



St. Edmund's Academy
An Independent School

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Head of School

“Keeping In Touch”

December 4, 2007

Dear SEA community members,

HAPPY HOLIDAYS!

At this time of year, I naturally move into a more reflective time where I think about all the blessings I have enjoyed throughout my life. One of the most enduring lessons of my life in education is that a school that thrives is one that is completely clear about its mission, purpose, and values and has developed a philosophy of education that embodies heart, mind, and community. I emphasize the importance of values and philosophical clarity because acting upon both is key to performing in a manner that supports our and others' expectations of the opportunities, experiences, and preparedness of SEA students to enter high school.

Living in the St. Edmund's Academy community for the past four months brings to the forefront and strengthens for me the heart, mind, and community triad as I relate it to this School. The richness of stories, experiences, convictions, and accomplishments of the past sixty years must now be balanced with an openness to consider and where appropriate implement modifications going forward. One of the goals of my first year as Head of School, is to provide the Board of Trustees with my assessment of St. Edmund's Academy in five areas. Each area includes assets, liabilities, and questions followed by recommendations. The five topic areas are:

1. Mission/philosophy versus actual practice – November
2. Curriculum definition and marketing versus actual practice – January
3. Positions/personnel support expectations versus actual performance – February
4. Financial/operations support expectations versus actual performance – March
5. Governance role and responsibilities versus actual performance - April

Often there is a tension between openness to growth on the one hand and holding firm to convictions on the other. The bridge to balancing current practice with future modifications is the understanding of and accepting the heart, mind, and community triad. Let me briefly explain.

Heart – what a warm, internal, personal and generous value. Heart to me suggests a depth of relationships, a passionate engagement with the job at hand and enthusiasm. Heart means real compassion and caring, not just for the children we teach but for their families and for one another. “Who cares for the caregiver?” is a commonly asked question these days, and the answer is, usually, “Another caregiver.” As a school with heart, we need to create ongoing opportunities for connections and support, and this means time. Therein lies the challenge---to forge alternatives to the frenzied pace we so often fall into and which holds so tightly many of our students and their families---to allow time for these connections and to create agreed upon ways of responding to dreams and collaborations.

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Mind – in some ways, I suppose, the bottom line for all good schools is the formal academic program, the school's curriculum. But reflect for a moment on the words in a recent NAIS article, "Learning is the young person's pathway to personal growth." For this to be true, learning is the key idea, and it needs to be expansive, encompassing for more than a sound set of skills and shared common knowledge. It must have real meaning and significance to the students and they should be able to articulate this meaning and significance.

Contemporary educator Grant Wiggins wrote:

"Understanding is not just about coverage of knowledge, then, but about uncoverage---being introduced to new ideas and being asked to think more deeply and more carefully about fact, ideas, experiences, and theories previously encountered and learned. Students' work must ask them to uncover insights, questions, assumptions and conclusions and to justify their knowledge, not as received ideas and skills to be unthinkingly used when the students are carefully prompted. Understanding involves the testing of ideas in action and insight into the implications of those actions----that is, deeper meaning."

Community – I know many of us have had experiences in work, fellowship, worship, sports, adventure, family and in our own education where the sense and presence of community was strong. We remember those times warmly and look forward to experiences of community that lie ahead. School communities are built, not ordained. They take work and intention. A sense of community is well developed at SEA, but community is a fluid entity that must be sustained on mutual respect, mutual confidence, and mutual trust. Community takes place in the classrooms, in afterschool programs, in the offices, in the PTA and its activities, at school gatherings, and through the active discussions and sharing among all partners.

As we go forward in our efforts to continue that which we do well, improve upon those areas identified as needing further support, and considering expanded approaches and opportunities to better prepare our students for their world, let's walk together across the bridge of heart, mind, and community.

May you and yours know the fulfillment of a happy, healthy, and safe holiday season.

Yours in Peace,

William L. Kindler