



February 24, 2021

Dear Saint Peter's School Community,

I hope this note finds all of you well. Can you believe we are approaching the one-year mark of when we had to close our school doors last March? It is overwhelming to recall the past year's events - how much we have been through and how far we have come. Now that we are about halfway through the school year, I want to highlight our successes as a community, acknowledge the challenges that still exist and look forward to continual growth and triumphs.

### **Gratitude**

In no particular order, all members of the Saint Peter's community need to be recognized for their commitment and support through this pandemic. With the help of one another, we have grown stronger and better.

**Parents** – thank you, from the bottom of my heart, for not only standing by Saint Peter's School during these tough times, but for going the extra mile and helping to lift us. Whether you are a long-time Saint Peter's parent or someone who is new to our community, each of you play an integral part in making Saint Peter's who we are. You have provided us with PPE supplies, built student desk partitions, organized and partaken in HSEB events (BINGO, clean-up day, Christmas lights tour, etc.), made significant monetary donations, sent notes of encouragement to teachers and administration and the list continues. In addition to actively participating, you have continued to be flexible and understanding with calendar changes, COVID protocols and updated policy decisions.

Parents of virtual students - you have created homework stations for your children, changed work schedules to help support your children in virtual learning, become familiar with navigating new technology platforms and helped your children stay motivated from home.

Parents of in-person students - you have followed the numerous safety protocols, managed schedule changes with classroom shutdowns, adapted to an altered in-person learning experience and been accepting of limitations that we have not had to endure in the past.

*All of you* have been trying to continue with your everyday lives and careers while still managing your child's education. We are beyond grateful.

**Teachers** – my appreciation is difficult to express without sounding like a broken record. First and foremost, you have risked your own health and put yourselves on the frontline in order to educate our students on a daily basis. You are working two full-time jobs; somehow, you are in two places at once managing two different groups of students. You have completely redesigned a curriculum in order to teach in a hybrid format. You are planning lessons weeks in advance to make sure the students at home have all of the materials they need in order to participate virtually. You continue to achieve the impossible, doing so with a smile on your face, ready to teach and inspire our young minds.

**Students** – you are remarkable, resilient humans. Without most of you even realizing the obstacles you have been overcoming this past year, you have done it with grace and acceptance. You hold your heads high and carry on with your responsibilities as students. You have learned and mastered new technology platforms faster and better than most of us adults have done in our entire lifetimes. You are the reason we educators continue to persevere. Thank you for being a light for all of us amidst the darkness of this pandemic.

**Father Kalita** – without you, our fearless leader and pastor, we would not be where we are today. Your support has been unwavering, and I am incredibly thankful for your leadership. Because of your guidance, understanding and encouragement, we have been able to continue to the school’s mission to unlock all the doors of the human character to release the spiritual, intellectual, social, emotional and physical potential in each child.

**Facilities Staff** – with all of the added responsibilities of cleaning and disinfecting this year, your jobs have been far from easy. You have gone above and beyond to help us offer a safe and healthy learning environment for our boys and girls. On behalf of the whole community – thank you!

### Accomplishments

Because all community members have done their part to help Saint Peter’s School, our successes as an institution have been plentiful. If you recall the state of our society just 11 months ago and the position in which it put schools across America, our accomplishments since then have been quite extraordinary.

#### **Academics**

- ❖ Saint Peter’s School was awarded the 2020 Blue Ribbon of Excellence Award for the second time in a decade. In order to be eligible for the award, schools must place in the top 15<sup>th</sup> percentile (nationally) in standardized test scores for math and reading.

- ❖ As directed by the Archdiocese of Washington, we have been able to identify priority standards for every grade level to ensure children are learning critical material to continue in their academic careers.
- ❖ Our 8<sup>th</sup> grade class showed high achievement through their HSPT scores this year; our students will soon find out where they have been accepted to high school, along with any scholarships they have earned. We are excited to celebrate their success!

### **Spiritual Life**

- ❖ As always, we remain strong in our Catholic faith and identity. While celebrating Mass as a school is more difficult than usual, we find other ways to stay steadfast in our faith. Our students routinely practice prayer, study scripture and are reminded of Christ's presence in all that we do. We have also continued to prepare our students in 2<sup>nd</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade to receive sacraments this year.

### **Technology**

Since March, we have been able to...

- ❖ Acquire a great deal of new devices using funds from the CARES Act.
- ❖ Provide all teachers and students with either a Google Classroom account or a Microsoft Teams account, allowing ease for the posting and submitting of assignments.
- ❖ Purchase IXL accounts for grades K-8 to track progress in grammar and math.
- ❖ Update our internet bandwidth by acquiring an additional line through Comcast.

### **Enrollment**

- ❖ At the end of the 2019-2020 school year, there were 353 students enrolled at Saint Peter's School.
- ❖ Our current enrollment for the 2020-2021 school year is 349 students, which shows a firm commitment to our school.
- ❖ For the 2021-2022 school year, we have waiting lists for 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grades.
- ❖ As a school, we have been able to offer virtual information sessions to prospective families and invite them to virtual events.

### **Hybrid Teaching and Learning**

Since September of 2020, Saint Peter's School has been offering a hybrid learning environment for students, four days per week.

- ❖ The challenges of hybrid teaching are monumental. Teachers are...
  - instructing two groups of students simultaneously
  - teaching stationary and from behind a computer screen
  - preparing both paper and electronic formats of assignments and assessments to accommodate in-person and virtual learners

- keeping track of attendance for children at home and at school
- tracking and grading assignments that are being submitted in several different ways and on various platforms
- planning lessons weeks in advance in order to prepare materials for the Wednesday exchange days
- ❖ In addition, the challenges of hybrid learning for students and parents are significant.
  - Virtual students and parents are facing difficulties staying connected socially, staying motivated academically and managing careers and schooling simultaneously. Many parents are spending much of their days helping their children stay on task and making sure they are logging onto all of their classes. Most students are yearning for in-person instruction and interaction but cannot fulfill those because of one or more barriers the pandemic has produced.
  - In-person students are experiencing a version of school much different than what they have experienced in the past. They are masked the entire day, socially distant from their peers, in one classroom with the same cohort of students all day, lacking hands-on and partner/group activities and more.

Admitting these challenges only make us stronger as a community because despite these inevitable obstacles, we are persevering.

### Academic Rigor

Our commitment to academic rigor and readiness remains a priority. We recently added academic work for students on Wednesdays. We take feedback we receive from parents and teachers and continue to develop and enhance our hybrid experience. We want to be sure our students are not falling behind and that Saint Peter's is continuing to challenge students across all grade levels. Our teachers were asked by the Archdiocese of Washington to select priority standards throughout the 2020-2021 school year in order to ensure the students are receiving instruction and practice when it comes to the most critical standards for each grade level. At the end of the year, teachers across grade levels will meet to discuss the accomplishments and challenges that were faced with priority standards, and thus, our teachers will adjust plans and instruction for the 2021-2022 school year as needed.

### Looking Ahead – FAQ

- ❖ Is there a plan to have students return to 5 days of in-person learning sometime in the 2020-2021 school year?
  - As long as hybrid learning remains a reality for 2020-2021 school year, it is not feasible for the school to provide 5 days of in-person learning. Wednesdays are used for preparing and creating lessons in two separate formats, gathering and packing materials for virtual students, and providing opportunities for students to meet virtually with teachers for extra support.

- ❖ Is the school still requiring 15 parent service hours for the 2020-2021 school year?
  - Yes. We are aware that this year there are some challenges to completing service hours. In response to these challenges, we have provided some unique opportunities this year, such as decorating for the Christmas lights tour and submitting recipes for the International Night Cookbook. School Service hours benefit the entire school community and are an important tool for keeping tuition affordable and tuition increases to a minimum. Services such as recess monitoring and building and grounds maintenance help to reduce operating expenses. Other types of service hours help build community and support some of the special services the school provides to students.
- ❖ With 4 days of instruction per week as opposed to 5 full days, is the school year being extended into July?
  - No. Our students, faculty/staff and families will have the full summer break – many of us need it more than ever. Our teachers are working hard to ensure minimal learning is lost this year, and our hard-working students are diligently carrying out their responsibilities. While it is simply impossible to make the same strides that we would make in a normal school year, we are on the road to success in meeting the priority standards that the Archdiocese of Washington had schools select in the beginning of the school year.
- ❖ What will the 2021-2022 school year look like?
  - The number one goal is to keep our community healthy and safe. Throughout the summer, we will be reviewing guidelines and protocols as they are updated and will make informed decisions as we plan to reopen for the 2021-2022 school year. One of my top priorities is to give children the opportunity to return to in-person learning 5 days per week. As plans develop, I will keep all stakeholders informed.

As we continue this journey as a Saint Peter's School family, I feel blessed to be the principal of such an inspiring community. Know that all of you remain in my prayers each and every day.

Blessings,



Kristen Coccozzella