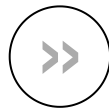


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When a School Becomes a Community:

Lessons on mindfulness, compassion, and building a better world



A school is more than a building and a curriculum. It's a living, breathing, evolving ecosystem comprised of individuals contributing to a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts. Students, teachers, staff, families, and the greater community all play roles in creating and supporting healthy, thriving schools.

We have seen the effect that toxic environments can have in our workplaces, society, and nature. Because a school is a microcosm of society, it offers us a window into how to collaboratively build a more productive, healthier, and empathic world. ▶

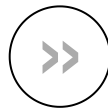
Establishing diverse learning communities that ensure equity and inclusion and support social justice action is at the heart of the progressive educational philosophy that drove the founders of Burgundy Farm Country Day School and grounds its work today.



PHOTO COURTESY OF BURGUNDY FARM COUNTRY DAY SCHOOL

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PHOTO CREDIT: MELLY RILEY


BASIS Independent McLean High School students take a stroll through the school's beautiful atrium.

Defining and measuring student success

In recent years, student evaluation systems have shifted to value the whole student academically, emotionally, and socially.


At Brookfield Montessori School in McLean, Virginia, teachers track the progress of every student. They review the data internally and update the families on weekly activities. Recognizing the need to support teachers, staff, and families in the development of their students in and out of school, Brookfield has a full-time family therapist devoted to providing tools, resources, parent education classes, and a compassionate ear to help solve challenges. As a result, they have very little turnover in students, staff, and teachers.

BASIS Independent McLean maintains a dynamic partnership between teachers, staff, students, and parents at the core of its operations. They value the ideas



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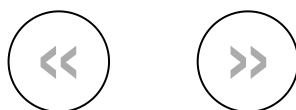
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of learning from mistakes, normalizing failure, and striving for continuous improvement. In engineering and design classes, they emphasize the critical work of prototyping solutions, testing, and iteration. Setbacks are a part of life, and the school works closely with parents and students to embrace setbacks as learning opportunities. This supportive mindset helps students thrive as they move on to college and into their careers.

"We celebrate not only academic success but artistic and athletic success, as well as the virtues of kindness and helpfulness. We recognize that every student has unique talents and challenges, and offer them opportunities to shine in a variety of areas beyond the classroom."

—David Mullen, Head of School, The Nora School

In Silver Spring, Maryland, The Nora School views student success through multiple lenses including academic, artistic, and athletic achievement, kindness, and helpfulness. Within their college prep curriculum, the understanding is that every student has a unique set of talents and challenges. They offer a myriad of opportunities for students to shine in and out of the classroom. Whether on the soccer field, in the science lab, or as a participant in their community service program, students are encouraged to ▶



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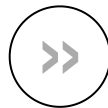
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play to their strengths and are supported in areas where they need assistance. The focus is not just on earning an A, but learning resilience and remaining thoughtful and compassionate in their efforts.

Bringing culture to the classroom

It is impossible to underestimate the role of school culture when it comes to student success. When we feel supported in our efforts to become the best version of ourselves, we thrive and grow in ways we never imagined were possible. So it is with our students, too. Inviting families and parents into schools in a meaningful way is the underpinning of a healthy school culture. Teachers and staff need the partnership of families, and like all relationships, the keys are continuous communication and commitment.

The Langley School in McLean has a community contract with students and families. Each year, everyone signs these contracts and commits to one another in the learning process. These contracts define shared beliefs with the



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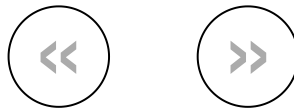
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Edmund Burke School's mission is to bring together students who are different from one another and actively engage them in their own education.

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PHOTO COURTESY OF NYSMITH SCHOOL

goals of educating, supporting, and encouraging well-adjusted, confident students. These shared values have been the foundation of their school community for over 75 years. To stay true to their mission, The Langley School conducts surveys of parents, faculty, and staff that include questions related to values, vision, involvement, satisfaction, and the fulfillment of their goals. The school uses this data, along with feedback from parent groups, to assess the climate and culture throughout the year.

"We have a lot of American families who appreciate our values. I am amazed at their level of French. You wouldn't know that some of these kids never have set foot in France. They speak like natives."

—Valerie Mérot-Burn, Director of Admissions, Rochambeau French International School

Diversity and inclusion are topics that are top of mind in today's national and international discussions. At Rochambeau, The French International School, multi-cultural learning is deeply embedded in the curriculum. Within a network of French schools all over the world, including one in Bethesda, Maryland, the French curriculum is maintained and also adapted to suit the needs of each local culture. At Rochambeau where 56 percent of the students are American citizens, they represent 80 different nationalities and 45 percent of their students identify as having more than two nationalities in their families. Experiential learning through engagement with one

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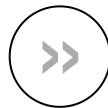
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another, the families, and the broader community are critical components of their mission. Graduates of Rochambeau are trilingual. All students speak English and French fluently and then choose Arabic, Spanish, or German as their third language.

Brooksfield Montessori School extends the concept of community to the natural world. Their

Roots and Shoots chapter, a division of Dr. Jane Goodall's global nonprofit, recently conducted a program to care for a neighborhood park that is a mile from their school. Knowing that bird species are in rapid decline due to climate change and seeing that so many different species of birds make their homes in their neighborhood park, the children decided that they wanted to erect a birdhouse for them. They got county approval for the new birdhouse, erected it with the help of a local business, and then had a birdhouse house-warming party at the park to celebrate the birds. Serendipitously, Dr. Goodall was sponsoring an event in Glen Echo and the children were able to go to the event and present their ideas to her as well as explain what it meant for them to be able to take care of their local bird population. Additionally, the Brooksfield students have a school garden. They use the vegetables in their school meals and donate a portion

of their harvest, after preparing it with a local chef, to food charities designed to feed kids. They also previously organized a large community event to make blankets to comfort children and families who are being cared for at the local pediatric cancer unit at Fairfax Hospital.

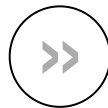
Emphasizing Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)

Mindfulness is radically altering the landscape of schools and education at every grade level. As children grow and develop, their needs change and therefore the types and degrees of support change as well. Mindfulness helps students self-identify their needs, and also helps them to ask for additional help when and where they need it. After participating in a mindfulness study with the Insight Meditation Community of Washington, Brooksfield made the decision to



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offer ongoing mindfulness training and curriculum to teachers, staff, families, and students. All students at The Nora School take a ten-week mindfulness curriculum designed to help them skillfully deal with stress. They also offer Mindfulness for Parents as part of their Parent Education Series.

In addition to mindfulness, many schools take as rigorous an approach to SEL as they do to academic learning. At BASIS Independent McLean, division-specific deans regularly monitor academic and social-emotional progress. They provide personalized encouragement, strategies, and support to every student. Acceptance, self-care, and emotional well-being are the cornerstones to help students build confidence, establish healthy, productive mindsets, and create a successful foundation for joyful learning.

The Langley School offers a comprehensive SEL program that works in tandem with the academic program and Langley's core values to foster students' emotional intelligence, cultural responsiveness, and overall health and wellness. Their custom-built SEL program also includes anti-bias education. These tools help students develop strong skills in emotional awareness ▶



Small classes at The Nora School easily provide personalized teaching opportunities.

PHOTO: KIMBERLY HOWARD ROYAL

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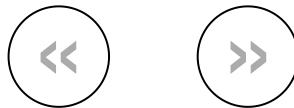
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and management. They also give students a deep understanding of their own and others' identities, an appreciation of diversity with a focus on equity and inclusion, the ability to productively respond to social injustice, and a solid foundational understanding of the brain, body, and interpersonal relationships in order to make healthy decisions.

"The Langley School's five core values – respect, kindness, honesty, trustworthiness, and citizenship – are integrated into the curriculum and are essential to creating an environment in which students care for themselves, develop a sense of personal integrity and self-discipline, and learn the value of individual and collective responsibility."

—The Langley School

Deeply valuing the power of the partnership between families, teachers, and students, The Langley School also has a robust parent education program, much of which focuses on topics related to the social and emotional growth of children. Their parent speaker series has featured speakers on topics such as helping children manage stress, anxiety, sleep, and nutrition, talking to children about drugs and alcohol, and answering children's questions about diversity and inclusion. During these talks, the school provides parents with specific lessons and topics that their

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children have learned as part of the SEL curriculum to ensure continuity across home and school. They also regularly communicate with parents about the SEL topics they are covering and frequently share resources to help parents continue the conversations at home.

The community-school continuum

In the digital age, the lines between home, school, and community become more blurred every day. Our children no longer live compartmentalized lives as many children did in previous generations. This idea can sometimes bring difficult circumstances as is the case with online bullying, particularly through the 24/7 endless nature of social media. The Nora School, Rochambeau, The Langley School, Brookfield School, and BASIS Independent McLean provide us with stellar examples of the gifts and benefits that can be created and shared by schools, families, and society when we all work together toward the common goal of raising children to grow up to be curious, compassionate members of a global community.




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