



THE ALTAMONT SCHOOL

Sarah W. Whiteside

Head of School

Dear Altamont Families and Friends,

Little did I know when I came for an interview in the spring of 1978 that almost 40 years later I would still be a part of this wonderful and special place called Altamont. I can still remember my very first day, walking into Room 23, where I was fortunate enough to spend the next twenty-three years, with idealistic and high expectations of students eagerly waiting there to memorize declensions and conjugations, to revel in translating Cicero and Vergil, and to cherish all aspects of antiquity. Thinking that it might save them from moving on to yet one more use of the ablative case, my Latin I class attempted a mini-version of the Gallic sack of Rome only to discover that revolt or not, they still had to complete the homework assignment. That same year, my Advanced Latin class was small enough that I loaded all of them into my '69 Buick Skylark and drove them to City Hall to receive a proclamation from Mayor Vann designating Latin Week in Birmingham.

Many things have changed over the years, but many have not. Altamont still attracts the best and the brightest students who embrace the opportunity to be heard as they find their voice, who not only meet but also exceed expectations, who hold themselves accountable for their actions and for their responsibilities. The Altamont faculty continues the tradition of our teaching legacy—memorable faculty members such as Martin Hames, Margaret Gage, and Betty Caldwell—as caring and inspiring educators devoted to demanding excellence in teaching and learning, to encouraging independent thought and respectful listening, to expecting one's best. As I hear so often from alums throughout the decades, it was here at Altamont that they learned to think.

Altamont finds itself in a place of great strength with full enrollment, outstanding facilities that match the vigorous curriculum, premier programs in cultivating ethical leadership, a strong endowment, a dedicated and committed Board of Trustees, a loyal Alumni Board and active Parents Association, and what lies at the heart of every school—outstanding faculty and students committed to Truth, Knowledge, and Honor. It is because of all these strengths that I am ready to hand over the role of Head of School to my successor who will have the opportunity to lead the school to new heights through the coming years. When I was interviewing for the position of Head, I committed to serving the school—if I were fortunate enough to be selected—for ten years. In what seems like the blink of an eye, those ten years will turn into eleven by the time I step aside at the end of the 2017-18 school year. I am excited at the possibilities that lie ahead for the Altamont community, which is poised for even greater excellence and achievement.

Anyone who knows me knows that I love etymology and keep nearby an unabridged dictionary given to me by a group of students in the late 80s. When I looked up the word “retirement,” I decided that it was not the right word to use because I do not plan to do any of those things listed in the meaning—withdraw, disappear, go away. Altamont is in my blood and in my soul. I hope to substitute in the Latin classes; you will see me in the bleachers and in the audience as I follow the accomplishments of our talented students; and I will continue to do anything I can for our community as chief cheerleader. I plan to be involved in volunteer work in the Birmingham community with students less fortunate than our own. I want to spend more time with our grandchildren, visit the Greek settlements in Sicily and the Roman ones in Provence, take long walks next to the ocean and through the mountains, and travel the Rhine with Caesar's Commentaries as my guidebook. But wherever I am and whatever I am doing, I will, as Vergil said, look back on these days and years with great joy and the happiest of memories.

Best regards,

Sarah W. Whiteside

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