

My Day as a Sixth-Grader at VCMS...

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As you may know, I am fairly new to our school and Grand Island community. I am still learning all of the details of our systems and procedures while trying my hardest to learn everyone's name as quickly as possible. Everyone has been incredibly welcoming and patient. I find myself wanting to better understand the culture of our district, especially from the student perspective. I recently read an article about another "new-to-her-district" educator who chose to shadow a student for a day in order to gain some insight into this valuable point of view. She mentioned it was one of her best professional experiences and she wished she had started doing so sooner in her career.

This article and the idea of shadowing a student stuck with me as something I'd love to do and when I started at Connor Middle I felt it was the perfect time. After discussing it with our principal, John Fitzpatrick, he agreed it was a great idea. We decided to move forward and selected a day.

Meet Savanna

Selecting a student was a little harder. I knew a female student might be a better fit, so that I could fully participate in physical education classes. I also had a feeling a sixth grader would be more likely to be enthusiastic about the opportunity to spend the day with me. Savanna was one of the very first students I met at VCMS, working at our school store, Ellie's Essentials, for student council. She was petite but confident; involved in just about every extracurricular activity we offer students in her grade. I felt her level of involvement within our school would afford me a broad perspective with regards to student life. Luckily, Savanna, was equally excited by the prospect. We decided to coordinate outfits – pink top with jeans and she filled me in on the details of her schedule.

Good Morning!

We started our day with two periods of English language arts. It was wonderful to have so much uninterrupted time devoted to reading and writing. Through historical accounts, we learned about the differences in gender roles in medieval times. Certainly, it was not the best time in history to be a lady. In science we spent time learning about genetics, even crafting our own Punnett Squares. I was struck by how advanced the work felt. I remember doing these in 10th grade Biology! We were also treated to Mrs. Boyer's "Happy Teacher Dance", a dance that apparently only comes out when each and every student comes to class with his or her homework done. Lucky I didn't count against our stats and her choreography was a hit.

Do Re Mi

Savanna and I were lucky enough to have both chorus and general music in our schedules today – what wonderful additions to all this core-subject learning! Though quite a hike (these classes are located in our High School), they were well worth the trek. We were out of our seats creating rhythmic eight counts with bodily percussion (clapping, stomping, etc.) and moving around so much, we hardly noticed we were *also* learning a ton about rhythm. Miss Dougherty made the concepts of eight and sixteenth notes easy understand and demonstrate. We even ended the period with a dance party! We sashay-ed around the room and everyone had a great time.

We're Hungry!

I'm embarrassed to admit that up until today I had not yet had the opportunity to sample a true student lunch. Was I ever missing out! Savanna and I selected the "pizza line" and enjoyed a great lunch of cheese pizza, mandarin oranges, and carrot sticks. An extremely generous tablemate of ours also treated us to cookies from the snack line – chocolate chip. Yum!

Ratios and Roman Life

Our last two core subjects were math and social studies. In math, Mrs. Ousler taught us how to convert various units of measurement, such as inches, feet, and miles in two different ways. Though it was tricky, we used a mix of our brains, our calculators, and our seat partners to solve the problems. Our measurement discussion led to a broader understanding of ratios and proportions and we all left feeling ready to take on our homework problems.

In social studies, we again learned about life and culture a long time ago – this time in ancient Rome. We had eight different stations to cycle through in order to gain information on various aspects of the Roman lifestyle. We learned about education, clothing, architecture, and even "sports" (if that's what you can call gladiator matches which often end in death!) Traveling to various stations in the room was a great way to learn about this. We all appreciated the ability to get up and move, and we took turns reading aloud at each stop. Again, however, I felt pretty lucky to live in our current time period!

A Great Way to Wrap Up

Though I was a little nervous about participating in physical education, I'm glad I did! We had SO much fun learning various skills in badminton, like the forehand and backhand strokes. We were really running around chasing those birdies and truly worked up a sweat. If I do say so myself, I don't even think I embarrassed myself too badly. With just a few minutes left in the period my shadow and I raced to the main office to do our PM announcements. We finished the day strong and got our students and staff ready to head out for the afternoon.

Reflecting on the Day

Overall, I'm thrilled I had the opportunity to devote an entire day to understanding what it is like to be a student at VCMS. My experience was profoundly rewarding and I ended the day with a much better understanding of the overall package we are providing our students. In 6th grade, my day felt so safe and structured. In each on-team class we entered to a list of tasks projected on the board for how to begin class. The first item was to copy down our homework into our agendas and the homework was listed in the same place in each room (the board in the back of the room). The consistency really helped even my most organizationally-challenged classmates to understand our teachers' expectations. I also feel this day was an amazing opportunity to build relationships with our students. Most students in my classes expressed genuine excitement to be joined for the day by their assistant principal. They really seemed to enjoy seeing me do all of the coursework and activities asked of them. I expressly stated to my teachers for the day that I expected **no** special treatment. I sang, danced, participated in group work, and even took a test. The girls with whom I spent my day welcomed me into their social group and could not have been more friendly and open. At Connor Middle School, we are lucky to have such flexible, welcoming students and staff. I learned many things during my day as a sixth grader, but this fact was not one of them – it has been apparent since my very first day.