

Dear Students and Parents,

Today marks four weeks after the first day of classes. Thanks for your good spirit and work thus far!

We celebrate the time-honored McNick tradition of Homecoming this week, and the traditions of Open House and Mardi Gras will be here before we know it. Like all vibrant institutions, we hold onto traditions that give us life, and we are open to new practices that renew life. The four-week mark is an opportune time to review the reasons for practices that are new this year. Here are the benefits:

### UPDATED DAILY SCHEDULE

A pair of block days most weeks improves opportunities for learning through...

- **Periodic longer classes that enable deeper and more active learning.** Students can experience a whole cycle of experience (being introduced to new learning), reflection (making new learning meaningful by connecting it to past learning), and action (applying the new learning, thus moving it into long-term memory).
- **Weekly Advisory periods.** In an era of communication via screens, we need intentional practice in meaningful eye-to-eye communication. This practice is especially effective in a small group of classmates led by the same adult mentor across multiple years. During their small group Advisory meetings, students build empathy for each other and support each other. They pray together, celebrate school spirit together, set goals, and learn soft skills useful for life during high school and beyond.
- **Explore periods.** Students round out what they learn in classes by selecting high-interest mini-courses about topics not addressed in classes: life skills, hobbies, career exploration, service learning, arts experiences.
- **Flex periods.** The whole school is free for 25 minutes. Students and teachers can connect for quick communications and make-ups, catch up on work, or take a breather and grab a snack.
- **Practice in college time management.** On days before block days, students have homework due in just half of their classes the next day. Based on their after-school commitments, they decide whether to focus just on what's due tomorrow or to work ahead.
- **Predictable class period lengths.** Class periods on block days stay 85 minutes even when we have all-school Masses and assemblies. On days with all-school gatherings, the time for Flex and Explore is used instead for the all-school gathering.
- **Weekly faculty meeting time.** Researchers have documented that weekly meetings of teachers to use data about student learning to improve instruction is one of the most powerful ways to improve student learning. Most weeks include an early dismissal or late start of about 30 minutes to provide time for these meetings. Given the responsibilities of faculty members as coaches and moderators, it is necessary to use time during regular school hours to ensure that all can meet. Parents, I encourage you not to change from your regular pick-up and drop-off times on these days. Students are always welcome to be at school as early as 6:30 and as late as 5:00.

### UPDATED UNIFORM

We continue with the same polo shirts. We've moved to a choice of khaki, navy, and grey for pants, women's skorts, and men's shorts. This appearance looks ahead to college and career. The majority of Catholic coed schools in the Archdiocese have adopted a similar look. This look helps us present

ourselves well at our partner elementary schools where students do service, at partner workplaces where students shadow professionals, and in our own classrooms.

We're at the beginning of implementing these new practices, and there will be bumps in the road for a while. Change is exciting...and also tiring. Thank you for dealing with the ups and downs. Please let me know if you have any questions.