



March 2019

Dear Town School Parents and Guardians,

In the past several days at the front door, I've been handed Mardi Gras beads and a fresh lemon from a home garden, helped a kindergartner get his "Boy of the Week" poster through the door (it was larger than he is!), and welcomed daily our visitor from the Teach with Africa program. I always take special delight in these spontaneous front door moments, but especially so after the February break and my time away at the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS) Annual Conference at the end of February. While I missed my daily injection of infectious optimism, my time at Disneyland with Mason and connecting with colleagues brought their own gifts. I value that time away provided an opportunity for reflection on Town and our school in relation to the broader educational environment.



A common thread running through many lectures, workshops and conversations at the NAIS conference was the changing nature of the educational landscape in independent schools nationwide. Speakers addressed the need to innovate, tear down walls and proactively design our future. It is fitting that our work on Town's Strategic Plan this year has invited us to focus on many of these initiatives. More than ever, there is broad consensus that schools must contribute to the development of good human beings with strong moral character – a role that, at Town, we are privileged to undertake alongside each of you.

Among many exciting educational trends, I was particularly interested to engage in deep conversation about the evolution of student assessment to better reflect the skills students need for success today. I attended an inspiring workshop on innovations in this area by a select group of schools from across the country. Their work stems from the [Mastery Transcript Consortium](#), a network of public and private high schools who are creating transcripts that reflect the unique skills, strengths and interests of each learner, enabling educators to facilitate the kind of learning that is best for students. Acknowledging the constraints of traditional transcripts, including the separation of disciplines in an increasingly interdisciplinary world, these schools have designed a multidimensional transcript that strives to capture mastery of both concepts and skills, in some cases including character-based traits such as creativity and persistence. This initiative is just one example of the ways that schools are innovating for the future.

The future of teaching, learning and academic excellence represent an integral part of our work on the Strategic Plan. We held a very successful Community Day in January, with over 80 members of the Town community participating on a Saturday. With input from parents, faculty and staff, we are refining and finalizing a set of Town values through focus groups, surveys, Strategic Planning Committee inquiry groups, and feedback sessions with faculty, staff, and parents. The Strategic Planning Committee, led by Trustee Ann Chen, has conducted over 60 information-gathering interviews both within and beyond the Town community, including educators, community partners and members of the corporate community. We look forward to sharing the other key pillars and the overall vision for the plan at the end of this school year. We will share our completed Strategic Plan and steps for implementation next fall.

Looking ahead to next year, please find attached [the 2019-20 school calendar](#) for your reference. Next year's calendar is very similar to the 2018-19 calendar, with increased school days from previous years, an August start to school and two Professional Development Days for faculty and staff.

Amidst all this planning for the future, we celebrate our successful *Mad Hatter's Ball* fundraiser, raising our highest amount ever, over \$600,000, for tuition assistance and a play structure for the Upper Field (which has been installed and is awaiting modifications to the safety netting before we can officially open it for play). I extend a monumental thank you to Event Chair Elizabeth Minick as well as to our committee chairs

and all who supported, underwrote, attended and volunteered at the event. I am also pleased to announce next year's fall fundraiser chairs, Rachel Euretig and Steffany Chisholm. Please save the date for next year's event on Saturday, November 16, 2019. I also extend a huge thank you to Mary and Jeff Miller and Joy and Andrew Woeber, who chair our Annual Fund efforts this year. Thank you to all who have already contributed to the Annual Fund; we are very close to our goal of 100% family participation!

At NAIS, it was deeply inspiring to learn about new initiatives and successes at independent schools across the nation. In this same spirit, I am pleased to share several areas of growth and success at Town. Areas of prioritization, which have been defined through both my listening journey during my first year as Head and the early stages of the Strategic Plan, include strengthening critical thinking within the academic program and more intentional work around developing character and building capacity to foster a more inclusive community. At this juncture in the school year, numerous initiatives by faculty and administrators have already taken root. Enhancements to our curriculum include expanding technology integration in the lower grades, increasing class time and resources dedicated to dance and music across the grade levels, and several course redesigns in the upper grades. We have also strengthened our work on building students' character and our commitment to an inclusive community, including implementing an expanded Week of Service, creating a 7th grade "leadership" year, and developing new programs and resources for both students and faculty. A selection of highlights from our work is included below.

In addition to prioritizing critical thinking and character education, a significant area of focus for Town's leadership is supporting our outstanding faculty and staff. At NAIS, I attended an inspiring talk by author and speaker Simon Sinek, in which he eloquently captured my feelings on a crucial component of my job as Head of School. He stated that the "responsibility of the leaders is to take care of the people who take care of the children." I am proud of Town School's long history of supporting faculty and staff and building a warm professional culture, as well as new initiatives that we have implemented during my time as Head. In addition to cookouts and happy hours, new programs for faculty and staff as of this year include yoga led by Resident Teacher Katie Johnston and a subsidized fitness bootcamp. Thank you to all of you who have participated in our initiative to cultivate gratitude across our community by writing letters of appreciation at our grade level coffees. For those of you who were able to hear [Dr. Laurie Santos](#) speak in the Dolby Family Center for the Performing Arts last week, you know how helpful these initiatives can be in increasing our "happiness quotient." We have strengthened our robust culture of professional development, engaging for a second year with Singapore Math consultant [Sarah Schaefer](#) to support faculty with the implementation of a new math curriculum and inviting behavioral psychologist [Dr. David Anderson](#) for a return visit with faculty to continue work on character development and building positive classroom culture. [Dr. Derrick Gay](#) worked with faculty to explore topics and conversations that would benefit students; he then worked with students in grades 4-7 to examine how empathy and respect look and feel. Our efforts at community-building extend to our families as we invite you to attend presentations by guest speakers, participate in books clubs and join our new "Tiger Packs." We are also utilizing the Dolby for family and community events, including the recent screening of the documentary [THE PUSH](#) on March 11. Additional information on our programming in the Dolby is included below.

I feel distinctly privileged to spend each day with your sons and to work with our Board of Trustees, Strategic Planning Committee and you, our family community, to develop a Strategic Plan to guide the direction of our school program and priorities over the next 5-7 years. Please reach out anytime with questions or concerns. Happy Spring!

Warmly,



Lorri Hamilton Durbin
Head of School

In all of our classes there is a rich array of learning. Some specific curricular initiatives include:

- We have added a weekly dance class for grades 1-6. This class, led by instructor Terrence Paschal, is an opportunity for boys to understand that physical activity comes in many forms and that movement is an opportunity to express oneself. Each grade performed a dance at this year's Winter Concert, and at the Lower School talent show in February, a student choreographed and performed a solo dance for his schoolmates.

- Beginning this year, students in Lower School take both a Music and a Theater Arts class once per cycle. This spring, these classes have been aligned with grade-level curricula, providing cross-curricular opportunities for the boys to engage with material they are studying in their classrooms. In kindergarten, connecting to their unit on plants and bugs, the boys are working on a play about bugs and learning rhythm blocks and instruments that are linked to the sounds of bugs. This summer, Lower School Music Teacher Laura Ruppert and Lower School Head Jennifer Warren will present on their work building these interdisciplinary connections at the annual conference of the International Boys' School Coalition in Montreal.
- We have also expanded arts programming in the upper grades. New courses include electric guitar and film electives for 7th and 8th graders and a ukulele selective for the 6th grade. As previously announced, we will also host [two week-long arts camps](#) at Town this summer.
- This school year our expanded technology team has implemented a Technology Integration class once per cycle in all Lower School classrooms. This class seeks to provide boys with the tools to use technology in a meaningful, purposeful way. First graders recently attended the San Francisco Symphony, and during their Tech Integration class time, they reflected on the experience by creating videos. The 4th grade used their recent class time to discuss and demonstrate test-taking strategies they found helpful during this year's ERBs. Students explored features of the Explain Everything app, created their own videos on the app, exported them to the camera roll, and uploaded these projects to their Digital Portfolios. Synthesizing their test-taking suggestions and moving, tracking and manipulating information using various platforms were embedded learning objectives in these Tech Integration lessons. Each Lower School student has a Digital Portfolio that documents student learning and builds boys' capacity to showcase their work in new and creative ways.
- In my October letter, I noted the redesigned 7th grade History curriculum. Students have completed their second unit of study, Tarnished Ages, in which they identified and researched a period of time traditionally known as a Golden Age and created a work of art reflecting the golden and dark aspects of several different elements of society, thereby communicating the complexity of their "Tarnished Age." Students refined their research, annotation, and synthesis skills, and they learned how to "read" an image through artful thinking routines. The course has now begun the third unit, Marginalized Voices in the Mainstream, an interdisciplinary collaboration with Spanish and STEM. This unit transitions to modern world history and students will learn about advocacy for the self and others, refine their skills as historians from previous units, and learn how to take notes and synthesize information from audiovisual sources. Students have selected and are researching a movement driven for and by marginalized groups of people worldwide. This research will culminate in public service announcements, which will take several forms including animations, posters, videos and images.
- The redesigned 7th and 8th grade Latin curriculum emphasizes critical thinking, an inductive approach to language instruction, and making meaningful connections between the Latin language and Roman culture with 21st century life in the United States. Grammar instruction is interactive and student-centered; instead of teaching students grammar and syntax rules, Rebecca Kilian and Kimberly Paton expose the boys to language patterns and ask them to generate observations and explain the rules. Students connect Latin vocabulary to English derivatives by creating English word families connected to specific Latin roots. Our Town boys are immersed in the study of Roman culture topics that remain dilemmas worth exploring today: political and social movements in ancient Rome, citizenship and immigration in Rome and its provinces, and religious tolerance in the Roman Empire.
- In our new 8th grade US History course, the boys have undertaken a challenging project requiring them to read and analyze the Lincoln-Douglas debates, a series of formative political discussions on the expansion of slavery in the 1850s. Each student is responsible for reading one of the debates closely, researching background issues, and summarizing the debate and issues in a 3-5 page exposition. This project challenges students to think critically about historical context and effective persuasion tactics, not only in the debates between Lincoln and Douglas but also in their own persuasive writing.
- Corbett Simons, in his role as Director of Teaching, Learning, and Innovation, partners with faculty in support of our curricular initiatives and to reflect on specific aspects of the teaching practice. For example, he collaborated with the Humanities Department to review an assessment from one class with the goal of aligning expectations for students as they move up each grade. He works directly with individual teachers as they prepare units or create lessons, and he is an administrator of the faculty professional growth and evaluation program. This spring, Corbett is leading conversations with faculty on how teachers use technology and how they might learn from each other's tech use, as well as to inform future planning for technology in order to enhance student learning.

Work on developing character and fostering an inclusive community includes:

- Expanded special opportunities for students encourage teamwork and community between grades. Several grades have attended a ropes course, emphasizing team-building, risk-taking, and identifying one's comfort and growth zones. The 4th grade attended an overnight with [Age of Sail](#) linked to their Social Studies curriculum on explorers. Students lived the life of a sailor, including working in teams on the boat and taking on a night shift.
- Seventh graders engage in a new year-long leadership program in which they participate in a 21st-Century Leadership class and work in formal partnership with kindergartners at the Dr. William L. Cobb School in alternating semesters. In the Leadership course, students complete "quests" designed to activate a broad array of leadership qualities. In one popular quest, students are tasked with cooking a family meal, highlighting the skills of organization, budgeting, communication and anticipating the needs of others. Many boys have expressed how much they enjoy cooking as an act of caring for their siblings and parents, who do so much for them. During the semester partnership with Cobb School, our students recognize that they are being asked to take on new and important responsibilities, including setting a positive example for younger children. Our boys learn the importance of connecting with their Cobb "buddies," getting to know their younger friends so they feel seen and heard. On the walk back to school, our students share their successes and any challenges in developing relationships with their buddies. These experiences have allowed the boys to open up about their own social struggles. As one 7th grade teacher reports, "it seemed as though our boys were learning a lot about themselves by focusing on the needs of other individuals."
- This month, [Dr. Derrick Gay](#) worked with students in grades 4-7 on exploring respect, identity, and empathy. Through fun and interactive sessions, he and our students explored topics such as what they each need from a good apology, beyond the words "I'm sorry." Teachers build upon these lessons in the course of their regular class days and the shared vocabulary is a helpful foundation.
- For a second year, we partnered with [Well Beyond Academics](#) for human sexuality and wellness education in grades 4-8. These sessions are age-appropriate and, depending on the grade level, might include conversations about puberty, self-care, respect and affirmative consent. Well Beyond Academics also facilitated both parent and parent-son workshops. Woven into SEL lessons beginning in kindergarten is the concept of respecting personal space and boundaries, laying the foundation for grasping concepts of consent at an age-appropriate time in students' development.
- As part of our ongoing efforts to support health and wellness in our students, grades 6-8 work with [FCD Prevention Works](#) for devoted class sessions. This work encourages the non-use of alcohol and other illegal or illicit drugs during the growing years, empowering students to make healthy, responsible choices, educating them on the physiological and psychological effects of alcohol and other drugs, promoting awareness of drug addiction, and teaching them how to recognize the early warning signs of substance abuse and to intervene appropriately. FCD Prevention Works educators also meet with teachers and administrators and we hosted a parent education night for parents of students in grades 6-8 with the FCD educators.
- Our faculty have engaged in numerous professional development activities supporting work on character education, inclusion, and cultural competencies. Examples of conferences and workshops from this year include the NAIS People of Color Conference, From Suffrage to #metoo by Teachers College Columbia University, the Learning and the Brain conference on "Educating with Empathy," the White Privilege Conference, Responsive Classroom, and the Institute for Social Emotional Learning.
- An expanded Week of Service in honor of Cesar Chavez better reflects Town's deep commitment to service learning and gives students at every grade level more authentic opportunities to engage in service. The shift to a Week of Service also allows more space for teachers and students to reflect on their service learning experiences.
- Our inaugural school bus program will continue next year. The bus makes four stops each morning, beginning at the Highways 101/280 interchange. We have marketed the bus program to prospective families and are pleased with the broad appeal that this program offers.

Programming in the Dolby Family Center for the Performing Arts includes:

- The Dolby Family Center for the Performing Arts has been transformative in allowing us to develop rich programming for school gatherings and other special events. In addition to strengthening our school community by enabling us to frequently gather as an entire school, we have been able to

forge connections with fellow schools through event and program partnerships. The Dolby also gives us the opportunity to host events for families, adults and the wider community.

- We host regular school-wide assemblies and special celebrations in the Dolby, including the Halloween parade and a Lunar New Year Assembly featuring traditional Chinese Lion and Dragon Dances performed by martial arts masters from the Panda KungFu Center in San Francisco.
- For our Lower School students, we recently hosted a Conference Camp during the second day of parent-teacher conferences. Each grade level started their day in the Dolby, engaging in all-day arts- and STEM-focused games and activities. The kindergartners enjoyed a special LEGO movie screening.
- In addition to serving as a performance venue for every grade, the Dolby has already showcased a number of outside performers, including the San Francisco Boys Chorus and dancers from the San Francisco Ballet. The Burke's 2nd grade class performed on the Dolby stage in January, and some of our Lower School students attended their dress rehearsal.
- We recently hosted basketball playoffs for Upper School teams. This season, nearly every grade enjoyed practice games in our new multi-use space. Hamlin also held a basketball game in the space.
- Our parent and adult programming includes an inaugural Town Film Series that recently featured [THE PUSH](#) and, in partnership with Hamlin, will screen [bias](#) on May 15 with special guests with expertise in artificial intelligence along with the film's director. We hosted the [Common Sense](#) Teen Panel, "Notes to my Middle School Self," which was open to parents at other independent schools. [SPEAK](#) sponsored [Dr. Laurie Santos](#), Yale professor of Psychology and Cognitive Science, who spoke last week about the science of well-being and happiness.