



SOR students experienced delight-driven learning of all types in J-Term courses last week.

THE NEWSLETTER OF
NEW COVENANT SCHOOLS

QUID NOVI

JANUARY 12, 2026
VOL. 28 NO. 16 MAJORIS

THE SCIENCE BEHIND THE SCHOOL CALENDAR

by John Heaton, Headmaster

School calendars are often treated as inherited structures rather than pedagogical tools. The most obvious evidence for this is the long summer break which is purely a convention left over from when America was a largely agricultural society, in which students' labor was needed in the fields. Yet over the past several decades, research in cognitive science and developmental psychology made clear that *how* instructional time is distributed across the year matters nearly as much as how much time is allocated.

Our academic calendar contains about 175

instructional days with 33-35 weekday days off distributed throughout the year, with a start-end window from mid-August to late May. As such it modifies the traditional model and intentionally integrates principles from research on learning, rest, and sustainability. When evaluated against the best-supported findings, our calendar performs strongly across 4 out 5 major dimensions which are 1) maximum uninterrupted instructional run; 2) length of longest learning break (think: summer break); 3) frequency of recovery breaks; 4) total annual instructional load; and 5) predictability

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WHAT'S NEW?

In Case You Were Wondering

This year our friends and families have been exceptionally generous in tangible support for projects around the school. **Jeremiah Rose and Joel Olenik** have been collaborating to provide concrete ramps for our sheds making them easier to access. Moreover, both our Annual Fund and Foundation initiatives have surpassed our goals

(see p. 3). We thank you for responding to these appeals so freely. Our major initiative this year is to put finishing touches on our ball fields which include a new fencing and netting apparatus, low brick walls that will provide casual seating and define the fields, together with attractive landscaping. You will soon see some activity as crews remove

the large white pines on the NW corner of the property. Finally as soon as spring sports conclude, Southern Landscape Co. will make the proposed improvements. Their work will only take approximately 30 days, leaving plenty of time for disturbed areas to grow over the summer months. Thank you for your generosity.

HONORARIA

KERSHAW PREVAILS AS MS SPELLING BEE CHAMP



Clover Kershaw and Ms. Martin.

New Covenant held the annual spelling bee last Friday in Moomaw Center. Students in Middle School studied for several weeks in preparation for the event. The group spelled various types of words with the winning word being "monolithic." Congratulations to our winner **Clover Kershaw** (6th grade) who will go on to represent New Covenant at the Regional Spelling Bee on Saturday, March 28. She will travel to Radford University to compete with others from around our area. Our runner-up, **Eliane Enlow** (6th grade) stands in the alternate place. We know both of these students will represent our school well.

HOMECOMING 2026 RECAP

Homecoming 2026 was held last week. We welcomed alumni parents back into our building with a morning coffee and concluded the day with a reception for our alums and a slate full of basketball games. The time was filled with the sharing of memories and the renewing of friendships. Congratulations to the following classes as they celebrate milestone anniversaries.

- **Class of 2011**—15-year anniversary
- **Class of 2016**—10-year anniversary
- **Class of 2021**—5-year anniversary

Be watching for the summer edition of the *Quid Novi* to see further updates on our alums and their families.



Lausyn McBride Johnson (Class of '20) and her husband update their lives with **John Heaton**.



Abigail Burton and Ellie Bonebright, Class of '25.



Calvin Hurt and Michael Minnick (both Class of '20) catch up with **Mrs. Mitchell**.



BASKETBALL SCORES

MONDAY, JANUARY 5

7/8 GIRLS

Westover Christian	.....	10
New Covenant	.....	22

TUESDAY, JANUARY 6

JV BOYS

New Covenant	.....	13
Covenant School	.....	40

VARSITY MEN

New Covenant	.....	46
Covenant School	.....	49

7/8 GIRLS

Lynchburg Homeschool	.....	16
New Covenant	.....	26

7/8 BOYS

Lynchburg Homeschool	.....	42
New Covenant	.....	17

JV GIRLS

Lynchburg Homeschool	.....	38
New Covenant	.....	24

THURSDAY, JANUARY 8

JV BOYS

Roanoke Catholic	.....	52
New Covenant	.....	24

VARSITY MEN

Roanoke Catholic	.....	55
New Covenant	.....	54

FRIDAY, JANUARY 9

JV BOYS

Lynchburg Homeschool	.....	37
New Covenant	.....	24

VARSITY WOMEN

Lynchburg Homeschool	.....	27
New Covenant	.....	20

VARSITY MEN

Lynchburg Homeschool	.....	53
New Covenant	.....	81

ET CETERA

EVERYONE

TUITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

The Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) for 2026-27 school year is accepting applications through **January 15, 2026**. For more details, refer to the email sent **Monday, October 27** from **Tiffany Fulcher**.

CONTINUOUS ENROLLMENT CONTRACT

In order to simplify reenrollment, New Covenant uses a Continuous Enrollment Contract for students, allowing them to be automatically enrolled each year until graduation without having to re-sign a contract. **PARENTS WILL NOT BE ASKED TO REENROLL FOR NEXT YEAR.** The opt-out deadline for enrollment for the 2026-27 school year is **February 1, 2026**. The Continuous Enrollment Fee of \$150 will be charged to your account in February if you do not opt out.

Please contact **Linda Hackenbracht** at lhackenbracht@newcovenantschools.org if your plans for next school year have changed.

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. DAY

There will be no school **Monday, January 19** in honor of Martin Luther King, Jr.

ACADEMIC TESTING

Students in grades 2-8 will sit for CTP-5 testing **Tuesday, January 20 through Friday, January 23**. Ninth-grade students will test from **Wednesday, January 21 through Friday, January 23**. Please help your students have the best experience by bringing them to school on time, and avoiding unnecessary appointments and absences.

ALLEGRO MUSIC LESSONS

Allegro Music will offer on- and off-site music lessons and group classes this semester. There are openings for most instruments. Visit www.allegromusic.school/our-programs or text (610) 350-1780 for info.

WINTER BREAK

School will be closed for Winter Break from **Thursday, February 12** through **Monday, February 16**. Students return on **Tuesday, February 17**.

ART FAIR

New Covenant's annual Art Fair will be held on **Monday, March 9**. See flyer for details.

REPORT CARDS

Report cards for second quarter will be emailed to parents on **Friday, January 16**.

HEAVENLY HATS

Thanks to the generosity and support of our school community, this year the Middle School raised a total of \$254 for Heavenly Hats. Over the years, our school has donated a total of \$2,925.77. Thank you to everyone who participated and donated.

SCHOOL OF RHETORIC

NO SCHOOL FOR SOR 1/14

The SOR will not have school on **Wednesday, January 14**.

SOR COTILLION

SOR Cotillion will be held at the University of Lynchburg Ballroom on **Saturday, January 31** from 7-10pm. Refer to the email sent by **Brandi Marchant** on **December 4** for more information including a map of the location, guest guidelines, and dress expectations.

ANNUAL FUND 2025-26

Fundraising goal: \$300,000



FUNDRAISING REPORT

	GOAL	RECEIVED
Annual Fund	\$300,000	\$311,150
General Scholarship	\$10,000	\$2,990
Scholarship Foundation	\$300,000	<i>Pledged</i> \$453,700 <i>Received</i> \$423,193

Please consider New Covenant Schools in your giving. All gifts are tax-deductible to the extent that the law provides. Donations may be given through cash, check, stock transfers, or IRA distributions. Contact **Dayna Renalds** in the Development Office for more information.

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and rhythm.

One of the most consistent findings in cognitive psychology is that learning follows a cycle of effort and recovery. Sustained cognitive work without adequate rest leads to diminishing returns: attention wanes, errors increase, and retention declines. Learning is more durable when instructional effort is broken into coherent blocks separated by meaningful breaks. Calendars that simply focus on the number of instructional days, say 180 in a cycle, but maintain long uninterrupted instructional runs degrade student and faculty performance.

I used ChatGPT to create a “hypothetical” calendar which comported with the current research, giving prompts for starting and ending dates and the number of total instructional days. Within a few minutes it produced a calendar that roughly approximated the one we actually created! ChatGPT “commended” our calendar as a significant improvement over traditional approaches, noting that:

“... instructional stretches are limited to eight or nine weeks before a meaningful break occurs. Fall break, Thanksgiving week, Christmas/New Year, winter break, spring break, and shorter spring pauses together create a rhythm that aligns closely with the research-supported recommendation of recovery every six to eight weeks. This alone places New Covenant’s calendar well above a standard traditional model and closer to balanced-calendar designs in terms of cognitive sustainability.”

A second finding pertains to the length of uninterrupted learning gaps, particularly with respect to forgetting. Summer learning loss begins to occur when more than three weeks pass

without engagement, notably in mathematics and foreign language. Our longest breaks in the cycle occur at Thanksgiving and Christmas; nevertheless, they are under the threshold and remain positive. Our summer break, by contrast, reflects the older pattern which was based on agricultural concerns, and our students *do* experience learning loss. The way we compensate is to adjust our pedagogy in the first quarter of each year to provide thorough review to “pull forward” material that was taught the previous spring.

Equally important is the calendar’s effect on adults. Teacher effectiveness is not constant across the year; it declines under chronic overload and improves when teachers have predictable opportunities for rest. While our teachers benefit from the same breaks that are given to students, the calendar does not quite accommodate the time needed for regular meaningful professional and project development during the year. It is very difficult to meet student needs, while at the same time tackling the necessary tasks of curriculum update, development and a host of other routine improvements. We “steal” a half day before fall break and a whole day on Martin Luther King day for this purpose, but it is not nearly enough. Ideally—though not necessarily a “doable” solution —would be an approach that utilized the long summer break to absorb a balance of instructional days, while maintaining three-week breaks, and scheduled professional days. Such a calendar would lean toward a more year-round school model, which, I assure you, we are not contemplating at present.

Even so, as currently constructed our



calendar comports with best practices that contemporary research supports. It reduces excessive instructional runs, provides regular recovery, maintains an efficient instructional load, and supports both student learning and adult sustainability.

QUID NOVI

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

CLASS OF 2026 • John Gauger, Nancy Hall, Chris Misiano, Sam Mizener, Tom Rogers, Anne Umbarger
CLASS OF 2027 • Dusty Miller, Court Shipman
CLASS OF 2028 • Neil Bohnert, Scott McCurley, Leann Perault, Leland Seckman

EX OFFICIO
John Heaton—Headmaster
Davidson Morse—School Warden

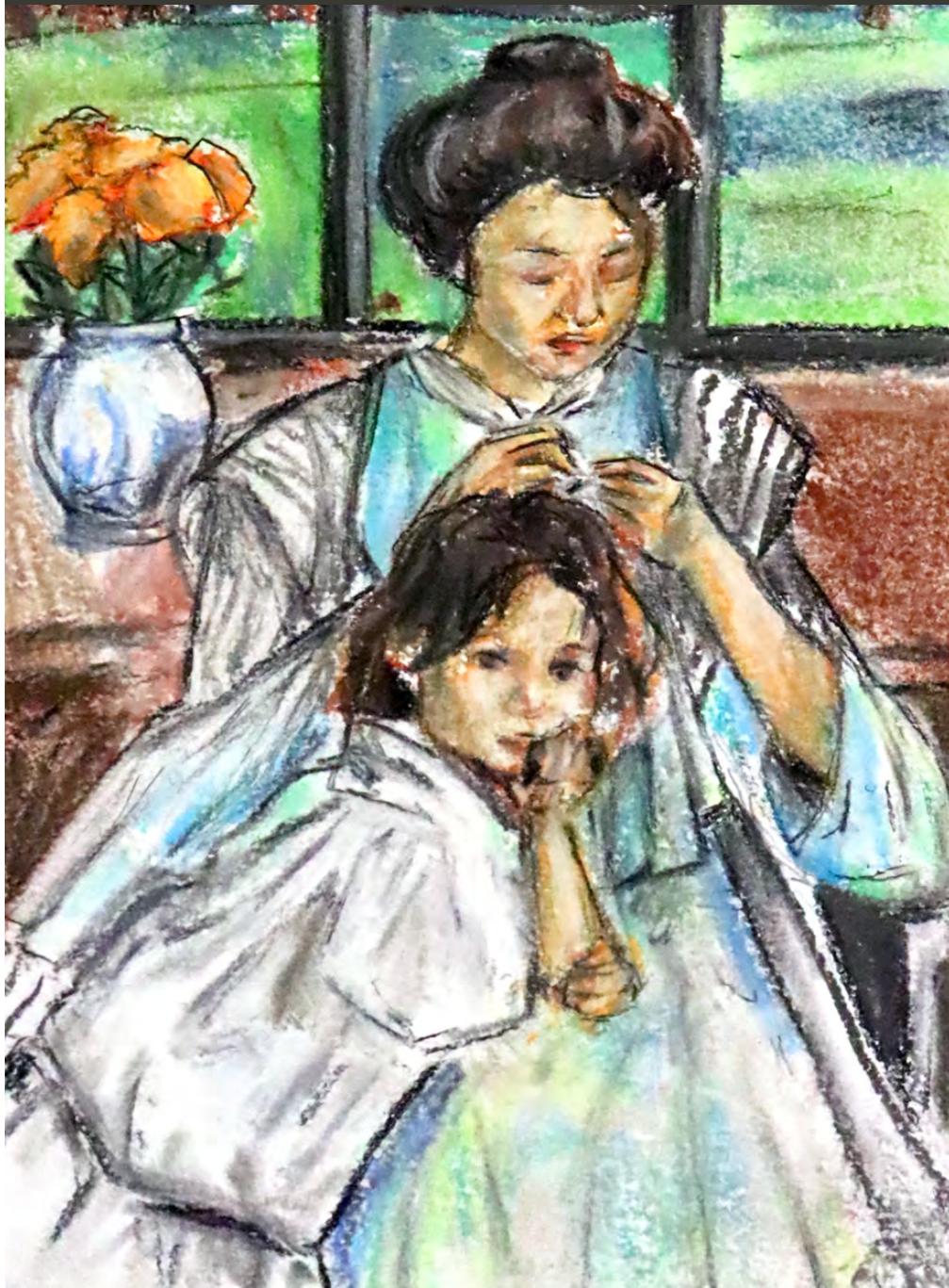
OUR MISSION

New Covenant Schools is an educational community serving families of Central Virginia, providing an exceptional education in a classical curriculum within the framework of historic Christianity, furnishing the student with the tools of education and the inspiration to be a lifelong learner.

NEW COVENANT SCHOOLS

ART FAIR

PAINTING | MIXED MEDIA | SCULPTURE | PHOTOGRAPHY | FILM



Ruby Helm (2025 Submission, 10th Grade)

**ALL submissions due
Wednesday, February 11th**

**Monday,
March 9**

IMPORTANT TIPS FOR ART FAIR SUBMISSIONS:

- Students in K-12th grade may submit **TWO PIECES** of art in each of the five named categories.
- Student work grades 4-12 will be in the **JUDGED** art show.
- All submissions should be given directly to Miss Eshleman or Mr. Dunaway.
- Flat (2D) submissions should **NOT** be folded or on lined paper.
- Submissions **MUST** be unframed.
- All photography should be printed on photo quality paper (preferably 8 1/2 x 11 or larger).
- Sculpture (3D) submissions should stand upright OR student should provide a base on which to stand the piece.
- Lego submissions will **NOT** be accepted.
- **ALL** pieces should be the **CREATION** of the student(s).
- Multiple students may collaborate on a single submission.

Parents who would like to volunteer to mat/hang work, please contact:

Hattie Eshleman at
hesleman@newcovenantschools.org
or
Michael Dunaway at
mdunaway@newcovenantschools.org.