



Harbor Country Day School
Embracing the extraordinary in every child.™

Tuesday, March 14, 2023

Dear Harbor Families,

In my second reflection topic, I will share thoughts and insights regarding the advantages of the independent school PK-8 model. These differentiating factors are often overlooked and are one of the most compelling reasons parents choose independent schools over their local public options. As I did with my first topic, I have crafted this in two parts for your consideration. This week's essay will include how mission and modeling play a key role in the development of a healthy culture. My second installment will delve into programming and curriculum advantages.

The Inherent Advantages of the PK-8 Independent School Structure

Part 2 - Curriculum Structures & Autonomy

This past Saturday, Harbor held an open house for prospective families. This was my first experience with being a part of such a forward-thinking model. I am not aware of many schools that offer an open campus opportunity on a weekend. I'm delighted to share that it was a great success, and those who came were extremely impressed with many aspects of our program.

So, I began this essay by mentioning the open house for a very specific reason. Not only was this event validating for us as a school, but the conversations that were had with a number of our guests parallel the topic of today's piece. The fact is, we are able to dictate our direction. What I mean by this is that the theme of best practices in education came up repeatedly. On so many occasions, I heard our curriculum being presented and explained with conviction and confidence. We were able to share the reasons why we chose certain aspects of a given program and then rationalize why we may be more selective by not using every component or every resource.

PK-8 schools have an innate capacity to sift through content strands, analyze scope and sequence, reflect on common core standards, and then create a "best of the best" progression with continuity within the curriculum. This autonomy enables schools like Harbor to grow its program organically with a purely child-centric approach. Teachers not only have the freedom and flexibility to craft their lessons,

but they also are able to align curricula through research, reflection, and professional dialogue. This is the very reason why we are enhancing our professional development model to include collaborative, full-day workshops throughout the school year beginning next fall.

Finally, there is another significant advantage to building a cohesive academic program in a PK-8 independent school. There are simply no top-down constraints. In many PK-12 schools, the upper school (9-12) program absolutely dictates what the middle and lower school curricula look like. There is an inevitability about this that PK-12 schools must own. Students are prepared for the next program, course sequencing, and schedule that follows. The high school leads the way, and the lower divisions must accommodate and flex accordingly. There is simply no avoiding it.

We are blessed in many ways, but perhaps the most important is that we are able to celebrate our strengths each day. Our mission fits our structure beautifully, and our model creates the conditions for Harbor to thrive and grow as a premier independent PK-8 school on the North Shore.

With kind regards,

Andy