October 14, 2011

Dear Pine Crest Families,

The first six weeks of School are among the most exhilarating of the year. Pre-kindergarteners discover the thrill of classroom learning for the first time; fourth graders discover what it means to “switch classes;” ninth graders discover the responsibility that comes with greater independence; and seniors begin to have deeper conversations about their lives beyond Pine Crest. From the President’s Office, I have the opportunity to be part of it all. I hope you feel the energy as much as I do. After all, we are Pine Crest.

I often say, “We are Pine Crest,” during school events and functions, in written communications with you, and even in impromptu conversations with students and parents. Never have I been more proud to be part of a community. As we continue to transition, we search for insight. In my first communication to you last May as Acting President, I acknowledged that there are many unanswered questions. “Where have we been?” and “Where are we heading?” were the questions on many of your minds. Today I begin to tackle those questions with some preliminary answers.

Where have we been?
In my short tenure as your Acting President, I have spent time with countless graduates, both very recent as well as from decades past. Many shared that the academic skills they honed at Pine Crest gave them the tools necessary for success in college, and life. In many cases, alumni spoke to me about their years at Pine Crest with vivid stories and nostalgia that illustrated how wonderfully our school has enriched their lives. Without question, this is a testament to my predecessors, whose fortitude and vision for Pine Crest began our path to greatness. Over the past 77 years, we have built a peerless academic reputation that we will not compromise.

Where are we going?
We are developing answers for this complex question, through ongoing dialogue, evaluation, and reflection. In an effort to chart a course for our future, we revised our mission statement two years ago, a first step toward establishing the change necessary to help our students meet “the global challenges of our future” through a “nurturing learning community.”

Pine Crest maintains an academic standard by which other schools are measured. We will continue to refine and strengthen our curriculum, communication, and opportunities for our students and the faculty who guide them. We will evaluate our learning environments, including our class sizes. Already this school year, more than 28 percent of Pine Crest’s 2012 graduating class has received national recognition for academic achievements. On a weekly basis, my office receives word of numerous commendations and awards being given to our students and faculty. As a School, our collective achievements are unparalleled.
In order to prepare our graduates to become leaders of the future, we must present opportunities for them to learn conceptually, which often will go “beyond the book.” As a Thinking School, Pine Crest will create opportunities for our students to learn a very different skill set from those of prior generations. Our dedicated faculty and administrators have demonstrated their commitment to this mission, and to developing and implementing the changes necessary to make it a reality. We will continue to honor teachers’ commitments by offering more professional development opportunities for brain-based learning. We will implement programs that will improve and analyze standardized test scores, which will allow us to teach more effectively and give our students a more relevant test-taking experience.

As part of my commitment to keep you informed, I will send monthly updates on our progress, which will be followed by pertinent school news and newsletters from our division heads. No matter what questions remain or what changes we make, always remember that we will continue to raise the bar and set the standard. We will deliver on our promise, and we will maintain our standing as an academic authority.

Sincerely yours,

Dana Markham, Ed.D.

Acting President