

# Why Denver Christian High School? ...a view from a parent

I'm always amazed how many parents seem to change their priorities about sending their children to Christian school when they reach high school age. From my view, this is *precisely* the time when children really need nurturing, Christian mentors. Middle and high school are the times when children begin to look outside their immediate families for acceptance and self-esteem. They start spending more time away from the family unit. Often teenagers seem to stop listening so much to their parents and begin to look outside their family for guidance. Isn't this precisely the time at which parents would want other Christian students and adults around their children, to serve as Christian examples, to be sounding boards with a Christian perspective, and to be a safe, Christian, loving place for their children to be as they struggle through the challenges of those teen years?

Many parents say that they want "more opportunities" for their students, especially in high school, thinking that larger high schools offer more. While it's possible that larger or newer high schools have a longer list of classes or fancier names for programs, if a parent looks at giving their child more and real opportunities, a small, focused, excellent school like DCHS is the perfect place.

In my opinion, a DCHS student has many more *real* opportunities on a daily basis than an average high school student, at say, Arapahoe or Mullen, or even Valor. Think about a volleyball team: at most, the team has 12 members, whether there are 200 students or 2000 students at that high school. In addition, does your child want to play multiple sports or have a love for sports AND music? Most high schools want their student athletes to focus on one sport, and "encourage" student athletes to participate in year-round activities related to that sport. So, taking advantage of other opportunities, realistically, is not possible. At DCHS, a student has multiple *real* opportunities. My daughter Chelsea is a real-life demonstration of this: she participated (often concurrently) in freshmen, JV, and varsity sports (soccer and volleyball); band and jazz band; mission/service trips; drama productions; and student government. She had the chance to choose challenging academics. She even had teachers along the way who took the time to prepare customized educational materials just for her. How many large high schools can (or will) offer that?

Many parents also see the number of AP classes offered as a measure of how "excellent" a high school is. I would encourage parents to take a closer look. When Chelsea was taking AP calculus at DCHS, I coincidentally ran into a woman who told me how her son, who attended a local large public high school, *loved* AP calculus and had such a great teacher and had received As and Bs in that class. This mom was so proud, yet was also openly puzzled about why her son scored a 1 (lowest grade) on the actual AP exam. What I took from this exchange was that it's not the fact that an

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AP class is offered, or even what grade is given to the student in that class. A more objective measure, in this case, was the AP exam itself. Chelsea scored very well on all the AP exams she took, whether the courses she took in those subjects were called “AP” classes or not. Some would say, “Well, Chelsea is a gifted student.” While this may be true, she was also challenged to be excellent, she worked VERY hard, and she was driven to achieve. So, when parents assume that a school that has more AP classes will better prepare their child for college, I caution against that conclusion. I believe that preparation for college is more about the context within which opportunity is presented and what the student is willing to achieve.

Another demonstration of the quality of DCHS academics is this: although Chelsea had taken four years of high school Spanish, VCU required Chelsea, as it does all students, to take a placement test. She told her advisor that she had done well on the AP exam, but the advisor was not swayed. The advisor told her she had met MANY incoming freshmen who had taken four years of Spanish—even AP Spanish—BUT their placement tests told a different story. Chelsea needed to score over 300 to be able to skip the basic language instruction courses. Chelsea scored over 500 and was able to take advanced level courses as a freshman. When Chelsea left DCHS, we knew she had worked hard, but we did not know how she would fare competing with students from some VERY prestigious high schools. This Spanish placement test was one indicator—her DCHS education had served her VERY well.

Indulge me a little further: I have one more example. As a freshman at VCU Honors College, Chelsea was required to take a “seminar” class, similar Senior Seminar at DCHS. Chelsea enjoyed the VCU class, but found it very easy, because she had been guided through a similar research, discussion, and analysis class at DCHS. In fact, it was funny to her that she ended up helping many of her Honors College classmates with the research paper portion of the course because many of those honors students had not written a paper longer than a few pages. DCHS had certainly provided Chelsea with the tools she needed to excel in this area as well.

Chelsea’s achievements at DCHS include varsity letters, valedictorian, Outstanding Senior Girl, and student body president. But as evidence that her education and experience at DCHS were not inflated or exaggerated, she is now a junior pre-med student at VCU (part of their prestigious Guaranteed Medical Program), majoring in Spanish and maintaining a 4.0 GPA. She is working in a prominent VCU Chemistry Research lab. She is highlighted on VCU’s Honors College website (<http://www.honors.vcu.edu/>-slide show on top of page, plus background bio). By almost any measure, Chelsea excelled at DCHS and continues to thrive in a large University setting. We believe that DCHS played a huge role in preparing her. Although hard work and encouragement were necessary, Chelsea’s ability to take advantage of so many opportunities at DCHS, the academic excellence she experienced, and the Christian mentoring that nurtured her all served to create an invaluable spring-board to college and beyond.

--Julie Olson