

## **UUAA 9.8.19**

*Up Up And Away - Notes from the Upper School Director*

September 9, 2019

Let's talk homework—everyone's favorite topic! We're getting into the groove of the school year, and students are getting a sense of the typical flow in the workload and scheduling of assignments. So it makes sense to reiterate our approach to homework briefly and for me to suggest some strategies.

Our homework philosophy and policies are articulated on pages 6-8 of the [Parent-Student Handbook](#). As a teacher, I have long believed in the value of homework, in reasonable quantities; the experience of discussing novel studies in depth is nearly impossible to achieve, for example, without some reading being completed at home. As a parent, though, I understand fully well the relief that comes from ample free time and rest. As Hamlet soliloquized: "To sleep, perchance to dream / Ay, there's the rub." Balancing school work and healthful rest is indeed the "rub."

It is not our intention for students to spend multiple hours on homework each night. But sometimes that happens, and when it does, it is valuable for students, parents, and teachers to investigate why in order to work toward a solution. Is the time mainly being spent on one subject? Is one sort of assignment (e.g. literature readings or math worksheets or test preparation) more challenging or time-consuming than another? Is work being completed more or less efficiently in certain surroundings (our study hall, the dining room table, one's bedroom)? Are devices like computers, phones, or televisions getting in the way of sustained concentration?

Parents should feel empowered to suspend their children's homework completion at a reasonable time of night to ensure sufficient sleep. If that leads to certain work being left undone, please communicate the circumstances to the respective teacher(s) and advisor, and we will go from there. If it happens frequently, though, a conference might be warranted. I would rather know than not, so don't hesitate to contact me if you have concerns.

Our goal is for students to become increasingly independent and to advocate for themselves as they mature through their adolescent years. Parents often

wonder how much to be involved in homework completion. My short answer to that complex question is: as little as you can get away with! What I mean to suggest is that you allow your children the opportunity to persevere and problem-solve in order to build their confidence and autonomy. Nonetheless, there will be times when things fall apart, and parents and teachers must step in to boost a struggling student back onto his or her feet. This accordion-like process can be challenging to get right, but our hope is for our graduates to enter high school ready to chart their own course to success.

### **In Other News**

We have initiated a formal search for a teacher for our 5th and 6th grade Science classes and one section of 8th grade Math. In the interim, we have secured two beloved retired St. Michael's teachers—Bob Smith to teach 5th and 6th Science and Lynn Jackson to teach 8th Algebra (Part I)—each with more than twenty years' experience in their content areas. During this period of transition, Ms. Gould will instruct the 8th Geometry class, and Ms. Fenstermacher will work with the 8th Algebra Part II class. Ms. Gould will also oversee more broadly the scope of 8th grade math instruction until a new Geometry teacher is hired.

In addition, Señora Van Straalen, the lead 6th grade advisor, is taking over Ms. Murphy's former homeroom for now. Our LEGO Robotics elective on Friday afternoons will also continue through the end of the trimester with the help of the LEGO engineering experts at Play-Well (who run our after-school LEGO club for younger students).

These temporary arrangements will allow for instruction to continue with minimal disruptions and with instructors deeply experienced and knowledgeable about the curriculum and needs of those respective classes. We appreciate your patience during this transition.

### **Events This Week:**

- The first round of **Renaissance Star 360** standardized testing (Reading & Math) will be completed this week. As always, please make sure your students are well fed and well rested!

● Our Upper School **Back-to-School Night** will be held Thursday, September 12, from 6:00 – 8:00 p.m. Parents are highly encouraged to attend. This evening is intended for parents only; there is no child care available.

● Our **Mass collection** for the World Wildlife Fund continues. Please remind your kids to bring donations on Thursdays.

● **Seventh graders** are requested to bring a dozen peeled, hard-boiled eggs to school for Casa Maria on Friday, September 13.

● Our **Eighth graders** will be signing up for their Community Service teams this week. The first project for one of those six teams will be to make sandwiches with all those eggs on the evening of Friday, September 13.

● The first **Coffee Corner** of the year will be held on Friday the Thirteenth as well. Tempt fate and enjoy a cuppa Joe with other parents.

● The following middle school games are scheduled for this week:

### Co-ed Flag Football

Wednesday, 9/11 - away at Academy of Tucson (on Wrightstown); A team released at 3:00 p.m. (A team game at 4:00; B team game at 5:00)

### Girls' Volleyball

Tuesday, 9/10 - away at Lemman Oro Valley; A Team released at 2:25 p.m. (A team game at 4:00; B team game at 5:00)

Friday, 9/13 -at home vs. Academy of Tucson (A team game at 4:00; B team at 5:00)

**Intramurals** (soccer) for 4th and 5th graders continue this week.

### **Events Beyond This Week:**

● **School pictures** are coming! Classroom pictures (red & khaki uniforms required) will be taken on Tuesday, September 17 for all grades. Individual

pictures (“relaxed dress” allowed) will be taken on Friday, September 20, for Upper School.

● There is a half day with **noon dismissal** on Wednesday, September 18. There will be no Upper School study hall that afternoon, but our students may attend After-care in Tankersley Hall (for a fee) if needed.

● SMA and the Vaqueros are organizing a **Welcome Back Night** for families on Friday, September 20, from 5:00 – 8:00 p.m. This fun-filled event is intended for both parents and students, and we ask that parents stay to supervise their children. There will be food trucks!

● “**Frozen Fridays**” are happening each Friday this month to raise money for the 8th Grade graduation plans (\$2 per frozen treat). There’s also a **Chipotle fundraiser** scheduled for Tuesday, Oct. 1, from 4:00 – 8:00 p.m. at 6501 E. Grant Rd. to support 8th Grade graduation.

● Our **New Parent Welcome** event is scheduled for Wednesday, Oct. 2, from 6:30 – 8:00 p.m. in the Smith Parish Center.

● **Fall Break** will be here before you know it: October 7-11.

● Our beloved **Grandparents Day** event is scheduled for Fri. Oct. 18, from 8:00 – 10:30 a.m. That evening, the annual Upper School **Coffee Cabaret** musical performance will be held from 7:00 – 8:30 p.m.

Best wishes,

Alex Hawes  
Upper School Division Director  
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**Links of Note:**

[Main School Website](#)  
[School Facebook page](#)  
[School Instagram page](#)  
[PlusPortals](#) (for students and parents)

[School Uniforms](#)

[Hot Lunch Ordering](#)

[School Calendar](#)

[Student-Parent Handbook](#)

[SMA Volunteer Page](#)

[5th Grade Test Calendar](#)

[6th Grade Test Calendar](#)

[7th Grade Test Calendar](#)

[8th Grade Test Calendar](#)