

H-B Woodlawn Secondary Program

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Arlington Public Schools

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H-B Woodlawn Program Description and Student/Parent Commitment

I. DESCRIPTION

A. Statement of Philosophy

The H-B Woodlawn Program, founded in 1971, is designed to provide students with more control over their own education. Our experience has shown that certain students will feel better and do better in a less-structured, less-formal atmosphere. Recent educational research has confirmed that there are many categories of intelligence, and that learning styles vary markedly from student to student.

At H-B Woodlawn, we allow students to operate with less restriction and more freedom. We develop self-motivation and self-discipline in our students, for we know these characteristics are vital for success here and beyond. We work hard to inculcate these habits in our students, incrementally increasing freedom and expectations of responsibility through the grades.

B. System of Operation

The central focus of our system is student choice. Students make choices in three general areas:

1. Use of Time and Personal Behavior

Throughout the middle school years students learn to use their time responsibly and wisely. They are given increasing opportunities to make decisions regarding how, where, and with whom they spend their time during the school day. By the 9th grade, students have at least one hour per day of “unsupervised” time. H-B Woodlawn does not provide “continuous adult supervision” for students; rather, they must decide how to use their time wisely to meet their obligations.

Some students use free time for study, while others spend it socially or away from the building. Students must monitor their own behavior on and off campus. Instead of a system of rules governing their use of time and behavior, H-B Woodlawn students are held accountable for the consequences of their actions.

For example, attendance in class is strongly recommended, but the “loss of credit” system is not in effect. If a student skips classes grades will usually suffer as a result.

With parent permission, students are allowed to leave campus starting in 8th grade. To make this offer of freedom work we must trust the good intentions of our students and they must reciprocate with a sufficient degree of personal responsibility. When students fail over time to demonstrate the necessary level of responsibility, parents may choose to return the student to the traditional structure of the neighborhood secondary school.

2. School Governance

Starting in middle school, students are introduced to the concepts of student-led meeting, community discussions and collaborative decision-making through regularly scheduled grade-level meetings. They are also invited to become involved in the governance of the school. The school is governed by “Town Meeting,” which is H-B Woodlawn’s policy-making body. The Town Meeting decides the allocation of staffing given to departments, teacher hiring, the expenditure of parent-raised funds and

general school rules. Town Meetings are held weekly throughout the year. Each student, teacher, and parent in attendance has an equal vote.

As students are treated equally with adults in Town Meeting voting, so are they in other relations with adults. Students address their teachers by their first names at H-B Woodlawn. To us, this symbolizes an equal footing in the educational process, and also stresses for the student the need to make decisions for him or herself, not be relying on an impersonal school structure or on the power and authority of a teacher or administrator. For this same reason we require our administrators to teach and have a “teacher-advisor” group.

3. Educational Goals

Beginning in middle school we use learning contracts, differentiated projects, student choice, and student interests to encourage personal goal setting. We expand choices in the upper grades to include the English and social studies elective programs, independent study and AP courses.

The student who can best take advantage of the personal freedom at H-B Woodlawn is self-motivated and self-directed. The flexibility, informality and individuality of the atmosphere at H-B Woodlawn give these students the opportunity to design and implement their own programs.

These design characteristics sometimes attract “selective learners,” or students who do only school work which interests them! As at other schools, the grades given by our teachers reflect the degree to which the students meet the teachers’ requirements. So selective learners may not find their courses perfectly individualized to their liking and their grades may reflect that. But these students often find the flexibility of our program and staff the best available match to their learning styles.

Students are empowered to have control over their educational program. They are also left somewhat unprotected to suffer the consequences of their actions. In 1971 we selected “a word to the wise is sufficient” (*Verbum Sap Sat*) as our school motto to reflect our association of freedom and responsibility.

It is our intent to make students responsible for their own education. In doing so students develop a heightened commitment for managing their personal behavior, for being a member of a learning community, and for learning for its inherent value.

II. Commitment

The applicant and the applicant’s family promise to accept and support the philosophy and structure of H-B Woodlawn, and try as best they can to make this unique program work for the applicant.

Student name (printed) _____

Student signature _____

Parent name (printed) _____

Parent signature _____

Current school _____ Current grade _____

Today’s date _____

Please sign and return this document to H-B Woodlawn.