

A PRINCIPAL'S REFLECTIONS

EDUCATION IS A REFLECTIVE PRACTICE. THIS BLOG PROVIDES MY VIEWS ON EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP, EFFECTIVE TECHNOLOGY INTEGRATION, BEST PRACTICES, AND CREATING A STUDENT-CENTERED LEARNING CULTURE.

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What I Learned Because of School

Last month I unveiled the first ever guest post on my blog written by one of my students. The success and impact of this tiny experiment motivated me to seek out other students whose stories and reflections could provide an inspiration to educators from all over the world. It is my honor to introduce Diane Montecucollo, a senior at NMHS. Diane not only accepted my invitation to write this post, but she wrote it during the most hectic time for any senior just days before graduation.

As my high school career winds down to only a few short days, I am forced to reflect upon my last 4 years at New Milford High School. Lately I have been asking myself questions such as what did high school really mean to me, what did it do for me, but most importantly, what did I learn? For me high school was a stepping stone, a four year experience filled with numerous opportunities and life lessons that have prepared me for college and beyond. And while most high schools are set up to give you the basic skills necessary for higher education or the workforce, I feel that New Milford High School presented me with so many unique opportunities and experiences that went above and beyond what other schools provide.



One of my most rewarding experiences was my involvement in the Peer Leadership Program. With this program I was able to comfort frightened incoming freshmen during orientation, raise money to assist victims of the genocide in Darfur, and attend inspirational seminars about leadership and ethical issues. Through this program, I was able to develop and utilize my leadership skills. As a future Business Management major at The College of New Jersey, I know that leadership is going to be a very important aspect of my life. I hope to eventually own my own company, and without leadership skills my dream would not be feasible. Leadership is an integral part of my personality and character, and I credit my leadership abilities to activities like Peer Leadership, Business Club, and Mock Trial, all of which were offered to me by NMHS.

A major life lesson that I took from New Milford High School is that you need to take advantage of every opportunity that comes your way. In the fall of 2009 I went on a field trip to Wall Street with my AP History

class. The trip consisted of a tour of Wall Street, a visit to Alexander Hamilton's grave at Trinity Church, a stop at The Federal Reserve, and then lunch at the historically significant Fraunces Tavern. Everything we did that day was thanks to Adam Leitman Bailey, a powerful Manhattan lawyer and New Milford High School Alumnus. However, Mr. Bailey's generosity did not end with that field trip. When it was time to get on the bus and head back to New Milford, Mr. Bailey handed me a business card and said to keep in touch. During the trip, Adam had mentioned that he offered a high school internship every summer, and that he was planning on continuing to reward a student with the Raymond "Hap" Harrison Scholarship, so I knew that I would be wise to hold on to his card.

New Milford High School presented me with the opportunity to meet Adam Leitman Bailey, Mr. Bailey then presented me with the opportunity to add him as a contact, and I then took advantage of this opportunity by e-mailing him regarding the trip and summer internship. The next day I was called into Mr. Sheninger's office, put on speaker phone with Mr. Bailey, and offered the internship. Not many people can say that they ever worked on Wall Street, let alone at only 17 years old. As if the internship was not enough, I was a co-winner of the Raymond "Hap" Harrison Scholarship this year. This experience showed me that you need to be able to recognize unbelievable opportunities and then act on them.

What other principals and educators should take from this is that you can't just hand your students everything. You need to teach your students the importance of leadership and taking charge, and then let them figure out the rest on their own. If you give them the skills and opportunities to do great things, and then allow them to seize opportunities on their own, you are giving your students guidance while allowing them to take responsibility as well. Independence and responsibility are two necessary skills for college students, and by building these characteristics in your students, you are setting them up for future success.

Education must be about facilitating and guiding students in a way that empowers them to make decisions, provides support as needed, and encourages risk-taking. A school culture that is established based on these principles as well as those mentioned by Diane assists in ensuring the success of all students. I can't thank Diane enough for clearly articulating how NMHS made learning meaningful and provided her with opportunities to take charge of her education. Her thoughts provide invaluable closure to a wonderful school year. Please share your thoughts as Diane will be reading the comments!