

May 26, 2008

Dear families,

I think the first day of summer vacation is the most difficult. A few short days ago there was energy and excitement; now there is stillness and calm. The children are gone. There isn't the pitter patter of feet throughout the hallways. Their voices aren't resonating in the classrooms or in the office. It's quiet. It's too quiet. A school without children is simply a building with desks, computers, and books. It's the children who bring life to a school. They bring with them their hopes and dreams, their joys and sorrows, their present, their past and their future each day they walk through our doors. They share their life's stories; their aches and pains. They are the heartbeat of this building. I miss them already.

As is the case this time of year, I am called to reflect upon the year just completed, and I ask myself, where have we been successful in fulfilling our mission? Intellectually, our students continue to be exposed to high quality instruction delivered by outstanding educators. We have students who have cracked the code of reading as young as kindergarten, and our pre-kindergarten students have discovered the power of the written word. On my wall I have a note from Jhansi in Ms. Nash's class. It reads (as it was written), "Miss O are we gowing to hav free gress on Friday". Our first grade students read over 1800 books this year! Imagine the love of reading that had to be developed to achieve such an impressive total. And that same enthusiasm for reading continued into fifth grade where Mrs. Boudreaux was proud to share that her students read more than 1000 titles. This is no small feat considering the complexity and length of books these students selected. The *Harry Potter* series and *The Chronicles of Narnia* books are just two examples of the rich and challenging literature students chose to read.

Morally, we continue to wrestle with the dilemmas that young children encounter. Through Chaplain Charlie's lessons in Morning Meeting, our conversations about friendships with Mrs. Mahaffey, and our ongoing classroom interactions with students, we work at developing habits of goodness which serve as a growing foundation for all our students and their interactions with one another. This, just as any skill, requires practice year after year, day after day.

What about physically? Our PE programs continue to foster a love of health and wellness, and our students love the sports programs we have in the Lower School. Whether it is girls' volleyball, boys' baseball or swimming, our children love to play. If you've had the pleasure of attending one of our sports awards ceremonies, you can see firsthand the level of involvement in sports.

Then, there are the arts. Under the direction of Amber Harris, 83 of our students performed the largest show in recent memory. *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* performed to two sold out audiences. Students who had never performed before made their way to the stage and learned what excitement performing before an audience could generate. Our youngest children performed their Christmas Pageant to a standing room only crowd in the Greer Center. Mr. Taranto worked his magic with our beginning instrumental students. As the daughter of a band director, I have great admiration and appreciation for what Mr. Taranto can do with young children just learning to toot those horns. Their end of the year performance at Morning Meeting was inspiring. Ms. Kate helped the artist in each child flourish. This was most evident when I noticed Kelly Dorris' second grade students nestled beneath the oak tree in the Middle School quad. Spread underneath its high branches, each student was focused intently upon drawing the subject before them. As Ms. Kate quietly moved from student to student offering quick statements of feedback, I had no doubt that this was a perfect example of our mission in action.

Finally, our mission calls upon us to nurture of the spirit of our children. This is perhaps the most challenging. How do we measure this? How do we know we're being successful? I feel our children's spirit when they sing the chorus of "Shout to the Lord" in Morning Meeting. I see their spirit as they welcome their younger buddies to their sides and when they band together to participate in our Cornerstones initiatives. Their spirit is what makes this building come

alive. Each voice, each step, each success, each misstep represents the growth, the energy, and the spirit of 384 children.

You know me, and I have already begun to look ahead to the coming year. We have much to be excited about. The launching of the Episcopal Fellowship in Early Childhood Education commences in the fall with three Fellows joining our kindergarten faculty. Tiffany Kinnison joins our first grade team after a year in fourth grade. Katie Allred and Leslie Arceneaux join our fifth grade team teaching writing and math respectively. Yvonne Watts will open the world of Spanish language and culture to our Lower School Spanish students. Eddie Cole joins our PE faculty with over three decades of teaching and coaching experience. Jennifer Keith brings her love of art and her amazing talent to our Lower School art enrichment program. Each of these dynamic individuals brings a new outlook and new energy to our already talented faculty and staff. Our work with curriculum alignment, Responsive Classroom practices, guided reading and writing and differentiated instruction continues; our journey toward the attainment our mission ongoing.

Finally, I do have one small piece of business to conduct. As we approach hurricane season and as we prepare to send home report cards, I am reminded of the importance of having copies of important documents regarding your child's education placed in an area that could be quickly retrieved should the need arise. Putting copies in a waterproof container in the trunk of your car would be helpful should a change of school be required or should the school sustain extensive damage. Of course, we pray that this won't ever be necessary, but as we've all learned, we can never be over prepared.

So, it's been a wonderful year –for the children, for our faculty, and for our school. And now it's time to slow down and rest. Settle in with a good book, putter in the garden, plan a trip to the beach, or simply take an afternoon nap. Enjoy the long lazy days ahead, and I wish you all the best for the coming weeks.

Thank you for everything.

With warm regards,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Cheryl Ollmann". The signature is written in black ink on a light-colored background.

Cheryl Ollmann