

Date: Tue, 1 Dec 2015 12:10:41 -0500

Subject: Habits of Mind Comments

Nicole, could you please distribute the following letter to the School Committee?

Dear School Committee Members,

Kathy O'Keefe shared her letter with me, and I agree with and support all of her points; I would just like to add a few points of my own. There are very few places where a student can be publicly recognized for his/her academic achievements. Top athletes' successes on playing fields or courts are commonly observed and lauded publicly by attendees. Hale has its Student of the Month program where a boy and girl from each grade are selected by their teachers. The teachers seem to select strong students on the basis of how they uphold and support Hale's core values rather than students' academic record alone. I expect all of these students score well in Habits of Mind.

In my opinion, the honor roll criteria should be based solely on academic achievement. While I believe Habits of Mind are important and reflect areas that should be reported to parents, I do not feel that they should factor into selection for the honor roll. The rating of students in Habits of Mind is subjective by nature. One teacher's standards and expectations can vary from another teacher's interpretation of how a student is meeting the Habits of Mind expectations. It becomes even more clouded and subjective when teachers are asked to provide accommodations or modify how they grade students based on IEP and 504 requirements. How do you truly and fairly evaluate a child with documented ADHD, Executive Function weakness, or some other disability on impulse control and remembering to bring the correct materials to class? What is willful behavior versus thoughtless, impulsive, or unintentional behavior? Once you are working with modified expectations for a student based on an instructor's interpretation of allowances and accommodations in an IEP or 504 Plan, I becomes a very fuzzy, suspect system. It would be a terrible shame to penalize children with high academic achievements for behaviors that may or may not be within their control.

Finally, the information disseminated to parents this year about honor roll requirements has been contradictory and confusing. I would expect that once you determine Hale's policy on the honor roll, it will be communicated to the school community BEFORE the start of the marking period or school year that it will go into effect. I hope that when you work to shape that policy you will consider the role students' disabilities may make in students' ability to consistently meet the Habits of Mind standards. Keep the honor roll purely academic, all the while continuing to foster a warm and respectful learning community in our schools. There are other ways that our schools can meaningfully honor and pay tribute to the students who showcase our schools' core values and who have excellent Habits of Mind.

Respectfully,

Sarah McBride
55 Wildwood Rd.
Sow, MA 01775