

Principal Devoti's Middle School Task Force Presentation – 2/13/18

- We are very proud of our middle school at Mount Everett.
- While we do not always get everything right, we are continuously trying to improve ourselves to provide excellent programming for our students.

The driving force behind our successes is adherence to cultural beliefs that pervade Mount Everett and guide a positive and productive school culture. They are:

1. From Struggle comes Strength.
2. Faith in each other yields exponential achievement.
3. Affection for kids and loyalty between staff and the school yields a work ethic based on commitment rather than compliance.
4. Effective and candid communication and organization yields confidence, clarity, trust, and sound ethical decisions.

Assets and Challenges currently on the field include:

Assets

- The middle school is safe and well ordered.
- Staffed with veteran teachers who are experts in their fields with over 100 years of teaching experience.
- We embrace project based learning and exploratory experiences that integrate curriculum areas. The highest of premiums is placed on student engagement.
- We launch the 7th grade year with a three-week unit on the plasticity of the emerging adolescent brain. It is important for them to understand the biological changes occurring within them which account for some of the emotional turmoil they experience as adolescents.
- Coherent themes pervade each grade level with personal responsibility being the 7th grade theme and social/community responsibility the 8th. Our 8th grade interdisciplinary unit embracing tolerance, diversity and multiculturalism is of an exceptionally high standard.
- We have a long-standing advisory program that promotes character education and fosters relationships between and among adults and kids.
- We integrate technology primarily vis a vis blended learning opportunities that have recently received praise from experts in the field.
- Wellness instruction in the 7th grade featuring Fitness, Nutrition, Substance Abuse Prevention, and Reproductive Health.
- Wellness instruction in the 8th grade featuring Mental and Emotional Health, Human Disease, Family and Social Relationships, and Body Systems.
- There are many extracurricular and after school experiences available to middle schoolers, including student government participation, Rotary Interact, peer mentoring, robotics, music, theater, middle/high school athletics and homework center.
- A constellation of special programming is offered in World Languages, Vocational, Arts, and Media/Technology.

Challenges

- Middle school teachers are no longer an intact team. Middle school teachers have been required to teach high school courses for several years and, beginning last year, high school teachers have been required to teach middle school coursework.

- Middle school teachers no longer have common planning time, and professional development opportunities have been curtailed.
- Field trips may have to be reduced or eliminated given rising costs.
- Integrating 6th grade into the Mount Everett Middle School presents numerous programmatic and logistical challenges; however, our staff have engaged in thinking about such a move several times over the years, most recently, last year. Some of these ideas and thinking are still applicable at this time, which we believe may make such a move possible for next year.

In summary what began with an emerging philosophy by Professor Alexander back in the 1960's continues to resonate among educators today even in the face of fiscal and political challenges. The ideas he held dear are currently still embraced by organizations like NELMS and AMLE, who provide very helpful guidance regarding middle school programming. A document called *This We Believe* is also very informative. If I were to identify one area of departure between our efforts at Mount Everett and some of the recent literature is the fact that our instruction is very standards based. I feel that some of the current literature indicates that standards and testing precludes teacher abilities to be creative with project based learning, field trips, exploratory opportunities, and integrated curriculum. I think that the many experiences we provide for our students in this regard together with our test scores demonstrate that we can do both. Last, but certainly not least, is the importance of remembering that middle school must be a place where the adults understand that social and emotional development is equally important with academics. We get that at Mount Everett. We work very hard to set the dial just right between the roles of taskmaster and confidante/mentor/trusted adult. It is an extremely difficult balancing act, especially when you are personalizing decisions for individual kids/families at the same time you are striving to have just, fair, and coherent policies and procedures for everyone. We do our share of stumbling in these matters, but I can assure you our hearts are always in the right place.