

April 18, 2020

Dear Upper School Students and Families:

I hope you all had a restful Easter break. We are now entering the final sprint to the finish line for the 2019-20 school year. There are just four full weeks of scheduled online classes remaining, a scary thought (for teachers at least). While we've ironed out many of the wrinkles of our distance learning system, there will continue to be challenges individually and collectively. I want the time we have left together this year to go as smoothly as possible. Please don't hesitate to contact me if there is anything causing significant frustration—for students or for parents!

Even though next week was originally going to be our middle school trip week, it will now follow the current virtual class schedule. (This will help offset the week missed when we were getting geared up for distance learning.) We also won't have a half day on May 13—it will be a regular full day online.

The last day of online classes will occur **Friday, May 15**. The week of May 18-22 will contain numerous “asynchronous” 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. I'll provide further details of the last week as they evolve.

Ongoing grades for core classes will be updated in [PlusPortals](#) by this Sunday evening. I would encourage families again to check in on student progress, including any missing work. We have decided not to administer final exams for our seventh and eighth graders this year. (Fifth and sixth graders don't take final exams even in normal years.) Because of the unique circumstances of this moment, we have also decided to count the third trimester half as much as the first two trimesters for Upper School students, yielding a 40/40/20 weight distribution of the terms respectively for the **final grade calculations**. But third trimester grades do still count!

Here are a few additional announcements and reminders:

- I hope Upper School students take full advantage of the **enrichment opportunities** that we've made available. As someone involved with overseeing five different groups, I can attest that some students are seizing those opportunities with gusto, and some are not. It would make me sad to hear that students aren't dipping their toes even slightly into sketching, writing letters to the elderly, learning a new language, stargazing, practicing the guitar, etc., when there's never been a better time to do so. Parents, please ask your kids about the clubs (plural!) they're enrolled in, if you haven't already, to see what they've been up to. Family members are certainly welcome to join in on many of those activities, if you're looking for something

creative to pass the time or to share with your “quaran-teens.” Once we learn a few chords, I’m hoping to form a folk trio with my kids. (I have not yet informed them of that fact. No doubt they will be thrilled.)

● Students, please remember that you are responsible for checking your **school Gmail** account routinely (at least twice a day) for important messages from your teachers, whether about academic work or enrichment activities. This month is a perfect opportunity to practice organizing emails in your inbox. A good Youtube video on that topic can be found [here](#).

● I will repeat my suggestion/plea that families limit or take away entirely smartphones and other non-academic devices during distance-learning hours (9:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.) at the very least. For too many students the **distractions** of group chats, Youtube videos, online gaming, etc. are too alluring, and it’s preventing some from engaging fully in lessons that teachers are putting a lot of effort into creating.

● Congratulations to our **Alan Schultz Memorial Declamation Day** competitors! The event, which has been a part of St. Michael’s for more than three decades, was re-named this year in honor of the legendary English teacher who presided over the competition for so long and who passed away last autumn.

The following seventh and eighth grade students were originally chosen to perform in our event on campus at the end of March:

Ethan Ackerman, Alexa Blair, Izzy Butler, Asa Dahdal, Chloe Harris, Ella Healy, Casey Huerta Rojas, Lily Huether, Lance Kaye, Virginia Kimme-Hea, Miika Lagat, Luc Leyton, Alex Nordstrom, Jackie Peterson, Trevor Peyton, Lila Smith, Scarlett Street, Ben Teller, and Ronnie Trezza

Unfortunately, the coronavirus prevented us from holding that competition at school in person. Instead eleven of the above competitors created video recordings of themselves reciting their poems. Our team of judges--Ms. Gould, Dr. Antista, and beloved former teacher Mrs. Thiltges--had the grueling task of narrowing that field down to the following three winners:

Lila Smith (8th grade) - First Place
Chloe Harris (7th grade) - Second Place
Lily Huether (8th grade) - Diction Prize

Nine of those videos, including the winning entries, can now be watched [here](#).

● Congratulations as well to Avery Johnson (seventh grade), our distance learning **logo contest** winner! We are in the midst of printing postcards featuring all of our brilliant logo design submissions.

I hope you enjoy more of this beautiful weather.

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.