

How the Middle School Develops the Essential Qualities of a Holland Hall Student

Joel Bicknell
Head of Middle School

Many qualities define what it means to be a “professional” middle school educator at Holland Hall. The understanding of the developmental stages our students progress through guides us to reflect upon strategies used in the classroom. The focus of nurturing students while accelerating achievement leads us to reflect upon both curricular and co-curricular offerings. As masters of content and skill, we reflect on both teaching practices and curricular connections both within the Middle School and between the other divisions. In actively contributing to a positive school culture, we reflect on how we communicate with all members of the community.

To reflect on the Middle School experience, to reflect on curriculum and the student experience and to reflect on ourselves as professional educators – these purposeful reflections have driven our work in the Middle School this year.

As we near the end of the 2008-2009 school year, reflecting on student and faculty achievements comes naturally. My approach to these monthly writings has been to share the processes we’ve engaged in this year in the Middle School. In continuing that theme, I wanted to share the initial results of a discussion we are having regarding the Essential Qualities of a Holland Hall Student.

In our reflections on each quality – Moral, Intellectual, Knowledge of Self and Citizenship – we identified what we currently do to develop that particular quality in our students. The results of that discussion affirmed the defining elements of the Middle School experience.

Moral

Programming

Service Learning
Chapel/RE
Advisory/Wellness
Cross-age Events

Communication

Lead by example/Modeling
Treat all with dignity
Capitalize on the Teachable Moment
Engage students w/ high expectations for behavior

Intellectual

Programming

4th-5th Reading/Writing Workshop
4th-8th Exploratory Science Program
6th-8th Humanities based instruction
6th-8th Leveled Math/Foreign Language
6th-8th Forum (Weekly debate)
4th-8th Comprehensive Arts Education
4th-8th Library Instruction/Collection
7th-8th Washington D.C. Trip
7th-8th Grade Cultural Exchanges (Mexico, France)
4th-8th Grade Discipline-specific clubs
4th-8th Grade Online Newspaper (Dutch Buzz/Clique)

Teaching Practices

Teach to a variety of learning styles/needs

Provide students opportunities to speak/perform
Teach explicit lessons on critical thinking
Develop interdisciplinary projects
Employ varied assessments

[Knowledge of Self

Advisory
Athletics/PE
Chapel/Religious Education
Fine Arts Education
Middle School Forum
Student Leadership
Student Led Conferences
Philosophy of Discipline

Citizenship

Student Leadership
Service Learning
Cross-age Events
Advisory Program
Chapel/Religious Education

After detailing current practices that develop the Essential Qualities in our students, we turned our attention to the future and how we can deepen the Middle School experience. That reflection identified steps we will take to enhance the strengths of the Middle School and to introduce new elements. Throughout the next year, we will be executing this plan.

None of this would be possible without a group of educators who willingly reflect upon *current* practices to identify best practices. We have much to take pride in at Holland Hall. Our successes are defined by the achievements and learning of our students. And it's our faculty we have to thank for embracing reflective teaching practices and the Essential Qualities.

Congratulations on a great year. We look forward to seeing you in August!