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NEWS 1

From the Desk of the Headmaster...

A warm welcome back to you all and special greetings to those families who are new to Umhlanga College this year. I trust that you will very quickly feel part of the Umhlanga College family and that you and your child/ren are going to be very happy here.

What sets our School apart from other local options, I believe, is the relaxed, collegial, family atmosphere, the care and concern shown by the teachers towards each child and the fact that, due to our small numbers, the teachers get to know every child very quickly and not just those in their classes. Add to this, our impressive academic record (of which more below), our growing ability at sports and cultural pursuits and you have the ideal environment in which your child can flourish and the springboard from which to launch them later, into their high schools of choice.

It is with a heightened sense of anticipation then, that we commence the new school year and we are keen to get going!

Thank You

I was humbled by the many gifts, cards and well-wishes I received from so many Umhlanga College families at the end of last year.

Thank you for your kind thoughts and your generosity. It really was appreciated.

Every year, much is made of the country's Matric results, although, educationists will argue that they are insufficient and inadequate, as a benchmark on their own, to gauge real progress in education. What they do signify to us though, as teachers in the foundational phases of the schooling system, is the need for greater focus on academic performance in the earlier grades.

There is, however, some encouragement we can all draw from the improved matric pass rate of the 2011 cohort. The pass rate suggests that the deterioration we have been witnessing, year on year, appears to have been halted and certainly, a growing number of urban and township schools are now returning admirable pass rates, thanks largely to Heads who have drawn a line in the sand with errant teachers and disruptive pupils and who have corrected the apathy towards teaching and learning, that not long ago, appeared to pervade those schools. The statement below, from Jonathan Jansen (Rector and Vice Chancellor; University of the Free State) confirms this...

It is 4pm on September 6, 2011. Every child is in school, not a soul has left. Every teacher is on site, not a car has

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moved. I follow the pairs of neat, black shoes gathered in two rows down the length of the inner courtyard of the school...there is no school hall and there is no loud-hailer. My voice will have to carry through the open air. Every shoe is brightly polished. Every window is whole. Every blade of grass seems perfectly cut. Every child's head is smoothly shaven. Every pupil is clothed in a spotless, grey uniform. The principal lifts his arm high and with the thumbs-up signal, more than 1000 high school students, fall quiet, instantly.

I am once again inside South Africa's best high school. It is where I come, again and again, when I despair about the future of our country. This is my holy place of annual pilgrimage: Zwelibanzi High School, in Umlazi's J-Section.

(The Times; 8 September 2011)

What caught our eyes, as teachers at Umhlanga College, in respect of the matric exams, were the results returned by matriculants in literacy and especially in numeracy. Proficiency in Mathematics and Physical Science continues to play a significant role in enhancing employment opportunities, yet the throughput of decently qualified Maths and Science matriculants remains alarmingly low, with the number of matriculants writing these subjects dropping annually. Indeed, some 40 000 less children, wrote each of Maths and Science, in 2011, than in 2010.

The path to securing a good matric pass, actually begins in Grade R and continues right through primary and secondary school and explains our vigilance and intent, as a top independent school, in securing the best teachers possible and our on-going wrestling match with aspects of the curriculum. The matric pass rate (with university exemption), in independent schools in South Africa is approximately 81%, which, in the context of the matric pass rate, country-wide, is good. Even in this sector, however, there has been a 5% drop-off, since 2008, of students choosing to take Physical Science at the Grade 12 level, an indication that there is reluctance by students, across even the independent schools, to tackle what is seen as a more difficult area of study.

When I commenced my teaching career, back in the early 1980's, my Headmaster emphasised that primary education was about teaching children to read, write, count and to develop physical strength and agility. He called these, the "Basic Pillars of Primary Education." Everything else we did, he argued, was mere padding and time-wasting. Now granted, his was something of a fundamentalist view, but over time, his oft mentioned, foundational supports, appear to have been lost. This has always been the case and is nothing particularly new. Indeed, there is every good argument for revisiting curricula from time to time. Just think though, of the revisions to our basic curriculum that have seen daylight since 1994 and it is small wonder that along the line, things have become muddled, teachers have become confused, the basic foundations have been tampered with and effective teaching and learning has been adversely affected.

When you see an emphasis then, being placed at Umhlanga College, in the areas of number and language, understand that we see our pupils, not just as a bunch of infants, or pre-teens, but as children on a continuum,

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which culminates in them being thoroughly prepared for what still remains their greatest educational challenge...matric. Mathematics, Science and languages will continue to receive priority, but we also believe that Art, Music and Drama form a vital part of the development of the whole child. It is our responsibility to ensure that by the time your children leave this school, the "basic pillars" are indeed, firmly in place, and further, that a caring, compassionate human being exits our gates, with an enquiring mind and the right morals, values and ethics, in place, to allow them to become worthwhile citizens of our country.

With acknowledgements : Econometrix; EcoBulletin; 5 January 2012

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Senior Primary Remedial Specialist

We are happy to welcome Mrs Anne Macnab to Umhlanga College as our new, Senior Primary Phase, Remedial Therapist. Anne has joined us to bolster our fledgling Remedial Department and to absorb some of the load from Barbara Wilson, who is doing such sterling work in the Foundation Phase.

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The Reid Astro

Last Saturday marked the official opening of our new synthetic, astro surface and what a wonderful morning we enjoyed. The children had ample opportunity to test their skills on the new field and loud was the praise it received from them.

Mrs Reid, the School's founding Principal, was on hand to cut the ceremonial ribbon and we were also joined on the day by Mr and Mrs Muir, the School's benefactors, who had just arrived in the country, from the United States.

It is appropriate, once again, to thank the Parents' Association for their efforts in bringing this project to fruition and to the parent community, for the generosity in providing the funding, which has made the astro a reality. Our children are fortunate indeed, to have this wonderful facility on which to develop their ball skills.

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Well Done!

I was chatting with Kearsney College's Head of Academics, during the holidays and he mentioned that the six Umhlanga College boys, who, last year, attended his school's Open Weekend, had all approached him, individually, at the conclusion of the weekend, to thank him for the occasion. They were the only boys from the entire group present that weekend, who did so, which was why their thanks had made such an impact on him. Do you have any idea how good that made me feel?

We seem to plug away, often it seems, without success, reminding the pupils to greet adults, to welcome visitors, to stand up when an adult enters the classroom and to remember to say "Please" and "Thank You." To be then, the recipient of an unsolicited pat-on-the-back, concerning our children's behaviour, was as good a Christmas present as anyone could hope for.



Although those six boys are no longer with us, it is right and proper to thank them, via this publication, for their exemplary behaviour whilst in an Umhlanga College uniform and to commend them to our school community in general.

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Farmhouse Cafe

We are pleased to inform you that Teresa Cameron, mother of Yasmeen in Grade 2, has taken over the management and running of The Farmhouse Cafe, with effect from the start of this year.

We are sure that Umhlanga College folk will give her every support and that our children will still continue to use the Farmhouse Cafe facility for their parties.

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Wager Road Extension

In case you haven't yet noticed, the Wager Road extension, into the Izinga Estate has been opened for use by vehicular traffic. This will be of great assistance to Umhlanga College parents, who wish to avoid the bottleneck at the junction of Autumn and Herrwood.

Now you can turn left up Fern, as you exit the school gates, then left again into Wager. Drive through Izinga Estate on Mahogany Drive and join Herrwood Road further north, meaning that you reduce traffic flow through Prestondale and avoid the congestion at Autumn Drive.

The cane road has also recently been graded and parents are still welcome to use this alternative means of accessing and exiting the campus each day.

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"Hot 100" Challenge

Our regular runners are already back on the track but an invitation is extended to any child who wishes to try out for their 100km badge, to join us every morning, Monday through Thursday, on the main field at **06:30**.

We run for 30 minutes only, after which the children are welcome to shower or, under supervision, to take a dip in the pool. You will be surprised, at how quickly they clock up their required 100km!!

Please Note:

Mondays: Grade 6 and 7 swimmers should go to swim squad and **NOT** come to running.

Tuesdays: Grade 3 swimmers should go to swim squad and **NOT** come to running.

Wednesdays: Grade 4 and 5 swimmers should go to swim squad and **NOT** come to running.

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Brain Food, Drain Food

Mums may be interested in attending a talk on Friday morning this week, at Makaranga Lodge in Kloof, on providing the best nutrition for children. Dr Kaz Pike is the speaker and having heard her before, I can highly recommend her.

In return for journeying up into the mist and rain of Kloof, mums can look forward to a great breakfast and some brilliant give-aways.

Starting time: 07:45 through 09:30. Bookings through candice@makaranga.com

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Still on a Mathematical note...

The fattest knight at King Arthur's Round Table was Sir Cumference. He got his girth from too much pi.

Till next time,

GREG