
LIVING AND LEARNING TOGETHER IN COMMUNITY



Earlier this year I heard the expression, “Farmers don’t grow crops; they create the environments where crops can flourish.” The comment came during a discussion about education and was much more about the work of helping young people become the best versions of themselves than it was about farming.

The underlying implications on education and parenting were intentional: Learning cannot be forced upon someone. While this statement reminds us of the responsibilities of young people to take advantage of their learning opportunities, as well as the limits on what educators and parents can do for children, it also reminds us of the importance of creating the best environment for young people to learn and grow.

The St. Stephen’s faculty often reflects on the important work of creating the right environments for our students. One of the most important roles of great educators is to provide spaces for young people where they are physically, emotionally, psychologically, intellectually, socially and spiritually safe to flourish.

I have thought a lot in the last decade about the environments within school communities. As information is more readily available on the Internet and as the number and type of online learning opportunities become increasingly prevalent and affordable, leaders of independent schools have been forced to reconsider the value of their school communities. However, the St. Stephen’s experience has never been about just access to information.

During our strategic planning process last year, community members talked about how St. Stephen’s provides a “joyful living and learning experience,” which is far more valuable to adolescents than a process by which information is accessed. Much of the work outlined in the strategic plan is dedicated to strengthening students’ relationships with others and their sense of belonging within our community. We also are committed to exploring and enhancing the ways that the physical environment—our sacred shared spaces on campus—impact us individually and collectively.

While Spartans are guided and inspired to acquire knowledge during their time here, they also are provided the transformative experience of living and learning together in community—one carefully crafted to enrich their creative, emotional, physical and spiritual development in truly profound ways. Whether students are sharing ideas in classes, spending time together in the dorms or dining hall, or worshipping with others in Chapel, their learning and development are informed and enhanced by the relationships they form with others on The Hill.

— CHRISTOPHER L. GUNNIN, HEAD OF SCHOOL