



Portrait of a Graduate Night: Alumni Reflections

February 7, 2024

Recently, five of our younger alumni met with parents for a question and answer session. Specifically, the focus was on transitioning to high school and the extent to which ASM prepares students for this next step in their educational experience. We thought it might interest you to review the questions asked, as well as summary responses.

Question: How was your transition to a more traditional, larger school setting?

Responses:

- At ASM, with its small class sizes, I really learned how to make deep connections with my peers.
- There are about 1200 kids at Phillips Academy. My time at ASM really prepared me well. Smaller class sizes meant that I was prepared for group discussions and forming connections.
- I have 350 students in my senior class at Central Catholic. When I first came to ASM, I was very quiet, shy, and wanted to do my own thing. ASM really worked with me on my communication skills, building relationships with my peers, and becoming more outgoing.
- ASM taught me how to reach out and connect with teachers, which I found really easy at the high school and college level.

Question: What did you get involved with at your current school?

Responses:

- I got involved with a couple things freshman year. I joined the swim team and also joined DECA, which is a business program. I really liked the business collaborative class at ASM. I pursued that interest in high school, and I'm still doing that. I also ran for Executive Board at my school and was secretary of my freshman class.
- Freshman year, I worked with the coding clubs. From my time at ASM, especially the day of code program, I learned a bit of coding and that was an interest I wanted to pursue more. Also at ASM, I started working on science research projects and that was something I've continued with in high school.
- ASM's STEM program is really rich and sparked my interest in biology. I'm in AP biology now and plan to take neuroscience next year. I still remember the labs we did and I think that really inspired me to pursue science.
- In high school, I was involved in research and robotics. Now in college, I spend a good amount of my time working in a cancer lab. I think at ASM is where I really developed that love for science. Science is going to be a big part of my future going forward as a biophysics major.

Question: How have the academics (at ASM) prepared you for high school?

Responses:

- I would say ASM prepared me, especially through the math program. At my high school, we start math at different levels, so I was able to jump into the Algebra and Geometry program instead of repeating Algebra 1, which is taught in eighth grade at ASM.
- I think ASM's math program really teaches some important key concepts that you'll use in high school. For example, I remember in Mrs. Orlowitz's class, we worked on credit card interest and banking. I think that's really important since those are real world skills you can actually apply to your life. I find myself looking at something in (math) class and thinking, oh yeah, we learned that in eighth grade.
- At ASM, you're definitely working on different projects and different classes all at once. And I would say learning time management and organizational skills definitely helped me as I transitioned to high school and took on a difficult course load.
- I think having smaller class sizes at ASM prepared me for the more discussion-based environment that many of prep schools in the area have, making that transition easier - especially in the humanities where everything is very discussion based. As far as math and science go, what I really liked about ASM was my ability to work at my own pace and even work ahead if I wanted to, which allowed me to excel in high school.

Question: At ASM, you may have less activities, less friends (compared to public schools). Do you think this is an important issue or not an issue at all?

Responses:

- My graduating class was four people and it really allowed me to bond with my classmates and create really deep connections that I wouldn't have been able to otherwise.
- Personally, I never felt there was a time when it was too small, and I wished I had gone to a larger school. I actually transferred to ASM for middle school for the smaller class sizes and the opportunity to receive individualized attention. Coming to ASM, I really learned who I was, how to connect with peers, and the importance of building those relationships.
- The small class sizes helped me learn how to really work with my peers on group projects. They also made it easier for us to learn how to form an initial connection with a teacher. When I was younger, I was a very shy person and I really did not like asking teachers questions. The smaller class size made me feel more comfortable in reaching out to people when I needed help. In a larger high school, the ability to continue to ask for help and clarification when needed has been extremely helpful. Many of the skills I learned at ASM, particularly the softer skills related to connecting with classmates and teachers, were important in enabling me to secure internships, for example. I felt comfortable reaching out to people at different universities and organizations.
- My journey was a bit different because I attended public school for four or five years before coming to ASM. My transition to high school felt really natural. With the small class size, you might think that spending time with these specific few people for so many years, you would be afraid to branch out (in high school). It made me excited to branch out, meet new friends, and join new clubs.
- I found high school to be a really great time to expand my social network. I know that for some people, high school was more focused on academics or sticking with a smaller, close-knit group of friends. Regardless of what kind of person you are, ASM's middle school really does prepare you for either situation.

Question: In middle school, students travel in the fall and in the spring. What did those trips do for you as far as growing as a person.

Responses:

- The trips were some of my best experiences. We went (in seventh grade) to Red Gate Farm and attended Montessori Model United Nations in New York City. Then, in eighth grade, we went to The Leadership School at Kiev in Maine. COVID prevented us from traveling to Washington, D.C. that year. The Leadership School and Red Gate Farm were definitely a great time to connect with one another. We engaged in a lot of team building, tried new things, and developed critical thinking skills through hands-on experiences in nature. Although we had similar activities at ASM, these took place in a different setting. I had friends who were afraid of heights, yet they climbed up a rope for the first time, and it was really nice to have everyone supporting and cheering each other on. We did a lot of team building activities, which helped to build trust among us.
- Montessori Model UN was definitely a big experience. First, we had to write a research paper and learn the importance of research, editing, and reading in the lead up to the event. Then we had to give a speech in front of people who weren't from our school. Although this felt intimidating at first, practicing a lot at ASM helped prepare me.
- At The Leadership School at Kiev and Redgate Farm, I learned a lot of collaborative and leadership skills, which benefited me in high school. Montessori Model UN helped me learn about the process of researching a topic and ensured that I could formulate a research paper that included all the facts.
- In my eighth grade year, we went to NYC and helped plan the entire trip. We were also responsible for navigating the group during the trip. Although we got lost a couple of times, there was a lot of learning that doesn't normally take place in the classroom.
- The middle school trips were my first real taste of independence as I always traveled with my parents. I remember coming back from those trips feeling more confident in myself and my abilities to network with other schools and do things on my own for the first time.

Question: For those who transferred to ASM for middle school, how was that transition?

Responses:

- At my public school, I had one teacher who taught everything, and we followed a set schedule every day. At ASM, the first thing I noticed was that the blocks were longer so you're able to go more in-depth in your classes. Sometimes we would have a work cycle that allowed you to choose which work or homework you would finish; it taught me how to be independent and manage my homework better. At a smaller school like ASM, there is more mentoring.
- At my previous school, we didn't go into as much depth in our subjects as we did at ASM. I developed stronger relationships with my teachers at ASM because the class sizes were smaller. The emphasis on developing more independence with our learning helped us prioritize the work that needed to be done. I also received more feedback on my work than at my previous school. For example, when writing a paper, I would have 15 minutes to talk with the teacher at the beginning, middle, and end of the process, which helped me correct my mistakes for future papers. I also appreciated the mentorship I received after class if needed.

Mrs. Orlowitz: “Research shows that finding a mentor in life can help you gain a lot and become very successful. As teachers in middle school, we know that we are mentors to these students and for them to learn from us and learn how to advocate for themselves sets them up for success.”

Question: How did ASM help you through the high school admission process?

Responses:

- We had a lot of support in completing our applications and the interview process. I met with Ms. Finno, who walked me through the interview process and helped me destress a bit. I think that process helped me better express who I am to my high school interviewer.
- There were a lot of high school representatives who visited our classroom and talked about their schools. We learned a lot about various high schools, and in turn, they got to know us personally. I think this helped when they reviewed our applications because they could remember the types of questions we asked and the interest we showed in their school.
- Because you develop close relationships with your teachers at ASM, they can write you some really valuable letters of recommendation, and those can definitely help set you apart from other candidates. The letters are very personalized and can support your application in the best way possible.

These young people certainly embody the characteristics of an ASM graduate. They are:

- Guided by their own values,
- Respectful of others’ values,
- Critical and creative thinkers,
- Problem solvers who persevere and collaborate,
- Independent, responsible and self-aware,
- Adaptive to varied environments and experiences.