



Vista Newsletter #11
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Partnerships Enhance the Vista Experience

"School - a building with four walls and tomorrow held inside"

I'm quite fond of the above quote, and used it to open my talk to the fifth grade graduates a few years back. I've always been an advocate for field trips and other "beyond the classroom" experiences, and the work in developing Vista has reaffirmed our belief in providing students with frequent authentic, meaningful opportunities to meet and interact with leading professionals. School experiences should not be limited to the physical building. We need to tap into the very best of the Puget Sound area, and make learning come alive through partnerships with area organizations.

We have made a commitment to this type of experiential learning by allocating one day each week for activities ranging from visiting an engineering laboratory at the University of Washington to welcoming a group of actors to Vista to help give new life to our study of Greek myths. Students will be afforded significant time to learn first-hand from scientists, architects, artists, doctors, and other professionals.

It is one thing to read about a researcher and her groundbreaking work in molecular biology, and quite another to visit her lab where students engage in scientific dialogue and experimentation. Learning about climatic zones solely through a textbook can pique interest only so much, but participating in the Elwah River Science Education Project (Vista is already booked for a 5 day experience in Spring 2008), where students learn the natural history of the river while

collecting important data about the unprecedented Elwah River dam removal project, ignites learning and could be a truly life-changing event for our students. In conjunction with our education partner Olympic Park Institute, Vista students will design and conduct their own Elwah River project, investigating the interconnections between forest, rivers, and lakes.

Vista believes that the more we can expose our students to leaders in fields like math, science, and technology, the more they learn to think and approach tasks like mathematicians, scientists, and IT professionals. Further, they have the opportunity to experience what it is really like to perform certain jobs, and begin to appreciate the time, education, and responsibility necessary for success in a variety of fields.

Looking back at your own schooling, I hope that many of you are able to point to a certain teacher or experience that helped inspire you to pursue a particular career path. For many people, all they need is the chance to see what's out there, and then for somebody to encourage them to go after their passion.

The fastest increasing employment needs for the next two decades are in the areas of computer engineering, programming, and design. In fact, half of all new jobs available in the next 20 years will be in new technological fields. Who will be the people filling these positions? The poor performance of American students in math and science in comparison to their peers in other industrialized nations has been well publicized. Vista Academy offers exceptional depth and challenge in these areas, and students will leave Vista well prepared for the rigors of honors and Advanced Placement coursework in high school, enabling them to pursue a variety of avenues upon graduation.

Girls in particular at the upper elementary and middle school grades are at an especially critical point in their scientific, mathematical, and technical development. When teachers create environments that nurture and encourage, they offer support and confidence to girls who may be interested in advanced opportunities in math, science, and technology (National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, 2000).

Teachers play a crucial role in encouraging girls in these areas by acting as role models and creating a psychologically safe environment that is conducive to all students' learning. A recent study found that almost half of the female mathematics majors at a very competitive college attributed their decision to major in mathematics to the influence of a teacher. Vista recognizes the importance of promoting math, science, and technology to our students, and this responsibility helps inform and guide our curricular and partnership decisions.

I end with another favorite quote. It is my belief that Vista Academy will provide students with numerous opportunities for the door to open and let in a world of possibilities.

"There's always one moment in childhood when the door opens and lets the future in"

Tim Costello
Middle School Head