

September 2010

Dear Academy Families and Friends,

Once again, our All-School Picnic and Ice Cream Social was a wonderful success. Although it was a hot afternoon, families returned to greet one another, get a burger, and relish in some favorite flavors of ice cream. This picnic is a traditional Academy event I look forward to each August — particularly the opportunity to mound up scoops of ice cream to everyone's delight!

Our school calendar includes a number of traditional events similar to the All-School Picnic. The Winter Concert, athletics banquets, Field Day, school plays, Authors' Day, the reenactment of Dr. Seuss' "The Grinch," Outdoor Movie Night, overnight treks to Camp Thompson and college campuses, and Science and States Fairs, are some that immediately come to my mind. Our new traditions, such as the annual performance of a Middle School musical, have excited all of us and probably will become "regulars." And there have been other times when we've dotted the school calendar with one-time favorites such as last year's burial of a time capsule.

All of these traditional events, whether long-established or newly-emerging, are important to the lifeblood of our school. Independent schools are famous for the annual rendition of time-honored events that become shared endeavors, building the lore of a student's school experience. As a faculty member from an independent school in St. Louis noted, these shared memories do more than "enrich teaching and learning" in a school. As she put it, "they foster community."

Michael Brosnan, editor of an outstanding journal dedicated to independent schooling, has said more about developing a sense of community in schools like the Academy. He believes, and I agree wholeheartedly, a school may be a community— but it's not a given. Although many children may attend a school and their parents might be present in the school, this doesn't mean that the school qualifies as a community. Brosnan claims, "Something else has to happen: intentionally" – for that deep sense of common purpose to well up and be sustained. Underpinning a strong sense of connection requires the commitment of the entire school community to engage with one another.

It is for this reason that independent schools place a high premium on defining the mission of the school. Here at the Academy, the review of our [Mission Statement](#) occurs every five years when we develop a new strategic plan. This happened most recently in 2008 when we created our current strategic plan, [Challenge 2013](#). At the same time, we took an additional step by developing our community's **core values**. Parents, teachers, administrators, alumni, and trustees met and discussed what they believed were the Academy's core values. The [Core Values](#) are now posted on our website and are displayed at each main entrance to our

Challenging our students in an environment that nurtures and inspires.

school. Most importantly, we discuss them in a variety of ways with our students and do our best to “animate” them every day.

Knowing our Mission Statement and understanding our Core Values is critical. But what elemental actions must each of us take and for what must we assume responsibility? What, specifically, must our students, their parents, our administrators, our faculty, and our staff do? How can we demonstrate our commitment to fostering community in our school?

Linked to this all-school letter is our “[Community Compact](#).” The Compact reflects several ways in which our entire Academy community can bring the school’s Core Values to life. It articulates common expectations for all of us that will help build our own school’s sense of community. For example, faculty and staff must serve as positive role models, provide consistent expectations to their students, and provide opportunities for involvement of parents and others in our school community. Students must agree to try their best in all of their endeavors and respect all members of the school community. Parents, similarly, must agree to provide an appropriate place and time for study. Each of us is expected to value the Academy’s culture of giving and support that value by giving time, talent, and treasure for the benefit of our entire school community.

I encourage you to [review the Community Compact](#) and to think about the ways in which your family can embrace these ideals —because your participation is vital to the ongoing success of Harrisburg Academy. If we hope to continue as a vibrant and dynamic independent school community, every member of the Academy community must go beyond knowing our Mission Statement and understanding our Core Values.

As the academic year progresses, the division heads and I will continue to share information with you about the Community Compact and its role in our school. We welcome the opportunity to speak more about the Compact and to answer any of your questions. Please stop me or your student’s division head in the hallway, or feel free to call and make an appointment to sit and chat.

The students have filled the school with excitement and a joy for learning during the first few weeks of school, and we are so excited to build upon this sense of community by partnering with you!

With warm regards,

Jim Newman