



Feb. 7, 2017

Dear Middle School and Upper School Families,

It is with unbridled enthusiasm that I officially announce a new bell schedule for Harrisburg Academy's Middle and Upper Schools, to take effect in the 2017-18 academic year. A copy of the schedule is included with this letter, for your review and to spark any questions you might have about its implementation. I have highlighted some of the most compelling changes in the remaining text of this letter, and I welcome any inquiries you might have for me about the new schedule in the coming days, weeks or months.

### **Consistent Monday-to-Friday Schedule / Easier Scheduling**

First and foremost, cycle days have been replaced with a Monday-to-Friday schedule. As you and your child(ren) are preparing for the day each morning, no longer will you have to consult multiple calendars and timetables to know the schedule for the day. The only frequent, abnormal consideration will be on Wednesdays — when the **Blue** or **Gold** distinction will cause some change to the schedule for the day (more on that below). Students will know with consistency at which times they have which class, and also when study halls will take place. This will allow for carefully-chosen study hall periods for students heavily involved in dance, ballet or cooperative sports; it will also support the introduction of a new elective tutoring program which will make it possible for outside tutors to meet with students during the school day (more news to come).

### **Wellness and Student Support**

Two changes that come with the goal of promoting a healthier use of time and a somewhat relaxed environment, when appropriate, are longer passing periods and a "Tutorial" period on Thursday mornings. Passing periods will now be five to 10 minutes long instead of three minutes long, affording more time for both students and teachers to mentally and physically transition from one class to another. The 10-minute passing periods are in targeted spots on Thursdays and Fridays, where class sessions are longer. This will provide time for students to have a snack and have a slightly longer transition between lengthier classes. The 40-minute "Tutorial" period on Thursday morning is a time where **every** teacher in the Middle and Upper Schools is available to answer questions and provide individual as well as small-group instruction. This can sometimes be used for make-up work, and always for homework questions, refining essays, and preparing for tests. Students will begin the day by checking in with their advisor, and will be able to sign out to spend time with any teacher.

### **Experiential Learning through the Centers Program**

The last major adjustment I would like to point out is the scheduled time devoted to our Centers for Experiential Learning & Innovation. I believe the Centers program is one of the hallmarks of an Academy Upper School education and is incredibly valuable to our students' comprehensive, experiential high school experience (if you have not already, be sure to read my [blog post on this topic](#)). The unique program, which provides our students with something more and different for college preparation and beyond, has operated mostly outside of the regular school day to this point. We have made due with project days and by taking away instructional time from courses,

but we will now be able to reinforce the value of our Centers by giving them explicit time in our schedule. Where you see "Centers Block" on the schedule, a combination of things will be happening. Vocal and instrumental ensembles will be meeting, Middle School students will have courses and clubs, and our Center directors will be working tirelessly to provide alternative programming, internship support, passion project development, relevant clubs, and more. Gold Wednesdays, which will happen roughly two out of every five Wednesdays (calendar coming soon), have additional time for Centers and will ensure that even the most musically-involved Upper School students have time for passion projects and unique programming. Middle School students will sometimes be exposed to Centers work to keep them in the culture of experiential learning, but their involvement will be largely tangential until they enter the Upper School.

### **TOK During the School Day / Additional Important Changes**

To maintain some respectable brevity, here is a list of additional changes to note, absent descriptions: TOK will take place during the school day instead of after school; there will be more time for music instruction and exploration in our new music suite; every week will include a combined Morning Meeting that is heavily programmed with student involvement; and block "G" will have several study hall options to support students with a heavier-than-usual schedule of extracurricular commitments.

As you can see, my unbridled enthusiasm is for good reason! As I shared with you recently via email, the scheduling process will be different this spring due to these changes. In previous years, students have been involved in conversations of interest around courses for the subsequent year, and schedules were sent over the summer. This year, students learn about course options by early April and will have a few weeks to get advice from parents, advisors, etc., before making decisions about their 2017-18 schedule. Parents will be able to consult advisors on the schedule at Parent/Teacher conferences in April, as well. Going into the summer, students will know, with a fair amount of certainty, not only which courses they will have next academic year but also during which periods the courses will be held.

Tenth grade families in past years have had meetings with the Head of Upper School in January and February to discuss two-year course planning, college aspirations, and the IB Diploma program. We will have these meetings again, but a little later than usual. During the month of March, each 10<sup>th</sup> grade family will have a meeting with Keo Oura Sabath, college counselor, and me during their child's study hall period or after school. At this meeting, we will use your son or daughter's college and career aspirations, IB interest, Centers focuses, and other pursuits to develop a tentative course plan for 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade. Please look for more information about these meetings from Mr. Nagle beginning mid-February. Any non-10<sup>th</sup> grade families wishing to set up a meeting with me and/or Mrs. Sabath are free to do so once scheduling gets underway. Please contact George Nagle for scheduling assistance.

Thank you for reading this letter in its entirety. Please do not hesitate to reach out to me with any questions you might have, be they big or small.

Warm Regards,

John J. Binnert  
Head of Middle & Upper Schools  
IB Coordinator