

UUAA 3.14.20

Up Up And Away - Notes from the Upper School Director

March 14, 2020

Happy Saturday, and Happy Pi Day (3.14)! I am writing during a moment of collective anxiety about the future, but I want you to know that the teachers at St. Michael's are ready to help your children deal with this moment and find comfort in shared moments of joy and inspiration. And we're ready to continue the business of instruction too!

As Mr. Sullivan communicated by email yesterday, St. Michael's will be suspending on-campus programming this Wednesday at noon. The school day on Monday and Tuesday, March 16-17, will proceed more or less as normal, and Wednesday morning, March 18, will be spent readying students for the transition to online distance learning. Thursday and Friday, March 19-20, will be dedicated to faculty training without programming for students. Then, on Monday, March 23, we will begin our virtual/remote learning program. We will be relying heavily on Google Classroom and the "G Suite" of applications (Docs, Drive, Slides, Gmail) for delivery of this system, while perhaps incorporating Zoom web conferencing into some classes as well.

In Upper School, our tentative plan is to provide programming from 9:00 a.m. till 3:00 p.m. each school day, Monday through Friday, for as long as we need to suspend our gathering on campus. Students will be expected to participate in a combination of online learning and offline independent work, following a specified schedule each day (a schedule which I will share with students and parents later in the week). Students will be sent home with their school Chromebook and a charging cord on Wednesday morning to facilitate this online learning. If your child is not able or planning to come to school Wednesday, please let us know in advance so that we may ensure that he or she receives all the materials necessary to complete coursework from home.

Students will need access to the Internet either on the provided school device or a personal device, so please let us know as well if there are any anticipated issues with Internet access wherever your child will be staying during the school day. These daily learning sessions are mandatory, and we are planning to continue assessing student performance and generating grades in each class. It's just that the instruction and assessment may look a bit different! Please be mindful of creating a workspace for your child that is conducive to such learning, including finding ways to minimize or eliminate distractions from television, cellphones, etc. during the hours of 9 a.m. - 3 p.m. each school day. That said, it may be beneficial (not to mention unavoidable) for families to arrange for shared childcare in which small numbers of students are together during the day, working alongside one another and occasionally collaborating.

At least as important as providing authentic, effective instruction is allowing for socialization and community building for our children during these times of uncertainty. Therefore, built into this daily schedule will be virtual assemblies, perhaps including staff members singing along to "The Fruits of the Spirit" and other familiar tunes from chapel, as well as homeroom advisory programming, art and music enrichment, moments for prayer and reflection, and even some fitness activities. We will not allow this virus to throw us off our BALANCE!

Student Council already is working on ways to keep our sense of school spirit and community alive even when we aren't together in fellowship. We will be brainstorming special projects, contests, and other opportunities for socialization and general silliness. And what a great chance to find further time for pleasure reading! (Sorry, the English teacher in me couldn't help myself.)

As mentioned yesterday, upcoming school events in March and April are cancelled for now, in particular the field trips scheduled for this Wednesday, Declamation Day, the third middle school dance, Fine Arts Night (for both Lower School and Upper School), the middle school class trips and 5th grade trip to Phoenix, and our rotation of 8th grade community service projects. I think it's premature to speculate on what May is going to look like and therefore impossible to predict the impact of our current campus closure on events that month, including Ludi Romani, Renaissance standardized testing, and Eighth Grade Graduation. We will certainly stay in touch, electronically at least, in the coming days to communicate our plans in this shifting landscape.

One silver lining in all of this is that it allows us to work together as a community in meaningful new ways. As educators we are feeling a profound sense of responsibility to help our students cope with this surreal moment. I encourage you to reach out to us with concerns — as well as ideas for turning this crisis into an opportunity for creative programming and community building for as long as this lasts. Some of these new ideas might just outlast the virus itself!

Best wishes,

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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](#)