May 8, 2020

Dear Members of the Ransom Everglades Community,

I know you have a lot of questions about the opening of school in August. We don’t have all the answers, but I want you to know that the leadership of the school, including the Board of Trustees, has been working on this issue and we are beginning to put concrete – albeit tentative – plans in place. Our goal remains to bring students and faculty back in August, and we are doing everything in our power to make that viable. We are currently studying three scenarios for an on-time opening of school: a normal opening with social-distancing plans and additional safety measures in place; a bimodal opening that includes a combination of RE mote School and in-person school; and a full-on continuation of RE mote School. We are focused on providing the highest level of campus safety and highest caliber of education regardless of how circumstances direct our reopening. We recently completed three new hires, all critical at this time: director of security and auxiliary programs, director of buildings and grounds, and chief technology officer. A health and wellness task force has been assisting us with recommendations for creating and sustaining a healthy environment. Our academic leaders continue to assess and strengthen Remote School and will determine what kind of summer work and curricular adjustments are needed going forward. Athletics and arts are similarly engaged. The Board of Trustees is also focused on financial planning.

By early next week, we will begin populating our Summer Explorations website with additional summer course offerings – some for-credit courses (such as Algebra 2 and Geometry) and others for enrichment and skill-building. (We will share a link to that information on our back-to-school webpage.)

Many of you reading this may be familiar with Jim Collins’ influential best seller Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap and Others Don’t. Collins’ hedgehog and flywheel concepts and his imperative to "get the right people in the right seat on the bus" are well known, and the book became a go-to source for businesses and corporations. Good to Great also became a guidepost for independent schools. At my former school, Good to Great was a faculty summer reading assignment, and "good is the enemy of great" was often repeated at leadership team meetings. The National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS) designed one of its annual conferences around Good to Great, and Jim Collins was the featured speaker.

It is hard to believe that was well over a decade ago, and I had not thought much about Good to Great recently until this past Wednesday. A few hours before the Paul Ransom Digital Podium broadcast, Debra Wilson, the executive director of
the Southern Association of Independent Schools (SAIS), reminded a group of heads of school of Collins’ Stockdale Paradox: confront the brutal facts. Later, as I listened to Steve Sawitz ’75 and Shareef Malnik P’19 P’22, *Good to Great* came to mind. Both of their restaurants, Joe’s Stone Crab and The Forge, respectively, embody those qualities that make a company great: the passion, the discipline and the DNA needed to drive break-through performance. Both businesses have weathered and survived all kinds of setbacks, and both restaurants have had a profound effect on the people and the community they serve. They are great companies in every sense.

After the broadcast, I did what a lot of us are doing: I googled. I found Jim Collins speaking about the Stockdale Paradox in March 2020, some 19 years after the release of his book. Simply, the Stockdale paradox is the ability to toggle between optimism and reality, to have the faith that we will get out of this while confronting the brutal facts of our situation. Collins’ message in March was one of optimism tempered by the need to focus on the harsh realities of COVID-19.

That is the spirit behind the efforts of the leadership team – Associate Head of School John A. King, Jr., Chief Operating Officer Rick Bernasco, Head of the Middle School Rachel Rodriguez, Head of the Upper School Patricia Sasser, Director of Admission Amy Sayfie Zichella ’93, Acting Director of Advancement Julie Rosenfeld, Director of Athletics and Physical Education Corey Goff and Director of Communications Amy Shipley – and our dedicated trustees. We will confront the perplexing trajectory of COVID-19 with disciplined research and critical thinking, and we will rely on the insights of experts. We will make it through this, and Ransom Everglades will be every bit the great school it has always been.

As we move forward, hold tight to your optimism and celebrate your children’s many accomplishments as well as their attitude and effort during a couple of challenging and disappointing months. Find the silver linings, and enjoy the time with your families. Thank you for your service to our community – today marks the second RE "Feed the Grove" event. And for the seniors, 14 more days until graduation!

Be well,

Penny