

COLUMN: The George Walton experience: character, community and opportunity

By Dan Dolan | Posted: Saturday, October 14, 2017 12:00 am

Imagine you're 16 years old and your day begins with a stroll through a spectacular museum in Barcelona, studying masterpieces created by some of the greatest artists in the world. After a hands-on culinary lesson that concludes with a delicious almuerzo (lunch) of authentic Spanish cuisine, you and your classmates tour a cathedral where you discuss 15th century architecture and the Spanish Inquisition. Your day ends with a captivating performance of Carmen at the Gran Teatre del Liceu. These are the moments that truly capture a student's imagination and foster a lifelong love of learning.

We at George Walton Academy are excited to provide such opportunities for our students through our newly-established international school partnership with St. Paul's School in Barcelona, Spain.

The George Walton Academy experience has three hallmarks: character, community and opportunity. Now that the school year is well underway, I would like to highlight some of the new opportunities available to GWA students.

No two students are exactly alike, so why shouldn't they have the opportunity to explore a wide variety of interests? We have launched several new initiatives to ensure we are more nimble, flexible, and attentive to the interests and needs of each of our learners. For example, we have added a new piano lab in our lower school, which allows for both individual and small group lessons during the day. Upper school students now choose from additional electives in English, science, history, art and PE. Yes, even PE! We now offer a two-track physical education program: one for life sports and one for athletic performance. Both are taught by a certified personal trainer and a physical therapist. We have expanded our options for learning environments and students can now take courses online, propose an independent study or participate in dual enrollment at one of the local universities.

We have also established a partnership in Asia to broaden our reach and invite more international students to experience GWA. And we are collaborating with Duke University and Johns Hopkins University to develop a semester-long course in medical service, which will culminate with a trip and field study in Belize in 2019.

We are revamping our schedule to allow students more discretionary time during the day, offering them a low-risk environment in which to develop and improve their time management and self-advocacy skills. Specifically, we will encourage students to use this time wisely to seek academic help from teachers and peer tutors, study independently during a proctored study hall, or capitalize on enrichment opportunities, such as listening to a talk and engaging in discussion with a guest speaker.

As we approach our 50th year, we remain committed to our hallmark of opportunity — simultaneously supporting students and encouraging them to explore the world and discover who they are.

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