

Creating and Defining Community in the Middle School

Joel Bicknell

What defines the Holland Hall Middle School as a school community? Certainly, the annual events, the daily rituals, the academic and behavioral expectations provide the framework within which our community functions. However, a school calendar and a student/parent handbook do not adequately define our school.

What does? On August 18th, we welcome 89 new students into the Middle School. Sixty-eight of those students will be fourth graders beginning their trek through our halls and classrooms. Twenty-eight of those 89 will be beginning their stories as Holland Hall students. All of these families will soon discover, if they haven't already, that the Middle School is defined by the relationships formed with their classmates, teachers and administrators.

But what makes those relationships different here? The strength of our Middle School community is found in bringing together a group of people who believe in the mission of the school. In doing so, we regularly see students reaching for and meeting the expectations set for them in the *Essential Qualities of a Holland Hall Graduate* (see *Essential Qualities* link on the website). I would encourage you to take a few moments to read over these qualities. It's an impressive list of characteristics we teach towards on a daily basis. We hold ourselves to these same expectations as educators.

As an independent school, we gauge our success in many ways. In *This We Believe*, the National Middle School Association details 16 characteristics of successful middle schools. Six of these characteristics address school culture and community.

1. The school environment is inviting, safe, inclusive and supportive of all.
2. Every student's academic and personal development is guided by an adult advocate.
3. Comprehensive guidance and support services meet the needs of young adolescents.
4. Health and wellness are supported in curricula, school-wide programs and related policies.
5. The school actively involves families in the education of their children.
6. The school includes community and business partners.

I ask you to keep us honest as we head into this school year. We believe where we are in our journey as a school in each of these areas demonstrates the strength of our community. We believe the culture and community of our Middle School is developmentally-responsive to your child's moral, intellectual, social, physical and emotional needs.

While we can promise you there will be ups and downs throughout your child's middle years, we can also promise that we'll be right there with you. In that partnership, we will

challenge your child to achieve more, to desire more of themselves and to care more about their community. Through it all, we look forward to hearing your child's laughter. These halls have been empty without it. Welcome back! Here's to a great school year!