



July 29, 2019

Dear Lower School Parents,

I hope you are enjoying this hot, hot summer! While the weather has given us many warm days, I hope you have had a great time with your kids. It was wonderful to be able to meet with so many of you to speak about the academic progress of your children as well as to hear your perspective on their experiences this past year in the Lower School. The conversations are invaluable as they help me, along with the Key faculty and staff, to prepare for the following year. We value your feedback and try to adjust to the needs of all Lower School families. With that said, Key faculty and staff have had a very productive summer; here are some of the highlights:

Lower School Summer Curricular Work

This summer, Lower School teachers framed their summer work around this question: How do we entice and excite children about the learning process to foster a love for life-long learning? Researchers Raymond J. Slodkowski and Margery B. Ginsberg concluded from their studies that no one teaching strategy will consistently engage all learners. In addition, other researchers, such as Nancy Darling Hammond wrote more recently that critical reflection was an effective strategy for incorporating issues such as equity and inclusiveness into teacher's thinking and practice. Furthermore, Hammond stated that her studies found that using critical reflection as a training tool with teachers directly correlated to building effective student problem solving skills and culturally relevant teaching strategies for teachers. Indeed, most research suggested that curriculum that helps students relate lesson content to their own backgrounds is more likely to motivate them to pursue their studies. In addition, meeting students at their cognitive skill level using inclusive instructional strategies and assessment practices contribute to maximum engagement in the classroom. A review of the research suggested four methods of instruction that teachers should consider to promote student engagement: (1) emphasize the human purpose of what is being learned, (2) initiate cooperative learning groups, (3) create inquiry based/discovery oriented curriculum that emphasizes community involvement, and (4) engage in historical investigations, art simulations, and case study methods by promoting a community of learners. Below is a sampling of Lower School teachers summer professional work that will be infused into our curriculum:

- **Vanessa Guitterez** and **Nina Austin** led a group of Key faculty in a professional learning project this summer that focused on the origins of the concept of race and its impact on our knowledge and interpretations of important events in our history. Teachers met weekly throughout the summer to discuss the episodes from the podcast *Scene on Radio* by John Biewen and Dr. Chenjerai Kumanyika. Our teachers engaged in conversation that critically reflected on the way they understood themselves and our history. Their discussions and reflections naturally expanded into the methods for our

students by providing tasks and activities that compared and contrasted different cultural perspectives around topical issues.

- **Erin Weiss, Jeanette Biegel, Crissy McKenzie, and Peter Branscombe** met to critique our Lower School Life Skills curriculum. There are exciting plans to expand and extend topics and units that are currently high-lighted in current educational research involving collaborative, interpersonal, and intrapersonal skills.
- **Meredith Marcum, Cat Parker, Erin Morgan, Jenifer Moore, and I** met to reframe the Social Studies units to include more diverse cultural perspectives and ground- breaking innovations with respect to the year-long theme, “The Age of Exploration.”
- **Nancy Conroy, Paula DeWitt, Meredith Marcum, Carol Mahoney, and I** met to infuse the Southwest Native American unit with the integration of science projects such as climate, weather, and land formation comparison of the Southwest with the Chesapeake Bay, animal adaptations in the Southwest, and adding data collection and data analysis to each of the interdisciplinary units.
- **Lydia Crooks and Angela Baccala** met to add to the Manse Library books with diverse themes and characters as well as improve the library catalog for access.
- **Catherine Hudson attended the American Federation of Teachers Conference** as there were sessions on equity and inclusion in the classroom as well as on teaching neurodiverse students.
- **Carol Mahoney** attended the LEGO Mindstorms EV3 Robotics Academy at Carnegie Mellon University in order to make better use of a generous donation of robotics equipment from two Lower School families. She also attended the ChattFab19 institute at the Volkswagen Elabs in Chattanooga, a three-day digital fabrication conference that offers educators an opportunity to engage in authentic experiences with 3D printing, laser engraving/cutting, vinyl cutting, CNC routing, and micro-computing. Finally, she also went up to the Peck School to attend a 3-day Agency by Design workshop through Harvard University’s Project Zero.
- **Marina Becker and Katie Berger** met to research resources and tools to teach global perspectives in relation to the role of French speaking countries.
- **Ellie Young and Carol Mahoney** teamed up to infuse current Maker-Tech projects in grades 3 and 4 with more application of mathematics skills. They also were busy creating new projects for grades 1-4.
- **Ellie Young** also worked on Grade 4 Math Puzzlers (formerly called Math Extras) to include a new Number Theory strand and has a goal to update all the Puzzle Packets to reflect the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) new mathematical standards.

- **Meredith Marcum, Jeanette Beigel, and Crissy McKenzie** met to design, create and plan a new science unit on light and sound in addition to reviewing and adding additional goals, anchor phenomenon, and investigations for the first grade science curriculum.
- **Meredith Marcum, Peter Branscombe, and Jill Smalley** reviewed and evaluated the Science curriculum for the fourth grade with the intent of adding more science and engineering practice to the science program.
- **Peter Branscombe, Carol Mahoney, Vanessa Guitierrez, Lydia Crooks, Meredith Marcum,** and I enrolled in an on-line course developed by Harvard University's Project Zero. The course starts this fall, runs for 13 weeks and is entitled "Thinking and Learning in a Maker-Centered Classroom." We are all very excited!

New Faces in the Lower School

Laura Meyer, Lower School Art Teacher

We welcome Laura Meyer to the Lower School! Laura has a B.A. from Point Loma Nazarene University in San Diego, California in Art and a Certificate of International Studies in European art history from Intercollege in Nicosia, Cyprus. Laura was the Art Department Chair at Balanced Life Skills where she planned art curriculum and organized bi-annual art shows for the students to display their work during the school year and also in the summer. It should be noted that Laura has also taught student and adult painting classes. In addition, Laura knows Key well as she has been and will continue to be a member of our After School Program.

Homeroom Teacher and Classroom Placement

Turning my attention now to our families. I know that your children are eagerly awaiting word from their homeroom teacher. The letter with this announcement will be mailed during the **week of August 12**. If your child has not received this news by **Friday, August 16**, please contact [Beth Neumann](#), the Lower School Administrative Assistant (ext. 1240) so we can issue another letter immediately; we will also tell you of your child's assignment at that time. Last year's homeroom teachers, learning specialists and I have worked very hard throughout the summer to make certain that the composition of classes for the upcoming year is as advantageous to all class members as possible...a very challenging task, I assure you, and one that is probably more art than science. I am grateful for the help of the First School Kindergarten teachers and Becky Fetters, First School Division Head, regarding the placement of our upcoming first graders. Our guiding principle throughout has been to create homerooms that are well balanced, with a healthy mix of the talents, the strengths, and the interests of our students.

Lunch

Unfortunately, **Nom Nom is not providing a lunch** service for the students this coming school year. Key School is looking for a replacement but as of this date, the administration has not found a suitable alternative.

Seesaw

The Lower School is very excited to be moving to Seesaw as our system for parent communication this year. Seesaw is not only a communication tool but also can be utilized as a digital portfolio so that your children will be able to share their posted work with you more frequently. We are hoping that you will be able to glean with greater understanding the classroom tasks, activities, and projects in which your child has been engaged as well as the classroom environment. In addition, the Seesaw app is very accessible as you will be able to view on your phone or computer. Please be looking for an invitation from your child's teacher when we return to school. In the meantime, if you would like to become familiar with the app, click [here](#) for instructions.

Student/Parent Handbook

While the Student/Parent Handbook will be on the website in early August, here are a few important details that will help aid your child for a successful school year:

Arrival: Lower School opens at 8:00 a.m. and begins at 8:20 a.m.

The Lower School begins at 8:20 a.m. and dismisses at 3:15 p.m. It is very important that **children are in their homerooms, ready to begin the day, by the time the school bell rings at 8:20 a.m.** A good suggestion is that your child needs to be **dropped off no later than 8:10 a.m.** so they have time to walk to their classroom, organize their materials, and **be ready for class to begin at 8:20.** With tardiness as a major deterrent to a smooth start of the day, all students who arrive late will remain in the Manse Office until the end of the homeroom period. Without the multiple interruptions of late arrivals, teachers and students will be able to remain more focused on the beginning of the day greetings, daily schedule and morning sharings.

Lower School parking/drop-off

The three designated areas for Lower School parking/drop-off are as follows:

- The **major parking lot just off Carroll Drive.** This works well for parents of **first and third graders**
- The **crushed stone area along Hillsmere Drive,** adjacent to the Manse field. This area provides easy access to our **second and fourth grade classrooms.**
- The **“kiss and drop” pull-in area on Mansion Drive.** Again, this location serves those **families with students in the Manse Addition.** For this site to work safely and efficiently, the student drop-off on the paved driveway needs to be swift. As a further safety measure, as there is a great deal of traffic on this street, students should get out of their cars only on the Key School side where they exit onto a safe stone surface.
- **Dismissal/pick-up: Lower School dismisses promptly at 3:15 p.m.**
- Dismissal at 3:15 will occur at the following locations:
 - **Grade 1** - Walkways adjacent to the 1st grade classrooms
 - **Grade 2** - Basketball court in front of the Manse Addition
 - **Grade 3** - Covered Arts Building Porch
 - **Grade 4** - Paved area just outside the doors to the Manse Addition

After School Program

Headquarters for our Lower School After School Program will once again start in **Katharine Hall for snack and then to the Arts Building**. Students attending the program will meet in the Amphitheater at dismissal time and move to Katharine Hall where they will be met by a staff member. The headquarters for the Lower School After School Program will be located in the Arts Building throughout the year. You must register your child for the program. [Registration forms](#) are on the **Parent Portal under Extended Day Option**.

In closing, my best wishes for a wonderful rest of the summer. I look forward to greeting you at Key School on the opening day of school, **Monday, August 26**.

Best regards,

Emily Legum

Lower School Head

Key School

410.263.9231 ext. 1237

[Website](#) | [Facebook](#)