

Dear Families of the Class of 2024,

I am so excited to get to know you and your sons better over the next few years as they develop academically, artistically, athletically, socially, and personally.

I suppose I should begin with some information about myself. Next fall will be the start of my 5<sup>th</sup> year at St. Paul's. I teach World Religions (10<sup>th</sup> grade) and IB Theory of Knowledge (11<sup>th</sup>) in the Upper School and have been the Religious Studies department chair for the past year. I also am one of the assistant coaches for the Cross-Country team. For the past year and a half, I was one of the Honor Council advisors. Now, it is with great enthusiasm and hope that I will be playing a new role as 9<sup>th</sup> grade dean. I am most excited to get to know your sons and oversee their growth and development—as individuals and as a community—over the next four years.

In a nutshell, my role as 9<sup>th</sup> Grade dean is primarily to work with the Dean of Students (Kevin Benzing) to lead student life for the class of 2024. We and the other deans will offer support regarding a host of student-life matters: fostering a healthy school culture, facilitating school- and class-wide events, managing disciplinary issues, and supporting action plans for students when needed. As part of this last point, I will be working closely with 9<sup>th</sup> grade advisors (who will be checking in with your son twice a week to gauge his well-being), teachers, the learning support team, and counselor. We are dedicated to supporting your son as he becomes a man.

**Here is a list of a few of my goals for the incoming 9<sup>th</sup> grade:**

- 1) **Encouraging a smooth transition from Middle School to the Upper School.** From being the big men on campus, to being the smallest and feeling out of place in a new building with new peers. We will be orienting the freshmen class to all the nuances of life in the Upper school—spanning social, athletic, and academic expectations.  
As a part of this, I will encourage a culture of integrity and honor, working closely with the Honor Council to establish as clear an understanding of the honor process and expectations related to academic integrity.
- 2) **Promoting the growth of each student as an individual.** I see Freshmen year as a time to start gaining a little more independence and sense of self:
  - a. **Branching out:** I challenge each incoming student to step out of his comfort zone and try something new—there are so many options for students to find their interests, spanning athletics, clubs, the arts, student government; vestry, etc.]
  - b. **Increased Personal Responsibility:** This year will be marked by increased self-advocacy. I will emphasize the importance of clear and consistent communication with teachers and coaches and proactive approaches to the challenges posed by transition into life in the Upper School.
- 3) **Finding an identity as a class:** Over the course of their freshman year, we will try and forge as many meaningful bonds in the classroom, on the field, at special events and beyond. Much of this is simply by communing with one another, building relationships and understanding of where others are coming from.

Obviously, we enter this new year together on shaky ground and with some uncertainty about what to expect. As many challenges as COVID-19 poses, I also see great potential as we go forward. This time of social isolation has given us all a more profound sense of longing for community and for being a part of something bigger than ourselves. I'm hopeful that we can harness those desires to make St. Paul's and the Class of 2024 stronger than ever.

All my best,  
John Lewis