

January 10, 2008

Dear Parents,

Where does the time go? I continue to marvel at the speed with which this school year moves. Our days race by, our weeks begin to blur, and lo and behold, here we are at the end of our first semester. It is when our days are at their fullest that we are called slow ourselves a bit, reflect on the events that have marked the passing of time, and look forward to what is on the horizon. As you can well imagine, there is no possible way I can effectively share each and every accomplishment with you. I will, however, hit the highlights and encourage you to continue to ask your children about their experiences here at Episcopal.

Cornerstones continues to be a significant factor for our Lower School students. The fall has found our children actively engaged in a variety of service projects benefiting local, national and world-wide organizations. Our tradition of collecting school supplies for Melrose Elementary School began our year together. Our students and families continue to be very generous as we work toward the goal of making sure their students have all the school supplies they need to be successful. Our fund drive for Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation prompted our children to donate their own money to support ongoing research in the hope of discovering a cure for this disease. Gabby and Jenifer Vinci continue to be a driving force in this project. Our Girl Scouts challenged our students to sift through their bookshelves and donate used children's literature books to Delmont Elementary as part of the "I AM" project. They collected well over 600 books. Halloween found our little Daisy troop working in conjunction with the Baton Rouge Food Bank. They challenged their Lower School friends to donate Halloween candy so that it could be redistributed to elderly people throughout the greater Baton Rouge area. Our students contributed over 190 pounds of candy to this endeavor. The Thanksgiving season allowed us to learn of and acknowledge the outstanding work of our custodial, kitchen and maintenance staffs. Each employee was invited into one of our twenty classrooms and attended classroom morning meetings to share information about themselves with our students. This was a resounding success, and it is delightful to hear our children greet our kitchen staff or the grounds crew by name. Not wishing to be outdone, our Boy Scouts held their annual "Toys for Tots" drive at the beginning of the Christmas season, and they successfully collected a wide variety of new toys for children throughout our city. Finally, we celebrated the Christmas season with the second year of the Episcopal Relief and Development Fund projects and the purchases of Gifts for Life. Once again, our buddy classrooms teamed up to create gift tags, chocolate pretzels and recycled ornaments with the goal of raising as much money as possible for this cause. Our students generated over \$3000 dollars toward the purchases of health care, goats, chickens, immunizations, education and mosquito nets. So, as you can see, our students have been hard at work putting their academic and social skills into action.

As Ms. Betts mentioned in her letter earlier this month, we have begun working on curriculum analysis with the help of Dr. Peg Meyer. That work is having an impact on the "what" and the "how" of teaching here in the Lower School. Our kindergarten and first grade teachers are working closely with me in the area of reading as we challenge our youngest readers. All grade levels are embedding opportunities for our students to write meaningful pieces for a variety of reasons and in different styles. We continue to

look toward assessments to guide our next steps for our students in all areas of our curriculum. Of course, our gardens are a constant source of discovery and learning opportunities for all. I have enjoyed picking beans, broccoli, and cauliflower as snacks during my walks throughout the school.

Our work with the Responsive Classroom approach continues to develop. Many of our teachers are conducting classroom morning meetings each day as they create a positive and caring learning environment. Our school and classroom rules truly guide the behavior of our students, and we refer to them on a regular and ongoing basis. While we are very much in the infancy stage of implementation with this philosophy and approach, I am pleased with where we are thus far, and I can see the fruits of our labor each day. I notice my older students seeking out their younger buddies for Morning Meeting. I hear students working to resolve conflict in their classrooms. I notice fewer and fewer students are visiting my office for behavioral difficulties, and I hear my teachers using language that encourages and promotes strong academic and social achievement.

In the coming semester, we will continue to focus on our curricular work and our implementation of Responsive Classroom. Your children, our students, remain at the heart of what we do here. All this work takes time and energy, and my faculty never ceases to amaze me. They rise to my challenges with determination, professionalism and yes, a little fear. But they, too, know what is at the heart of our mission....the 384 students that you entrust to us each day. I couldn't ask for a better group of colleagues, and I deeply appreciate their commitment to this vocation.

I could go on, but time dictates I bring this to a close. Don't forget to check the website for information regarding the Lower School. Casie is outstanding at keeping that up to date. As always, I encourage you to come to visit us. This is your school, too, and you are welcome anytime.

Thank you for your ongoing support and encouragement. We/I couldn't do it without you. Best wishes for a healthy and happy new year.

With warm regards,

Cheryl