



Deerfield Parent Network

“Network Notes”

SOPHOMORE YEAR Checking In & Looking Ahead

A Program for Parents of Sophomores

TUESDAY, JANUARY 15, 2013

DHS Principal, Audris Griffith, discussed why Sophomore year is so important.

Should my child study with friends on Facebook?

No. Setting up groups, posting group projects and communication with groups is useful like an electronic bulletin board. She would recommend no more than 5 minutes a day....everything else is socialization.

What Study guides/On-line tools and other resources can my student utilize?

She is not aware of any on-line products that are particularly useful yet but there are products coming down the pipe line in a few more years.

There is pressure to take summer school before junior year in order to either fulfill all of the requirements/electives and/or open up a free period. What are your thoughts on this and as parents what should the focus of the conversation be with your child?

Each child is unique and you know your child best. Summer school can open up a free period during the school year or the opportunity to knock out graduation requirements. It is ok to not take summer school and give your child a chance to really disconnect from school. Please be warned of intensity of some class such as US History. It is correct that they can have hours of homework a day for this class. Please remember that this class has to be pared down from 36 weeks of instruction into a summer school session which is significant. **How do colleges value it?** No specific feedback but we are very established as a school district and have a reputation for the quality of curriculum. It depends on the schools that your child is looking at in some cases as the more select schools such as MIT can be very specific. If your child has a specific school in mind, it is always best to check their requirements.

What advice would you give the student who is not in AP level courses, is an average test taker, is involved in some activities and who is already worrying, due to the stiff competition from fellow students, whether they will be admitted to a college of their choice?

Breathe & relax as there is a good college match for every child. If a student is considering a very selective college, then these colleges are looking for a rigorous course load transcript. Please remember that we have some of the best admission rates and highest national retention rates for public high school students. For example, Wash U. accepted 6 of 7 seniors already this year. I will never tell a student they shouldn't try for the school of their dreams but I will have the hard conversation if they are not working to their full potential or coasting in their course load. The most important decision is to help your child find the best match for them NOT if you can get them into a school. Getting into a college is such a small piece, they need to be able to succeed when there. **Do selective colleges accept summer school?** Schools like Wash U. do accept summer school. MIT, Pamona, Hampshire are the 3 that are presently drilling down on our course work. We find that happens when a college admission department is going through a major reevaluation of their admission process.

What's a good balance between academia and extracurricular involvement when thinking ahead to the college "resume"?

It is good to have another activity so you can meet more people. Navigating groups successfully is one of the main goals for all students who participate in extracurricular activities. As far as academic rigor, students are welcome to jump into an honors class, if they are ready to make that commitment and it is a reasonable step up. We always emphasize that each student should take the most rigorous course load that they can successfully navigate. We would always like to see students reach and try. It is better to see them struggle a little than coast. Every year we have a few kids who take 5-6 AP but remember that is 1% of each class. If your child is contemplating an AP class, the most approachable is AP Environmental Science and then AP Psychology as these classes are topical in nature and not built on past coursework. My one pet peeve is students who drop in the first few weeks. They need to stay through the first quarter at least as the transition time is necessary. Be insistent that they don't bail too early.



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How much “letting go” do you advise now that our students are beginning to drive and take on more independence?

I’m very conservative on parenting and we put too much emphasis on the letting go part. They need us more now than when they were toddlers. They have such a varied set of emotions & you must be the ballast in the boat. I personally think they should NOT drive at 16. All research says they have immature frontal lobes so their brains are NOT like our brains which can focus on the most imminent concern among the myriad of stimuli while driving. This is paramount. I also don’t think more than one kid should be in the car. Remember to smell your child after every evening out. Most children make good decisions most of the time. I don’t think it’s the time to let go as parents of Sophomores. Begin to launch in Junior year and continue to do so Senior year but still always keeping tabs. Consider checking the mileage on the car when they’ve been out, remember to keep informed & then you are not surprised. Don’t helicopter but be present. For example, Can you name their best friend? The last time their feelings were hurt? Are they really ready to be dating? What are they looking for in a boy or girl? Are they comfortable in relationships with teachers? I think society requires more & more sophisticated parenting to do it well.

There is a high demand for “early bird” classes. Has the school looked into adding more?

Yes & then not enough enroll. Remember that I don’t want to cancel classes that have low attendance as that forces other classes to swell in class sizes in other areas. This is a gigantic puzzle that is very difficult to navigate.

Have you considered adding any accelerated level classes that would fall in between the regular level classes and the Honors/AP level?

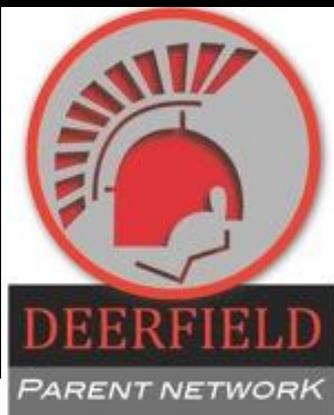
Accelerated classes that would fall between these tracks could only happen if we had tremendous resources to decrease our class size across DHS. She gave an example that if you had this enrollment for one type of class: Survey=18, Level 2=low 20s & this middle level = 12 then we have to pull teachers and resources from other classes or departments to help this class run. We work hard to give every student an equal shot at a reasonable class size in every one of their classes. The one area that has smaller class sizes every year are the World language APs so that forces us to swell lower level class sizes.

When should students start to study and prepare for the ACT/SAT?

The best thing your child can do to prepare for this test is to have a good engagement with rigorous curriculum. They do NOT need to begin studying for this during their sophomore year. They took the PLAN this fall which is a baby ACT. One thing to consider next year, Study Strategies class which is not a graded class & only meets on non-lab days. It is like a FREE ACT class focusing on time performances, question formats etc. Different elements of the class are taught by teachers who are subject specific. Not offered in summer school but is offered with early bird. Another thing to remember that not every child needs to take the first national ACT in early fall of Junior year. I really don’t recommend it as this is a huge maturation year academically so most will do much better on an ACT in the spring when they have gotten through more curriculum. Please visit ACT.org for practice tests and more information. Science section is the weakest section of the test as it is more of a reading section. A student can take the test as many times as they want. The highest score will be submitted to the colleges. As you all know there is a whole host of commercially offered options for preparation and our community uses it heavily. These outside options are not necessary, but each family should decide as they can be worthwhile for students with test anxiety.

What is the significance of the PLAN scores?

We are looking for growth in each student from their EXPLORE test in 8th grade (which will be moving to 9th grade) to their PLAN test. When I look at the data from PLAN to actual ACT scores, the national average for growth is – 5 ½ to 6 point growth. DHS growth averages 7.5-8.5 points. This is AMAZING! Please know that the teachers are constantly modeling their test questions on the ACT model to give the kids ample practice. SAT – 57 kids took it this year. CCRC does a fabulous job giving you information with series of morning meetings for Junior parents. They run these in the mornings but notes and handouts posted that afternoon. One parent commented how this significantly diffused the tension between her & her child as she could get information directly from the meetings. We also increased from one college counselor to 1 ½ college counselors to service the students better. Beth G. is a master with regard to financial aid.



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Have there been any recent changes to school security in light of the Connecticut school shootings?

Yes, there are several and more in the works. This is the most important part of my job, to keep these kids safe. Every morning I arrive at 5:45am and walk the school checking all the alarm panels. I am always thinking about this. The district has begun work with architects to grossly limit access to building in the front foyer. Everyone who comes to the school after the day has begun will enter a locked glass room where you will have to sign in and get buzzed into the building. We are considering ballards or concrete planters (this summer) outside the front entrance so no one could drive a car, etc in. Over the PA, I instructed the student to no longer open outside doors to let others in for any reason. If a teacher props a door, immediate disciplinary action will be taken. We are planning lock downs during passing periods and during lunch. Electronic security is part of the spring referendum. Is this the best we can do? We constantly ask ourselves. Metal detectors are very ineffective in suburbs based on research data. I have been working for the last year to acquire a School Liaison Resource Officer and continue in negotiations with Village over this issue. This person would have an office right by the front. These officers are very good problem solvers and would work with the kids in addition to adding to the security of the campus at all times. Officer would be armed. There is no map of building online for security reasons. We have a night watchman until 10pm. Please remind your kids – if something doesn't seem right, share don't keep it quiet. We are sending a large contingent of staff to a threat assessment training in the next few weeks. Every year we call in police and parents when we have issues with a student and they are then required to get a note from psychiatrist before allowed back into building. This happens periodically each year as many mental illnesses emerge during this time of adolescence.

Are there any new plans/programs (academic, athletic, or extracurricular) on the horizon that this Class of 2015 will benefit from?

Working hard to defend what we have during budget constraints, not foreseeing any additional cuts. The one thing we have implemented recently is a more intensive reading program for those most at risk when entering DHS.

How accurate is the PLAN score as an indicator of their potential ACT score?

It is relatively accurate. One big thing to consider: How seriously did they take this test?

Is the PRARIE STATE ACT the same as National ACT?

No, our state test no longer includes the ACT writing portion required by many college admissions.

Are there any NEW CLASSES being offered next year?

Anatomy & Psychology – it is a semester class elective. Class will go only with enough enrollment. Rigorous course but not AP – independent study in past with 12 enrolled this year.

Would you consider cancelling Turn About?

Lower level kids mostly go to Turn About. We cancelled a few years ago and the parents were very upset.

Why are there so many different types of finals in the Sophomore English classes?

There is uniformity within most departments. A common assessment is used in math, science & world languages. However, the Humanities are 3-4 years out before common assessments will be successfully implemented.