

Musings on Circles and Cycles

Dennis L. Calkins
Head of the Upper School

As a career teacher of mathematics, I am familiar with that classification of functions known as circular functions. Any teacher or student with a knowledge of the concepts of second year algebra knows about certain functions for which values repeat themselves in a cyclical or circular manner. No matter where we begin, if we continue long enough, we find ourselves back where we started, ready to repeat the process over and over again.

Life in the world of education offers a number of circular or cyclical patterns that constantly remind me of the circular functions from mathematics. The cycle of the school year itself, the 18-mod school day, the class period — all of these are recurrent and repeatable patterns that we all experience. In addition, because of our modular schedule in the Upper School, we employ the same mathematical vocabulary when we talk of our six-day cycle of classes.

Of course, the parallels between the world of mathematics and life in the educational world don't correspond completely. None of us would enjoy the predictable regularity and precision of the mathematical world in our every day lives. For example, we all appreciate the six-day cycle of our class schedule, partly because days of the week don't rigidly conform to our lettered days of the cycle.

One of the joys of experiencing the cyclical patterns in the world of education is the opportunity to begin a new cycle with the possibility of change or improvement over the last cycle. As we begin a new school year, we can all anticipate the familiar patterns and cycles we have experienced in past years — the enrollment of new students, the beginning of the fall sports seasons, the anticipation of new classroom experiences, the reconnection with old friends and the possibility of forming new and positive relationships with teachers and students. More important, perhaps, is the knowledge that we all have the opportunity to create a slightly different journey through the cycle this year. We can repeat those experiences that had value and meaning for us but we can also carve out a new path for ourselves to create a slightly different journey around the circle. For every member of the Holland Hall community, I trust you will be able to find a healthy balance between the comfort and security of a familiar cycle of events along with excitement and anticipation of a new journey filled with experiences that will become memorable because they are unique to this year's trip around the circle.