



Reflections on the 2014-2015 School Year

Thank you to all the students and parents who participated in our annual surveys last spring. The feedback we get from these surveys is invaluable. We have taken your input along with what we've heard through conversations in our community and would like to share with you our thoughts and plans for the 2015-16 school year.

Things to Celebrate

1. Satisfaction with the School

Students and parents are overwhelmingly satisfied with Animas (mid to high 70%) but we saw a bit of a dip this past year from previous years. Animas was built upon the principle of every student being known well and our teachers knock this out of the park. Some other strengths identified from our open ended responses include strong teacher-student relationships, small class sizes, and a supportive culture with high expectations for all students.

2. Meeting the Academic Needs of our Students

For the most part, with the exception being addressed in the below section, our students and parents felt as though their academic needs were met. Most of the classes and departments fell between the 70-90 percent positive reviews range. Some strengths identified include challenging classes, preparing students for college and career, and our focus on meaningful project learning.

3. Would Recommend Animas to a Friend

It was great to see that a significant majority of our students and families would recommend Animas. We had a bit of a dip this year but more than 80% of our parents and students would recommend Animas to a friend. It is inspiring that our community believes enough in our school that they would stake their name to a positive recommendation.

Things to Work on

1. Spanish

Teaching a foreign language at the high school level will always be a challenge. Every student enters at various levels of competence and readiness as well as various learning curves, throw in the fact that we really only have the ability to offer one foreign language and the foreign language department is seen as a dilemma that we will constantly strive to perfect. Our goal will always be to offer strong programs across our school and this is no different in regards to Spanish. The decision last year to offer 9th grade Spanish through an online program was not taken lightly; multiple parties were involved in the redesign of the curriculum. This year, we are making three changes to our Spanish program. 1) 9th grade Spanish will be taught by our highly qualified faculty rather than through an online program; 2) 9th grade students will have the option of taking Spanish or choosing to wait until their sophomore year to begin Spanish (we will counsel 9th graders about

this decision during Orientation as it has implications for their college admissions); 3) we are offering Conversational Spanish for any student who has completed Spanish 2.

2. Substance Abuse

Colorado is in the midst of a social experiment that has our children in the middle. Substance abuse is not a new issue for high schools. However, there is rising concern over the use of illegal substances on campus as noted via the parent and student surveys and we are taking this concern seriously. Fortunately, both our student and parent surveys stated that students felt safe on campus. At the end of last year an AHS Substance Use Task Force made up of teachers, parents, and community members began to meet after the conversation arose at a PAC Meeting. The Task Force will continue to meet and is exploring implementation of programs for students, staff and parents that will help us address this issue through education, conversation and more consistent messaging around expectations. Please contact Assistant Head of School Libby Cowles if you'd like to join the Task Force in our work.

The Big Question

How do We Strengthen the School Culture and Focus on Deeper Learning and Meaningful Projects?

After speaking to all teachers, some students and parents, and the board it is clear that our community has always been a special and unique place. There is some nostalgia for the good old days when we were smaller and the mentality of barn raising permeated the atmosphere. We are in a much different place now; 300+ students is still a small school but by no means a village. Our goal is to be the place where every student is known well and pushed to be their best self. How do we do this when our freshmen class is about the size of our founding school? How do we ensure that our students and teachers have an exceptional pride in themselves and the school family? To partly answer this, Ashley Carruth has taken a new half-time administrative position with a focus on programming that builds positive school culture, but it really is up to the entire community to ensure that we are prideful of our school. It is also my responsibility to be the beacon of excellence and pride through ample facetime with our students and teachers.

The second aspect of this question is around deeper learning and meaningful projects. At our core we are a school that prepares all students for postsecondary success through project based learning. However, this does not mean that we are doing projects just to do projects. Every aspect of our academics need to strive for deeper learning. When we are engaged in a project it needs to be meaningful, which leads to a transformation in our students. It means ensuring access and challenge for every student. It means rigor but not in the traditional sense. I will defer to HTH's "Emperor of Rigor" Rob Riordan rules for rigor to better explain:

*No rigor without engagement; No rigor without ownership; No rigor without purpose;
No rigor without audience; No rigor without dreamers; No rigor without fun*

At the end of the day, this is what we strive for. These rules are what we promise our students and families. To answer the question of how we build a strong culture that embodies an ethic of

excellence and deeper learning, Riordan's rules of rigor get at what I strive to see in every classroom. They are the bar that we are aiming for and will reach.