

James Newman, Ph.D., Head of School

October 2011

Dear Academy Friends and Families,

My October all-school letter begins with a short story I told to Upper School parents at Back-to-School night.

On Thursday morning of the rain-filled week we experienced as a result of Tropical Storm Lee, I sat in the "Cove" (the study area immediately outside the Middle School / Upper School Library that is claimed quickly each year by members of the new senior class), speaking with a group of five seniors about the start to their school year and life in general as a senior. The students in this particular group have spent an average of three-quarters of their educational lives here at Harrisburg Academy. At that point in the week, the Academy had neither delayed the start of a school day nor canceled classes. The seniors asked if I thought our school would be in session the next day, Friday. Always curious about what our students think, I solicited their opinions on the decision. They responded in unison: "Don't cancel school!"

These are seniors, mind you, supposedly driven by their interest in leaving their high schools far behind as quickly as possible and eager to experience the freedoms that await them on college and university campuses. Like me, you may wonder why they would want to be here rather than enjoying a day to be filled with activities of their own choosing. The answer came back without hesitation — "The Academy is our second home and we would miss not being here."

Of course, I was pleased to hear their responses. By the same token, I wasn't completely surprised by their answer. The seniors in the Cove were expressing an attitude towards learning that resulted from years of experiencing the *personalized* nature of schooling at the Academy. Multiple years of thoughtful individual attentiveness from our faculty and support staff make Academy students highly engaged in their learning.

The personal attention our faculty directs towards our students results in an environment of mutual respect and a sense of genuine care. As a result, our students feel positive about their school experiences, their teachers, and their peers, and they find joy and success in learning. Aside from our instructional and curricular focus to help your children master our rigorous learning competencies, I'm proud to say that we simultaneously ascribe to the *Responsive Classroom*® and *Developmental Designs*® adage of "knowing the physical, emotional, social and intellectual needs of the students we teach is as important as knowing the content we teach."

Challenging our students in an environment that nurtures and inspires.

Education is a journey — a personal journey — and the Academy is organized to support each student's learning adventure. We are a small learning community by choice and not one that constructs its learning according to a standardized curriculum designed to help students learn how to take a test. Our commitment to maximizing your children's learning outcomes is based on a personalized instructional approach that teaches our students to use their minds well and encourages them to actively pursue learning for the sake of learning by developing a healthy curiosity for the world around them.

Not for a minute do I wish that we would experience the kind of continuous rain we underwent last month. I do, however, look forward to the moment when another senior tells me that the Academy is his or her "second home."

I am so pleased to be head of school at Harrisburg Academy, a learning community that offers something more and something different.

With warm regards,

Jim