



## GREENS FARMS ACADEMY

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Dear GFA Community,

At this year's State of the School, we unveiled an exciting new Upper School curricular initiative, one that builds on over a decade of curricular evolution at GFA. As part of our ongoing commitment to excellence and innovation, we have intensively examined the role of APs to consider whether they engender the highest level of excellence our students are capable of. Based on this research, we will be phasing out AP courses at GFA over the next two years so that we can commit more fully to our mission and core values; better prepare our students for college and beyond; and pave the way for more students to do more ambitious, more meaningful work, and at a higher level, than is currently possible in our AP-heavy curriculum.

At GFA, we continually measure success against the ambitious goals set forth in our mission: to partner with students in an innovative, inclusive, and globally minded community, to prepare them for lives of purpose. We seek to live out our core values of passion, integrity, empathy, curiosity, and excellence in everything we do, particularly in the classroom: we know that good teaching begins by connecting students with ideas to make learning come alive.

For quite some time, our Upper School teachers have observed that the AP curricula do not always reliably align with our mission and core values, and that much of the most purposeful, energizing, and impressive work our students are capable of does not surface in the exercise of preparing for AP Exams.

However, when watching students prepare for the World Perspectives Symposium, conduct original scientific research, or deliver an 8th-grade Capstone Speech, their effort and ambition are unmistakable: they want to deliver the very best they are capable of, and they do whatever it takes to make that happen.

The contrast on AP Exam days, quite frankly, could not be more striking. A standardized test, graded by machines and anonymous teachers, simply does not consistently elicit the creative, rigorous work we know our students can produce.



For a long time, AP has been shorthand for high school rigor. Students are encouraged to pursue as many AP classes as possible in an effort to ensure a strong transcript. Tens of thousands of students — including many current GFA parents and teachers — applied to college on the strength of their AP courses. AP is a known commodity, and as the most widely recognized indicator of academic achievement, it exerts an understandable, almost magnetic pull for students, parents, and schools.

And therein lies the problem: in a world where enrollment in AP courses has grown exponentially, AP has ceased to provide the level of differentiation it once did for our students a generation ago. Leading independent and public schools across the country have realized this and have dropped or drastically reduced their AP offerings, and their graduates have proven that colleges recognize academic excellence with or without the AP label.

Our counterparts in college admissions offices have been unequivocal in their support for this move. We conducted extensive research with admissions officers at 40 selective colleges and universities, and our findings matched what dozens of peer independent schools who have moved beyond the AP have already found: this change will not have a negative impact on our students' college admissions. In fact, by expanding and deepening opportunities for original inquiry and research, we will not only give our students better opportunities to cultivate their intellects, interests, and passions, but we will also give our college counselors better opportunities to tell our students' stories and communicate the nature and level of their achievements.

We know that GFA students do their best work when they chart their own paths of inquiry, produce original work, and share it with real audiences — three features of high-level learning that AP can't standardize. And colleges know that this kind of learning prepares students for excellence in higher education and beyond.

Sincerely,

Bob Whelan  
*Head of School*