



Saint David's School

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Headmaster

Friday, August 31, 2007

Dear Saint David's Community,

In the early morning hours of Monday, September 10th, the black doors that mark the entrance to Saint David's School will swing open briskly, signaling the start of the school's fifty-seventh year. For many of our boys, their entry through these doors will represent their very first opening day; for others it will be their last as Saint David's boys. In either case, the door by which they enter Saint David's for the first time remains the same door by which they will eventually depart. Navigating their way through the elementary school years, facing challenges, overcoming fears, making wrong turns and then correcting them will prove to be one of the most formative experiences of their lives. That experience will be shaped by what this community defines as important. Dictated by the school's mission statement, by the adults who implement it, and by the values and morals we espouse and adhere to, our objective is the formation of strong young men, balanced men ... good men.

Two essential elements of a Saint David's education that help achieve this objective are *Scholarship* and *Spirituality*, both of which have formed overarching school-wide themes in past years. This year our focus will spotlight the school-wide theme of *Balance*. Saint David's believes that to be good men, in part, requires establishing a balance in all things. Our mission states, "Saint David's boys are scholarly and creative, aesthetic and athletic". Central to boys' development is learning to balance the various aspects of their lives – the often competing forces of intellectual passion, "scholarship"; health and physical development, "athletics"; faith and morality, "spirituality"; and the recognition and appreciation of beauty, "aesthetics".

A wonderful example of balancing competing forces that illustrates this point occurred on a winter day last year. In the upper gym at 94th Street, Saint David's Red basketball team was battling it out with St. Bernard's for the Manhattan Middle School League Championship – the biggest game of the season. It was an intense, fast paced game that ended in victory for the Reds. As you can imagine, the boys and their classmates were on a sweaty high. What makes this story so remarkable is that within forty minutes of the final whistle, all thirty-seven boys were sitting in the Large Dining Hall, blazers and ties intact, cool and collected, actively engaged in a formal, public exchange with Prince Zeid of Jordan and Ambassador al-Istrabadi of Iraq. Within a three hour time frame, they balanced the demands placed on a highly competitive athlete with those of a serious scholar.

To the ancient Greeks, the notions of "balance and youth" were expressed in what they called the *Paideia* which reinforced the ideals of wisdom and the power of reason. It affirmed the notion of free people belonging to a democratic society based upon the rule of law as well as the force and power of words. To the ancients, *Paideia* represented the grouping together of accumulated knowledge and the transformation that a young man had to experience in his quest to become a "good man". In essence, *Paideia* was the process of "educating man into his true form". When Saint David's refers to balance, it is within this concept of the *Paideia* that we find its meaning. Youth and balance were the keys to the "good," and so it is at Saint David's.

Saint David's achieves balance by ensuring that a three-part underlying program structure is applied throughout the curriculum. The *recitative* focuses on the absorption of facts – the grammar if you will of training the memory, building a foundation of knowledge; the *dialogic* on the categorization and organization of knowledge, how to think through problems and develop arguments by applying and linking facts and figures; the *generative* on expression – the rhetoric – knowledge applied to the solution of novel problems, the generation of original thoughts and ideas in speech and writing.

This three-part structure combined with the best of current research further ensures balance. The faculty recognizes the importance of paying attention to the needs and interests of the individual learner; the degree of freedom and exploration, choice; they recognize that boys do not all learn in the same way or at the same pace; that there are different learning styles and preferences for learning; that learning, for boys especially, needs to be active, physically engaging; that boys need to feel a sense of ownership and responsibility; that success is the greatest motivator. The faculty also aims to achieve balance along the teaching-learning continuum. Roles and responsibilities for learning are carefully constructed and aim to achieve an appropriate mix of teacher-directed (direct instruction of specific skills/concepts), shared (collaborative and cooperative learning exercises), and student-generated/lead learning opportunities.

At a time when it would be easy to lose sight of some of the foundations of a classically structured education, Saint David's is using it to help critique and guide our program. As the school moves into its fourth year of a major curriculum review, we now focus on planning changes that have been called for in the critique phase. During the summer months, curricular chairs presented their committee's findings and recommendations. It's been a busy summer. In most curricular areas what's called for amounts to slight adjustments and streamlining. Since we are fortunate to have an academically rigorous, successful program, areas that have been identified as needing a particular focus include the sciences and foreign language. Although strong programs, they can be made even stronger. This year will be spent planning improvements in these areas.

Most importantly, Saint David's also recognizes the importance of keeping the academic, aesthetic and physical balanced with the need to nourish the soul and develop a moral and ethical foundation through the tenets of the Catholic faith. As a summer reading assignment and as a follow-up to last year's theme, the faculty read Michael Schulman's book *Building Moral Communities*. In it he defines morality, at its simplest, as the inclination to treat others kindly and fairly. As we work through this curriculum planning year, this Saint David's *Golden Rule* is the basic premise that provides our context for learning.

Our continuing work on faculty professional development, supervision and evaluation has resulted in a comprehensive plan which will enter a pilot implementation phase this year. Saint David's is incredibly fortunate to have an exceptional and dedicated faculty. To keep our standards high, in addition to ensuring highly competitive compensation, we have closely examined our procedures regarding the evaluation and internal professional development of our teachers. It is a credit to the professionalism of the faculty that Saint David's teachers have embraced the clarification of standards and procedures, the increased accountability and the importance of the extraordinary responsibility they share.

Along with curricular and faculty work, during the hot summer months, Saint David's completed several important projects. In keeping with the ongoing aim of maximizing the school's resources to meet needs, two additional apartments in Building 18 were converted into instructional space. Modeled on the Music Suite constructed last summer, a new Art Room provides a large, custom-designed art space and a large classroom space which will relieve the pressure on the much utilized Smith Reception Room. The new 6th floor instructional spaces also address scheduling difficulties and allow for a lab dedicated to Foreign Language instruction.

Following a year of research, focus groups and planning, a new web site will be launched with the opening of school this September. Designed to function as our most important information source, the new website will be for some, a virtual tour of the school, for others a continuing source of useful and up-to-date happenings at Saint David's.

The school believes that a balanced, nutritious, lunch program offering a variety of choices is essential to the growing boy. After careful thought and due consideration, a new food service provider will be joining us this September.

The Five Year Report for the New York State Association of Independent Schools has also been completed. A team of evaluators is scheduled to visit the school during the week of October 22. In preparation for this Five Year Accreditation Review, the school completed a comprehensive response to the decennial committee's commendations and recommendations. The report has been submitted to the Visiting Committee. Saint David's is looking forward to sharing its growth and accomplishments since the 2002 visit. It has much of which to be proud.

Strategic planning continues. As mentioned in previous letters, strategic goals have been identified. During the spring of 2006, the nationally recognized consultant, Robert Evans, guided the school in identifying the following three goals: attracting and retaining exceptional teachers, commitment to financial aid, and continued development of the physical plant. During this past year, the school engaged an outside firm that specializes in soliciting feedback from school communities regarding strategic planning. The team met with a broad cross section of the community during the winter and spring terms. The result of their interviews indicated overwhelming support for the goals articulated. This year, the school plans to actively and purposefully pursue each of these initiatives.

As the opening day of school quickly approaches, the faculty and I share your son's excitement, his eager anticipation and even his touch of trepidation. But the black doors of Saint David's School are readied, oiled at the hinges, prepared to open and welcome three hundred ninety Saint David's boys to the 2007-08 school year. It's going to be a great one. I remain,

Sincerely and respectfully yours,

David O'Halloran