



Tuesday, March 7, 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 1 - Mission & Modeling

It's not surprising to note that once prospective families visit and tour Harbor, a significantly high percentage of them enroll. I begin with this fact based on data and regular observations. First, when I made my initial visit to campus, I was struck by the tone that was felt. And while this might feel like the same comment we often hear, what I am referring to is a sense of intentionality and spirit that can be felt. Children connect in ways you don't often witness, and there is a notable amount of camaraderie that you experience when walking through the halls. Yes, that's the magic of Harbor's mission in action. But have you ever considered that children also thrive due to the structures we create?

The PK-8 independent school model, in general, is an especially powerful one. Kids can "grow up" on campus and are immersed in a culture that promotes friendships across grade levels. Harbor's all-school recess each morning is an example of just how potent this can be for kids. Simply providing time for children to cross paths and interact with one another through play routinely stimulates a healthy dynamic.

Further, younger children thrive when there is modeling and mentoring from their elder peers. This repeats itself throughout the day at Harbor. Whether at an all-school meeting, in the dining room during lunch, or just passing in the halls, our middle-school-aged students regularly and even unknowingly set the tone for the littles. They greet them, remind them of rules, hold the door for them at drop-off, and often are mindful to exemplify rules when younger kids are watching.

Of course, there are times when our upper school students are impulsive and deviate from this cultural norm (and phenomenon), but the tone is present the vast majority of the time. And it's the way in which they exemplify "how things are done" based on the range of ages that makes such a difference.

Finally, I would argue that in school, this range of ages truly matters. What I mean is that other models (such as K-12 or 5-8, for example) contain unavoidable flaws. When younger children aren't present, the tone can and often does shift dramatically, becoming less likely to create those modeling opportunities. And when you add high-school-aged students, the filters typically dissolve, and a whole litany of challenges present themselves.

Next week, I will share insights related to curriculum, programming, and teaching autonomy, particularly when comparing Harbor to public school options. I look forward to engaging in more conversations regarding this and other similar topics in the future.

With gratitude,

Andy