A Description of the Academic Program

In 2003 Hillsdale High School began its redesign into three semi-autonomous Smaller Learning Communities (SLCs) centered around the Cornerstone values of Equity, Personalization, Rigor, Autonomy and Collaboration/Shared Decision-making. Our SLCs have broken with the mold of an outdated factory model of education, empowering teachers to work collaboratively, develop rigorous curriculum and personalize the learning experience for every child.

Hillsdale has embraced SLCs as a school-wide model and has created reforms that have resulted in higher test scores, greater levels of personalization and more students successful in college preparatory programs. With few exceptions, all 9th grade students are enrolled in four core classes of English, World History, Biology, and Algebra I (or higher), as well as PE, World Language, and a possible elective. Core teachers and students loop together into the 10th grade where students take English, World History, Chemistry, and Geometry. Each student is also assigned an advisor with whom they meet several times a week to focus on academic, personal, and life-long learning goals.

In the 11th and 12th grades, students move to a new set of teachers, with a core of two to four teachers who also loop with the student for two years whenever possible. For the upcoming 2008-2009 school year, plans are being made to add four more components: Internships, Digital Portfolios, Community Service, and College Coursework.

Student Support

The Hillsdale teaching faculty and support staff are dedicated to the academic success and well-being of each individual student. With the implementation of SLCs, as well as a full array of support programs, students find that they have multiple and varied opportunities for academic support. SLCs enable teachers to better employ strategies such as: looping, collaboration, integrated curriculum and instruction, personalization, differentiated instruction, and authentic learning (e.g., project-based learning, exhibitions).

Hillsdale believes (and found support in the research and consultation of scholars such as Jacqueline Ancess of Columbia University and Linda Darling-Hammond of Stanford University) that rather than adding remedial classes onto a core, improved instructional strategies and a more focused use of resources to support students in demanding college preparatory courses would allow more students to succeed at high levels. Our enrollment, grade, and test results suggest that this belief was well-founded.