



ST. GEORGE'S
SCHOOL

Oct. 10, 2017

Dear SG Community,

Now that I am three months into my tenure as head of school, I thought it would be a good time to check in and share some of my impressions about life on the Hilltop.

In no particular order, here are some of the things I've noticed.

1. Kids at St. George's live a wonderfully balanced existence. While they are no doubt challenged academically (more on that below), their days are structured to include time for community, for spiritual growth, for exercise, and for fun. What I see are kids who are tired by the end of the day, but not stressed. This is in direct contrast to the issues facing adolescents elsewhere, where talk of stress and pressure are ever-present. My sense is that St. George's success in this regard is the result of some very thoughtful work by the faculty and administration over the past decade. Whether it be our later start time in the morning, our community gatherings four days a week, or the availability of teachers for extra help virtually 24/7, kids at SG appear to me to experience a wonderful mix of challenge, joy, community, and support in their daily lives. Honestly, it's refreshing to see.
2. This balance by no means belittles what's happening in our classrooms. I have committed to see each of our teachers in action by Thanksgiving. At this point, I am more than halfway there, and I have been so impressed by what I have seen. Kids are active in their learning — engaging regularly in simulations, experiments, discussions, and projects. Our teachers are well aware of the latest thinking in brain development and pedagogy, and have designed their curricula and instruction accordingly.
3. Our chapel program is another source of strength for our school. Students attend chapel twice each week — once for a more informal service, usually with a student speaker, on Tuesdays, and on Thursdays for a more traditional Episcopalian service. This past Thursday featured our first communion service of the year, and truth be told, it warmed my heart. Watching our kids respect each other's choices about whether to take communion or not was impressive — and touching. With no apparent peer pressure or drama, some students rose and went to the altar while others remained in their seats. Students from every grade level and every friend group participated, with kids notably respectful of the choices their peers made. To see that kind of respect in action was simply lovely.

And finally, some news ...

As you know, I have termed the 2017-2018 school year my "year of anthropology." My plan is to take the time to really understand the community before undertaking any large initiatives. For the most part, I am sticking to that plan. However, as I collect data that clearly indicate issues, I will take action as necessary. One issue that the board and I have identified as critical is the condition of our athletics facilities, particularly our fields. Our lack of artificial turf fields has become a hindrance both in terms of our ability to attract

students, and as it relates to our overall win-loss record. With certain sports like field hockey and lacrosse now played almost entirely on artificial surfaces, our teams are at a

distinct disadvantage when they play away contests. While I have no plan for our school to undertake the production of professional athletes as a particular goal, I would like for our students to have a fighting chance. Our win-loss record over the past few years indicates this is not happening. As such, I am working with the board to raise the money necessary to install two turf fields before the start of the 2018-2019 school year. We are excited by this initiative, but more important, the kids are excited! I am hopeful that we will be in the position to green light this project by Christmas. Stay tuned for more information!

Please know that I welcome your thoughts and comments about these and anything else happening at the school. I would love the opportunity to connect. Please feel free to reach out to me at alixe_callen@stgeorges.edu with any thoughts or ideas.

Thanks for reading!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Alixe Callen", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Alixe Callen
Head of School

