August 20, 2019

Thank you, Cary, for your steady and energetic leadership. Your continuance as Board chair during the school leadership transition and into David’s tenure is a very good thing.

CCES’s greatest strength is and has always been its people. Teachers have always had their hearts and souls in their work and in the school. Our teachers have established an exceedingly high performance norm. That’s why we are experiencing record demand. Word of mouth is a powerful instrument with or without social media in spreading favorable testimonies. We have a surge of good feelings and admiration spreading through the Upstate. For that elevated demand, I thank the entire team. The crux of it all is that our faculty deliver the goods day in and day out. Teachers who know and love children win trust. What happens in instructional spaces is the name of the game. The instructional team matters most to students and their parents. You give admissions and marketing the material with which to tell the stories that promote the school.

I am the luckiest Head of School. The administrative team facilitates excellent teaching by providing professional direction, infrastructure improvements (from standing desks to the refresh of the interior of the LS and MS), and professional development opportunities and funds. The stellar work of our administrative team allows teachers to concentrate on the main thing, teaching kids. As Stephen Covey recommends: the “main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing.” We do that especially well. We keep our eye on the ball. Every administrator is here to boost instructional success. Admission and marketing account for the students that the faculty teach. Advancement and Finance generate and manage the resources that faculty need to be all they can be. Doug and his team see to it that our campus is well maintained and running well so that the physical plant supports the learning outcomes. Our technology staff keeps us all connected so that we can collaborate to maximize the good of students. Advancement tells the school stories that warm hearts and promote advocacy and support. The fund-raising story that Jamie shared reflects the energized culture of philanthropy that Advancement is cultivating.

I am daunted by our chaplains: individually and as a trio they are mentors, pastors, shepherds, and wise counselors. Wallace, Valerie, and John Mark animate our Episcopal identity, which is the foundation of our institutional being. This team needs to commit to CCES for life. They are singular and precious. Our college counselors comprise a peerless ensemble. At a recent college summit, with about twenty college reps, our team designed an engaging day that highlighted our school and its students. They are all-stars: professional, well connected, empathetic, and articulate.

When the going gets tough, go to Kathy Corwin. So much of what the administrative team does to support faculty—from Strategic Plan work to flawlessly organizing retreats, board materials, admin council meetings, and innumerable details that make things run smoothly—is attributable to Kathy. Thank you, you saintly one.
The energy and output of the maintenance team adds beauty and functionality to the campus. Mark and his team have completed over 30 significant projects on campus this summer. Many projects upgrade security; several enhance the look of the campus. Some restructured entrances and renewed science labs. The catalog is formidable. Danny and his teams are dedicated to keeping us safe and maintaining cleanliness in our buildings. Our Flik team stands out in these two weeks of re-entry. Thanks to Collin and his folks.

One final nod—this one to a brand new colleague, Dr. Angela Allen. She took charge of the organization of the new faculty onboarding last week and the schedule for this week. She is tireless and unflappable, practical and prudent to a fault.

All of you account for the current prosperity and fitness of the school. You are also the people who will drive evolution of the school as it continually improves. The roadmap for the latest evolution is the Strategic Plan.

CCES has evolved from its origins in 1959. Its campus has moved six and a half miles from the church campus. CCES has grown into a beacon of educational excellence in the Southeast. The success of CCES rests squarely on the Founders’ vision for an Episcopal college prep school. The last sixty years reflects a steadfast allegiance to that vision and a relentless commitment to evolve to fulfill the promise of that vision. We have witnessed significant re-calibration in the church, and the tool kit of a well-equipped college freshman has changed from two decades ago. In remaining true to the original vision, we evolve to respond to external changes and thereby sharpen our relevance and enhance our performance. Change and growth are the fuel of institutional improvement.

Carol Dweck did not invent “growth mindset.” People and institutions have been practicing embracing challenge and risking failure with big ideas and passionate wills for millennia. Our country’s history from the inception in 1776 celebrates a risk taking for the sake of cherished principles and expanded opportunities. Growth mindset is infused in our national DNA and in our school’s genetic code.

Consider a representative sampling of changes that we have instituted since 2008:
- one-to-one laptops;
- Math in Focus;
- mandatory instrument music in fifth grade and the burgeoning of the program;
- the creation of a fifth-grade enclave;
- Global Online Academy,
- a seven period schedule in the US,
- full-fledged foreign language starting in sixth grade,
- the transformational establishment of the Achievement Center,
- the creation of a college counseling office with three full-time veterans,
- the addition of two school counselors,
- the addition of a school nurse,
- mandating uniforms in LS and MS,
- the lucent emergence of our marketing team, SMAC,
- the introduction of JV and varsity LAX and JV soccer programs
- swipe card entry eleven years ago to the latest raft of security innovations.

This inventory is hardly complete, but it testifies to our dynamism. We don’t stand still and satisfy ourselves with good enough. In our current evolution, we will seize the moment to act fervently to achieve our next iteration, one grounded in a relevant and challenging college prep program and fully embraced Episcopal identity.
Moving forward on Strategic Plan action steps and our Diversity and Inclusion initiatives are crucial to keeping pace with the future and remaining faithful to the original vision. The Strategic Plan has momentum. In an early August administrative retreat, Angela reported on the basis of her interviews with Goal committee leaders that 29 action steps are in progress, with eleven “in the queue,” or waiting to be launched. Of those 29, several are familiar: a curriculum map that covers most academic disciplines; more school-wide gatherings; an US counselor; the Lucy Calkins writing program; Cavback and junior internship summer programs; the adoption of core values for the Middle School behavior template, Cavalier Way; the inclusion of a Cavbloc once a month in the Upper School provides time for key Strategic Plan initiatives, and yesterday’s session with Milt that emerged out of a conscious determination to apply the techniques of the Leadership Institute beyond the playing field to the classroom and the stage.

The first three goals of the Strategic Plan will transform the student experience at CCES and cultivate the emotional intelligence to navigate human relationships in this century. Just as a reminder, Goal 1 is to live the Baptismal Covenant; Goal Two is the resilience and growth mindset mandate; and Goal 3 focuses on Wellness, which I would characterize as self-care or healthy habits. Developing these crucial attributes in our students places us in the vanguard of schools dedicated to college preparation for the 21st century. A well-prepared college student must be culturally competent, resilient and risk oriented; and equipped to mitigate negative stress, anxiety, and depression. All of these non-cognitive attributes are learnable. We will instill them just as we inscribe a service mentality among our students. These goals will be integrated into our curricula.

CCES has always treated each student as a precious creation from God. This standard guides our interactions with students. It speaks to who we are. An apt expression of that principle resides in a memorable question raised by Archbishop Tutu: “Isn’t it amazing that we are all made in God’s image, and yet there is so much diversity among his people?” Each of us is a reflection of our Maker, no one less so than another.

CCES has welcomed diversity from its earliest days. CCES stood out in 1967 when Headmaster Rufus Bethea publicly expressed his unequivocal support of equal access to CCES for all families. Mr. Bethea wrote to parents: “The policy of Christ Church Episcopal School since its inception has been one of being open to any qualified student without regard to race, creed, or ethnic origin in accordance with the canons of the Episcopal Church.” For the 1968-69 school year, we admitted our first black students, three youngsters into Primer. As an Episcopal school, we have actively promoted social justice, equity, and inclusion. Now, we will pick up our pace. We will be increasingly systematic in our efforts to promote racial and ethnic diversity.

Our friend, Juan Johnson, likes to highlight the advantages of diversity by analogizing it to an investment portfolio. Diversification maximizes prosperity. Diverse points of view lead to better thinking about our knowledge and values. I love the definition of diversity attributed to Malcolm Forbes; “The art of thinking independently together.” Exposure to divergent points of view sharpens and enriches the discourse in the classroom. Living side-by-side with diverse people, we understand and appreciate one another. Building relationships starts out with presence. They can’t be engineered; they will develop organically through daily interaction with others.

We will respect academic and professional standards and evenly apply them to all applicants for admission and candidates for employment. We are not making “diversity” admits or appointments. We are admitting students who are academically qualified and hiring candidates who demonstrate significant professional promise. Rest assured, progress on this initiative will nourish our school and make us more fully us.

To welcome diverse families and employees successfully, we will monitor our institutional behavior to ferret out implicit bias. Like all of the good things ahead for our school, the foundation for this initiative is firmly in place—in principle, policies, and practices. Our community is distinctive for its efforts to include new families in
the life of the school. In doing so, we honor the Baptismal Covenant, which summons us to ensure a place at
the table for all people who make up or interact with our community. It’s important to be mindful that
diversity efforts will be successful long-term only if we faithfully devote ourselves to genuine inclusion.

CCES is closely tied to the greater Greenville community. We benefit it, and we benefit from it. As it prospers,
we do as well. That relationship grows stronger with greater access of community resources. For example, our
junior intern program, which we will launch next summer, will connect 20-25 rising seniors with professionals
in the community. Students will be our ambassadors representing our brand. It makes sense to capitalize on
the bountiful opportunities in our area. To be good neighbors and corporate citizens, we will work to mirror
the demographics of Greenville.

I am passionate about who we are, where we have been, and where we are going. To channel Milt, let’s savor
the memories while we pursue our dreams.

I wish you a happiness-filled year. Oh, the places we will go...

God bless you, my friends.