April 1, 2020

Dear Middle School Families,

I am writing to share the distance learning schedule that we will adopt in the Middle School when we resume classes on April 13th. As I mentioned in yesterday’s email about midterm grades, I’m very proud of our community’s ability to pivot on such short notice and begin distance learning on March 16th. While we have continued to deliver a strong academic program and maintained consistency and a strong sense of community for our students, we have learned that the schedule we adopted — our regular Monday-Thursday daily schedule — is not sustainable in the long run for many students or for our faculty. The key concern was that the days are long, and students and faculty have been overwhelmed by the amount of daily screen time resulting in challenges with focus, eyestrain, and headaches.

In seeking a more balanced schedule that will allow us to continue to deliver a strong academic program, we consulted with many of our peer schools and also looked at what is considered best practice for a distance learning model. We created several model schedules and then sought feedback from faculty. Attached, you will find the schedule that we selected. Please take the time to watch me explain the schedule here, via video.

Here are the high-level key points of the schedule:

- We will continue to offer a highly structured daily and weekly schedule with predictable start and end times for classes.
- The student learning experience will remain largely synchronous and students will continue to connect daily, in real time, with peers and teachers.
- Friday will be an instructional day.
- Students will begin the academic day at 9:00 AM and required academic classes will end at 2:15 PM.
- We will closely monitor the homework load for students.
- Students will be able to meet with their peers and teachers and seek extra help during Conference and Collaboration periods.
- Students will meet weekly with their advisory.
- We have created a small selection of optional activities for students at the end of the day on Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday. Students can also use this time for homework so that they are free in the evenings to relax and spend time with family.

We are confident that this schedule strikes a healthy balance for our students and faculty. Also, we regret that Focus Days are not included in this schedule; distance learning simply does not lend itself to the highly collaborative and experiential activities that are such an essential component of our Focus Day curriculum. However, teachers are committed to finding new ways to teach the same important skills and content to their students this spring.
Please let me know if you have any questions as we prepare to make this transition on the 13th. Thank you again for your words of encouragement and support these past few weeks. Please stay safe and healthy!

Warmly,

Lauren

Lauren Railey
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50 years of intellectual exploration and meaningful contribution