January 9, 2017

Dear Upper School Families,

Happy New Year! I know we are past the official date, but this is my first opportunity to communicate with you via newsletter in 2017. I hope that you had a wonderful break over the holidays. As always, the time seems to pass quickly and before you know it we are back to business here at ESD. The faculty came back bright and early on the 3rd of January. We had a good day of in-service activities, including a workshop entitled “How might we bring the energy of Candy Crush into the classroom?” A tremendous amount of research has been done regarding gaming and its impact on the brain and learning. Our goal for this workshop was to capture those strategies used in Candy Crush that can translate into a learning environment – including in the ESD classroom. Students from the Lower, Middle, and Upper Schools participated in the workshop with the faculty and staff – not only to give us a much-appreciated view of the game from the mindset of the “younger” generation, but also to share their genuine insight into why gaming is so addictive. After the workshop and lunch, Upper School teachers gathered to learn more about the numerous educational tools available in Schoology. Beyond the grade books, calendars, and posting of assignments, Schoology offers a number of great tools and resources for helping teachers teach and students learn. We truly want to maximize the effectiveness of this learning management system.

January and February used to be “quieter months” of the school year, but they aren’t so much anymore. The second quarter and first semester end this Friday, January 13. Grades will be entered and comments completed in My BackPack next week. We will send out an email on Friday, January 20, informing you when you can login to My Backpack to the see the final grades and comments for the semester. These are summary comments – be sure to look at the more specific comments in Schoology for more detailed teacher feedback, and please contact the teacher if you have any questions or concerns.

Other dates of note coming up include the kick-off for the WORX program and the annual Deans Panel. If you are the parent of a Junior who is looking for some real-world experience next summer, make sure you consider the ESD WORX internship program. Juniors will hear more about ESD WORX and how to apply at a meeting on Thursday. The Deans Panel on January 23 is an annual event in which Deans of Admissions from three higher education institutions visit ESD to talk to
our students and parents about the college admissions process. This event is open to all ESD families, but we particularly encourage our sophomore and junior families who are headed into the college admissions process to come and listen to the panel. This year’s panel consists of Deans from Sewanee, University of Virginia, and George Washington University. It should be a very interesting presentation. Finally, we will celebrate our student volunteerism in the first part of February with ceremonies for the recipients of the Presidential Volunteer Service Award. Be sure that your student has logged all of his or her hours for 2016 so that we can celebrate their service to others, a Founding Tenet of our school.

If you have younger children in the Middle School, you are certainly aware that the Middle School has changed their student cell phone policy. Middle School students are no longer allowed to use their cell phones during the entire school day – phones must be kept in their backpacks, turned off. I am very supportive of this policy for Middle School students – cell phones are highly addictive and distracting. Which leads to the next question that I’ve been asked – will the Upper School follow suit? The answer for now is “no” – we want to continue with our current policy of placing cell phones in baskets during classes, but allowing the students access between classes. Our goal in the Upper School is to help students learn how to have a cell phone without necessarily using it. That said, I do request your support on one issue. Even in the Upper School cell phones can be a significant distraction. Students forget to turn them off completely, and they are regularly buzzing and dinging in baskets during classes. Often the call or text is from home. I do understand the need to pass on information – but there is a best time to do so. The best time to send a message to your child is between 12:25 and 1:35 p.m. (lunch and flex). Unless they are in a meeting, they will be able to respond. If there is a true family emergency, and you need to get a message to your son or daughter during class time, call or email Helen Skalniak or my assistant, Josephine Mucciolo. We will happily deliver the information. Of course, you might also remind your student to turn that phone completely off during classes, and that would help as well! Thank you for your cooperation in this matter.

And finally, I hope that by now you have read my announcement from last week that this is my final year as the Head of Upper School at ESD. I will be returning to the classroom to teach science, the place where I began at ESD fifteen years ago. I am not sure exactly which classes I’ll be teaching at this time, but I am working with key people to determine how I might meet current needs.
Regardless of the level, I love teaching science, particularly because it is a field in which there is always more to learn. Even while working on my Ph.D. in Geology and doing research in the mountains and on oceanographic ships, I always knew that I wanted to share what I was experiencing with students. That said, I want to also tell you how much I have valued the position that I have had as the Head of Upper School these past five years. There is a long list of “things that I will miss!” I think that most of all, I will miss the birds-eye view I have of your children. The Head of Upper School has the privilege of being a part of every class in the Upper School – English, Science, Ceramics – you name it. I go to sporting events, plays, concerts, competitions, and retreats. Yes, it takes up a tremendous amount of time on weekends and evenings. But in doing so, I have the joy of seeing the many talents of each student illuminated and developed as they prepare themselves for the next step in life. It has given me a perspective of the role of administrators and faculty in the lives of these students that I will not forget and will always respect. Thank you for your support over the years, and as I noted in the announcement- I’m not done yet! There is a semester to finish and a bright future beyond that.

Take care and my best to you,

Donna Hull