



News in the HS @ ISP

August 10, 2009

Greetings Parents of ISP High School Students,

The 2009 – 2010 school year has officially begun. We got off to a good start yesterday, and with hundreds of details to put in place. I hope that your sons and daughters came home from Day One with news of a smooth and exciting start. I told them all at our Opening Assembly and Flag Ceremony that I wished for them a year in which they feel inspired, challenged and supported at ISP. If we achieve all three of those aspirations with our students, this will be a great year for the HS and for the International School of Panama.

Your sons and daughters all received their schedules of classes yesterday in their Advisory groups. There is a Drop/Add Period of three weeks, in which students can make changes to their schedules. A great deal of work went into setting up the Master Schedule (beginning last April), and student schedules were finalized over the summer, according to the course request forms submitted. I believe that we will only see minor changes during the Drop/Add Period. Please take a look at your son or daughter's schedule and review with them whether the classes are the ones they want and need for fulfilling graduation requirements.

So, as we launch the 09-10 school year, I would like to highlight a few important developments and news items for you all to be aware of regarding the high school.

- **Growth**
You have already heard in some detail from Ms. LaPine about the growth of ISP and the on-going construction. The high school is opening this year with 220 students, and ISP with over 900. More and more families arriving in Panama seem to be seeking out ISP, and I believe this is because of our reputation for academic excellence and for being a truly international institution. To accommodate this growth, the construction work continues. The impact on the HS, for now, is in the cafetorium. The new kitchen and cafetorium will be fully functional in a few weeks' time. HS students have plenty of options for snack and lunch in the meantime, but no hot food for these first few weeks. We greatly appreciate your understanding and flexibility.
- **HS Faculty & Additions**
Our core team of high school teachers is back this year. As you know, our team is a mix of ISP founders who have been here for over 20 years, some longstanding faculty veterans, and a number of recent arrivals. We believe it is a dynamic mix of professionals – some who know ISP's history so well, and others who come with valuable experience from other international

schools. We have added a small and outstanding group of new teachers to the HS team this year: Mr. Steve McCallum in IB English, Ms. Darlene Frketich in IB Chemistry, Ms. Pamela Montgomery in ESL, Mr. Brett Banducci in Social Studies, and Mr. Erik Kehl and Ms. Nyasha Warren in Learning Support and Resource. Ms. Cristy Kelso also joins ISP (ES, MS and HS) as our new Athletics and After School Activities Coordinator. We are quite fortunate to add these excellent educators to the existing core team.

- **Open House / Back to School Night**

A great opportunity for you to meet these new teachers, along with all of your child's other teachers, will be at the High School Open House / Back to School Night on Wednesday, September 2. Based on strong feedback from parents last year, our program this year will start at 4:00 in the afternoon and run until 7:00. Please mark the date on your calendar and plan on joining us then.

- **HS Advisory**

I am quite proud to announce to you that we have brought the High School Advisory back this year. Our faculty last year recognized that this was a vital and missing piece of our program. A committee, led by the HS counselor Mr. Seedorf and History/Economics teacher Dr. Krohn, put together a pilot Advisory program for this year. We have 20 advisory groups in grades 9 – 12. Each Advisor has a group of about 10 to 13 students in the grade level he/she teaches. They meet every Wednesday for 20 minutes (between the 2nd and 3rd block classes), and check in throughout the week as needed. Essentially the goals of the advisory program are: to know our students better, to create a small community group within the grade level, to provide parents with a valuable contact person on the faculty, and to support each student in ways academic, social-emotional, etc. Advisors will be contacting parents in the days ahead to introduce themselves to you.

- **Student Handbook**

All students received the High School Student Handbook in the first Advisory session. This is a vital document explaining the various rules, guidelines, routines and procedures in the high school. There are only a few changes, but they are important. Mostly, we have made clarifications and I believe you will find a more reader-friendly handbook. Our students are accountable for knowing and following these rules and guidelines, so please read over the handbook and encourage your son or daughter to review it carefully. The sections regarding attendance, uniform and electronic devices are important ones to review. The Student Handbook will also be published on the ISP web-page for you to access there as well.

- **IB Scores**

Of our 50 graduating seniors last year, 20 of them were pursuing the prestigious IB Diploma. Our IB Diploma success rate was 95% and our average exam score in the many IB courses was just over 5 – which is considered Good on the IB scale of 1-7. We had many students who earned 6s and 7s, and we had students who earned 3s and 4s. An average of 5 suggests that our average IB student is achieving good results, and that is something of which we can be proud. We also embrace the reality that we still have room to improve. Our incoming class of 11th grade IB students has the largest group of IB Diploma candidates that ISP has ever seen. That is a promising indicator of the strength of our program and of a steadily rising standard. You can expect more detailed information, regular communications and IB Newsletters in the months ahead from our IB Coordinator, Mr. Salah Altaji.

- **PANAMUN, AASCA, etc.**

Mark your calendars with a few important HS events that will be coming up in the early part of the year. Our boys and girls basketball teams will travel to San Jose, Costa Rica from October 7 through 11 to compete in the Association of American Schools of Central America (AASCA)

tournament. We will be starting 4-day a week practices this week in preparation, in the hopes of putting two very competitive teams on the court in San Jose. We are also hoping to take a team to the AASCA Knowledge Bowl in November.

The annual PANAMUN conference – a proud and signature component of our HS program – will take place this year on October 28, 29 and 30. Every one of our HS students will participate, as debaters, committee heads, journalists or administrative team. We will also welcome an additional 200 students visiting from other schools around the region, and around the world. Our social studies department chair, Mr. David Swartwout, is the MUN Director this year and he will be in contact with parents in the days ahead. Every year PANAMUN is an intense experience, when students conduct themselves as world leaders and grapple with the issues and problems that face our planet. In a school year of many worthwhile and empowering experiences for our young people, there is none quite so invigorating as PANAMUN.

That is certainly enough information for now. I will do my best to send parents a monthly News in the HS. Please be in touch with us for any questions or concerns, and let us know how we can assist. My email address is dmckee@isp.edu.pa

And you may also rely on Sharon Johnson (sjohnson@isp.edu.pa), the high school secretary. And, a great help to us, we have added a second HS secretary this year. She is Reyna Gonzalez (rgonzalez@isp.edu.pa).

I hope it is a great year for your sons and daughters in the high school. A year in which they all feel inspired, challenged and supported. All the best!

Daniel McKee
High School Principal