Dear Parent,

Congratulations - your students successfully completed the 2019-2020 school year.. and what a year it was! During this time, we were reminded again and again of how important our community is to one another. We are blessed to have amazing faculty that jumped from in-person learning to virtual teaching with little time to prepare, dedicated parents that stepped up to help our students adjust to distance learning, wonderful administrators who led us all through these unprecedented times, and a supportive Board of Trustees. The Waldron Mercy community is nothing short of amazing!

Before we look forward to our fall opening, we wanted, as we always do as the school year ends, to look back and celebrate the accomplishments of the 2019-2020 school year.

Academics

It was wonderful to be able to see our eighth grade students in person for their drive-up Graduation ceremony. Our accomplished and confident students are moving on to a variety of notable schools, and we are proud of the many students who received scholarships for their pursuits in outreach and academics. They are all true testaments to a Waldron Mercy education and will be greatly missed.

During the year, students of all ages participated in a variety of new events that were integrated into the curricula. In the fall, our students gathered for a Hispanic Heritage Celebration, learning about the important contributions of Hispanic people in art, science, athletics, and more, while practicing their Spanish language skills. During World Read Aloud Day, our students were exposed to new stories read by everyone from our teachers to authors to astronauts. This year for the first time, our students also participated in Global Maker Day, a worldwide educational initiative that aims to help students become more innovative and creative problem solvers, where each grade solved specific challenges using a limited set of materials.

A new Mercy curriculum was introduced across all grade levels this year. This curriculum, written over last summer as a collaboration between Mercy elementary educators, is a way to link our school with Mercy schools around the world, and strengthens our students’ awareness of what Mercy really means in a Mercy school.
The math curriculum continues to evolve with progression towards all 8th graders completing more if not all of the Algebra 1 content. Our new science curriculum in grades 4-8 provided greater experiential learning opportunities, creating more excitement and engagement in science. The Spanish program began the use of some digital components to enhance student comprehension of the language and its mechanics.

When the format changed to remote instruction, our teachers didn’t let Distance Learning hold them back, but in fact added new experiences: some students (virtually) traveled to France to see and discuss architecture, toured Catherine McAuley’s house on Baggot Street in Dublin, Ireland, headed to the zoo to learn about animals, watched each other perform in a talent show, and so much more. And while separated by distance, the support services that are critical to some of our learners continued virtually with our own specialists and through the Montgomery County Intermediate Unit.

In recognizing the need for adaptability in a successful remote learning program, we created and then took into consideration the responses to our Parent Survey and implemented changes immediately. Our Reopening Task Force will continue to review the survey data, and develop new surveys, as we form our plans for the next school year.

**Safety**

This year continued our focus on examining and improving safety and security on campus. Four new speed bumps were added around campus to slow down drivers on campus. This year we also began closing our car line doors at 8:15 a.m. This system increased security by shortening the time the doors were open, allowing roll to be taken earlier, knowing who was (and who wasn’t) on campus more quickly, and giving time for teachers to plan more relationship building activities in a longer homeroom period.

Also this past year WMA received a $24,000 state grant that together with Tigerfest Fud-A-Cause donations will be used this summer to install phone lines that will minimize the disruption of walkie-talkies throughout the building and allow for enhanced security and communication throughout the building, especially in an emergency.

**Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion**

We continued to expand our efforts to talk about and address diversity and inclusion with our students. This past fall Dr. Juliana Mosely, the College Officer for Diversity and Inclusion at Chestnut Hill College, facilitated workshops with our sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students and led an evening conversation with parents of students in those grade levels. The DEI assembly planned for the spring that was cancelled due to COVID has been moved to this September.

Thanks to eighth grader Leah G.’s efforts, Mix It Up at Lunch Day was brought back to WMA. This international campaign encourages students to identify, question and cross social boundaries. Eighth grade students facilitated the event where students sat with new people across different grade levels.
**Extracurricular Activities**

Our athletes had phenomenal seasons this year. WMA began a chapter of Girls on the Run this year, which continued during Distance Learning. Among the team highlights: our Varsity CAL Boys Basketball team won the championship trophy; varsity soccer qualified for the championship playoffs; and instructional field hockey had a record number of participants. To celebrate these achievements and our eighth grade graduating athletes, we ended the year with our first Virtual Sports Banquet!

Athletics wasn’t the only way students stayed active on lockdown: our student-favorite tradition of Field Day was able to continue at home, and most clubs, many music lessons, and even Reading Olympics went on remotely. Our students continued to create art based on our theme Art in Spanish Speaking Countries, and if you haven’t done so already, you can appreciate all the beautiful artwork in the Virtual Art Show by clicking here.

Although they were unable to actually perform onstage, I do want to acknowledge our musical theater students for the hard work and effort they put into preparing for both the Stars and Stripes and Spring Musical productions. The lessons they learned during these rehearsals will be evident in their future performances and public speaking efforts.

**Mercy in Action**

It is clear to all that our community is overflowing with Mercy Spirit, as we continued established traditions and looked for new ways, several of which are highlighted here, to immerse our students and staff in our Mercy charism.

Fourth grade teachers taught their students to be Mercy activists for climate change when they wrote letters to their government representatives advocating for our Earth, one of the Sisters of Mercy’s Critical Concerns. Those students were able to see how their actions can make a difference when Senator Bob Casey responded to their letters. And this past fall, our staff showed that we don’t just teach Mercy - we also live it - by participating in a Global Climate Day of Action protest on Montgomery Avenue that was organized by the Sisters of Mercy.

For October’s Breast Cancer Awareness Month, we filled the halls with visual representations of our prayers for those in our community affected by the disease. November brought our book fair where families had the opportunity to purchase books for one of our outreach partners. Our families donated $500 worth of books to bolster the classroom libraries at St. Francis Cabrini, a Philadelphia parochial school, and each kindergartener at St. Francis Cabrini had the opportunity to pick out a book from the fair to take home.

WMA’s Mercy spirit was truly visible during the COVID-19 pandemic. Families followed our school’s example of donating masks to local hospitals; went above and beyond our usual monthly dinners by
funding a full seven nights of dinners for residents at St. Columba; and raised money to feed healthcare heroes and the homeless. Most recently our alum families contributed to our newly established Circle of Mercy Emergency Fund.

During our time apart this spring, we also continued our grade level retreats virtually, reimagined our Passion Play; and joined together to pray the rosary together and write letters to individual Sisters of Mercy who live on our campus. I was so pleased to receive the following note from the Sisters:

Our sisters at the Convent of Mercy have received many beautiful and creative cards and notes from the students of Waldron Mercy Academy. Their prayers, well wishes and expressions of care are very heartwarming. Please be sure to let the students and parents know how much we appreciate and treasure each letter and the students as authors. We also will keep them and their families in our daily prayers as we chart our way together through these pandemic days with faith and hope. May God bless you all!

Middle States Accreditation

We are proudly moving into the 2020-2021 school year re-accredited by the Middle States Commission on Elementary and Secondary Schools! As part of our re-accreditation, we created an Action Research Plan that benefits the mental health of our students by building their resilience. This past year we focused on building connections between and among students and staff by, among other plans, initiating a longer homeroom, introducing more connection building activities, and making it a point to greet each child by name as they each enter the classroom. Students completed surveys as a way to gauge the progress made as we continue to implement the plan over the next several years. They definitely had a need for their resilience skills throughout their distance learning days!

And also...

You’re probably so accustomed to it by now that you forgot that we launched a revamped website and Parent Portal in August! Our website is more modern and makes it easier for current and prospective families to find everything they need.

We revealed our amazing plans for our cafeteria renovation to our students, parents, and other WMA constituents this year. Although we were progressing well in planning, construction preparation, and initial fundraising, COVID-19 presented logistical uncertainties and the Board of Trustees determined it best to postpone the cafeteria renovation until next summer. You’ll hear more about the project as the school year progresses.

This February, a core group of staff, Trustees, parents, alumni, parents of alumni, and community members met to begin the creation of a new Strategic Plan. The group has been working diligently over the past months to gather information and data across seven domains - from our Mercy Catholic identity to academics and finances, and will continue their work this fall.
Summer Projects

- Developing reopening plans for the 2020-2021 school year
- Providing staff professional development to support distance learning and other plans
- Purchasing books and materials to better reflect our diverse student body
- Purchasing, using a list developed by WMA Trustee Curtis Cockenberg ’67, a reading specialist with a Masters of Science in Reading, fiction and non-fiction student reading material focused on diverse authors and subject matters
- Continuing implementation of the Middle States Resilience Action Research Plan

Over this summer, I urge you to continue to pause at 6:30 each night to pray for all the members of our community and the hardships with which they may be struggling. In the words of Catherine McAuley, “we have one solid comfort amidst this little tripping about: our hearts can always be in the same place, centered in God, for whom alone we go forward or stay back.” Thank you for remaining our strongest supporters through this constantly changing, unprecedented time. Our community is our strength, and we could not have done any of this without all of you.

Yours in Mercy,

Ann Marie