

# Aristoi Classical Academy

West Houston Charter School

Mrs. Brenda Davidson

Headmaster

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Dear Parents,

There is excitement in the air at Aristoi Classical Academy. I have been energized by the training, team building and goal setting, but mostly by the anticipated arrival of new and returning students. I'm ecstatic to be back at Aristoi. I have missed the students and the team with which I began my journey into the realm of classical education when I first arrived at West Houston Charter School many years ago. I'm returning to Aristoi with a renewed commitment to offer this community an excellent, tuition-free classical education. My experience and focused study of classical education has equipped me to lead our school to succeed in its mission: "*Our mission is to provide our students with an academically challenging Classical Liberal Arts education that helps them develop a passion for learning. Our mission is to help these students become life-long pursuers of the true, the good, and the beautiful. Our mission is to provide the kind of education that gives our students the means to become men and women of virtuous character.*" I am honored to be your headmaster.

I consider Classical Education to be the most promising present day education reform. Recently, the Associated Press reported that the Program for International Student Assessment shows that out of 34 countries, the US ranked 14th in reading, 17th in science, and 25th in math. While there are many arguments about what would be the best cure for the ailing education system, it is obvious that change is requisite.

The classical pattern is a three part process of developing the mind. I have continued to refer to *The Well Trained Mind* by Susan Wise Bauer for teacher training and resources. I wholeheartedly embrace her definition of **What is a classical education?**

- a. It is language intensive – not image focused. It demands that students use and understand words, not just video images.
- b. It is history intensive – providing students with a comprehensive view of human endeavor from the beginning until now.
- c. It trains the mind to analyze and draw conclusions.
- d. It demands self discipline.
- e. It produces literate, curious, intelligent, students who have a wide range of interests and the ability to follow-up on them.

Susan Wise Bauer has developed a vertical scope and sequence for grades kindergarten through 12th grade, implementing the elements of classical education, using curriculum and resources to integrate knowledge across the subjects, building a foundation of knowledge to successfully train the mind and continue the learning process for a lifetime. Her methodology is a helpful guide for our school.

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In Fritz Hinrichs' essay, "Why Classical Education," he explains what "classical" means this way "...classical usually means something that through time for various reasons has been proven worthy of our respect and interest. The same is true of books; some books are more worthy of study than others because of the profundity and clarity with which they express the ideas that they contain."

Dorothy Sayers, in her essay "The Lost Tools of Learning" has defined the process of a classical education as learning built on the great works of western civilization taught through a process called the trivium. E. D. Hirsch has produced the Core Knowledge curriculum for grades kindergarten through 8th grade which complements the grammar and logic stages of the trivium. Core Knowledge is one of the foundational resources at Aristoi.

Some individuals question whether a lesser value is placed on science and math compared to English and history in a classical/liberal arts education. Dr. Gene Veith defines the traditional understanding of the trivium in his book *Classical Education* as follows: "The trivium is a paradigm for the mastery of language. But, it applies to far more than language. Every subject has its grammar, logic, and rhetoric. To be educated in any discipline, you must 1) Know its basic facts (grammar) 2) Be able to reason clearly about it (logic) 3) Communicate its ideas and apply it effectively (rhetoric)" p.12. The desire of my heart is to make a difference in this community by offering this most valuable education to our greatest resource, our students.

A productive first week reminds me to applaud some of our own. Thanks to our school board, administrative and office staff for their support, encouragement, and resourcefulness, all of which resulted in a seamless transition. Mrs. Cummins' team took great care of our students, parents, and staff as they ended the 2010-11 year with integrity and grace after an administrative change. We appreciate the PTO for their hard work and dedication which led to a wonderful new playground. I can't wait to see the faces of our children when they get their first glimpse! Aristoi teachers were on campus Friday attending a workshop on differentiation focusing on the needs of our gifted students. They are scheduled for more trainings which will sharpen their skills to meet the challenges of the new year with confidence and drive. I look forward to working with you and your children as we grow in wisdom, knowledge, and character.

Sincerely,

Brenda Davidson

Headmaster

Aristoi Classical Academy/West Houston Charter School