

ENGAGING THE MIND IN UNHURRIED EXCELLENCE BY WARREN GOULD, DIRECTOR OF UPPER SCHOOL

There's plenty of room to debate the notion that a secondary education can be, in the same breath, both unhurried and academically excellent. I've known my share of parents who fear that a course isn't good if it's not requiring a substantial portion of a child's evening—and who gauge a school's excellence in part by the hours of homework it requires. Even as an educator, I feel the temptation to declare the logic obvious: More time equals more learning.

But the equation, which resonates with more consumerist, product-oriented ways of thinking about education, is reductive. Pedagogically, the assumption simply doesn't hold—other variables need to be accounted for, including type of homework, quality of instruction, and students' individual talents and study habits. No wonder that the actual research on the relationship between homework and academic achievement, in spite of what 'homework experts' like to claim, is inconclusive.

What *is* well-established, though, is that deep learning experiences require lots of time. They don't happen quickly, and they're too infrequent when coverage is more valued than understanding. They occur through a rich steeping in dialogue, reflection, discovery, connection-making, and meaning-constructing. To turn the homework question around, then, in the upper school we want it (1) to facilitate an academic program that values the unhurriedness necessary to learn deeply, and (2) to occur in a manner that leaves time for students still to be kids. A junior needs to read the next two chapters tonight in order to experience engaging study in class tomorrow, and she also needs to compete on the court and have some down time with her friends.

Both kinds of "unhurried"—the curriculum and its homework—will work in tandem to provide a rich, excellent academic experience, but only if the academic expectations remain high. This is where our sights are set in the upper school, and we do so in the conviction as educators and Christians that full intellectual engagement for each of our students honors God and the amazing minds he has given them.

Our path towards this "unhurried excellence" is guided by some important principles:

- Our differentiated levels of courses, with honors and regular study in science, math, and the humanities, allow us to set the academic bar appropriately for the range of learners in our classes;
- Our pedagogical focus is on Socratic investigation, reflection, interdisciplinary study, and depth, rather than on lecture, regurgitation, and content coverage;
- Our curricular expectations are high, and we assess student work in this same spirit;

- Our homework guidelines help students decide which level of study is appropriate and where they may wish to invest more of their academic efforts. Our policy: for a strong student in the class, whether it's an honors or regular course, homework should average 30 minutes per academic subject (60 minutes for double-period humanities); students with less proficiency may require more time to complete their work.

Thanks to our talented faculty, these principles are encouraging our students to apply their God-given talents, be excited about their scholarship, work with focus and purpose, and experience deep, transformative learning—all, we believe, in an academically excellent, unhurried manner.