

Spring 2012 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Parent Meeting  
May 24, 2012

Dr. Allan Gold, Reed District Psychologist, Dr. Alan Vann Gardner, Principal

The meeting began with small group discussion of two of the five vision areas of the Reed District graduate: engaged citizen and balanced individual/best self to elicit parent opinions of what was most important in these areas, what they felt their children had accomplished and what they still needed to develop or work on.

The area of self-knowledge, good judgment, honor and integrity were felt to be very important. Parents felt that kids were learning the consequences of their decisions. Dr. Gold mentioned that the decision making part of the brain, the frontal lobes, is not fully developed until the late 20's, so that teenagers and even older young adults still make unwise, impulsive decisions. This is an area that they still need to work on and he agreed that understanding the consequences for choices can and should be very helpful for making better choices. Challenging situations for making good (or bad) decisions will multiply in high school.

Parents also noted that students' self assurance and self-confidence has increased from 6<sup>th</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> grade and that they seem well prepared in this area to enter high school. Again, there will be challenges to self-confidence when they meet students from other schools who may be even more athletically or academically accomplished than they are at Del Mar, so there will be a natural adjustment and reevaluation of their status and self-confidence.

Perseverance and resilience are two other qualities that will serve them well as they move into eighth grade or high school. Eighth grade parents noted the difference in these qualities just this year, as students learn to better cope with the academic demands of eighth grade and the social ups and downs.

One parent asked about a seventh grader defining himself as a "nerd," and wondered about how cliques are formed and whether only the "jock," athletic students are popular. Popularity is a variable quality and it is common for students this age to try to identify themselves by labels. "Popularity" ranges from kids who are typically nice, friendly, smart, athletic, good looking, come from well-off families, to mean - all depending on the class culture. And this can vary dramatically from class to class (fortunately, mean = popular doesn't last long). At Del Mar everyone finds some peer to be friends with and if they self-define as "nerd," that is not necessarily a bad thing. There are often a lot of kids who like to play on the computer at break or lunch and might be considered "nerds," but they have plenty of company. It is also important to recognize that group identification does change over time. The greatest years of pressure to conform are from the end of fifth grade through seventh grade. Eighth graders are much more accepting of their classmates whom they've known for a long time and are more tolerant of each other's personalities.

One of the major transition issues for parents of entering high schoolers is how to develop relationships with parents of new friends who come from different districts. It is very important to NOT be afraid to call parents to get acquainted, to find out if parties are supervised, if there will be alcohol, etc. Most parents are glad to receive a call. Parties will start in earnest in ninth grade, so be prepared to discuss what temptations might arise and how your child will handle those. Have discussions about how to recognize when they are uncomfortable (for example, being offered pot, beer, or hard liquor), and how to respond. It is good to role play situations at home. Discussions of wanting to be “cool,” but also earning the trust of parents is a common conflict. Remember, driving is just around the corner now, and kids must have the trust of their parents in order to earn the privilege of driving – and they will want that privilege. The convenience of texting parents provides privacy when kids feel uncomfortable and want to get picked up from a party that is getting out of hand. Code words can be used to let parents know to come and get them without any questions asked.

At this time, whether going into eighth or ninth grade, parents need to adjust their roles. Kids need parents now more than maybe ever since they were babies, but the push away is strong. Be available to them and be good listeners. Don't be “helicopter” parents, because the kids will be more inclined to rebel, but don't assume that they don't need you anymore and that they will always exercise good judgment; they won't. It is still quite acceptable to have rules at your home, but those rules will need to be readjusted. Kids will need to have practice managing their increased freedom, but you may need to rein in the “apron strings” if they show that they cannot be responsible most of the time. Responsibility still means that they help out around the house, do their school work, be where they say their going to be, and are home when they're supposed to be. It's a challenging time for all, but there are many exciting and gratifying times for both parents and kids as they grow and mature.