
The Tremendous Power of Summer Academic Boarding Programs

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A positive transformation sparking students' interest in taking charge of their education

It goes without saying that most students in the United States do not go to private or independent schools, and even fewer go to boarding schools. For these students, a summer academic enrichment program at a boarding school is a great way to get a taste of boarding school life and experience the benefits of a boarding education. Parents who would probably not consider sending their children away to school will consider sending them to a summer program lasting somewhere between three and six weeks. We are all familiar with the notion of sending kids away to summer camps or outdoor programs, and we are all aware of local summer academic programs for students. Summer academic boarding programs allow students and parents to try out boarding schools without making a year round commitment. Boarding schools are able to reach out to and serve students who otherwise would not be exposed to that type of education.

Students who attend summer boarding programs face the same challenges, have most of the same opportunities, and develop the same skills as their peers who attend boarding school year round. For many students, it is the first time they will be away from home or from their parents. When I speak to parents on the opening day of summer school, they are often quite nervous about leaving their children with us. I always tell them that homesickness works both ways and that the parents are sometimes the ones that have trouble letting go! By the end of the program most parents are amazed at the positive transformation that occurs in their children. I want to talk about that transformation, and about the tremendous power of summer programs to spark students' interest in taking charge of their education. Boarding schools and summer boarding pro-

grams cover a broad spectrum in terms of size, curriculum, particular strengths, and teaching philosophy. The good schools are all distinguished by the fact that they have a clear, well-articulated mission and a faculty and administration that strive to fulfill that mission.

The first thing that good schools do is create a positive atmosphere, where learning is fun. Many bright, motivated students come from schools where it is "not cool" to be smart, or to care about learning. These students are immediately put at ease because they are surrounded by peers and teachers who all want to be there and to learn. It is hard to overstate the effect of this atmosphere on the desire and ability of students to learn. They begin to realize what they are capable of academically and intellectually, and it makes them into active learners. Once they become active learners, they begin to take charge of their education and they figure

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out how to maximize their educational opportunities no matter where they go to school.

Another thing good schools do is foster a spirit of community, where all students feel safe, respected, and cared for. When students feel free to be themselves, they are much more likely to find success and to give respect to others. Every school has its own values and traditions, its own way of defining and developing the kind of community it wants. When students buy into the process of accepting those community values (or even helping to create them in some cases) they begin to feel as if they are a part of something larger than themselves. This process occurs over the course of a four- or five-week program and it is a special thing to observe. The students both absorb values dear to the school and at the same time take the responsibility to help create shared values by sharing themselves with the school. Typically, most students in a summer program are new to the program every year. This makes every summer a challenge and an opportunity. I have always found students to be excited and engaged by the possibility of creating a positive community.

In most summer boarding programs, students will encounter a level of diversity that is greater than what they are used to in their schools at home. This diversity could be geographic (regional, national, or international), ethnic, religious, cultural, and/or socio-economic. The diversity might exist in the student body and in the faculty. Good schools understand that we

live in an increasingly global and inter-connected world. They know that education in the 21st century requires that students be able to understand and assess complex, multi-faceted problems, and work together to create sustainable solutions. Students in diverse summer programs learn to listen to each other, to share their stories, and to be open-minded about people and ideas which are new to them. It is amazing how open most students are to this process.

Boarding schools have the unique characteristic of educating students in and out of class. Many times students will report to us that though they learned a lot in their classes, they learned even more out of class—from their roommates and friends, from their dorm adviser, from the field trips they went on, from late night conversations with kids in their classes. They make life-long friendships with peers and teachers and they feel supported by each other. Through the use of social media such as Facebook and other means students are now able to easily stay connected with each other—and they do.

Finally, students go back to their homes, back to their towns and cities and schools, and they bring with them a new-found sense of themselves and their capabilities. They are energized and excited about taking on new challenges, and their energy and enthusiasm is contagious. They are already making a difference in both their own lives and the lives of the people with whom they come in contact.

