

# Episcopal



FROM THE HEAD OF SCHOOL

Friday, January 4, 2008

Dear Episcopal Parents,

During the Christmas season, we are all bombarded by messages that often distract us from the real meaning of the holiday. I'm no exception. While a small voice urges me to focus on Advent, a time of patient and prayerful waiting, more strident voices steer me to more secular concerns. This year, like most years, I found myself tangled in un-Advent-like preparation. Gifts, food, and Christmas decorations; family, friends, and work--I juggled them like Satsuma oranges. And while I know that eventually the preparation will result in a harmonious holiday, at the onset each effort often results in more dissonance.

Nevertheless, there was light at the end of the tunnel of preparation. Christmas Day dawned bright and clear and full of love. And there's certainly a spiritual lesson to be learned from my own holiday madness. I imagine Mary and Joseph were mighty tired, too, by the time Christmas day arrived. Finding a place at the inn, I'm guessing, was more discouraging than finding a parking place at the Mall of Louisiana. And that nasty customer at the store, the one who was frustrated when she didn't find what she wanted and whose anger punished all of us within range, she was nothing compared to Caesar Augustus. It's good for me to reflect on these things. They've helped me to find a new perspective on the familiar Christmas story.

And sometimes it's good for all of us to seek a new perspective. This fall, EHS was engaged in doing just that. Charged by the visiting accreditation team last January to "Initiate a study of campus scheduling for the purpose of assessing the best use of faculty . . . and to determine if core academic time is prioritized," a group of teachers was tasked to examine the daily schedule and recommend changes if appropriate. This faculty committee of ten teachers was led by Grace Oulton (Upper School), Pam Goodner (Middle School), and Cathy Sabottke (Lower School). In order to prepare for their assessment of the daily schedule, the three leaders attended a week-long workshop conducted by Independent School Management. They then convened an interdivisional faculty committee that met from August through December 2007.

Basing their recommendations on research and educational best practice, the committee introduced its proposed 2008-2009 schedule to the full faculty and to Episcopal's Board of Trustees in mid-December. While we know that some fine-tuning remains, I'm excited to announce that the revised schedule results in increased teaching time, especially in core academics, with minimal impact on Episcopal's program. We anticipate sharing the revised schedule with parents at the January grade level meetings. I hope you'll be able to attend--both administrators and members of the faculty committee will be available to answer any questions.

Our internal work on the daily schedule also rededicates Episcopal to an increased level of academic excellence. The Scheduling Committee has recommended a daily schedule that places child development and student achievement as its core values; by endorsing it, all of our teachers have embraced a model that enables them to dedicate more time in the classroom. Teaching is a vocation in which the needs of others have priority, so it comes as no surprise that the faculty at EHS have raised the bar for themselves in order to help children learn.

Attracting and retaining teachers of this caliber does not happen by lucky accident. In creating the 2007 Strategic Plan, Episcopal's Board of Trustees recognized the strategic priority of competitive faculty salaries and benefits. With the knowledge that the gap between Episcopal's teacher salaries and other local parishes continues to widen, the Board of Trustees plans to gradually close this gap, beginning in the 2008-2009 academic year. (For example, in 2007-2008 a teacher with a B.A. degree and no experience earns a salary of \$31,590 at EHS. In EBR parish schools, that same teacher qualifies for a salary of \$41,005.) Through a combination of increased endowment, a vigorous annual fund, and tuition increases, Episcopal's Board of Trustees has projected that our faculty salaries will be comparable to those of EBR and neighboring parishes within the next 3 - 4 years.

In addition to the scheduling work, the entire faculty has been engaged in the study and enhancement of Episcopal's curriculum. This fall, we began a hard look at assessment, its relationship to student outcomes, and their integration with academic standards. Guided by Peg Meyers, a curriculum consultant, the faculty is assessing the curriculum in every discipline and in each division to insure vertical and horizontal alignment. Because Episcopal's analysis of curriculum is designed to be both systematic and comprehensive, this will be a multi-year process for our teachers. In addition to the work structured by Dr. Meyers, we are already finding ERB test results to be helpful in determining whether there are gaps and/or redundancies within the EHS curriculum. (On the topic of the ERB, I hope you were able to attend the very informative sessions for parents that were conducted by Ann Harris this fall.) In order to use time most judiciously, we have scheduled Dr. Meyers to return to campus on Friday, April 18<sup>th</sup>, for a half-day in-service with our faculty. **April 18<sup>th</sup> is also Grandparents' Day. Dismissal will be at noon for all three divisions.**

For the past few months, childhood obesity has been in the news nationally and locally. These daunting statistics have prompted Episcopal to re-examine our cafeteria and snack offerings. Much progress has been made during the fall of 2007. I thank those parents whose passionate attention to this subject has sparked lively campus dialogue. I would also encourage all who are interested both to visit our cafeteria and to check out our progress on the EHS web-site. Please navigate to the "Observations from the Head of School" and select "Health and Nutrition". Throughout the coming months, we'll continue to evaluate and improve our food offerings at Episcopal; in the meantime, I commend Debbie Nicholas and her staff for their commitment to excellence.

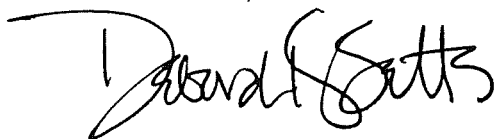
Many of you have had the opportunity to view a presentation of Episcopal's Campus Master Plan. This plan, along with our goal to raise endowment, has catapulted Episcopal into a capital campaign. The campaign is currently under design and will remain in its quiet phase until early 2009. Episcopal is privileged that John and Virginia Noland bring both experience and wisdom to their leadership of the full campaign. Their enthusiasm has infected Matt McKay, who has agreed to spearhead the campaign in the area of athletics. Rounding out the Capital Campaign Committee are Scott Singletary, chairman of the Board's Development Committee, and Allen Penniman, one of Episcopal's founders and a long-term supporter of the School. The Baton Rouge Area Foundation has been a great resource to Episcopal's Advancement Office as it organizes for this ambitious effort.

An integral component of both the Strategic Plan and the Campus Master Plan is our Cornerstones Program and its commitment to environmental sustainability. Our stated intent-- for the bricks and mortar of our campus to lead by example—is beginning to take shape. I'm proud to announce a major step forward in this initiative. In mid-December, Will York, Episcopal's Director of Operations, was recognized as a LEEDS Accredited Professional, one of only sixteen in Baton Rouge. This certification is the culmination of a rigorous process, one that has prepared Will to guide Episcopal into its next phase of green building practices.

In addition to Will's certification, I'm engaged in conversation with other local agencies and hope that very soon I will be able to announce some community partnerships in the area of environmental education. These partnerships will integrate the School's commitment to the Baton Rouge community with our goal to serve as a moral and ethical leader in the wise stewardship of God's creation.

Each Christmas season, as we shift our focus from ourselves to others, we all have the opportunity to remember that first Christmas and to learn its lessons anew. As I reflect on my own holiday and find my personal, very singular, parallels to that first Christmas, I'm reminded that the season is not over. Epiphany is coming and, with it, thoughts of wise men and great gifts. I would like to thank all of you for the gifts you give to Episcopal every day—from the smiling tray helpers in the cafeteria to the carpool drivers who wait without complaint. It may not seem important, but every person here has an impact on every other person. You have made Episcopal a very special place. And thank you for the greatest gift of all, your trust.

God Bless You,



Deborah Kay Betts  
Head of School