

James Newman, Ph.D., Head of School

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Dear Academy Families and Friends,

Margaret Mead, the famous 20th-century cultural anthropologist, was correct when she said, “Never doubt that a small group of committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.” No example proves her point better than the explosive impact created by Bill Gates and Steve Jobs, and now a later generation of social media pioneers such as Larry Page and Sergey Brin (Google), Mark Zuckerberg (Facebook), and Jack Dorsey (Twitter). The world Margaret Mead knew prior to her death in 1978 has changed, and changed dramatically.

My faith in the ability of committed people — both young and older — to change the world is unwavering. What I find most exciting today is that people of all ages are collaborating in ways that social norms prior to the 1960s, and the “generational divide” of the 1960s and 1970s, often stymied. Now, Margaret Mead’s “committed citizens” are of diverse ages and diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds.

While I am unsure whether basic institutions — such as elementary and secondary schools — can respond adequately to the unprecedented change that our global society will continue to experience, I am certain that the best chance to create exemplary programs of “deep learning” will occur in independent schools, such as Harrisburg Academy.

Learning environments like that of the Academy will effectively provide students with skills for the future and aptitudes for embracing new ideas, different people, and solving complex problems our global society faces both now and in the future. Why do I believe independent schools, like the Academy, are key to sustaining effective learning communities? First, independent schools are designed to function along the cusp of tradition and innovation. Our schools have long traditions of creating learning environments that inspire and engage students in the joy of learning, for the sake of learning. Independent schools nurture students towards becoming close-knit groups who are excited about working collaboratively — analyzing data, solving problems with new and different answers, and debating the conclusions of their research.

At the Academy, this tradition is best articulated in our *core values* and demonstrated in our daily efforts to make those values a reality for each member of the Academy community. Second, because we are a small school community, we can adapt our instructional programs both to meet the needs of individual students and the profile of overall learning necessary for the 21st century.

Challenging our students in an environment that nurtures and inspires.

The [National Association of Independent Schools \(NAIS\)](#) commissioned a study to articulate the essential skills that 21st-century learners need. The commission recently published its findings, including this list:

- Analytical, creative-thinking, and problem-solving
- Complex communication, both oral and written
- Leadership and teamwork
- Digital and quantitative literacy
- Global perspective
- Adaptability, initiative, and risk-taking
- Integrity and ethical decision-making

I'm sure while reading the list you can identify valuable ways in which the Academy supports your child's development of each essential skill. By providing our traditionally effective instruction while innovatively adapting our programs, the Academy ensures that your decision to provide an Academy education for your child is the right one. I am proud of how the trustees of our school and our faculty and staff have continued to address how to best prepare our students and modify our programs thoughtfully and innovatively. We, as a community, embrace the value of maintaining the balance of tradition and innovation in our classrooms.

I'd like to hear your thoughts about what global change means for your children, our learning community, and our educational programs. Please join Tom Schmidt, president of our Board of Trustees, and me at 7 p.m. on Wednesday, Jan. 26, in the Meeting Room. Tell us your thoughts about progress we made in 2010 toward achieving the ambitious goals of our strategic plan, [Challenge 2013](#), and participate in the conversation about our plans for 2011.

At 7:30 p.m. that same evening, parents of all students in grades 5 through 9 are encouraged to join Steve Fry, Tom Banks, and me to learn about the International Baccalaureate's Middle Years Program (MYP). As I mentioned in [last month's all-school letter](#), the Academy is in the process of deciding whether to seek authorization from the International Baccalaureate Organization to offer the MYP next year to our students in grades 6 through 10.

We've been very pleased with the [IB Diploma Program](#) currently offered to our 11th and 12th grade students and we believe it's been a very successful innovation for our academic program, in part because it is helping to build those essential skills for the 21st century. Join us in the process of determining if the MYP can be equally beneficial to our students and learning community.

Please mark your calendars and become part of our own “small group committed group of citizens”. Help prepare our students to face the remarkable challenges of the future and to change the world in the best interests of all. All of the technology innovators mentioned above did just this — and all, except for Steve Jobs, attended an independent school!

With warm regards,
Jim Newman