



HOLMDEL TOWNSHIP SCHOOL DISTRICT

"A COMMITMENT TO EXCELLENCE"

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HOLMDEL ALUMNI PAYING IT FORWARD (AND BACKWARDS!)

HOLMDEL (January 6, 2017) – On Friday, January 6, Holmdel High School seniors were treated to an informative Q&A session with thirteen Holmdel alumni who came back to the school for the annual “College Connection” visit.

The Guidance Department at the high school has been holding this College Connection assembly for many years and the basic goal is for current seniors to interact with recent alumni so they can learn more about what is in store for them, both leading up to, as well as after, graduation. Topics include the application process, academic and social experiences, and advice for staying focused as students complete their senior year. The returning graduates are always insightful, offering both poignant and humorous advice in equal measure. The seniors love to hear about what is in store for them, both the fun moments as well as the potential hazards they might face as incoming college students.

Each year, comments from the alumni range from the good to the bad to, unfortunately, the ugly. The good includes the sense of independence you feel once you embark on this journey. You will make new friends, experience new things, and expand your mind beyond what you learned in high school. One student lauded her opportunity to study abroad for a gap semester. Even though it was not her initial plan, she learned more during that trip than she would have back at her home school. Another student encouraged joining clubs, not just to make friends, but to explore interests and maybe set get set for what’s down the road when you need connections to get internships or jobs.

And the bad? The potentially ugly? Some alumni focused on the aspects of independence that are not so glamorous. They reminded seniors that you really need to be organized, because parents and teachers are no longer there to prop you up. Parents are not there to make your meals, so you really need to remember to eat three times a day, and to eat nutritiously. Pizza seven days a week sounds good, but is a recipe for disaster. Plus, it is not really “pizza”, one student cautioned, depending on what state your college is in. A number of alumni emphasized that seniors will no longer be able to rely on teachers to provide study guides, or to even be available for a conference or conversation. You must learn how to organize your time, plan your life around each class’s syllabus, and take those difficult final exams seriously because unlike high school, the final exam often makes up the bulk of your grade. One student lamented that she thought she knew how to study in high school, but the pressure is really on in college when you have to manage it all on your own.

School Counselor Kate Gargiulo, who organizes the assembly, was very impressed with this year's participants. The reason for the assembly is to provide advice to seniors in preparation for what is to come and by January, many have succumbed to what they love to call "senioritis". Gargiulo was thrilled to hear one panelist mention "to save all notes from high school" because of how many entry level classes he took throughout his first semester that touched upon the same material covered in high school. "I thought this was simple, but extremely practical and valuable advice" she said. Alumni also stressed how much the Holmdel schools had prepared them for the rigors of college, and advised seniors to absorb as much as they can from teachers in their final year as it will come in handy at the next level.

Not only do Holmdel alumni pay it forward, but also backward. Recently, a Holmdel graduate and current University of Pennsylvania fourth year engineering student Josh Parasar planned on reaching out to one of Holmdel's current seniors, Sneha Sharma. Sneha was recently recognized for her work on a mini-grant funded by the Holmdel Foundation for Educational Excellence where she successfully produced biofuel from coffee grounds. Josh read about Sneha's work in a district press release and he plans on speaking with her about it before he starts his own senior thesis on the same subject.

With alumni returning to impart wisdom on current students, those same alumni recognizing how Holmdel schools have benefited them and continue to do so, and community groups like the HFEE supporting all district students, Superintendent Dr. Robert McGarry could not be more pleased. When asked for his reaction to both the College Connection assembly and college students reaching out to current seniors for assistance, and how impressive it is to see the educational system functioning so perfectly, McGarry said it all by simply stating, "We don't just say we're a community of learners, we live it."