

COLUMN: Changes at George Walton Academy honor history, reinforce mission

By Dan Dolan | Posted: Saturday, August 19, 2017 12:00 am

The beginning of every school year is a new opportunity. Students and teachers not only get to start fresh with classes and activities, but as a school community, we also get a chance to reflect on where we've been and where we'd like to go in the future. At George Walton Academy, we strive to remain true to our founding values — a quality education in a college preparatory environment — as we continue to work toward the objectives established in our 2016 strategic plan.

This summer was a productive one, as faculty, staff, parents and students all pitched in to prepare for the upcoming school year. From painting classrooms to hanging student artwork through the hallways, these Bulldogs made a tangible investment in GWA through their time and efforts that reminded many of the early days. Their teamwork confirmed that when we come together and take pride in what we do, almost anything is possible.

We not only tackled physical improvements to the GWA campus over the summer months, but we also laid the groundwork for a few new programs and classes that will begin this 2017-2018 school year. As part of our new Global Studies Program, GWA solidified its partnership with St. Paul's School in Barcelona, Spain, and will be welcoming five St. Paul's students to campus this fall as part of an ongoing international exchange. (Five GWA students will travel to St. Paul's next spring to complete the first exchange cycle) We're also in talks with Dainfern College, located just outside Johannesburg in South Africa, with expectations of establishing a similar exchange with this school for next year. Additionally, our students will have the opportunity to earn academic credit on several study abroad trips planned for next summer, including one to Britain and another to the Galápagos Islands.

Students are also taking advantage of new course offerings on campus. Faculty members have created a number of academic and co-curricular electives, such as Hollywood and American history, forensic science, athletic performance and design and social thinking through sculpture — among others.

Other notable changes include the addition of Michael Clancy, our new director of college counseling, and the launch of Dawgs 360. Mr. Clancy has served as a college counselor for over a decade at schools both in the U.S. and overseas, and he will work exclusively with our oldest students as they prepare to find the best individual fit for their postsecondary educations. Dawgs 360 is an organization that exists primarily to build community, make sure every student's interests are equally valued and supported and find meaningful ways to involve parents in the life and mission of the school. We like to think of Dawgs 360 as the driving force behind Bulldog student life as well as family involvement on campus.

Speaking of student life, many of our fall athletic teams have already begun their 2017 seasons, and others are gearing up for competition in the next several weeks. Bulldog volleyball, softball and cross country are currently underway. Our varsity football team will face off against Social Circle on Aug. 25, then play Towns County in the first home game of the season on Sept. 1. We're looking forward to seeing these Bulldog athletes take the field as well as our cheerleaders, majorettes and the Bulldog marching band.

Finally, GWA's annual ice cream social is coming up on Thursday, and there's no better way to kick off a new school year. This "welcome back" meet-and-greet gives our Bulldog families an opportunity to visit with both old and new friends and neighbors while enjoying their favorite frozen desserts.

The ice cream social is just one of the many examples of how George Walton Academy honors a rich history of tradition while pursuing the progression of its mission.

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