

Upper School Families,

August 23, 2017

Welcome back to what I hope will be an exciting year of academic and personal growth for your child.

This will be my twelfth year as the Head of Upper School, and one thing I have undervalued but come to appreciate over these years is the importance of positive, caring relationships between teachers and students. As much as this seems a given, it continues to be a fundamental principle that we must occasionally reassess and sometimes redefine for all those involved.

As classes resume, we find ourselves at an opportune moment to redefine norms in the Upper School. With a number of new teachers joining the faculty, a newly appointed Dean of Students and Athletic Director, it is an appropriate time for us to articulate and implement anew the norms that a school of our caliber should have.

In this new academic year, I ask that you as parents support the School's desire and need to have a respectful, civil, and positive learning environment in the Upper School. For any number of reasons, a lack of basic civility is something that I believe has been eroded in our culture and school the past few years. It would appear that the simple courtesies we learned in early grades become too cool to continue in the upper grades. I, on the other hand, would beg to differ. Those same courtesies and "soft skills" we learned earlier in life are even more important as one grows older.

I am emphasizing this need for a more positive, civil ethos because of a recent conversation I had with a junior faculty member. Last year, I had asked what had convinced her to take her position at TPS rather than at another school. She explained that from her observation, it was obvious that first and foremost, TPS expected its students to engage respectfully and appropriately with adults in their lives. She then said what we all know to be a fact - without appropriate respect and a clear establishment of boundaries and expectations, any type of meaningful learning and interaction is all but impossible.

In the weeks ahead, if you hear from your child that things at school seem to be a little strict or the rules are being enforced more so than in previous years, don't be alarmed! In the end, the consistency in our practices will help achieve what we all want - a safe, nurturing environment that is currently counter cultural in its expectations of students' deportment, attitudes, and ways of interacting with those in their immediate school community.

Here's to a great start to our 2017-18 school year!

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "ERM McKinney". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "M".

Everett R. McKinney
Associate Head of School and
Head of Upper School