

Ten Minute T(ea) with Mr. Nick Hiebert

*Interview conducted by Joon Kyun
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Q) Do you think our school gives “enough” freedom to students or restrict them too much regarding the use of electronics in school?

A) I think it gives students plenty of freedom. I read a lot about technology and think about whether a constant use of technology has a positive or a negative effect on school life. One of the things that is most compelling to me about students using electronics [pretty freely] is that technology is always going to be with us. I think of sorting out how to integrate technology into our everyday lives as a good thing. At the same time, I’m also really thankful that our community thinks about—in a classroom, for instance—when technology can be useful to us and when it is not.

Q) Are you aware of the punishment for drug and alcohol use at our school? If so, what are your opinions on that?

A) I would say that I am aware of the punishments in a general sense. CA is unlike some other schools I have been at in terms of the way they think about the discipline process, and I am compelled by that [difference]. I have worked at a boarding school with a one strike policy, and I understand the clarity of that. It seems to me that CA approaches the question a bit differently. In terms of working with students, I understand that drugs are a heavy issue and an important one. And I get a sense that there is more than one way to approach this issue. In all, I think that CA is doing a good job of integrating the idea of “common trust” with our policy on drugs when it comes to a student’s education.

Q) Are there any school rules that you deem as unfair or need change?

A) It’s interesting, because I’m in contact with a lot of different rules here [in my roles] as a coach, a teacher, and as a house parent, and my sense is that CA is very thoughtful about rules. [The rules] provide both a consistency for students and a built-in human flexibility, and that’s one of the aspects [of the rules here] that I have appreciated. In terms of unfair school rules? None immediately come to mind or strike me as unfair. At the same time, I really appreciate that students can have a voice in changing some “unfair” rules. For instance, a recent change in the boarding community is that students who have in-room study hall can now use a portion of their study hall time to take a shower. This small rule change seems like one that comes from the students and involves communication with the faculty. And it’s a rule change that remains, to my mind, in the spirit of what we’re trying to teach when it comes to the rules of study hall: time management and responsibility. In this aspect, I think, CA gives both a sense of freedom and responsibility in our community policies.

Q) What do you think the “darker side” of boarding life is? Is there a darker side?

A) As a high school teacher, I think a lot about what it means to be fourteen—and, in particular, starting at a new school. So one of the things that comes to mind is the importance of your connection to your family at home when you’re a boarder. I think it takes a lot of bravery and courage to be part of a boarding community as a high school student. I wonder, sometimes, about the mental and emotional toll living at school might take on a student participating in a very rigorous, yet (I also suspect) life-giving residential program. So when I think about the “darker side” of boarding school life, I have wondered if being away from one’s family is a factor. Feeling lonely, having a sense of who you are, having a sense for how to participate in community—these are challenges that students face on a daily basis in a new environment. I think CA does a great job of connecting students to the community, but I also suspect that the reality of boarding life is that a student is spending more time independently than they might be otherwise—if they were living at home, say.

Q) Is hazing an issue at our school and if so how do you think it could be improved?

A) I have appreciated—as a faculty member, as a coach, as a house parent—the real clarity the school has given about hazing and the expectations that students have regarding that issue. CA has done well to remind students that hazing of any sort is not welcomed in this community. In my experience coaching softball, for instance, the school’s rules about hazing have provided coaches and athletes with language and a useful structure for talking about the fact that there isn’t a place for hazing here.

Q) Our school has been a ‘bubble’ in a sense for a lot of students. Do you think this “bubble” has a positive or a negative effect to our school? In what way?

A) A bit of both. I do not think CA is unique in its bubble-ness, having worked at other schools. I think the bubble [effect] is a natural part of any community that provides time and space to be intentional about our behavior without as many distractions from the world beyond it. One of the difficult things is that we can be insulated. And yet I do understand that the bubble lets us compartmentalize in a useful way. But there’s a cost to that compartmentalization.

Q) Our school has changed the Discipline Committee system from an announcement system to a privately-dealt system. What are your thoughts on this?

A) This relates to so many of these questions about a student’s freedom to know certain things in and about the community. As a person who lives on campus, I feel like I’m in contact with the community in many different ways, but at the same time I also feel removed from the information regarding the Discipline Committee. I think there are certain pros and cons to both sides of the issue but I think that the shift to the more private system makes sense. I understand

the interest in transparency of the more public system. And I understand that one of the projects [of a disciplinary system] is for us to understand our community [together]. I think the shift towards a more private system of discipline is a good acknowledgement of how we can work together to learn in a community. This type of system lets the student understand the gravity of the issue and perhaps gives the student an opportunity to work and think differently about particular choices they'll make in the future. I think about this all the time in terms of *The Scarlet Letter*—of what it means to be disciplined publicly. As always, we may not know the whole story. In this sense, a more private system can thoughtfully acknowledge the need for privacy with respect to both discipline and the interest of student learning from that misstep.