

Pinecrest School

Nurturing curiosity, confidence, and a love of learning since 1957

January 19, 2011

Dear Parents:

The Board of Trustees and I have made some recent decisions set to affect enrichment classes for the next school year (2011-12), and I want to share those decisions with you now.

Based on feedback from the school community and an awareness of our target market as a quality independent school in Northern Virginia, we are making the following program changes, beginning September 2011:

- K-6 students will no longer have library as an enrichment class with a library teacher.
- K-6 students will have art one hour per week as an enrichment class with an art teacher.
- Our school's primary foreign language will change from French to Spanish beginning with preschool.
Rising second – sixth grade students will have the opportunity to continue with French if desired instead of taking Spanish.

I know that parents will have many questions about all of this and more. I want to address some of your anticipated questions now.

What about Mrs. Samaha?

We are so grateful for Mrs. Samaha's time at Pinecrest School. She has been our dedicated French teacher for the past 12 years, and we are so appreciative of everything she has done for Pinecrest School. Mrs. Samaha has been a pillar of our community, and Pinecrest has benefited from her wisdom, time, and talents. The change in language does mean that Mrs. Samaha will not return to Pinecrest for the 2011-12 school year, unfortunately.

Who will teach Spanish?

Our plan is to hire a Spanish teacher for preschool, kindergarten, and first grade. Preschool will continue to have foreign language twice a week for twenty minutes per session. Kindergarten and first grade will have foreign language three times a week for thirty minutes per session. I do not yet know who our Spanish teacher will be, but parents will be kept updated as we move through the process.

Second through sixth graders will have Spanish three days a week (thirty minutes per session), but will be using a different method: Rosetta Stone Classroom. Rosetta Stone Classroom is language-learning software specifically designed for schools. Rosetta Stone uses rich visual imagery to help students learn and think in a new language. The association of language and images is an integral part of their "Dynamic Immersion" method, ensuring a direct connection between words and their meanings. Board Chair Nate Carmody and I recently talked with some schools currently using Rosetta Stone. Their references about the program were very positive. Some of their comments included: "it's 1-on-1 instruction – it's not like a regular classroom – it is completely individualized" / "it's interactive" / "Rosetta Stone requires a careful and thoughtful approach – the kids have to be as attentive to it as they would be to a teacher." An assistant superintendent from New Jersey with whom I spoke said that Rosetta Stone has been very well received by both students and parents. The Board and I feel strongly that Rosetta Stone Classroom complements our school's mission of individualized instruction. Based on our research, we feel that students will be conversationally capable when they leave us, after using Rosetta Stone Classroom. Using this program is also a way to allow current students (and families) invested in French to continue their French language learning. Current families of rising second through sixth graders will have a choice with Rosetta Stone: continue to learn French or move to Spanish. There is not an option for students to do two languages at one time, but we feel that the chance to maintain French and continue to build on all that Mrs. Samaha has taught is very valuable.

Why is K-6 Library being eliminated?

Our classroom teachers do an outstanding job of incorporating read-alouds and instilling a love of reading to our students at every level. In the absence of designated library time as an enrichment class, K-6 classroom teachers will take their classes to the library once a week so that students may still check out books, but read-alouds will only happen in the context of the classroom with the teachers, as they already do now. Ms. Minnick will remain at Pinecrest as our preschool 3/4 teacher.

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What about Preschool Library?

Preschool students will continue to have library once a week for twenty minutes per class.

Why are you adding K-6 Art?

The classroom teachers and I feel strongly that art is needed. Ms. Bleggi proposed this to the Board of Trustees this fall, and the Board agreed. Art also appeals to a broad base of students with or without various learning differences, and all students can be successful in art class as it's very individualized. Our plan is that each class will have 1 hour of art per week (in a 1-hour block as opposed to two 30-minute blocks); details will follow about our art curriculum and the art teacher as we have them. We anticipate that the art program will involve students learning different art forms. Art lessons would be taught so that students experience a sequence of activities which will include skills, processes, and communication with art media as well as studying art history and appreciation. The lessons would be structured so that students engage in activities that are appropriate for their intellectual and physical maturity and utilize and build on life experiences.

What about Preschool Art?

Preschool students will not have art as a formal enrichment class. We feel that the preschool teachers incorporate art in an effective and age-appropriate way for preschoolers. When preschoolers move onto our kindergarten, they will have art one hour per week.

What about Computer, Music, and Physical Education?

Computer will continue two days a week (for 30 minutes per session) for K-6 students; due to the length of the preschool day, there are no plans to add computer for preschool at this time. Preschool and K-6 students will continue to have music and PE twice a week (for preschoolers, 20 minutes per session, and for K-6 students, 30 minutes per session). We received many valuable comments on the recent parent survey about enrichment classes. Feedback from that survey is being considered as plans are made for next year.

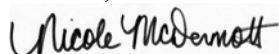
I read this letter, but I still have questions.

I realize that this letter contains a lot of information, and that there may be additional questions beyond what this letter covers. To this end, Board Chair Nate Carmody and I will host an open question and answer session with parents on Monday, January 24, at 9 a.m., in the newer building. Please come and join us. If you have questions, but are unable to attend on the 24th, please let me know and we can set up another time to meet.

I recently came across something I had saved in my email to use for some unknown occasion in the future. It's an anonymous quote from a parent: "You don't always get what you're looking for in one place, but Pinecrest is an exception: polite, courteous children; caring and attentive teachers combined with great leadership and loving parents, all in one place!" We are proud of what we do at Pinecrest on every level, and we are proud of our efforts towards continuous growth. While these changes are...well, big, for lack of a sophisticated term, we feel they are important on our path of continuous growth and continuous improvement. Your commitment to Pinecrest as a parent includes your support of our school's mission and programs and your trust in me, in the faculty and staff, and in the Board of Trustees. We do not take this support or trust lightly and will continue to work tirelessly to maintain it while continuing to ensure that our students get the very best academically, socially, and emotionally.

As is often the case with new beginnings, they come from endings of what came before them. I am sad about what these changes mean for Mrs. Samaha and her role in our community, and I understand that you will feel the same. We wish Mrs. Samaha and her Critical Language Center in McLean the very best, always.

Onward,



Nicole McDermott
Head of School

Enclosures