



GARDEN SCHOOL NEWSLETTER



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Thoughts for the Week

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In the Fall issue of *Independent School*, a quarterly published by NAIS, there is an important article by Amanda Torres that focuses on student engagement in independent school. NAIS conducted a survey of forty-nine schools with the intent to understand what students find most important in their experience as learners. Questions from the survey ranged from what students found most engaging in the classroom to what attracted and held their interest outside of the classroom.

Some of the results were very revealing. A majority of students indicated that what engaged them most was active discussions and debates within the classroom. For these students, the level of active engagement became a significance activity in which they took ownership of the learning process. The second highest preferred activity involved the use of technology for doing research and as part of the daily lessons; third among

the preferred activities were group projects.

An additional part of the survey asked student to identity what they thought were the most effective teaching areas in our schools. The results certainly add to our understanding of the role of the independent school in the learning process. Students felt that learning how to write effectively was a high priority and was done well in our schools. Thinking critical and being able to understand challenging material also received high praise from those surveyed. Ideas such an independent learning, creative solutions, using technology, speaking effectively all ranked high among what our students felt were the strengths of the learning process in independent schools.

So much of this points to the missions our schools have and to the independence and responsibility that we encourage among our students and our families. Independent schools, such as Garden, focus on developing a sense of responsibility for the learning process. Learning needs to be and often is a community based activity; yet within that communal forum resides an equally strong sense of the independent and responsible learner. Taking responsibility for one's education and learning emerged as one of the strong points in student attitude.

As we as an independent school reflect on what we do and how we implement our missions, we can see that many elements that this survey reveals remain at the center of our educational process. Writing and thinking skills, independent learning, vibrant classroom discussions, using technology for research and an open and safe environment which guarantees and sustains the idea of the free exchange of idea all form part of the daily life of our school. These are the areas the make a school a vibrant learning community; these are the areas the all schools need to sustain, enhance and expand.