

James Newman, Ph.D., Head of School

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Dear Academy parents and friends,

Can our Harrisburg Academy students provide valuable advice about our school? Without a doubt... For that reason each year I invite the seniors — four at a time — to join me for lunch in my office. Pizza is the menu and I'm the one taking notes.

These lunches provide our seniors an opportunity to speak about their personal experiences at the Academy. Their comments are insightful, and our conversations are wide-ranging, lively, and delightful. Of course, the students typically advocate for expanded "senior privileges," but the discussions always extend beyond "more freedoms" to other valuable topics such as the Upper School curriculum and schedule and their thoughts about what constitutes a superior education.

I have come to see these lunches as important student dialogues. This shared perspective about their experiences tells of an Academy education which has been personal, rather unique, and highly valued by our students. Consistently, and almost predictably, our seniors speak about their relationships with their teachers, and not just one who may have made an impact, but many who personally connected with them during their time at the Academy. They respect and admire their teachers and regard them as mentors in the broadest sense. They believe faculty members are "guides" who lead their learning without demonstrating each step to take. Our seniors value how their teachers encourage them to reflect, construct their thoughts and theories. At the same time, they understand the faculty will challenge their ideas and require them to articulate their thoughts clearly. In listening to our seniors, I hear from students who believe they are known, understood, and validated.

As Academy parents, you are aware that this highly personal learning experience extends beyond the Academy's Upper School to other divisions. We are purposefully organized on a small-school scale to foster successful personal learning experiences for each and every student. Harrisburg Academy is a community of learners committed to a set of [core values](#) that permeates our school environment and encourages our faculty and staff to always do the best we can for the "whole child" and every child. We believe this combination of a personal learning experience with our dedicated focus on maximizing the learning outcomes of all students is a powerful dynamic.

In contrast to other school options that are based on standardized curricula engineered to cultivate a narrow band of learning and test-taking, we are proud that the Academy stands out as "something more and something different." The Academy fosters a personal experience of responsive teaching and learning that encourages students to become inquirers and thinkers who are open-minded, caring, reflective, and always in the process of transforming. Why? Because education in the 21st century must be a transformational process and a highly personal learning experience, at that.

I'm not sure who enjoys these pizza lunches more — me or the seniors — but they certainly bring out the best in student dialogues. I'm learning more all the time!

With warm regards,
Jim

Challenging our students in an environment that nurtures and inspires.