



WESTRIDGE SCHOOL

November 21, 2020

Dear Parents and Students,

Thank you for taking the time to provide such thoughtful feedback through our remote learning survey. We appreciate the many acknowledgements of the effort and care our faculty and staff are providing this year, as well as the strong sense of community that came through your ideas and constructive criticism—we truly are all in this together.

We received responses from more than 40% of parent households and nearly 30% of Middle School students, 25% of Upper School students, and about 20% of Lower School students. A number of clear themes came through. Here is an overview of what we heard:

- **Westridge Wednesdays** are an overwhelming success, providing a break from screens, time for homework, and community connection. Students and parents both requested that we retain these days even during four-day school weeks. We agree! **With the exception of just two more times during the remainder of the school year (the weeks of February 15 and April 5) short weeks going forward will include the special Westridge Wednesday schedule.**
- **Advisory:** More frequent advisory meetings have been a strong addition to the program this fall, but most students and parents feel it isn't needed every day. Middle and Upper School faculty agree, so beginning after Thanksgiving break up until Winter break, we are going to test running advisory only two times each week to understand what is gained and what may be lost before making a final decision.
 - **Upper School advisories will meet at 8:30 am on Tuesday and Thursday only.** School will begin at 9 am on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday.
 - **Middle School advisory will meet on Mondays and Fridays.** On Tuesday and Thursday, school will begin at 9 am. On Wednesdays, students will continue to meet for PE.
- **Online Socializing:** In the Lower School especially, parents and students would like to see more opportunities for online socializing. We will continue to work on this. Plans include:
 - Social hours with Ms. Heydorff for 4th and 5th grade students in the December Tiger Club. Ms. Heydorff will also host 5th and 6th grade optional lunchtime chats next month.
 - We will begin to mix cohorts of Lower School students for morning homeroom meetings so that students will have an opportunity to interact with more students in their grade.
 - Middle Schoolers will offer 4th grade “mix it up” lunchtime Teams meetings in December.

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- **Screen Time:** There is widespread concern about overall screen time and a desire for more time spent in asynchronous learning. We share this concern and are in daily conversations about the conundrum of how we might decrease time in front of computers while they remain the conduits for learning and communication during remote learning. Our goal is for classes to be broken into periods of synchronous learning, collaborative work, and asynchronous learning. We continue to work with faculty to make this approach as consistent as possible while acknowledging that some subjects are more easily adapted to asynchronous learning or offline projects. We are afraid this answer will not feel terribly satisfying but know that we are aware and trying.

There were **suggestions for shorter classes** in the Middle and Upper School which we think are related to issues with screen time. Our 75-minute blocks are needed for the content we cover and the in-depth learning for which we aim. We think this request will be best addressed through our work to break-up activity within our current blocks, and as was also suggested, having teachers integrate more short breaks for stretching or a change of scenery within each block.

Of note: we are planning **two upcoming speakers** related to the topic of screen time and parenting during COVID. On December 2, Lori Getz, a cyber education specialist, will meet with Lower and Middle School students and parents to talk about managing technology in our lives during this period of social distancing. (Detailed information will be sent from the division office.) Details for the second speaker are being finalized and information will be shared in early December.

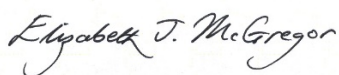
- **Homework:** There is concern in the middle and upper divisions about too much homework. We hear you and are constantly evaluating homework, the pace of teaching and learning, and manner of assessment in light of our desire to provide a serious and engaging Westridge curriculum while acknowledging the added variables and demands of remote learning. It is true that sometimes teachers underestimate their assignments, and that sometimes “heavy” homework days align for different classes. Know that we are deep in this discussion and that if your daughter is consistently concerned, she should speak with her teachers and advisor. Parents may always reach out to teachers, deans, or division directors so that we may discuss individual situations. *A note about holiday breaks: there will not be any homework over Winter Break. Over Thanksgiving break, there is no homework in the Lower and Middle divisions. Upper School teachers will refrain from giving assignments unless they are unavoidable.*
- **Physical movement:** Parents want students to move more – both to break up screen time and to partake in physical activity. We agree and will continue to encourage this and look for more creative ways to integrate movement throughout the school days.
- **Mental Health:** Parents and students in Middle and Upper School suggested more outreach surrounding mental health. Student well-being is always our top priority, even more so in this challenging period. Our director of counseling and student support, Dr. Lisa Carruthers, is a trusted resource for our community and families and students are welcome to reach out to her directly should they need assistance at lcarruthers@westridge.org. In addition, we continue to expand our student support team and have increased the frequency of our grade-level meetings, which provide a forum for teachers to identify students who might need extra support. It is, of course,

more difficult to identify students who are struggling when we are not together in person. Should you have any concerns about your daughter, please contact your division director or Dr. Carruthers immediately.

- **In-person Activities:** You are eager to begin in-person socially distanced activities and athletic conditioning and so are we. We miss our students and, more importantly, know how important connection is to their well-being. We continue to make each decision in step with health authorities and with health and safety as our leading principle. At this time, we have permission to bring back Upper School student athletes for in-person conditioning and have started preparation to begin that after the Thanksgiving break if conditions remain favorable. In mid-January, after several weeks for social isolation after the holidays, we will assess opportunities to begin small-group activities on campus. *We are mindful of not wanting to raise expectations too high at this point because, based on the increase in COVID-19 positivity rates that experts are predicting for the coming weeks, we may have to delay further.*

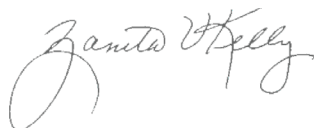
This covers the vast majority of the responses we received from the survey. Know that we have read all of your responses and are also looking into more specific notes and suggestions. We did hear frequently that the Townhall Meetings and regular communication are especially helpful right now and we will keep communication up. Ironically, seeing that this detailed update is only now coming to a close, we can also report that students have appreciated being included in the surveys and community updates but noted their aversion to lengthy emails and requested that we report to them in person. **Students!** If you are still reading, we will have optional drop-in lunch sessions with division directors after break so you can talk about the survey and your thoughts on remote learning in person.

We miss you all and we thank you for your input, support, and patience. Surgere!



Elizabeth J. McGregor

Head of School



Dr. Zanita Kelly

Director of Lower & Middle School



Gary Baldwin

Director of Upper School