

Jill Phillips' Speech at Back to School Night

If I had known months ago when I volunteered to give this talk that it would be on the heels of what's been happening on Wall Street the past few days, I'm not sure that I would have actually offered! But given the likelihood that most of us will land on our feet, as well as the philosophy of "long-term' investment', this becomes an easy spiel to deliver.

To those of you new to the Field School, I'm so envious of what your family has ahead of you. This is Michael's and my 13th and final year as Field parents, actually our 18th 'kid year'. Today I served my last Field lunch. Our entire family is so grateful to have stumbled upon this place – a school that I consider to be one of the healthiest, most comfortable, welcoming, transforming, yet challenging and rigorous schools there is.

Every school that we visited 14 years ago with our oldest daughter claimed to value the individual (and I'm sure you all heard that as well), but the only place where that really rang true for us was Field. SELF-DISCOVERY turned out to truly be the mission here --- you become who **you** are, you're appreciated for who **you** are, you find and develop your **own** passions.

SKILLS OF MIND will be developed at any school in some form – that's what schools do. But the small classes, culture of dialogue, **expectation** that students will question, challenge and push themselves outside of their comfort zones, and the respect for ideas different than one's own, sets this place apart from others.

And it is that respect that leads me to GENEROSITY OF HEART, the third pillar of the Field mission, and the one that strikes the loudest chord for me tonight. Which, in turn, leads me to the teachers. These teachers at this school are some of the most remarkable and generous folks you will ever meet. They are role models, they are friends, they are brilliant, and they really get to know and care about your children.

Let me tell you briefly about the value of a Field education for our family, because with one child close to the end of his six years here

and two who have not only graduated from Field, but from college as well, we have a fairly long-term perspective.

Our oldest daughter, Kate, was a very shy and creative elementary school student who intuitively knew that Field was the right school for her. In time, in this supportive environment, she began to break out of her shyness and find her place. By the middle of high school she was involved in a million activities and was a totally different kid. Her confidence and love for learning was astounding. She fell in love with photography, went from being a total non-athlete to a dedicated cross-country runner, and discovered that she was quite a skilled writer. She went off to Haverford College where an article was written about her in the school paper her first year describing her as a “community organizer!” That’s just one thing that Field did for her!

Kate’s sister Molly and brother Greg have very different personalities, passions, strengths, and weaknesses --- and both also thrived at Field. Molly chose the opposite college route from Kate --- she wanted big Michigan, which made us nervous at first. But for both of our girls, the high academic expectations and intensive writing program at Field made them well prepared for their very different college experiences. Accessing professors and feeling comfortable with them was not a problem at all because the comfortable teacher/student relationship was so natural for them from their years at Field. And they both felt they could question, challenge and explore in ways that their friends from other types of schools were hesitant to do.

When I asked Molly last night what she thought was the most valuable thing she took away from Field, without hesitation she said “Creativity and problem-solving skills.” And that’s what a 21st century education needs to be all about. Kate said “learning to appreciate difference.” That’s cultural competency, also critical in the 21st century. All of our kids have learned to ask hard questions, take risks, be flexible and be compassionate. And for that, Michael and I are so grateful.

Field kids don’t end their connection to the school after they graduate. Both my girls are constantly in touch with former teachers who continue to give generously of their advice and expertise. One

veteran teacher even arranged an entire day for Kate to come back and observe before she set out for a year of teaching high school overseas. With the perspective of time, our girls can now really speak to the value of their Field educations. This past year, on their own, each made a small contribution to the Annual Giving Fund as alumni.

Michael and I have stretched every year to support this school, in annual giving and special campaigns. As a board member who approves the budget every year, I can tell you that the Annual Fund bridges the difference between tuition and cost of a Field education – yes, a Field education is very expensive, but there is no better investment. It's an investment in excellent teachers, terrific programs and support systems, small classes with lots of individual attention, and the value of all kinds of diversity. The annual giving goal is big, both in amount and participation. When the campaign begins in a few weeks, I hope you'll respond with as generous a heart as you can. I can promise you that our family will continue to support Field, even after our last child graduates this year, to sustain this extraordinary place.