



Saint David's School

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Headmaster

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Dear Saint David's School Community,

Dylan, Max, Sasha, and Felix, the O'Halloran children, were dancing on the beach this summer. Like many Saint David's boys, they thoroughly enjoyed the less structured and more relaxed pace that summer days permit. Their imaginative frivolity reminded me of how precious and fleeting childhood is as well as just how welcomed the return to school can be. "Saint David's boys," our mission statement declares in its concluding paragraph, "distinguish themselves as young men of ideas and ideals, action and reflection ..." In years past we have focused the school-year around a central theme that helps develop or articulate an important aspect of our school's mission. These have included *Scholarship*, *Spirituality*, and most recently *Balance*. Our school-wide theme this year, taken from this phrase in the mission, is *Action*.

Defined at its simplest "a thing done," action suggests doing. It suggests a physical, tangible outcome as well as movement, optimally forward, and growth. Action suggests definitiveness. Action can also be defined as the unfolding of the events of a drama. In the context of Saint David's, I favor this latter definition. Not only because of its literary and artistic allusion, but because, when combined with the simplest definition—the thing done, it gives action a context and meaning.

Saint David's continually draws upon its classical roots to help inform its program. Within this tradition, action typically takes one of two forms: tragedy or comedy. The action found in dramas of the Classical poets questioned the framework by which human life is to be lived—whether by fate (necessity), morality, and/or heroism. Classical drama, with its roots in religious ritual, attempted to understand and answer many of the questions humans from ancient times to modern times have grappled with—the relation of the human to the divine, of the human to the material world, of the nature of being human. The actions we take and the actions we teach at Saint David's are informed by these larger questions and by our own religious tradition. The concluding statement of Saint David's religion department philosophy states it best, "Growth along the way should be intellectual, social and spiritual, and implies making reflective choices that become transforming actions so that doing good becomes the real meaning of being good."

In keeping with this year's theme, Saint David's is taking action on several fronts. After three years of deliberate and strategic preparation, several significant changes are being implemented this year: on the curricular side, Science, Foreign Language, Lower School Reading and school-wide writing, within the administration, a major restructuring. Physically, the school building has enjoyed important improvements, and the faculty initiative has moved into high gear.

As a result of our Curriculum Initiative, discussed in previous letters, important changes are occurring in many areas of the educational program. Some deserve special mention now while others will be touched upon in the future. A new centralizing theme "The Scientific Method" will now permeate the entire science program at Saint David's. This overarching focus of the program represents our movement toward a much more hands-on, engaging, investigative approach to the teaching of science. Personnel, curricular, scheduling and physical plant changes have been

implemented to help achieve this goal. We are moving from a model where many teachers each taught a little science, toward a model where fewer teachers are teaching more science—an emphasis on greater specialization. We have modified and increased the physical space committed to science. During the summer months, a new and much larger Lower School Science Lab, a new Middle School Science Lab, a new Upper School Science Lab, an office space and a new science preparation space were constructed. All have been specifically designed for the curricular needs of each of the age groups assigned to them. Our new, larger and uniquely designed Lower School Science Lab will now allow us to double the amount of dedicated science instruction each week for boys in grades K through 3. The cumulative effect of this extra time in the lower grades will have a profound impact on the boys' science learning and on the quality of the boys' overall educational experience.

In the upper grades, science will increase from 3 classes to 4 classes per week. The new, much larger Upper School Science Lab is designed to accommodate more advanced scientific experimentation and investigation. Group work stations have gas, water, and electric lines dedicated to independent lab tables; the room also accommodates more specialized work with chemicals.

The old Lower School science room has been completely renovated to accommodate a third section of third grade, bringing all lower school homerooms from the previous model of two slightly larger homerooms in grades 1 through 3 to the newer model of smaller homerooms divided into three sections throughout the Lower School.

Like Science, Foreign Language is another curricular area experiencing significant change. A new *Introduction to Latin* course is added to the fifth and sixth grade program. This two year sequence will meet twice weekly and introduce boys to Roman culture and ancient mythology through stories derived from the *Metamorphoses* of Ovid. Using this context, boys will study basic Latin grammar and learn language skills applicable to any language, including English such as vocabulary derivation, parts of speech, and the importance of word order. Learning an inflected language such as Latin teaches boys to identify “parts of wholes,” to identify the more specific details of words and structures of language that are so often hard for boys to learn. It also builds vocabulary and develops a greater facility with words. After this two year introduction, boys may opt to continue Latin as a seventh subject in the seventh and eighth grade, allowing a boy to graduate from Saint David's with a comprehensive exposure to four years of Latin.

After considerable research and investigation, the school is close to making a decision regarding the earlier introduction of Spanish and French. If the school does move in this direction, it will make a solid commitment. Research shows that to be most effective, instruction needs to be frequent and early. The staffing, scheduling, and space implications of earlier instruction in foreign language continue to be carefully examined, with pros and cons being fully considered. A decision will be finalized this year.

Other important changes that have resulted from our Curriculum Initiative include Upper School athletics being moved from two morning and two afternoon sessions weekly to all afternoons. Not only does this change bring consistency, but it allows prime instructional time to be allocated to academic studies. In the lower grades, working with outside specialists, we have further refined our beginning and emerging reading programs resulting in an even more balanced, consistent, and skill focused program. Scheduled time devoted to both reading and math is increasing slightly across the board, and we now have two teachers scheduled with boys during special writing blocks in the Lower School.

This summer, as an outgrowth of our Curriculum Initiative, 22 Saint David's Language Arts teachers met for an intensive week-long workshop to put the finishing touches on a new *Comprehensive Writing Program* for Saint David's. We have always been known as having a strong program regarding the development of expository writing skills. Feedback from research conducted with the parents of high school aged Saint David's alums and the alums themselves, identified a need to balance the program to include an equal emphasis on developing the creative and narrative writing skills of our boys. For the past year, we have been laying the foundations for that change which culminated this summer with the creation of the new Comprehensive Writing Program. It will not only balance expository and creative structures but will also balance direct writing skill instruction with modeling, guided practice and more writing opportunities. As a result of this intensive work, a writing manual has been produced by Saint David's and will be used by teachers to inform and help structure their instruction, ensuring a purposeful sequencing and scaffolding of skill development through the grades. This is an exciting initiative.

The Comprehensive Writing Initiative is just one of the many professional development activities undertaken by the faculty this summer. In fact, more than half of our faculty members were involved in creative and innovative professional development activities that have generated a sense of excitement and forward momentum.

Administratively, we have implemented a few changes, the most significant of which is the creation of a new senior administrative position: Dean of Faculty. In keeping with the school's first strategic goal—attracting and retaining exceptional teachers—the school recognized a need to devote more time and resources to the faculty's professional development, including the mentorship of new faculty, training, supervision and evaluation of faculty, and the procedures and protocols for their effective application. Last year's pilot program experienced great success and clearly demonstrated the need for more administrative attention in order to ensure continued success.

The competitive compensation dimension of the Faculty Initiative has proven incredibly successful. We have been fortunate in attracting and retaining exceptional teachers. My next letter will detail our new members to the faculty and other changes in the structure of the staff and administration.

As a summer reading assignment, the faculty was asked to read Howard Gardner's new book *Five Minds for the Future*. In it, Gardner suggests skills necessary for the 21st century will tap into five distinct kinds of thinking. As we embrace action this year throughout the school as a unifying theme, we will be keeping an eye to the future. However, with all the improvements we have taken action on to further refine and strengthen our program, another phrase in our mission statement has remained ever present in our minds, "that elementary education ... should always be compelling" and "joyful." My hope, as your sons return to Saint David's, fresh from an invigorating summer, although they may not be dancing in the halls as the O'Halloran children danced on the beaches of Delaware, is that they experience a joyful and successful year of learning nonetheless. These are exciting days at Saint David's. Thank you for all your continued support of the school and her mission. We eagerly await the arrival of the boys. I remain,

Sincerely and respectfully yours,

P. David O'Halloran