

April 26, 2020

Dear Upper School Students and Families:

Before I delve into logistics related to the end of the school year, I want to pass along some exciting changes in store for next school year. With the retirement of beloved fifth grade teacher Patti Garcia, we have hired **John Layer** to be a fifth grade homeroom teacher and to teach 5th Reading. (Some current fifth graders in 5B may remember him from a sample lesson he taught them a few months back.) In addition to being a highly experienced and qualified grade 4-6 instructor, Mr. Layer has extensive experience teaching French, including at Basis, University High School, and most recently Cambridge Rindge and Latin School outside Boston, from the introductory level through immersion and AP French. With his hire we are embarking on a somewhat new approach to foreign language instruction within the Upper School, which will include Mr. Layer's also teaching some French for us.

Students in grades K-6 will continue to receive Spanish instruction. In addition to having two periods of Spanish instruction a week in sixth grade, there will be a third period a week devoted to foreign language. This will allow sixth graders a brief introduction to Latin and French as well. At the end of sixth grade, students will select **one** language to pursue for the following two years: either **Spanish, Latin, or French**. Students will have four periods a week of that language in both seventh and eighth grades. This rigorous instruction in a single foreign language (with more than 200 instructional minutes a week) will put students on a path to study that language in even greater depth, if they so choose, in high school. Those languages in particular are the ones most widely taught at the Advanced Placement (AP) level locally.

(In the 2020-21 pilot year, incoming seventh graders would make selections without the benefit of the preview rotations, and eighth graders selecting French would take an introductory course similar to the curriculum for 7th Grade French.)

Seventh and eighth graders currently take Spanish and Latin three times a week each. Consolidating to a single language will free up two periods, one of which will be used for an additional dedicated study hall period (during school hours) once a week, and the other will allow seventh and eighth graders to take both art and music throughout the year, each for two periods a week.

Speaking of music, there is one additional development, again affecting seventh and eighth graders primarily. We are going to apply the model from fifth and sixth grades to our music instruction for seventh and eighth grades. Namely, all students will select either **Band or Choir** for their music class. Their two periods a week of Band or Choir instruction will occur during the school day rather than as zero-hour classes before school. With this model in place over all four years of Upper School, I anticipate

an incredibly rich foundation of skill development in these fields as well as more robust musical troops in each grade. Furthermore, all Upper School students will participate in concerts during both the fall/winter and spring seasons.

These are indeed significant changes to our program, and I am very happy to discuss their implications or answer any questions by phone or email. We will share further details in particular about the language selection and music selection process with current sixth and seventh grade families in the next few weeks.

By making such adjustments we are endeavoring to achieve the right *harmony* (to use a synonym of “balance” for variety’s sake) between challenging academics, enriching fine arts, spiritual growth, and physical health and wellbeing. It’s ever a work in progress.

Returning now to the short term...

● As mentioned previously, the last day of online classes will occur Friday, May 15. The week of May 18-22 will contain numerous special activities, including end-of-year programming and celebrations, and opportunities for students to wrap up required work, but we won’t follow the daily distance-learning schedule during that week. Students must have all academic work completed no later than Thursday, May 21.

● That final week will also require the **exchange of materials** between students and teachers on campus. Eighth graders get to keep their Chromebooks upon graduation. For everyone else it’s vital that we receive both the device itself and its charger back. All Upper School students, furthermore, will need to return any additional school property, such as textbooks, still in their possession and retrieve personal materials left in lockers, as well as their Yearbook, their portfolio of artwork, and perhaps some miscellaneous items. The entire process should take less than five minutes, and, for safety’s sake, we are going to space out the Upper School students in four separate shifts, according to last name:

Wednesday, May 20

3:00-4:00 p.m. - last names **A-F**

4:00-5:00 p.m. - last names **G-L**

Thursday, May 21

9:00-10:00 a.m. - last names **M-R**

10:00-11:00 a.m. - last names **S-Z**

If your family absolutely can’t swing through during your scheduled time, you may choose another (please let your advisor know beforehand), but we must spread out the

foot traffic as much as possible. This will not be a time for students to catch up with one another—rather, it’s a quick grab-and-go. Masks highly recommended!

● Eighth grade students and families: keep an eye out for a separate email just sent regarding the “**drive-in**” **graduation** scheduled for the evening of Saturday, May 23.

● Following the end of the academic year, teachers will finalize grades, and **report cards** will be put in the mail soon thereafter. Please note: if a student’s final year-end grade in a core subject (English/Language Arts, Math, Social Studies, Science, Spanish, or Latin) is below a C-, the student will be **required** to do additional summer work in that content area. Evidence of completion of that work will need to be furnished before the resumption of classes in the fall. I will reach out as needed to students and families in such an event.

There are three full weeks of instruction remaining. Students, please try to stay focused during these trying times and be proud of how you finish out this strange spring term!

Best wishes,

Alex Hawes

Useful links:

St. Michael’s Distance Learning Webpage

<https://stmichael.net/covidresponse/distancelearning/>

PlusPortals

<https://www.plusportals.com/SaintMichaelsParishDaySchool>

Arizona Together

<https://arizonatogether.org/>

This is a thorough compilation of resources, regular information updates, and links to community support.

Junior Achievement USA

<https://www.juniorachievement.org/web/ja-usa/critical-issues>

Financial education resources written for teens, including about the economic impact of COVID-19.