Marisa Fujinaka in second grade. Nzingah Smith, not new to the community but new to the position of Band Director will expand her responsibilities at HRS.

Here is some important logistical information for the upcoming school year:

- All kindergarten students and 1st-5th new students will begin the school year with an orientation on **Tuesday, August 31st** from 9:00-10:30 AM to meet teachers and visit classrooms. During this time parents will meet with me to learn more about drop-off/pick-up, safety on Lincoln Avenue, and the After School Program and its many offerings. We will have some snacks and time to socialize. Meet in PA 1.

- Classes begin for everyone on **Wednesday, September 1st**. Before School will open at 7:30 AM. The school day begins promptly at 8:25 AM for all grades. Dismissal for kindergarten is 2:00 PM every day.
- Grades 1-5 are dismissed at 3:20 PM, Monday through Friday. **The After School Program will be open from 2:00 to 6:00 PM beginning Wednesday, September 1st.**
- We will notify students of their class placements the week before school begins. Students will receive a welcome letter in the mail from their teacher and a list of classmates. We hope this early notification of class placement eases opening day for students. Supply lists for K-4th grade are currently available on the Lower School website.
- The summer mailing has many important topics and will direct you to the website for vital information including a letter from the business office regarding Translink. The AC transit website is also informative. Bus tickets will not be sold at school. Students must have a pass or pay cash.
- Epicurean will continue to offer daily lunch for the LS on a pre-order basis. The chef, AJ, informs me that the September calendar will be available by mid-August. Directions for preordering should be in your summer mailing as well.
- Back to School Night, Thursday, Sept. 23rd is a very important date to put on your calendars. Teachers will present an overview of the school year and grade level curriculum. I am sorry we cannot offer childcare that evening as we hope you will join other parents for café dinner and we do have a very full house.
- Please join me for the Parents Association Back to School Coffee, Wednesday, September 1st, 8:30-9:20 AM in the After School Program room.
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If you need to contact me, I will be back in the office August 16th. I hope you are enjoying a restful and fun summer. I look forward to launching a new and exciting 2010-11 School Year!

Warm regards,

Suzanne Abbey
Head of Lower School

P.S. Once again, please consider donating gently used backpacks to students living in a transitional shelter. Backpacks and any new or slightly used school supplies collection is Sept. 1-15th LS Office.