

# KnightTimes

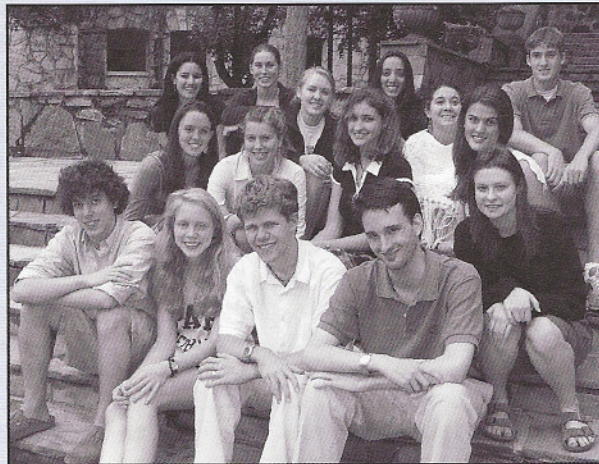
Pace Academy Newsletter

November 2004

## 22 Seniors Earn National Merit Honors

22 Pace seniors have been honored by the National Merit Scholarship Corporation for outstanding performance on the 2005 Preliminary SAT/National Merit Scholarship qualifying test. Five of the seniors earned National Merit Semifinalist status and 17 were named National Merit Commended Students.

The 2005 National Merit Semifinalists are from front left, **Sam Sabulis, Caitlin Fearing, Jeff Crosley, Dorrier Coleman** and **Matthew Rothman** (not pictured). Finalists will be named in the spring. The 2005 National Merit Commended Students are from second row left, **Rachel Korschun, Emily Evert, Shaina Koval, Vanessa Petrosky, Isabella Edmundson**, top row left, **Lauren Marx, Alex Cunliffe, Rachel Clark, Rahima Dosani, Alyssa DeSocio** and **Frank Woodling**. Not pictured, **Maya Cohen, Jennifer Newman, Kieffer Pirrung, Jenni Ridall, Amanda Siegel** and **Mark Smith**.



It is a privilege to begin my role as a consulting psychologist to Pace Academy. I have been working in the Atlanta area as a clinical psychologist for 15 years, often working privately with students and families from Pace. I am excited about devoting one full day per week to such an excellent institution and community.

In my experience, Pace Academy offers students an experience that is paralleled by only a small number of the finer schools in the country. From the Lower School through graduation from the Upper School, Pace offers each student an outstanding academic education, exposure to myriad extracurricular activities and opportunities, and a wonderfully supportive community comprised of faculty, administration and parents all working together to provide an environment that is challenging while also providing support and nurturance for each child. It is exciting to be a part of this community.

My experience suggests that despite all of these advantages, an environment like Pace Academy can be something of a two-edged sword for our children. Blessings should not be received without an awareness of their potential for harm. I am reminded of the title of one of my favorite books by Dan Kindlon, Ph.D., *Too*

## The Two-Edged Sword

### *Raising Children in Outstanding Schools*

By Mark E. Crawford, Ph.D.  
Consulting Psychiatrist

*Much of a Good Thing: Raising Children of Character in an Age of Indulgence.* I recommend this book as required reading for every Pace parent.

While I could address this caveat specifically to different age groups, I will address one concern to parents of the Lower School students. In the past decade, I have seen an alarming increase in the number of

younger children who are manifesting symptoms of anxiety and stress. When I was growing up, childhood was generally experienced as an idyllic time of laughter and recess. Time crawled at a snail's pace. Summer vacations were relaxed and lasted forever, and it seemed like years passed from Halloween until Christmas or Hanukkah. Schoolwork, while perhaps boring, was not described as "stressful" and sports were fun. My teammates didn't worry or even give much thought about how well they were *playing*. We simply enjoyed getting together to play the sport, while our parents cheered (without critiquing our performance) from the stands. Students who made B's did not get tutored to make A's, and a 9-year-old would never have received private lessons to enhance

Two-Edged Sword

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his skill at a sport played for fun. The only children who seemed anxious or stressed were those whose families were going through a crisis (e.g., serious illness or divorce), and these were relatively rare.

At the risk of waxing nostalgic, it appears that things have changed. As a parent of two elementary-aged children, I clearly see a cultural parental peer pressure that compels us to begin “developing” our children so that they “succeed” as early as first grade. Fifteen years ago, the only parents who talked about their children getting into college were parents of high school juniors and seniors. Today, parents of children as young as elementary school age discuss what their children must do to “get into a good school.”

Not only do I think this is premature, I believe it can be nefarious. My colleagues and I frequently see parents enrolling young children in “enrichment” and extracurricular activities to gain an advantage over their young peers in the race to become attractive to a handful of “the best” colleges. These youngsters are sleep-deprived due to over-scheduling. While the parents’ motives are unquestionably benign, the methods

have unfortunate consequences. Instead of happy, carefree, enthusiastic children, I am seeing more and more children who appear busy, hurried and worried.

One of my other all-time favorite books on parenting is *The Blessing of a Skinned Knee* by Wendy Mogel, Ph.D. In her book, Dr. Mogel cautions against over-scheduling young children, and states, “Amid all the hurry, it’s hard for children to learn essential life skills: “vegging out,” contemplating life, relieving boredom by entertaining themselves, and feeling a general sense of peace and contentment.” She recommends that parents find everyday methods to guard time, including the following: 1) find time to connect: find time daily to listen and give your child your full attention; 2) let your child dawdle; 3) don’t enroll

your child/family in activities that no one enjoys just because they are “good opportunities;” 4) give your children a chance to get bored – they need to build up their boredom-tolerance muscle; and 5) find time to reflect and plan.

Sometimes, it is difficult to recognize that just because something is a good opportunity does not make it a good idea. For example, if enrolling in cello or ballet lessons means your child is going nonstop from dawn until she collapses in bed at night with no “empty space” in her day, it is a bad idea.

I hope I do not sound “preachy.” To be perfectly honest, I find myself directing my thoughts toward myself and my wife as I write this article. We are trying to raise young children in the same culture with the same pressures and concerns. To

close, I encourage all of us to keep in mind a few principles that may buffer our children from the tendency to become overly anxious and over stressed:

1) Remember that our children only have one childhood, and that it is brief. Let’s not take it from them prematurely.

2) The elementary years are not the time to over-focus on achievement and performance. Learning is a process, and the most important thing a young child can do is gain the

tools to learn (e.g., learning to read and learning to ask questions) accompanied by a love for learning.

3) Play and free time are valuable to young children. This is the arena they use to develop important social skills such as sharing, learning to be a team player, and learning to accept that they are better at some skills and not as good at others – and that this is O.K. Play also allows them an opportunity to be creative and to express their individuality in ways that may not be allowed in other arenas such as school.

4) Children develop at different rates. Give them time to grow and develop. Resist the urge to rank and compare them to their peers. This is unfair, frustrating and ultimately not helpful.

5) Understand that some children need more

unstructured free time than others. As a parent, you are responsible for deciding how many activities your child can participate in. Don’t be afraid to say “no,” even to “good activities.”

6) Your child may end up pitching the seventh game of the World Series or becoming a world-famous musician, but odds are that he will end up going to college, getting a job, getting married, raising children, and living among the rest of us mortals. His chances of being happy, fulfilled and significant may be as good or better living a “normal” life as they are living as a superstar. Try not to focus on your child’s performance in an extracurricular activity. Instead, focus on the things he can take from these activities into all areas of his life, e.g., teamwork, sportsmanship, perseverance, etc. Above all, make sure activities are fun.

7) Many sleep experts suggest that elementary aged children should get 9-10 hours of sleep *each* night. A child who is sleep deprived is more susceptible to illness, less attentive in class, and less able to cope effectively with everyday stress.

I encourage you to write down your child’s schedule for the week. If you cannot find time each day for at least nine hours of sleep and a couple of hours of unstructured free time, re-think your child’s schedule. Also consider how much your child is enjoying the extracurricular activities. As a parent, I certainly want my children to take school seriously, become involved in a few extracurricular activities, and behave properly. However, I also want them to have time to play, worship and connect with others, and I do not want their lives and schedules to be a recipe for the development of an anxiety disorder. The balance is often difficult to find, but being aware of the need for this balance keeps us all from straying too far from the goal. I hope that this will challenge all of us to keep our perspective as we fulfill our highest and most honorable call – raising our children. I look forward to working with the faculty and families of Pace Academy.

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