

"If there is anything we wish to change in the child, we should first examine it and see whether it is not something that could better be changed in ourselves."

-- Carl Gustav Jung

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I hope everyone had a good weekend. The Hardimon household spent our time shuffling from soccer practice to birthday parties, something I am sure is familiar to many of you. Add in a BBQ with friends and the Pats face-saving victory, I'd say it was a pretty good weekend.

In many of the conversations I have had with the parents and staff of RJG since I came to Acton Boxborough last July, a pattern of questions has arisen regarding such topics as: the value of and differences within the team model, the leadership structure of the school, equality of opportunities for students, fairness in responsibilities between the staff, and the type of schedule we should follow, just to name a few.

At first glance, these topics may appear to have no connection to each other, but under closer scrutiny they are all related. In order to address any of these issues we need to take a step back and ask ourselves a question. "What is the identity of our school? Are we a middle school, a junior high, or some type of hybrid?" Once we answer these questions, all of the above mentioned issues should be easier to answer.

A reasonable place to start this dialog is to create a common vocabulary so allow me to provide a working definition of these two structures. In a typical junior high school, students are assigned to a homeroom and a set of classes that best fit their academic needs. There is no formal structure for communication between teachers beyond department or building meetings - very much like a high school. Academics are the primary focus with little to no structure for teachers to meet to talk about individual students.

In a typical middle school, students are also assigned to a homeroom and a set of classes that best fit their academic needs. The significant difference is that the teachers are clustered, or teamed. Five teachers - Language Arts, Social Studies, Math, Science, and World Language or Exploratory - share approximately 100 students. In addition to teaching their allotted sections of academic classes, time is built into the school week to allow the team to meet to discuss how their shared students are doing in order to assure consistency and provide support - academic and social/emotional.

At their extreme both models have their dangers. The academic focus of a junior high could eclipse the emotional needs of a typically crazed 12 and 13 year old. The middle school, however, could spend so much time on the social emotional needs of the students that academic challenge suffers.

Please note that I am neither suggesting nor do I believe that RJG falls into either of these extremes. In fact, I am extraordinarily impressed with how well the staff of RJG has been able to create an environment that academically challenges our students without losing sight of their social emotional well being. Nevertheless, I have found that these broad and exaggerated working definitions allow for a better understanding of the differences.

As the year progresses, we will continue this conversation and I will be asking for your input and assistance as we delve into our self definition.