

How We Raise and Educate our Children: What's in the News

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As we turned the page from 2010 to 2011, parents and educators in the U. S. have been bombarded with issues that have sparked conversation and debate across the country. Much of what we might believe about how we raise and educate our children has been called into question by concerned parents, educators, writers and columnists. Let me briefly describe three of those issues.

In a New York Times article from January 7, 2011, Christopher Drew reports that the College Board is now in the process of revamping the entire curriculum in A. P. Biology and A. P. United States History. You may remember that these two courses are among several A. P. courses that were once taught in the Upper School but have since been replaced by other course offerings, some required and some elective, that more closely align with our mission statement at Holland Hall. Mr. Drew reports that the College Board will “slash the amount of material students need to know for the tests”, with the goal of “clearing students’ minds to focus on bigger concepts and stimulate more analytical thinking. In biology, a host of more creative, hands-on experiments are intended to help students think more like scientists.” Our response at Holland Hall to their efforts at reform can be summed up quite succinctly – “It’s about time!” Much of the rest of Mr. Drew’s article reads as though the A. P. test writers had been attending Upper School faculty meetings for the past few years and who only recently began to listen. Some examples:

- “The curriculum needs to focus on what students need to be able to do with their knowledge.”
- “Critical thinking skills are considered essential for advanced college courses and jobs in today’s information-based economy.”
- “More real learning takes place if students spend more time going into greater depth on fewer topics, allowing them to experience problem solving, controversies and the subtleties of scholarly investigation.”

At Holland Hall, we will be watching and waiting for the new curricula to be announced, perhaps within the next year or two. Re-instating an A. P. course is within the realm of possibility if the philosophy and goals of the College Board align with our mission at Holland Hall.

On Monday, February 15, the entire Holland Hall faculty will view a documentary film entitled “Race to Nowhere”. A recent New York Times article reviewing the film states: “With no advertising and little news media attention, “Race to Nowhere” has become a must-see movie in communities where the kindergarten-to-Harvard steeplechase is most competitive. The film portrays the pressures when schools pile on hours of homework and coaches turn sports into year-round obligations.” The film was made by Vicki Abeles, a middle-aged mother and first-time filmmaker. She picked up a camera when a doctor stated that her 12-year-old’s stomachaches were being caused by stress in school. She believes that the “testing movement” is one reason that has caused education to go

off the tracks, and that schools and parents are guilty of over-scheduling their children and robbing them of their childhoods. At Holland Hall, we are interested in what the film has to say as it relates to the demands we place on our students for their time, participation, and achievement in school.

A radically different view of childhood and parenting is espoused in a recent book by Amy Chua entitled "Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother". Ms. Chua has focused our attention on the subject of parenting like no other book in recent history. Recent television appearances by the author and a cover story in the January 31st issue of Time Magazine have raised issues ranging from what we have a right to demand from our own children to America's standing in the global marketplace. And, since schools are in the business not only of educating our children, but also passing along important cultural values, Ms. Chua raises some important questions regarding what values should be central to our culture in this country. I encourage you to read about this "Tiger Mother" and think critically about the issues she raises. Perhaps there is a middle ground about which we can all agree. One leading psychologist, Hara Marano, suggests such a compromise position: "Kids can grow and thrive under a wide variety of parenting styles. American parenting at its best, combines ambitious expectations and a loving environment with a respect for each child's individual differences and a flexibility in parental roles and behavior."