

# Supporting Students from Afar

*From School Counselor Emily Cotto*

The difficulties presented to parents when sending their student to a residential school are truly unique. You miss them, the student misses you, and their demanding schedule limits the amount of time you have to connect with one another. Here are some things you may consider utilizing to connect with and support your students while they are away at IMSA.

## **Change happens. Trust the process.**

It is undeniably true that being away from your student for such extended periods of time is hard. It is also true that staff and programs at IMSA work to provide a nurturing environment for your student's growth and development. Know that changes will occur academically, socially, and emotionally during this important developmental stage of your student's life. Your patience and encouragement are essential.

## **Send a text.**

Consider sending an update about what's going on back home and expressing love to your student through words. Include new pictures of family or pets for your student to keep them in the loop.

## **Create a home away from home.**

A cozy dorm always makes students feel more at ease. Encourage your student to bring some things that remind them of home such as pictures, a pillow/blanket, or stuffed animals.

## **Send a care package.**

A surprise in the mail makes just about anyone happy. Sending a care package with special treats you know your student enjoys tells them that you are thinking of them and know what they like. Consider snacks, fun school supplies, gift cards, and a personalized note.

## **Schedule voice/video calls.**

With such busy schedules, it can benefit your student to schedule a time throughout the week for a phone or video call. This way, your student can ensure they are available to talk, can build a connection to home into their calendar, and avoid any hurt feelings from missed calls or playing phone tag. When you talk, listen to their success stories and concerns. Remind them you are there to support them and remember to also talk about things outside of grades/academics.

## **Visit campus for events.**

IMSA students are always doing something on campus. Whether it be musical performances or

cultural shows, there are often events open to families. Making time to attend some events, while visiting your student can remind them that you're interested in the non-academic things they are doing and create an opportunity for quality time.

### **Consider your student's individual needs.**

Ask them what they need. Whether emotional like an extra phone/video call to chat or physical like a small care package of necessities and treats, asking your student what they need allows them to openly communicate and feel heard which facilitates connection and closeness. This also allows you to recommend IMSA supports that may be helpful.

### **Familiarize yourself with IMSA supports.**

There are socio-emotional and academic supports on campus for students and you may recommend or refer your students to seek their assistance.

- **Social Emotional Support:** IMSA counselors are available to help with emotional needs pertaining to a variety of challenges such as homesickness, mood, or relational challenges. Counselors are available to students Monday through Friday from 7:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.
- **Residence Life Support:** Residential Counselors (RCs) can assist with housing issues, roommate challenges, or anything relating to residential life.
- **Academic Support:** Academic support such as executive functioning skills (i.e. organization and time management), self-advocating academically, and support in maximizing the use of IMSA resources is provided by the College and Academic Counselors or Learning Strategies Coordinator, Ms. Amy Keck.

No matter the challenges that arise, know that the empathetic support you show your student makes a lasting impact. Also remember, there is so much to celebrate. Your student is doing incredible things!