October 1, 2021: Learning Beyond the Campus

Dear CDS Community,

During their time at CDS, our students have many opportunities to explore the world outside our doors, taking field trips in San Francisco, elsewhere in California, and even across the country. Getting away is a critical part of the educational experience.

Our youngest students often leave the classroom to explore our neighborhood, walking through the Mission to look at street murals by local artists and visiting beloved establishments such as 826 Valencia. As they get older, they go further afield: some of our annual trips include a second grade tide pooling day at Pigeon Point Lighthouse and an opportunity for fourth graders to explore Angel Island and its complex history. In middle school, our students’ growing independence allows each grade to take an overnight trip.

This week I had the privilege of joining the joyful seventh graders on a four-day camping trip in the Sierras. We had beautiful weather at Bass Lake, which was our basecamp for the week and just an hour’s drive from the splendor that is Yosemite Valley, which is on the land of the Southern Sierra Miwuk people. We cooked together and hiked together. There was late night music and shared stories. For both the students and adults, it was the ultimate bonding experience.
It was cold, we got dirty, we hiked A LOT, and there were beautiful views along the way. There were sweet moments of connection and support from friends, and even some cheers for other hikers heading up the steep trail as we were heading back down. Putting students in situations that are safe and pushing their comfort zone offers opportunities for them to see themselves and each other in different ways. They are able to take on the role of coach, cheerleader, or problem solver – and, just as importantly, be vulnerable and ask for help.

Being outdoors with little technology also offers us all the opportunity to enjoy the moment and be present with ourselves and others. We did watch videos while on the bus, including *Hidden Figures* and *Finding Nemo* and a few more in between.

Student perspectives on the best things about the trip: our group, spending quality time with friends, watching the sunrise, snacks on the hikes, and seeing the views. I also really loved having someone cook meals for me and students even washed dishes.

We all had such a wonderful time in Yosemite, and I'm glad that our students are able once again to take their learning into real situations and push themselves to new types of skill development. We look forward to many other fun and educational field trips in the year ahead and hopefully some more outdoor education experiences for other grades.

Warmly,
Shelly