

Incoming Grade 9 students will be prepared for a global future



By Brock Weir

If you're in a canoe with 19 other people, it is probably best to make sure you're all rowing in the same direction.

That's exactly the experience Josie Hadden was faced with just starting Grade 9 at Pickering College.

An Aurora student who joined the Newmarket independent school towards the end of Grade 8, Josie was a relative newcomer to the school when she plunged into Grade 9. Thankfully, everyone was quite literally in the same boat.

‘We had to work together and be on the same page to move that canoe,’ says Josie about her Grade 9 trip to Camp Tawingo near Muskoka at the start of the 2016-2017 school year, a trip designed to build camaraderie amongst Grade 9 students, many of whom were coming to Pickering College from the public school stream. ‘Some of us had to work harder because other students couldn't push as hard, we had code words, and it was fun. I really learned a lot about students in my class and really bonded with them.’

And that, in a nutshell, is just the first way Pickering College sets itself apart.

Grade 8 students from across the Region are gearing up for their final exams, knowing that after just a couple of months off for summer vacation, they are headed to high school, whether in the public, separate or independent streams.

If they are headed to ? or are considering Pickering College ? they know what awaits them will be a little bit out of the norm.

‘We have students who are new to the school and haven't had the Pickering experience yet, so we have to get them integrated fairly quickly,’ says Janet Downer, Director of Middle and Senior School, at Pickering College. ‘We begin the year with a four-day camping trip at Camp Tawingo and it is a time for students to get to know each other and to bond as a group ? both with the students and the teachers as well.’

The relationship between students and teachers, and among the students itself, is a hallmark with which Pickering College prides itself. With smaller class sizes and programs and Advisor Groups designed to build ongoing bonds, Ms. Downer says their program has taken the emphasis off teacher directed learning to student directed through collaborative learning, group work and pushing the limits of their own innovation and creativity. Among the key components of this is Pickering College's Global Leadership Program, which is designed to encourage students to consider what they are learning in a wider global context and develop the skills necessary to go out into the world. Lessons in the Global Leadership Program are augmented by the Co-Curricular Program, which is intended to expose students to various activities ? from athletics, to in-school clubs, to volunteer opportunities out in the wider community ? they might not otherwise be keen to try.

For each individual student, all this is steered in a very hands-on way by teachers and other students alike in Advisor Groups, tailored to provide students with not only a regular faculty member but students from across grades, cultures and backgrounds.

‘It's nice to have international students in my Advisor Group because I get to learn about different cultures and what it is like to live in their countries,’ says Josie. ‘Everyone in my Advisor Group is amazing and it is so nice to have that support. They just take all that stress off me when I can just talk to them; they are just like friends and family and it is amazing.’

Seeing these relationships develop are what Ms. Downer says are the most rewarding aspects of the job.

‘We have students who come from countries all over the world ? Mexico, Kazakhstan, Turkey, Russia ? and it is really rewarding

for me to see that all of these students are working together, building friendships, feeling good and secure about being in this environment," she says. "When students feel safe and secure, this carries over to success in their academics as well."