

Collaboration

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One of the benefits of choosing a preschool through 12th-grade educational environment for your child is the opportunity for interaction and collaboration across the grade levels and divisions. We've had several learning opportunities for our students in just the first few weeks of school. For example, our first through third graders each had a conversation with the Upper School student who walked and sat with them during Convocation on August 26. I overheard discussions about mutual interests such as sports, art, and music. The younger children enjoyed the one-on-one attention from an upper classman, and I was touched by the sincere and gentle manner of our seniors and juniors. What wonderful role models they were!

There are international learning opportunities for our students, too. Our Middle School exchange students from Mexico are spending part of their time interacting with our Primary School students. They might visit an art or music class, read together or work on math with an individual or small group, or simply enjoy having a conversation during lunchtime in the cafeteria. Each interaction I've observed has been positive and an opportunity to learn about life experiences or practice some Spanish.

And then there was the day when Mrs. Becca Parker's Middle School science students came to set up experiments in the Primary School. Several grade levels enjoyed rotating among the various experiments, and the space was filled with excited questions and exclamations of surprise and wonder. Several older students shared their memories of the Primary School with students, but more importantly, they shared their enthusiasm for learning and discovery.

I've just learned about another interdivisional effort – this time between seventh-grade writers in Mark Johnson's English class and our third-grade students. Sixty-six seventh-graders will work with our 53 third-graders on a special writing project over the course of three joint classes. Our students will each interview a grandparent, take notes, and then write a small moment story about their grandparent when he/she was about their age. On October 25, the students will work together to brainstorm 10 possible interview questions and learn about taking notes. After interviewing their relative, they will begin writing an initial draft in their respective classes. The groups will meet together again to work on editing and deciding upon the revisions they will make. The students will then make their revisions and craft their final draft for "publication". Everyone will be looking forward to sharing the published pieces on November 22, and our grandparents and special friends will be excited to read and react to these small moment stories on Grandparents/Special Friends Day.

I can't imagine more authentic learning for everyone involved. Just think of the understanding that will be gained from crafting the interview questions and conducting the interview itself. Journalism at a young age! Imagine the attention to detail that will be invested by both third and seventh graders as they work to make the necessary changes for grammar, punctuation, and clarity of content as students write their best small moment from the interviews. And lastly, just imagine the moments of sharing these special memories not only with your writing buddy but also with your grandparent or special friend the next day. I can't wait! Do you think there might be a few moist eyes? I'm confident there will be some proud beaming smiles. It's a validation of the Holland Hall experience: careful preparation, engagement in dynamic curriculum, and inspiration from older mentors – what a combination for true learning.