Ahead in 2020: Paideia@50 and Annual Auction

By John Jordak, Paideia Board of Trustees Member

As a board of trustees member, I chair the board’s development committee which works with the development office to raise money through the Annual Fund and occasional capital campaigns. Annual Fund and capital campaigns are not the only fundraising at the school. Trustees and parents also raise money through the large parent involvement efforts, most notably the Auction and Art Visions. While the Paideia@50 capital campaign will overwhelmingly be the school’s financial priority in 2020, the Auction remains important from a financial perspective as well as our community commitment to financial aid.

Mark your calendar for an exciting start to 2020. Hope to see everyone at both events.

As some of you may know, the Paideia@50 three-year $35 million capital campaign formally launches in January. It has been well over a decade since Paideia’s last capital campaign. For almost all of us this capital fundraising is new. Paideia@50 could not have come at a more critical time in our school’s history. The campaign will raise much needed funds for new and improved academic space (a brand-new junior high to make room for extensive renovations to existing spaces for expanded elementary and high school programming), playground renovations, and significant upgrades at Python Park. The campaign will also increase Paideia’s endowment, a critical component for the overall financial health of Paideia. We will share more details about our plans at the current parent launch party on Saturday, Jan. 25. More details to come!

We all look forward to the Paideia Auction every spring - the festive spirit in the room, the camaraderie among parents and other volunteers who spend months planning and preparing, and the excitement of the live bidding for spectacular experiences (and perhaps some wine). Most importantly, however, the Auction raises funds for financial aid — a past, present, and future core value at Paideia. On Saturday, March 28, our school community will gather once again for the 2020 Auction - this time, in Paideia’s main gymnasium. That’s right, we will go old school at school to celebrate with food, fun, friends, and fundraising by bidding on the many wonderful donated items that we all love.

Grandparents’ and Special Friends Day and Fall BBQ Combine for a Great Weekend

Grandparents and Special Friends’ Day drew hundreds of visitors as these special guests got a glimpse of a day at school at Paideia from the half day to high school. The day began with a program in the theater that featured student musical performances and welcome speeches from Amelia Gaines, chair of the high school Steering Committee, Elizabeth Bliss and Frank Critz, Paideia grandparents, Paul Bianchi, headmaster, and Melinda Cooper Holladay, board of trustees chair. Later in the day, Grandparents and special friends were entertained by performances by the high school concert band and jazz ensemble. The Oct. 3 event was followed the next day by the Fall BBQ, which drew hundreds of families for food, music and a good time. Both events were put on by scores of parent volunteers led by Hellena Moon and Cindy Stemple, chair and chair-elect of Grandparents and Special Friends’ Day and Nicole Cheng and Jen Kahlon chair and chair-elect of the Fall BBQ.

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Elementary PiRanger Outdoor Club Explores Cloudland Canyon

Kirsty Lubicz-Nawrocka, Elementary Science Coordinator

Over the first weekend in November, Gavin Drummond and I took a group of fourth and fifth graders for a two-night adventure in Cloudland Canyon. The after-school elementary club, called PiRangers, met weekly during the fall and planned the entire expedition. They learned “Leave No Trace” strategies, organized the menu, practiced with camping equipment and put together first aid kits for their hiking packs.

The weather was outstanding, sunny and very cold. Temperatures dropped to around 29 degrees during the night, but the PiRangers are a hearty crew, and tea and hot chocolate came to the rescue. On Saturday, we were extremely fortunate to meet up with two volunteers from the “Friends of the Canyon” group. A retired DNR geology expert and a retired science teacher took us on a four-hour journey into deep, off-park locations to see special geological features, caves, old coal mines and the highlight of the day for our explorers: a remote area where we saw 300 million-year-old plant fossils in every other rock we turned over. Wow!

At the end of this long, exciting day, Gavin helped the chilly PiRangers build a strong campfire while I worked with kids in the “kitchen” getting their pasta dinner, complete with salad and garlic bread, prepared. Both Gavin and I have spent many years working with children in the outdoors; teaching self-sufficiency, self-confidence and just enjoying being a child in nature is something we both hold close to our hearts. This group of PiRangers did a wonderful job at all of these skills and we were both very proud of all of them. See you in the spring!

Diwali Displays Explain Hindu Festival to Students

Diwali, the Hindu festival of lights, took center stage at the elementary library where tables were decorated with traditional lights, colorful statues and fabrics. And in Isabelle and Kristen’s class, students were treated to their own special celebration led by Paideia parent, Vandana Ramaswamy.

“We’ve tried to make it more of a cultural event, rather than strictly a religious one,” she said of the afternoon visit with excited students. But the holiday does focus on Lakshmi, who is the goddess of luck, wealth and prosperity, she explained.

Students got a chance to decorate clay diyas, which are shallow dishes that are made into oil lamps. All kinds of colorful markers, especially metallic ones, were used to decorate the round vessels with intricate designs. Vandana, who was wearing a traditional sari, lit candles and had incense burning to add to the atmosphere.

In the library, the display included diyas and figurines of religious characters, as well as examples of the dress and possessions of people who celebrate Diwali.
The Gift of Listening and Writing Poetry

By Elisa Herrera, Elementary Teacher

Each year at Paideia, I have been given a gift. It hasn’t come in a neatly wrapped package, complete with hand lettered note. Yet, there it has been, each year, in the spring, waiting for me. It is shared with my classroom; it is not given just for me. It is the gift of poetry and listening, given freely when John Fox, a visiting poet therapist, enters the room quietly, book and tea in hand.

He tells the students a bit about his life, how poetry helped him heal after a surgery to amputate part of his leg, and then he asks a question few us take the time to ponder. What does it feel like to have someone truly listen? The room invariably goes silent for a few beats. Then hands raise. Students talk about feeling special, feeling heard and understood, that not being listened to can sometimes make you feel alone, unimportant. Heads nod. It is clear. This is a time of truly listening.

John continues with his queries, then asks if we can look at poems, some written by famous poets, some by students around the same age as those in my room.

We find favorite lines, words that strike us, images that move us. Then, we settle down to write with a prompt from John. Some pencils move tentatively over the blank pages. Others fly. It is always a surprise, a pleasure, to see poets emerge from one unexpected corner after another. It is always a surprise to see my own words emerge on my paper.

Then comes time to share. Some hands shoot up. The room is silent as each volunteer reads aloud, then reads aloud a second time at John’s beckoning. Murmurs of agreement, nods. We’re not there to criticize, just to listen. Listeners find words that stick with them, surprise them. Once the ice is broken, more hands shoot up. The time goes by quickly. It is time for the gift giver to head to his next classroom. Children stream by, thanking John as he packs up his supplies. I prepare to escort him to his next stop.

One year, as John departed, a boy wistfully sighed, “I love writing poetry. I wish I could write it all the time.” After a few times with John Fox, I know exactly what he means.

The Sun, by Alok Ahn

The sun sits in the big long sky
Warming the world
Growing the plants
Embracing life
It always shines
Bright and luminescent
Making its way through the clean air of earth
Waking up the world
Adding color
Then settling back down again
A small dot in the infinite universe
But a big dot in our world

Photo, by Mika Hernacki

A photo
Is more than just paper and ink
A photo
Tells the stories of forgotten times
A photo reminds you of things happy or sad
A photo
Reminds you of what you once were
A photo
Gets hung on the wall to remind you of a friend
A photo
Gets torn in half when it makes you mad
A photo
Gets put in a box as a reminder of your past
A photo
Can make you laugh
A photo
Can make you smile
A photo
Can make you cry
A photo
One simple photo can make the whole world stop
A photo
Is more than paper and ink

Shoes, by Abby Ippen

I walk through the rain
Every rain drop sinking into my shoes.
My shoes help me walk through
The dark and stormy night.
They are padding, cushions for the Terrors you may encounter.
You take steps on the cold
Solid ground and they lead the Way for you to walk, with no pain.
They protect you from pain others May put down. They protect you from The cold, sloped, ground that the world has.
They are the padding and armor that Helps you persevere though every day And day to come.

Pencil, by Porter Higgins

Carved of fine sleek wood,
Injected with graphite.
The tool to find for :
Notes, letters, stories
Confessions, and maybe dreams.
Could be frantically writing down what comes to mind
It could be cool, calm and collected Writing what was thought out and planned.
Making streaks a shade above black, And healing friendships or shattering them. It is the strongest object in the book.
A pencil is used for many powerful things. Breaking and sealing anything that can be sealed or broken.

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“Have A Great Day”

By Paul Bianchi

“Have a great day.” Everybody says it, from the person in the drive-through window to the phone representative who troubleshoots my constant cable problems. Elementary children opening the door for me on the side porch say it, as do parents pulling out of carpool line to scurry off to work.

It’s quite possible that my status as senior campus curmudgeon is clouding my sunny disposition, but, bah-humbug, I have come to believe that “have a great day” is problematic. It’s more than just a harmless throw away line. Instead, it creates and extends the unrealistic expectations so many of us live with and pass along to children.

Let’s face it: a successful week has, at best, several good days in it; great days, like great presidents or great shortstops, are by definition few and far between. The only people who string together unbroken sequences of great days are the people who design birthday greetings for Hallmark cards, and they are paid to uplift us.

A portion of all my days, from annoying and disappointing to occasionally great, are spent thinking about child rearing and education. Is this idea or that practice good for the kids, I ask myself. Telling children that great days await them every morning and in every endeavor is to set them up for expectations impossible to deliver.

We live in an age of inflated expectations. Take youth sports, for instance. Paideia students have been playing youth soccer since the beginning of the school, but only in the last decade or so has advanced placement soccer become an option with its 12-month commitment, paid coaches, greater travel, extensive wardrobes, and pyramids of increasing competition.

Many children are now encouraged to major in one sport: it is rare to find a multi-sport athlete in high school. A few years ago Paideia had a young woman who played on three varsity teams. The coaches were so thrilled that they created a special award for her. Also, it is not uncommon for the coaches in the outside advanced placement world to forbid their players to be part of their high school or even junior high teams. Fortunately, interest and talent in music and art have not spawned equivalent networks.

Greatness in athletics is rare and we ought not to pretend otherwise. Paideia has had numerous graduates move on to compete in college Division I programs, but last I checked, only one, swimmer Dean Farris ’16, is nationally prominent (and now training for the Olympics). Everyone else, as the NCAA advertisement counsels, have gone on to what we hope are satisfying jobs in other areas.

“Have a great day” can be equally problematic in academics and intellectual achievement. First of all, does it mean the highest G.P.A. possible? Let’s hope not because grades and test scores measure only a small part of what we think of as intelligence, and they fail to predict many achievements and opportunities that come with other manifestations of intelligence.

As much as we promote this de-emphasis of grades and scores with older Paideia students, my guess is that we are not entirely believed. Grades and test scores are concrete numbers that one can take to the bank. Creativity, resourcefulness, curiosity, independent thought, and the ability to work with others are probably more valuable qualities, but, alas, they are less quantifiable.

When we narrow the definition of intellectual achievement to grades and scores, the pressure on most students increases, and this pressure does not help them grow. Teachers hate the question “will this be on the test” because the question assumes that nothing else being learned in the course much matters.

We want education to be a process of opening up, not a process of constricted thinking and grade obsession. We live in a time of less opening up. Although it’s always easy to blame the victims, it’s not the fault of the young. They are only doing what the older generation implicitly or explicitly has told them are good things to do.

The corruption and outrageous behavior reported in the national press regarding falsifying college applications, bribing college officials, and terrorizing high school college counselors are extreme reactions to the anxiety many parents feel about the American future that awaits their children. Parents are more stressed, and that stress is in the air for their children to breathe. Maybe a student has to have lots of great days in school and in extracurricular activities to put on an application to have the same chance that seemed to be more readily available to an earlier generation.

One of the many things I appreciate about the Paideia community is the culture that we are still a step behind, or a step away from the excessive pressure befalling similar school communities in many other major cities.

While the Paideia bubble is not impervious to those societal pressures, fewer of those pressures infect the school. Parents and students do not enter the college placement process with a list of colleges and universities all of which are highly selective. We take pride that every year 100 graduates head off to 60 or more colleges and universities. They typically spread out across the land and enroll in schools as different as the University of Michigan, Elon, Emory, Auburn, Davidson, and Columbia.

Another measure of the good health of the community is the attitude toward sports among our oldest students. Most Paideia teams are highly competitive with notable interscholastic success over the last few years in soccer, tennis, cross country, and girls’ basketball. Most important, these successes come without im-
Alt Break brings Service Learning Closer to Home

When 14 Paideia students in grades 9-12 spent their alternate fall break in the nearby community of Clarkston, their experience brought them a wealth of out-of-the-comfort zone moments.

The found themselves working on a local farm, teaching afterschool classes, learning how to make chai tea, eating cuisines from many different cultures and last but not least, getting to know people who have had to leave their homes in countries including Syria and Myanmar, Congo and Afghanistan.

That those people are making a new life just 15 miles east of downtown Atlanta made it easier for students to become familiar with a unique neighborhood right in their own backyard, explained Natalie Rogovin, director of service learning and civic involvement.

Clarkston New American Experience was the 2019 focus of fall break Oct. 17 and 18. Participants were: Lily Babcock, Josie Bond, Aminah Gassama, Anne Hanes, Adi Kadragic, Hayden Levine, Margaret Pope, Emma Schulder, Isabel Seward, Javier Pardo, Cate Taylor, Sophia Yang, Sean Zheng and Christina Walker.

One student, Aminah, wrote in her journal about the experience, “I’ve always known I wanted to travel and help people, but for the first time ever I feel like I can clearly see career options I’m interested in…I might even want to live in Clarkston when I’m older.”

The structure of alt-break programs has recently changed, thanks to a recent partnership with Breakaway. Breakaway is a national nonprofit organization that promotes the development of quality alternative break programs through training, assisting, and connecting campuses and communities. The organization has chapters on about 200 college campuses throughout the United States.

As a result of the partnership with Breakaway, Paideia has shifted emphasis from destination-based alt breaks to issue-based breaks, planning to serve local regions. And immigration is a timely and relevant issue exemplified in Clarkston, one of the longest established and varied immigrant communities in the region.

Natalie also pointed out that by picking locations where an ongoing impact can be made – a place which is a six-to-eight-hour drive away – means participants will be leaving a smaller footprint than they would if they were flying to some far-off location. Also, the new game plan means simple living in local facilities and bringing along a compost bucket everywhere, even to restaurants.

Cross Country Teams Make Top 10 at State

The varsity cross country teams placed in the top 10 at Georgia High School Association state championship on Nov. 2. The boys’ team placed third and the girls’ team placed sixth. Boys’ team members Sam Colton and Elijah McCauley placed ninth and 10th in 1A Private. Girls’ team members Luna McCauley and Jordan Walter placed sixth and ninth in 1A Private.

Have a Great Day continued

moral recruiting behavior and the manipulation of financial aid. Furthermore, the widespread popularity of ultimate Frisbee at Paideia reflects an interest in sports apart from the excesses that have distorted some more conventional sports. Over the years, these teams have won multiple state championships as well as “Team Spirit” awards, given in recognition of the teams showing exemplary “spirit of fair play”.

There are other manifestations of days at Paideia free from the expectations of greatness. We have long said that we wanted Paideia to be a good school, while always working to become a better school. Because of some of their inherent advantages, independent schools can kid themselves and in turn kid their students that everything is great. Those are self-delusional promises that end up boomeranging on the children.

So instead, have a good day, and enjoy it.
COMMUNITY

Art Visions 2019

Once again, Art Visions, the annual arts and craft sale put on by parent volunteers, raised thousands to support the art program at Paideia. One of the year’s most anticipated events draws attendees including all segments of the Paideia community from current parents, faculty and staff, alumni and alumni parents. The opening reception on Friday has the air of a family reunion as old friends greet one another while shopping and perusing the art and craft items for sale. The group of parent volunteers who put on the event were led by co-chairs Preeti Ayyangar and Julia Berry assisted by Judy Schwarz, director of parent involvement, and her assistant Caroline Cook.

“Art Visions has been wonderful opportunity to raise funds for the art department. But we always look forward to Friday morning when Diane Bush brings her group of students to look at the art and all the handmade items,” said Preeti. “It is so gratifying to see the students pick up a piece of ceramic, peer into the details of a painting, and marvel at the beauty of some of the hand hammered jewelry. Their curiosity and admiration is a wonderful thing to watch. The show set up also receives a lot of buzz from other students who always stop and look at the art we install in the galleries. It’s a joy to see that interest.

“We are also so thankful for the art department’s support and the help we received from all of the art faculty during set up. This is truly an exceptional community. We are grateful for the support of our parent volunteers who worked tirelessly to put up a beautiful show and support our budding young talent,” said Preeti.

Paideia Wins Science Olympiad Single A Division

The high school Science Olympiad team took first place among Single A Georgia and Florida schools that competed in the University of Georgia invitational. Paideia was 23rd among all schools. Shelby Pullen and Nikhel Krishna won second place in the chem lab event.

Katharine Wilkinson ’01 is Pepperdene Lecturer

Paideia alum Katharine Wilkinson ’01 visited school Oct. 24 and offered high school students a long list of practical solutions to the problem of climate change. Katharine is a good source of information on the topic as her life post-Paideia has been all about sharing expertise on “the heating of our globe”.

First, she paid an emotional tribute to her former teacher, the late Jane Pepperdene, who established a program for visiting writers to come to Paideia. Katharine’s visit was part of the writers lecture series sponsored by the Pepperdene Fund, a trust established by Jane, who was an English professor of renown at Agnes Scott College and later taught English teacher at Paideia for 20 years.

Jane believed it was important for students to be exposed to living writers and she was instrumental in bringing several well-known authors to Paideia when she taught here including James Dickey, Richard Wilbur and Eudora Welty. The trust has brought speakers such as Natasha Trethewey, Ron Rash and Edwidge Dandicat in recent years.

Katharine noted that as student in Jane’s classes her final two years at Paideia, Jane had a major impact. Her first book, Between God & Green: How Evangelicals Are Cultivating a Middle Ground on Climate Change, was dedicated to Jane.

The Paideia alum, whom Time magazine called “one of 15 women leading the fight against climate change” told students “we have never lived in a climate like this” and while she promised not to “go into too much doom and gloom” she told students “we have to change this decade.”

Katharine is currently vice president of communication and engagement at Project Drawdown and senior writer for the New York Times bestseller Drawdown: The Most Comprehensive Plan Ever Proposed to Reverse Global Warming. Drawdown is a global research organization that explores ways to mitigate climate change and lessen the emission of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere.

Some of the ideas she presented included: reducing food waste by shifting our diet from animal to plant based; changing building materials and designs, promoting gender equality through education and productive healthcare, participating in climate strikes, using technologies such as solar; changing behaviors and cultures using storytelling.

“People in your generation can help us envision what needs to happen,” Katharine said, suggesting students take a look at the Drawdown website and “start where you have passion.” She warned: “There are no silver bullets in solutions.” She also said, “it’s a lie that we can’t afford to fix climate change.”

As the capital campaign at Paideia moves forward and thinking about a new building, these issues should be considered. Katharine was introduced by Ashley Danzig, president of the high school Climate Action Club.
COMMUNITY

Photos from Grandparents and Special Friends’ Day
THE PAIDEIA SCHOOL
1509 Ponce de Leon Avenue
Atlanta, Georgia 30307

THE PAIDEIA SCHOOL is nonsectarian, serving families with children ages three through 18. Paideia does not discriminate in employment or in admissions. It actively seeks racial, cultural, and economic diversity in its student body. The ancient Greek word Paideia conveys the concept of a child’s total education: intellectual, artistic, and social. The Paideia School Newsletter is published 10 times a year. The deadline for the newsletter is the 1st of the preceding month. Send all correspondence to Jennifer Hill, Editor, at Paideia School, 1509 Ponce de Leon Avenue, Atlanta, GA 30307. Phone number is 404/377-3491, ext. 339; e-mail address is hill.jennifer@paideiaschool.org. For information about sports schedules and upcoming events visit our web site at www.paideiaschool.org

School Year 2020-2021 Calendar Highlights

Thursday, Aug. 20 – First day of school
Thursday-Friday, Oct. 15-16 – Fall Break
Friday, Dec. 18 – Holiday break begins end of school day
Monday, Jan. 4 – School resumes after holiday break
Thursday-Friday, Feb. 25-26 – Winter break
Monday-Friday, April 5-9 – Spring break
Friday, June 4 – Last day of school

Latino Heritage Day Celebration

Each year the Latino Heritage Day Celebration introduces and educates the community about the culture and customs of different Latina countries with a Day of the Dead student altar competition, live Latin music and performances. This year, a very stubborn piñata provided students with challenge and suspense and finally cascading sweet rewards. The event is sponsored by the Latino Parent Group.

Fire Truck Visits Half Day

The morning half day students were delighted and a little awed when a fire truck came to visit. Paideia parent and Atlanta firefighter Shomari Owens facilitated the visit.