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November 16, 2009

Dear Villa Academy Families,

Many exciting endeavors are underway these days as the students and their teachers are engaged in the work of learning and collaborating. The classroom, common areas, and hallways are alive with a happy, purposeful hum of activity. Community service projects are in full throttle at many grade levels. November 16 is the first day of our all-school CleanScapes Food Waste program, which the Fifth and Sixth Graders are implementing in the Lower and Middle Schools respectively. It is a busy time of year and I encourage a close reading of the weekly Monday Memos in the weeks ahead as we move into Thanksgiving, Advent, and the Christmas season.

On November 16, a team of educators and staff members will attend a PNAIS workshop on "Creating Inclusive Communities: Teaching, Leading, Learning." Kate Brooks, Norma Jenner, Katie McPhail, and I will be joining colleagues from other independent schools to consider the ways we communicate with our internal and external constituents around issues of cultural competence and diversity. We will focus on strategies to develop communities that "work" for students and their families from different socioeconomic, ethnic, and racial groups.

This workshop is of interest to our school in light of its most recent PNAIS accreditation recommendation to "refine further the school's diversity statement and delineate the meaning of diversity and its impact upon the school community."

The Board of Trustees has already revised the school's Statement on Cultural Competency and Diversity and it appears as follows:

In the spirit of the Cabrinian tradition, cultural competency is essential to the education of the whole child at Villa Academy. In an effort to honor, respect, and engage people from all walks of life, we nurture in our students a desire to seek solidarity with all whom they may encounter. We endeavor to create opportunities for constructive dialogue and responsible action. At Villa Academy, the entire community works together to develop a greater understanding of the complexities of a diverse and global society.

Villa Academy strives to be welcoming, inclusive and accessible to all members of its present and future school community. While acknowledging the value of all forms of diversity, we recognize the need to focus our efforts to build on the diversity that exists in our community. Therefore, in accordance with our Cabrinian heritage, we will seek greater socioeconomic, ethnic, and racial diversity and cultural competency within our school community.

Approved by Villa Academy's Board of Trustees,
June 14, 2008

Our workshop team has already met to talk about plans to follow up on the PNAIS conference with a goal to be consistent in our policies and practices, to create culturally responsive classrooms, to look at the best practices of other schools in regard to cultural inclusion, and to bring back a conversation about how we can continue to engender in our students a greater understanding of the complexities of a diverse and global society.

God Bless,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Polly Skinner".

Head of School