

WOLF WATCH

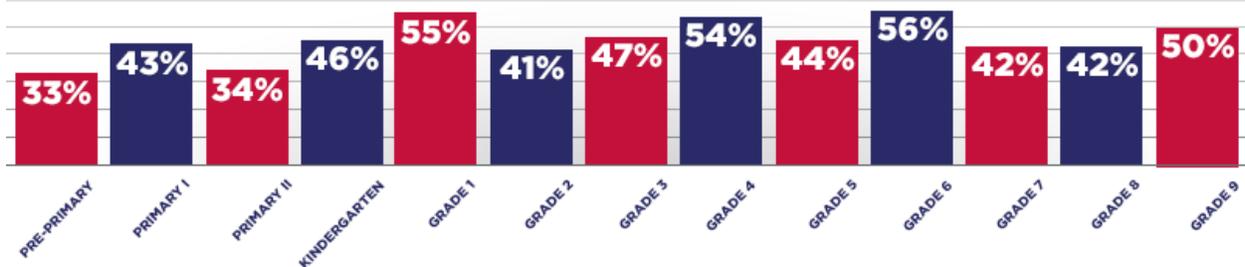
— WEEKLY E-NEWS —

News for the Week of January 13

All School

St. Francis Fund Participation Challenge Extended Until Spring Break!

PARENT PARTICIPATION BY GRADE



... And sixth grade has taken the lead in the St. Francis Fund Participation Challenge, with first grade and fourth grade closing in! **Mr. Lovejoy has extended the challenge through Friday, March 8.**

The grade with the highest participation in supporting the St. Francis Fund will be treated to a pizza party with Mr. Lovejoy the week after spring break!

[Please make your gift to the St. Francis Fund today!](#)

Every gift counts and helps bring us closer to our goal of \$800,000.

Buy Your Student Raffle Tickets This Week

Your child should have come home last week with a cheat sheet and one FREE raffle ticket.

- **You can purchase additional raffle tickets [online here](#) for \$1 each until this Wednesday, January 16.** (On the Registration page, scroll down to find the Student Raffle Ticket section. After entering the quantity of tickets you want and selecting “Next,” you will be asked for your student’s name, grade level, and teacher, plus how to allocate the tickets if you have more than one child. Please provide this information so that we can ensure your child receives the tickets you purchase.)
- **Starting TOMORROW and ending Thursday, January 17, at noon,** prizes for all ages will be on display on the Main Campus in the Anne Chisholm People Place.
- **After you purchase tickets online, our volunteers will have tickets ready for your child the following day.**
 - **Lower School and Middle School** students may deposit tickets for their desired prizes at lunchtime.
 - **Primary School and Upper School** parents can bring their students over to check out the prizes anytime tomorrow through Wednesday between 7:30 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. and on Thursday between 7:30 a.m. and noon. **Tickets can also be purchased on campus during this time.**
- **Prizes will be drawn Thursday and Friday.** Winners will be e-mailed.
- Speaking of prizes, we have some amazing items to choose from: **an Xbox One console; Apple AirPods; a karaoke party machine; an Ultimate Slime Kit; a signed Alex Bregman jersey; a hoverboard; and much, much more!**

Have fun, and good luck!

Cozy Up: Pajamarama Is January 25

On Friday, January 25, St. Francis will celebrate our annual Barker’s Pajamarama Day Ingathering. On this day, **students are invited to wear their pajamas to school to celebrate the weeklong ingathering of pajamas, books, toiletries, and luggage.** Named after Dianne Barker, Head of Primary School from 1992-2008, Pajamarama continues the tradition she introduced of wearing pajamas to school one day a year in conjunction with collecting books for donation.

All donations will benefit [Arms Wide Adoption Services](#), an organization that supports foster children awaiting permanent homes. As in the past, the focus of the ingathering for Primary and Lower School is pajamas and books. However, Arms Wide has requested a variety of other items that will allow them to serve the children in their care more comprehensively. We are asking our Middle and Upper School families to donate these items.

As usual, Pajamarama Day promises to be a lot of fun, and your support in helping our children become *people for others* is truly appreciated. A few guidelines to remember:

- *What should you donate?*
 - **Primary School and Lower School:** One pair of new pajamas and one new book in the zipper-lock bag sent home with your child
 - **Middle School:** The following items in travel or regular sizes
 - Grade 5: Brushes and combs, deodorant, shampoo and conditioner, shower gel
 - Grade 6: Socks and underwear
 - Grade 7: Wipes, toothbrushes, and toothpaste
 - Grade 8: Pull-Ups and diapers
 - **Upper School:** Backpacks, duffle bags, or small luggage
- *Where should you donate?*
 - **Primary School:** Boxes in the pods
 - **Lower School and Middle School:** Labeled boxes in the People Place
 - **Upper School:** Andrews House
- *When can you bring your donation?*
 - Tuesday, January 22-Friday, January 25

All Primary, Lower, Middle, and Upper School students who participate may wear appropriate pajamas to school on Pajamarama Day, which is Friday, January 25. If students choose not to wear pajamas, they may wear their regular uniform or their house T-shirt and jeans.

Congratulations, Winners of the Library Christmas Book Tree Guessing Game!

Congratulations to Mr. Morris, fourth grader Perri M., and second grader Emi G. for getting closest to the correct number when guessing how many books were on the Library Christmas Book Tree. Thanks for playing!

The Gala Is Coming Fast! Buy Your Tickets Today

The Gala is fast approaching, so don't let time run out before you get your tickets. New to the Gala and not sure how it all works when it comes to getting a table? Please get in touch with Director of Events [Abby Clark](#), and she will answer all of your questions and help you with your reservation.

[Click here](#) to get your tickets now!

Hear Dr. Stixrud Speak on January 30

Don't miss this! Dr. William Stixrud, co-author of the *New York Times* best-selling book *The Self-Driven Child* (also the recommended SFES parent summer reading book), will be the featured speaker at the Parents Association's upcoming Winter Parent Education Program.

- Dr. Stixrud will speak twice on **Wednesday, January 30—at 11:00 a.m. (the Lunch and Learn session) and again at 6:30 p.m. in the Fine Arts Center on the Main Campus.**
- Buy tickets for the 11:00 a.m. Lunch and Learn via [MySchoolAnywhere](#).
- Buy tickets for the 6:30 p.m. lecture at [StFrancisHouston.org/tickets](#).
- Please contact [Paola Lehman](#) for more information.
- If you have not bought this book, now would be an excellent time to purchase and read it prior to January 30! You can find it on Amazon [here](#).

Please Share the Word! Upcoming US Admissions Tours

Our best advertising is word-of-mouth, so please tell your friends and neighbors to come learn more about St. Francis at one of our Upper School Admissions Tours, which are **held most Wednesdays at 9:00 a.m.**

Save the Date: Woolrich Luncheon Is March 5

Please mark your calendars for this year's **Woolrich Luncheon on Tuesday, March 5**, when we will be honoring our 2017-18 award recipients:

- **Alison Salinas** traveled to Germany to study the collections of the Brothers Grimm.

- **Angela Flowers** traveled behind the former Iron Curtain to study the impact and lasting effects of the Holocaust and World War II.
- **Kimberly Dunn** received training in Krav Maga mixed martial arts and self-defense.
- **Amy Chandler** and **Julia Traber** traveled to Japan to study art and theater.
- **Melanie Wallace** and **Lydia Urbanek** traveled to France to study the cultural roots of fiction and fairy tales.
- **Carlo Minotti** received training in welding and fabrication.

We hope you can join us to hear about these educators' summertime adventures—which were made possible by the Sarah W. Woolrich Fund for Faculty—and how these unique opportunities are helping to bring classroom learning to life! Invitations will be mailed in late January.

Primary School

From the Division Head

Welcome back to school!

In a conversation with my colleague Margaret after the holidays, we talked about the transition back home after an out-of-town vacation. She said she enjoyed the “resetting” after being away from home. I like that word. From vacation to home it might be unpacking, doing laundry, shopping and restocking the refrigerator, getting a calendar for the new year, and even getting to bed at a predictable time again. As we begin a new semester, we do a lot of resetting at school, too.

Our Primary School faculty and staff spent our inservice day on Monday resetting. We took time to rearrange classrooms, look at our learning spaces with fresh eyes, collaborate with team members, restock materials, plan ahead, and set new goals.

As you readjust to school routines, reset, and look forward to 2019, we hope you'll attend a Step-Up event later this week for a glimpse at what is ahead for your child next fall. You'll have the opportunity to hear from teachers in your child's next grade level and visit their learning environment.

- **Step-Up to Primary I** for parents of current Pre-Primary students: **Thursday, January 17, or Friday, January 18, 8:30-9:30 a.m.**
- **Step-Up to Primary II** for parents of current Primary I students: **Friday, January 18, 8:30-9:30 a.m.**

Greeting your children this past Tuesday and seeing their joy in returning to school with their friends was one of the highlights of our week. There is an amazing amount of growth (in all forms) that takes place in just a few short weeks during the holidays.

It's good to have you all back again!

Amy Whitley, MA
Head of Primary School

Primary School Dining Hall Menu

To view the Primary School Dining Hall menu, please click [here](#).

Mark Your Calendar

Monday, January 14

- *Spring Explore and Extend Classes Begin*
-

Tuesday, January 15

- *Chapel: 9:30 a.m.*
-

Wednesday, January 16

- *Chapel: 9:30 a.m.*
-

Thursday, January 17

- *Parent Step-Up Visit:* 8:30 a.m.; parents of Mrs. Ferguson's T/Th Pre-Primary students visit Primary I
-

Friday, January 18

- *Parent Step-Up Visits:* 8:30 a.m.; parents of 5-day and 3-day Pre-Primary students visit Primary I; parents of Primary I students visit Primary II
-

Monday, January 21

- *Martin Luther King Jr. Day:* School holiday
-

Tuesday, January 22

- *Chapel:* 9:30 a.m.
 - *Pajamarama Ingathering*
-

Wednesday, January 23

- *Chapel:* 9:30 a.m.
 - *Pajamarama Ingathering*
-

Thursday, January 24

- *Barker's Pajamarama:* Mrs. Ferguson's T/Th Pre-Primary students
 - *Pajamarama Ingathering*
-

Friday, January 25

- *Barker's Pajamarama*: All 5-day and 3-day Pre-Primary, Primary I, and Primary II students
 - *Pajamarama Ingathering*
-

Tuesday, January 29

- *Chapel*: 9:30 a.m.
-

Wednesday, January 30

- *Chapel*: 9:30 a.m.
 - *Winter Parent Education Program*: Dr. William Stixrud, co-author of *The Self-Driven Child*, speaks at 11:00 a.m. (Lunch and Learn session) and at 6:30 p.m. in the FAC on the Main Campus; purchase your tickets using the links in the "All School" section above
-

Thursday, January 31

- *Pre-Primary Fathers and Friends Breakfast*: 8:15 a.m. for Mrs. Ferguson's T/Th, Mrs. Meriwether's, and Mrs. Oteiza's classes
-

Friday, February 1

- *Pre-Primary Fathers and Friends Breakfast*: 8:15 a.m. in Mrs. Britton's and Mrs. Ferguson's M/W/F classes
-

Tuesday, February 5

- *Chapel*: 9:30 a.m.

Wednesday, February 6

- *Primary II Parent Tour of Lower School: 8:30 a.m.* in the HBR on the Main Campus
- *Chapel: 9:30 a.m.*
- *Primary School Coffee and Fellowship with the Head of School: 10:00 a.m.*

Lower School

From the Division Head

Our first week back was fantastic! The students were eager to see friends and get back to learning.

As I mentioned in my December *Wolf Watch* article that summarized Lower School's ERB results, all of our subtest results were positive, but our Auditory Comprehension scores did not match with the other scores. Because of that, we are taking an intentional look at Effective Listening as a division-wide initiative. To do this, we need to examine what we are currently doing in the classroom—what is working and what is not. In late January, our teachers will start taking “Learning Walks” to determine how to best promote effective listening skills. Working in teams of four and each using the same observation form, the teachers will make four visits to other teachers' classrooms for seven minutes each, noting teacher language, student listening habits, and the overall classroom environment. Teachers will then sit together and synthesize observations. Our aim is to come up with some generalities and trends. After our fact-gathering stage, we will examine our practices and determine what more we can do to improve effective listening in our students.

Not only are these Learning Walks great opportunities to problem-solve around a specific topic, they are wonderful ways for faculty members to learn from one another. We are blessed with incredibly talented teachers who have so much to offer others.

One of the challenges with teaching is that we are all in our OWN classrooms and have very limited time to get out and about. By providing these structured visits with coverage for our teachers' classes, we are opening many doors for professional growth. I have worked in several schools over the past 30 years,

and the level of transparency, collaboration, and professionalism our faculty members exhibit is truly remarkable. Your children are very blessed to have these wonderful people in their lives who care about them and are always looking for ways to be better for them.

We know that developing good listening habits is not simply accomplished at school. Many of you have asked what you can do at home to promote effective listening. Here are some suggestions:

- The easiest change to make is to stop repeating yourself to your child. Let them know that this is a goal on which you are working, and that it takes practice to be a great listener. If they do not listen after a couple of reminders, then let the natural consequences happen. Try picturing yourself as a “coach” rather than thinking of yourself as the “doer.” In the beginning, having your child repeat instructions back to you is quite helpful. But continuing to repeat yourself in order to get tasks accomplished is rescuing your child and is not a positive way to teach accountability.
- Reading aloud to your child and having discussions is a wonderful practice. Give them something to listen for before you start reading. For example, ask them to listen for their favorite part or for specific details or facts, especially when reading nonfiction. Ask them to make predictions before reading, and then discuss the accuracy of that prediction. Or, simply tell them before you start that you’d like them to summarize what you’ve read aloud to them when you’re finished. Anything to promote engagement while listening is beneficial.
- Help your child remember to show listening with interest when others are speaking. Children may learn habits of looking away or interrupting. Gently remind them to refocus on the listener.
- Model respectful listening yourself. Our children are always watching us, so we can do some of the best teaching by being strong listeners ourselves.

I hope you have a wonderful week! I will be traveling to Dallas today to be part of a school accreditation team for another Episcopal school, and I will return to work on Thursday. Do not hesitate to reach out to Kristal, Debbie, or Ryan if you need anything.

Cheers!

Carol Christ, MEd
Head of Lower School

Mark Your Calendar

Monday, January 14

- *Birthday Chapel:* Students with a birthday between January 1-19 will receive a birthday pencil in Chapel today
-

Wednesday, January 16

- *Student Holiday*
 - *Parent Conferences:* 9:00 a.m.-6:00 p.m.
-

Monday, January 21

- *Martin Luther King Jr. Day:* School holiday
-

Wednesday, January 23

- *Birthday Chapel:* Students with a birthday between January 20-26 will receive a birthday pencil in Chapel today
-

Friday, January 25

- *Pajamarama Day:* Students may wear appropriate pajamas to school; please see the letter that is being sent home and e-mailed
-

Monday, January 28

- *Birthday Chapel:* Students with a birthday between January 27-February 2 will receive a birthday pencil in Chapel today
-

Wednesday, January 30

- *Chapel:* 8:05 a.m.
 - *Winter Parent Education Program:* Dr. William Stixrud, co-author of *The Self-Driven Child*, speaks at 11:00 a.m. (Lunch and Learn session) and at 6:30 p.m. in the FAC on the Main Campus; purchase your tickets using the links in the “All School” section above
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Wednesday, February 6

- *Primary II Parent Tour of Lower School:* 8:30 a.m. in the HBR

Middle School

From the Division Head

Happy Sunday, Middle School families! I hope this finds you well today.

Last week, we introduced an idea to the MS student body that I hope will be a game changer within our community. In a previous *Wolf Watch*, I mentioned the book *Unselfie* by Dr. Michele Borba (here is the [link](#) to her useful website). Part of the book highlights a story at Milford High School in Delaware, where students organized an Act of Kindness Challenge for the school and accomplished wonderful things with it.

During the homily in Wednesday’s Eucharist chapel, Father Wismer discussed the Epiphany and how each of us is expected to shine God’s powerful, positive light on the world. I then issued the students and faculty the Middle School Unselfie Challenge, which will run through the rest of the school year.

We are aiming to surpass 600 acts of kindness before the end of January, and I have chosen a very large number for us to surpass before the middle of May.

I have not told anyone the number, nor have I told students the possible rewards that would come with surpassing this number.

What constitutes an act of kindness? As I told the audience, it's any act that comes from the heart and aims to help a person or the school in a positive, constructive way. Examples are holding a door for someone, cheering up a sad friend, picking up trash around the school, writing a thank-you note to a peer or teacher, etc. There are so many free, simple, transformative ways to improve the quality of life here at school, and I believe we will do just that. The Middle School is on the clock, and each week either the observer or the recipient of an act of kindness will report it to their advisor to keep track. I look forward to the wonderful things we can accomplish with this challenge!

This week, we look forward to hosting parents—and possibly students, too—at our Welcome to the Den Conferences with advisors. Students are welcome to attend, but it is not mandatory. These meetings are designed to help parents and advisors establish student goals for 2019, revisit 2018 goals, discuss student progress with academic and social-emotional life here at school, and connect further. I hope these meetings foster fruitful, productive discussions that help our students have a great second half of the school year.

On the Mind, Brain, Education science front, I want to share this [research article](#) about fostering and teaching empathy, which is the main motivator for the Unselfie Challenge.

I wish you all a wonderful week. It's a beautiful day, and we are Wolves!

Sincerely,

Connor Cook, EdD
Head of Middle School

Mark Your Calendar

Monday, January 14

- *Monday Schedule/Dress Uniform*
- *Chapel: 10:45-11:15 a.m.*
- *TIP Meeting: 3:30 p.m. on the South Campus*

Tuesday, January 15

- *Tuesday Schedule/Regular Uniform*
 - *Bible Study for Eighth Graders: 7:15-7:45 a.m. in the Christian Education rooms at the end of the Middle School hallway*
 - *Advisory: 10:45-11:15 a.m.*
-

Wednesday, January 16

- *Student Holiday*
 - *Parent/Teacher Conferences: 9:00 a.m.-6:00 p.m.*
-

Thursday, January 17

- *Thursday Schedule/Regular Uniform*
 - *Bible Study for Fifth and Sixth Graders: 7:15-7:45 a.m. in the Christian Education rooms at the end of the Middle School hallway*
 - *Trimester 3 Elective Sign-ups for Grades 6-8*
 - *MS Class Meeting: 10:45-11:45 a.m. in the FAC*
-

Friday, January 18

- *Friday Schedule/SFES Spirit Dress*
 - *NJHS Meeting (Geo Bee Preliminary Competition): 7:15-7:50 a.m. in Dr. Bedard's classroom*
 - *Trimester 3 Elective Sign-ups for Grades 6-8*
 - *WEB Leadership Training: 10:45-11:15 a.m. in Mr. Duran's classroom*
 - *Advisory: 10:45-11:15 a.m.*
-

Monday, January 21

- *Martin Luther King Jr. Day: School holiday*

Tuesday, January 22

- *Tuesday Schedule/Regular Uniform*
- *Trimester 2 Progress Reports Go Online*
- *Pajamarama Ingathering: Through January 25*
- *Bible Study for Eighth Graders: 7:15-7:45 a.m. in the Christian Education rooms at the end of the Middle School hallway*
- *Trimester 3 Elective Sign-ups for Grades 6-8*
- *Advisory: 10:45-11:15 a.m.*

Wednesday, January 23

- *Wednesday Schedule/Regular Uniform*
- *Bible Study for Seventh Graders: 7:15-7:45 a.m. in the Christian Education rooms at the end of the Middle School hallway*
- *Trimester 3 Elective Sign-ups for Grades 6-8*
- *Chapel: 10:45-11:15 a.m.*

Thursday, January 24

- *Thursday Schedule/Regular Uniform*
- *Bible Study for Fifth and Sixth Graders: 7:15-7:45 a.m. in the Christian Education rooms at the end of the Middle School hallway*
- *Last Day! Trimester 3 Elective Sign-ups for Grades 6-8*
- *Class Meeting (Geo Bee Competition): 9:15-10:00 a.m. in the FAC*

Friday, January 25

- *Friday Schedule/SFES Spirit Dress or PJs*
- *MS Pajamarama Day*
- *NJHS Meeting (Reading Aloud Preparation): 7:15-7:50 a.m. in Dr. Bedard's classroom*
- *WEB Activity (Grade 5): 10:45-11:15 a.m. in classrooms*

- *Advisory: 10:45-11:15 a.m.*
-

Monday, January 28

- *Monday Schedule/Dress Uniform*
 - *Chapel: 10:45-11:15 a.m.*
 - *Speaker for Seventh Graders Attending the Summer Costa Rica Trip: 1:10-1:40 p.m. in the HBR*
-

Tuesday, January 29

- *Tuesday Schedule/Regular Uniform*
 - *Bible Study for Eighth Graders: 7:15-7:45 a.m. in the Christian Education rooms at the end of the Middle School hallway*
 - *Advisory: 10:45-11:15 a.m.*
 - *Howlers Practice (Grade 8 Only): 10:45-11:15 a.m. in the Dance Room*
-

Wednesday, January 30

- *Wednesday Schedule/Regular Uniform*
 - *Bible Study for Seventh Graders: 7:15-7:45 a.m. in the Christian Education rooms at the end of the Middle School hallway*
 - *Chapel: 10:45-11:15 a.m.*
 - *Howlers Practice (Grade 8 Only): 11:20-11:55 a.m.*
 - *Winter Parent Education Program: Dr. William Stixrud, co-author of *The Self-Driven Child*, speaks at 11:00 a.m. (Lunch and Learn session) and at 6:30 p.m. in the FAC on the Main Campus; purchase your tickets using the links in the “All School” section above*
 - *Fifth-Grade Colonial Day Parent Meeting: 12:50-1:40 p.m. in the HBR*
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Thursday, January 31

- *Thursday Schedule/Regular Uniform*

- *Bible Study for Fifth and Sixth Graders*: 7:15-7:45 a.m. in the Christian Education rooms at the end of the Middle School hallway
 - *MS Class Meeting*: 9:15-10:00 a.m. in the FAC
 - *Winter Pep Rally*: 2:35-3:00 p.m. in the Gym
-

Friday, February 1

- *Friday Schedule/SFES Spirit Dress*
 - *NJHS Meeting*: 7:15-7:50 a.m. in Dr. Bedard's classroom
 - *Wolf Wear Sale*: 7:45-9:00 in the Concessions Area near the Gym
 - *Advisory*: 10:45-11:15 a.m.
 - *Faculty vs. Eighth-Grade Boys Basketball Team*: 2:40-3:30 p.m. in the Gym
-

Saturday, February 2

- *Spring Musical Rehearsal (Actors Arrive at a Time TBD)*: 1:00-5:00 p.m. in the FAC

Upper School

From the Division Head

We're looking forward to seeing you on campus this Wednesday for our second round of student-led parent-teacher conferences. This time, the conversations will include the student, the advisor, the parent(s), and possibly one additional teacher. With advisor assistance, each student will lead a conversation about academic and social-emotional strengths and challenges and will revisit the goals he or she created in October. This will also be an opportunity to debrief the Immersions and Explorations experience. If you haven't yet signed up for your conference time, please do so using the advisor links below. (If you're not sure which advisor to sign up with, please ask your child.)

[Mrs. McMillian](#)

[Mrs. Matzen](#)

[Mr. Zacaraev](#)

As promised, this week's message includes some excerpts from the next three chapters of *The Self-Driven Child* that resonated with me as both an educator and a parent.

CHAPTER 6 (“RADICAL DOWNTIME”)

The Importance of Rest

- Rest, activity, rest, activity. Everything we do requires this alternation.
- The brain has at least 40 resting-state networks. The fact that so much of the brain activates when we're at rest strongly suggests that rest should be taken seriously. We think of this deep resting of the brain as “radical downtime.”
- Radical downtime means doing nothing purposeful, nothing that requires hugely focused thought. This is one of the most powerful things we can do for our brains. It is enormously important as the antidote to the mind-scattering, mind-numbing effects of 24/7 technology and multitasking.
- This chapter delves into two powerful forms of radical downtime: daydreaming and meditation.

A Wandering Mind: The Benefits of Daydreaming

- When your default mode network is active, you think about yourself, about your past and future, and about problems that need to be resolved, all of which are crucial for developing a sense of self. You consider the experiences and feelings of other people, a process that is important for the development of empathy. The default mode network is where the all-important work of personal reflection takes place. It's what makes you a thoughtful human being. It allows you to organize your thoughts. It grounds you.
- It is only when we let our minds wander that we make unexpected connections between things that we did not realize were connected. This can help us solve problems that previously seemed to be unsolvable.
- The answer here is that less is more. Alternate periods of connection and activity with periods of quiet time.
- We need to actively choose not to take our phones with us, to turn them off.
- Learning to tolerate solitude—to be comfortable with yourself—is one of the most important skills one acquires in childhood.

A Meditative Mind

- Practicing meditation is increasingly important as changes in the world lead to higher levels of anger and fear, and as advances in technology quicken the pace of life, giving us little time to simply “be” with ourselves.
- Mindfulness
 - Jon Kabat-Zinn is the scientist whose mindfulness-based stress-reduction (MBSR) program has played the largest role in helping mindfulness gain popularity and scientific respectability. He defines mindfulness as “paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally.” The basic mindfulness meditation practice involves focusing awareness on the breath and noticing thoughts as they arise. The goal is to focus on the moment-to-moment experience, without judging or reacting. You monitor the content of your thoughts and your reactions to them. Other mindfulness practices include scanning the body for areas of stress, and mindful eating and walking. Some mindfulness practices encourage the development of ethical values such as patience, trust, acceptance, kindness, compassion, and gratitude.
 - Research of the impact of mindfulness on children is still in the early stages, but studies have shown that in the school years these practices can lower levels of stress, aggression, and social anxiety; improve executive functions such as inhibition and working memory; and contribute to stronger performance in math. Studies on adults also show changes in brain activation and even in gene expression—the turning on and off of specific genes.
 - The mindfulness app Headspace is recommended.
- Transcendental Meditation (TM)
 - Although transcendence is the epitome of doing nothing, over 40 years of research has found that this experience of deeply quieting the mind and body improves physical and mental health, as well as learning and academic performance.
 - Many years of research on TM has shown that kids who meditate for as little as 10 or 15 minutes twice a day experience a significant reduction in stress, anxiety, and depressive symptoms and express less anger and hostility. They sleep better, think more creatively, are healthier, have higher self-esteem, and do better in school and on tests of cognitive and academic skills. While TM involves no attempt to control the mind, it increases

practitioners' internal locus of control. ("Locus of control" basically means the extent to which people believe they have power over what happens in their lives.) It does this, in part, by allowing the brain to refresh itself, which enables it to keep things in perspective. It also reduces the extent to which we feel overwhelmed and allows our minds to work more efficiently, increasing both the effectiveness with which we tackle challenging situations and our confidence that we can handle the big and little challenges life throws our way.

- Schools that implement the Quiet Time program have seen less stress and higher grades among students.

What to Do Tonight

- Talk as a family about the importance of going offline and giving yourself truly free time. If they're open to hearing it, tell your kids that it's only when they aren't focused on anything in particular that they can really think about themselves and other people. Also tell them that discoveries and insights will often come when they let their mind wander, and that they need downtime to solidify the things they're learning in school.
- Consider learning to meditate yourself. The University of Massachusetts Medical School has a [Center for Mindfulness](#) with great resources, as do the [University of California, San Diego](#) and the [University of Wisconsin-Madison](#). You can also [visit the main TM website](#).
- If you're interested in mindfulness, you could try a mindfulness app with your child, such as Headspace or Mind Yeti, which can be particularly useful in times of stress.

CHAPTER 7 ("SLEEP: THE MOST RADICAL DOWNTIME")

Sleep Is Essential

- Sleep experts say that if you're too tired during the day or need caffeine to keep you going, you're not getting enough sleep. And if you need an alarm clock to wake you up, you also need more sleep. By those measures, many of us are seriously sleep deprived.
- The cycle of sleep deprivation is actually hard to break because if you're tired, you'll be more anxious, and if you're more anxious, it will be

harder to sleep. This is a big problem, because sleep is arguably the single most important thing for healthy brain development.

- Sleep is brain food.
- Sleep deprivation is a form of chronic stress.
- Emotional control is dramatically impaired by sleep deprivation. Sleep deprivation decreases your flexibility, weakens your ability to see things in context, and impairs your judgment.
- Sleep loss is like a “negativity bomb.” “This result suggests the rather horrifying possibility that when you are sleep deprived, you effectively form twice as many memories of negative events in your life as of positive events, producing a biased—and potentially depressing—memory of your day.”
- Sleep deprivation, like chronic stress, can trigger anxiety and mood disorders in children who are already vulnerable to getting them.
- Sleep deprivation has physical implications.
- Sleep is critical to learning. There’s almost nothing more important to learning than being well rested. Simply put, it is far more effective to teach someone for four hours after they’ve slept for eight than to teach them for eight hours after they’ve slept for four. It doesn’t take much sleep deprivation to impact thinking and cognitive performance. A study concluded that people who slept after learning and practicing a new task remembered more the next day than those who stayed up all night after learning the task.

When You’re Rested...

- When you’re well rested and not stressed, the prefrontal cortex helps regulate your emotional systems in a top-down way. If you sleep well, the connection between the prefrontal cortex and other systems is refreshed and strengthened, enabling your trusty “Pilot” to regulate your thinking and behavior.
- Put simply, sleep heals. Rapid eye movement (REM) sleep—where most dreaming happens—takes the sting out of emotional experiences. When we’re in REM sleep, all stress-related neurochemicals are absent from the brain—the only time this happens in a 24-hour period.
- Just about everyone experiences a greater sense of control after a good night’s sleep. But here’s the clincher: to fall asleep, you have to let go. You have to give up control to gain it. And clearly, you can’t do this for someone else. So how can you help your children get enough sleep?

- Teenagers aged 14 to 17 need eight to 10 hours of rest per night. And young adults from 18 to 25 years old need seven to nine hours. This is a general guideline, and Judith Owens, one of the top pediatric sleep researchers in the world, suggests that, like most other human needs, the need for sleep probably varies according to a bell curve. Some people need more sleep to function effectively than others. To determine whether your child is getting enough, consider: Does he wake up on his own? Is he tired during the day? Is he restless or irritable during the day? Use these considerations to guide you as you help your child get the sleep he needs.
- An important part of high school is learning that you can't do it all and knowing that your own well-being has to come first.
- Ned's pep talk for high-achieving kids: "I know how conscientious you are. You've made all these commitments and will never let anyone down. You'll stay up later and work harder to get everything done. And so you will sacrifice yourself. You cannot be doing your best at anything if you're chronically tired. One of the things you don't know yet is that you don't have to be superior at everything. You need to figure out what you want to specialize in and put your time and attention there. Consider dropping one of your extracurriculars or settling for a lower grade if there's one class you both don't like and know consumes a disproportionate amount of time. Reinvest that time in yourself, your sleep, and the classes or activities that really matter to you. Don't look at it as letting someone down if you say no to an opportunity—instead, you're giving someone else a chance to step up."
- The evidence that sleep is important is irrefutable. Here are some strategies you might use in your consultant role:
 - Provide an incentive. Doing so is okay in this case because you're not offering it as a means to get her to do what *you* want her to do, but to help her to do what *she* wants to do on her own but finds challenging. It's a subtle but important distinction.
 - Encourage your child to do screen-time homework earlier and save reading homework for later so she gets less light exposure nearer to bedtime.
 - Tell your child that staying well rested without the use of stimulants is a great challenge for most adults in our society, too. Ultimately, it is your child's responsibility to figure out how to manage his or her own energy.

- Helping kids figure out if they've gotten enough rest is a process, and trust, communication, and collaborative problem-solving are key to that process.
- The Mayo Clinic recommends a maximum of 100 milligrams of caffeine (about the equivalent of one cup of coffee) per day for adolescents and no caffeine for children.

What to Do Tonight

- Talk as a family about creating technology-free zones in bedrooms at night. Danny Lewin recommends that kids (and parents) leave their devices charging in the kitchen 30 to 60 minutes before bedtime. (This gives us a chance to resist our phone only once, rather than all night.) Lewin also encourages negotiating with teenagers in a respectful way. If no phones in the bedroom seven nights in a row is too much for your teenager to manage, how about five? Then you and your child can discuss the difference between what happens when the phone is in the room and when it isn't. If your child insists that she needs her phone because she uses it as an alarm clock, go to the store immediately to buy her an alarm clock. Get her the most high-end kind she wants. It's money well spent.
- Encourage your sleepy teenager to take a 20-minute power nap after school or during study hall. Naps shouldn't be longer than that, otherwise they can cause grogginess and throw off sleep rhythms for the night. Think of them as a little pick-me-up to get through to bedtime.

CHAPTER 8 ("TAKING A SENSE OF CONTROL TO SCHOOL")

Get Them Engaged

- From preschool through college, we want kids to have a school experience that is engaging and inventive. School should provide a mixture of stimulation and downtime. It should encourage kids' natural curiosity and allow them to be in a state of flow for long periods of the day. In an ideal school, teachers have autonomy and kids have choices. This type of school environment provides a nearly perfect model of an internal locus of control.
- The best thing you can do to facilitate engagement in the classroom may be to give your kid autonomy outside of it.
- What happens inside the classroom matters, too, and supporting autonomy within the teaching environment doesn't have to be difficult.

- It also helps to offer more than one way to demonstrate mastery of material, seek student feedback, encourage them to explore strategies that work for them, and more generally explain why they're being asked to do things and what you hope they will gain from them.

Reduce Academic Stress and Pressure

- In the early 1900s, two psychologists, Robert Yerkes and John Dodson, proposed that performance increases with physiological and mental arousal up to a point, after which it starts to decline. We need a certain level of arousal—from curiosity, excitement, or mild stress—to reach our optimal level of mental acuity. But when we're too stressed, we can't think straight. Our brains become inefficient.
- Students learn and perform best in an environment that offers high challenge and low threat—when they're given difficult material in a learning environment in which it is safe to explore, make mistakes, and take the time they need to learn and produce good work. When students know it's alright to fail, they can take the kinds of risks that lead to real growth. They can develop brains that are capable of performing at a high level and of being happy.
- Remember, we're not supposed to be able to think clearly and logically when we experience a threat. Survival will always trump learning.
- Although we want schools to challenge our kids, they should do so in an environment that feels accepting and encouraging. What this looks like will vary depending on the circumstances, but the questions are the same: Do our kids feel safe in school, physically and emotionally? Do they have a sense of control over what they're doing in the classroom? Is it safe for them to make mistakes?

Homework: Inspire—But Don't Require

- Small amounts of homework (one to two hours a night) can contribute to academic achievement for middle and high school kids, but any more than that backfires when it comes to actual learning.
- In the best of all possible worlds, teachers would say, "If you can work on this for 20 minutes at some point after school, your brain will make new connections when you sleep tonight that will help you understand and remember what you've learned. But if you're too tired or stressed, do something else. You can always turn back to it when you feel fresher."

Teach Kids When They're Ready

- When kids fail again and again, they internalize failure.
- The central, critical message here is a counterintuitive one that all parents would do well to internalize: earlier isn't necessarily better, and likewise, more isn't better if it's too much.
- Relax and take a long view, even if no one else around you is.

Test Kids the Right Way

Neuroscientists are fond of saying, "neurons that fire together, wire together." What we do repeatedly with deliberate effort more readily becomes etched in our brains. Henry Roediger, a Washington University in St. Louis psychologist who is an expert on testing, thinks that while the word "test" has a very negative connotation, it's still one of the most powerful learning tools available. As he observed, when you struggle to recall a fact or concept, the act of doing so strengthens your memory of it, unlike simply reviewing notes. "Testing not only measures knowledge, but changes it," he said.

Ways to Bring a Sense of Control to School

- Overall, schools should focus more on nurturing healthy brain development and less on test scores. They should be exploring how to make the school experience less stressful, to promote self-understanding and self-regulation in students, to maximize self-motivation by promoting autonomy, and to maximize engagement by incorporating the arts into all aspects of teaching.
- For kids to become depressed because they're too tired and stressed and have been driven for too long is too high a price to pay for that admissions letter. Getting in is only one piece of the college experience. The most crucial question is, "What happens when you get there?"

What to Do Tonight

- Teach your kids that they are responsible for their own education. Kids should feel in charge, not that school is being done "to them." Note that this is very different from blaming kids who are struggling.

I look forward to hearing about what resonated most for you in these chapters. Please share your thoughts with me at an upcoming basketball game or swim meet or on conference day. Next week, I'll share with you my highlights from Chapters 9, 10, and 11. Happy reading!

Sincerely,

Cara Henderson
Head of Upper School

Please Share the Word! Upcoming US Admissions Tours

Our best advertising is word-of-mouth, so please tell your friends and neighbors to come learn more about St. Francis at one of our Upper School Admissions Tours, which are held most Wednesdays at 9:00 a.m.

Mark Your Calendar

Monday, January 14

- *Day 1 Schedule/SFES Spirit Dress*
 - *Boys and Girls Basketball Practice: 4:15-5:45 p.m.*
-

Tuesday, January 15

- *Day 2 Schedule/Regular Uniform*
 - *Swim Practice: 6:35-8:00 a.m. at the Houston Racquet Club*
 - *Chapel: 9:50 a.m. in the Crum Gym*
 - *Boys and Girls Basketball Practice: 4:15-5:45 p.m.*
-

Wednesday, January 16

- *Welcome to the Den Conferences: No classes*
 - *Boys and Girls Basketball Practice: 4:15-5:45 p.m.*
-

Thursday, January 17

- *Day 3 Schedule/Regular Uniform*
- *Swim Practice: 6:35-8:00 a.m. at the Houston Racquet Club*

- *Boys Basketball Game: 4:30 p.m. at Awty International School*
 - *Girls Basketball Practice: 4:15-5:45 p.m.*
-

Friday, January 18

- *Day 4 Schedule/SFES Spirit Dress*
 - *Girls Basketball Game: 5:00 p.m. at Episcopal High School*
 - *Boys Basketball Game: 6:30 p.m. at Episcopal High School*
-

Monday, January 21

- *Martin Luther King Jr. Day: School holiday*
-

Tuesday, January 22

- *Day 5 Schedule/Regular Uniform*
 - *Pajamarama Ingathering Begins*
 - *Swim Practice: 6:35-8:00 a.m. at the Houston Racquet Club*
 - *Chapel: 9:50 a.m. in Crum Gym*
 - *Boys and Girls Basketball Practice: 4:15-5:45 p.m.*
-

Wednesday, January 23

- *Day 6 Schedule/Regular Uniform*
 - *Pajamarama Ingathering*
 - *Girls Basketball Game: 4:30 p.m. in Crum Gym*
 - *Boys Basketball Game: 5:45 p.m. in Crum Gym*
-

Thursday, January 24

- *Day 1 Schedule/Regular Uniform*
- *Pajamarama Ingathering*

- *Swim Practice*: 6:35-8:00 a.m. at the Houston Racquet Club
 - *Girls Basketball Practice*: 4:15-5:45 p.m.
 - *Boys Basketball Game*: 5:30 p.m. in Crum Gym
-

Friday, January 25

- *Day 2 Schedule*
 - *Pajamarama Day*
 - *Pajamarama Ingathering Ends*
 - *Girls Basketball Game*: 4:30 p.m. at The Village School
 - *Boys Basketball Practice*: 4:15-5:45 p.m.
-

Saturday, January 26

- *Swim Meet*: Time TBD at Emmons Natatorium

Church

Outreach Sunday Is February 3

St. Francis is a generous community, and we love to show it in a big way on Outreach Sundays! Held each fall and spring, these parish-wide outreach event offer activities for all ages so that everyone can participate in serving others. This spring, Outreach Sunday will be held on **February 3 at 10:00 a.m. in the Wheatcroft Parish Hall**. Join your parish family for a fun time of service together as we make sandwiches, snack packs, and more to share with those in need in our city.

Join Us for New Member Orientation on March 2 or 3

If you started attending St. Francis Episcopal Church within the last two years and have not made your membership official yet, we invite you to become a member of our family by attending one of our New Member Orientation classes! Join Father Bates to learn about our church, our mission, and how membership in Christ's Body at St. Francis can help you deepen your relationship with God.

- **Saturday, March 2, from 10:00 a.m. to noon in the Hogan Board Room** (Snacks and refreshments will be served.)
- **Sunday, March 3, from 12:30-2:30 p.m. in the Hogan Board Room** (Lunch will be served.)

Please RSVP to Amy Homer via [e-mail](#) or at 832.325.2983.

Spring First Communion Classes Begin Sunday

First Communion classes begin this coming **Sunday, January 13**. This eight-week course is designed to prepare second-grade students to receive the Holy Eucharist. If you would like to sign up or request further information, please contact [Nichole Hilgert](#).

Discovering Christian Meditation

An opportunity for silent prayer at the church is available:

- Tuesdays, 5:00-5:30 p.m.
- Thursdays, 7:30-8:00 a.m.

These sessions are in the St. Clare Chapel and are led by Father David Price.

We find the roots of Christian meditation in the practice of Jesus recorded in the Gospels and in the content of the Epistles. We see it developed further in the writings of the desert tradition of the early church. Come learn a bit about it, gain a few hints about the practice and, mostly, come and pray.