

Dear Upper School Students and Families:

I hope you have had a restful weekend so far. I took my children for a walk along the San Pedro River east of Sierra Vista on Saturday. The cottonwoods were greening up, the stream was burbling. It was quite restorative.

Our first week of distance learning was quite a whirlwind. I have admired the patience that students, parents, and teachers have shown in adjusting quickly to our new approach. We dealt with the anticipated technological hiccups, and there has been healthy conversation surrounding the delivery of instruction, the challenges of participation, and the expectations both on teachers and students in carrying out this virtual platform. We have made adjustments already, and we will continue to do so. Rome wasn't built in a day, and our distance learning program will take more than a week to perfect!

While many of our academic policies remain despite our shift to virtual instruction, we are quickly hammering out policies that apply specifically to distance learning. We hope to have a policy document to release publicly by the end of this week that will spell out expectations for student participation, our approach to grading and assessment, and academic integrity online.

The administration will continue to reach out to families on a weekly basis as we eagerly solicit feedback on the efficacy of our online program. Please don't hesitate to email me any general observations or specific concerns or obstacles in your family's participation in our virtual platform.

I also continue to encourage families to help children strike a healthy balance between spending their hours online and offline. My advice is to limit the use of personal devices and non-academic screentime until at least 3:00 each afternoon (and later if possible). The distractions of web browsing, social media, and gaming make it nearly impossible otherwise for adolescents to give their undivided attention during our narrowed school-day schedule. Private student-generated Zoom sessions and group texting during class time further erode the community we are attempting to maintain during these trying times.

I am hoping that our reduced academic schedule allows for bounteous time for socialization, exercise, and family time in the evening. My goal is that students who use the available work times throughout the day to accomplish required work as well as pursue enrichment opportunities should be able to set their school work outside for the day by 4:00 p.m. each afternoon. Individual students, however, may distribute their work hours differently, either by choice or due to childcare logistics and the like, which is perfectly fine.

Being glued to screens brings other potential problems. Students browsing the Internet these days are likely to encounter disturbing images and information that can not always be trusted as reliable. A Common Sense Media article discussing how to protect students from news overload and fake news about coronavirus can be found [here](#).

On a lighter note, today is the last day for students to submit entries for our school's distance learning logo contest! Details can be found [here](#). Student Council has announced a new contest for the upcoming week: the Mug Challenge. See the attached flier for details.

I hope (as do you, no doubt) that we will become more and more accustomed to our virtual platform, and that my need for lengthy memos about it will abate! However, if you're ever trying to dig up a memo about our coronavirus response or our distance learning program, you might want to bookmark the webpage we've set up to serve as a hub for those communications: <https://stmichael.net/covidresponse/distancelearning/>

Here's to a wonderful Week Two!

Best wishes,

Alex Hawes