

celebrating
30
years

HILLSIDE HAPPENINGS

Special Edition with Mrs. Connolly Guidance Counselor



What are some of the primary responsibilities you have as a counselor at The Hillside School?

One of the things Mrs. Connolly enjoys most about working at The Hillside School is that she has a variety of responsibilities. Because the administrators have understood the importance of educating the whole child since the inception of the school, they have employed a guidance counselor to assist parents and teachers in understanding that child. Of equal importance is that child's understanding himself or herself.

During a typical week Mrs. Connolly teaches guidance classes that deal with a variety of topics from bullying to understanding learning disabilities. She encourages younger students to develop a feelings vocabulary to be able to describe how they are feeling, and encourages older students to develop communication skills to enable them to stand up for themselves and others.

She also works individually with students, sometimes when a situation is more acute, and at other times to help them work through a long range peer or school related issue. Sometimes students just need someone who can listen without judging and offer understanding.

The first Wednesday of every month, Mrs. Connolly facilitates a HELPS meeting for The Hillside School parents and supporters. These meetings delve into topics relating to learning disabilities and parenting. The most important facet of these meetings, however, is that they give parents an opportunity to share their anxieties as well as their hopes.

How is working at The Hillside School different from working at a public school?

The most obvious difference has to do with class and school size. The Hillside School offers educators the unique privilege of getting to know a child on a deeper level than possible in a traditional public school setting. Knowing a child's personal qualities and educational needs is more possible when that child is in a small class (8:1). Visitors sometimes comment that we seem to know the names of every student. Not only do we know the names of each and every student, we know their struggles, their strengths, and their gifts.

Learning is said to be life-long. Do you feel you are still learning?

Mrs. Connolly first worked at The Hillside School in the mid-eighties when the field of learning disabilities was relatively new and somewhat misunderstood. It was not until 1975 that Public Law 94-142 was passed, providing that all children with disabilities be assured a free and appropriate education. Today we have a much deeper understanding of what an appropriate education looks like for the student with a language-based learning disability.

Current research is helping parents and educators understand the connections among language, reading skills, auditory processing, attention, and a myriad of other brain functions in ways most of us never imagined. Mrs. Connolly has been fortunate not only to be exposed to this knowledge, but also to work with students and families as they discover what these connections actually mean for the child who learns differently.

What do you enjoy most about your job?

Mrs. Connolly loves working and talking with The Hillside School students. The younger ones, the older ones, and the ones in-between. She is constantly amazed by their intelligence and their insight. Not a day goes by that she does not learn something from them she didn't know or could not imagine before. The students make Hillside a great place to come every day.