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Students Switch To Woodlawn Why?

By Dolma Nelson

Its primary goal being "to provide an alternative to the traditional high schools in Arlington," the Woodlawn Hoffman Boston Program (newly merged) has fulfilled the needs of quite a few former W-L students. Set up similar to a college structure, with different classes on different days, Woodlawn has been in operation for six years. It formed a union with Hoffman-Boston (a similar program for grades 7-9) in its seventh. Washington-Lee math teacher and former Woodlawn teach Dan McSweeney views the merger as a minor setback to the efficiency of the original program. Many students, however, feel that the effects are minimal, only increasing the size somewhat.

There is no difference between the students as students. In W-L and those at Woodlawn, according to Mr. McSweeney. They all have similar work-related programs, similar ranges of academic ability, and all are interesting and stimulating. They are, though, incongruous in the conditions and atmosphere under which their maximum performance is obtained.

While our school may be very good for the needs of a certain student it may not satisfy those of all other students and vice-versa. The vast structural difference, the size difference, and the fact that the systems exemplify an objective (W-L) versus a subjective (Woodlawn) educational procedure, are reasons why strict comparison should not be encouraged. This also applies to drawing a general conclusion of which system is "better" or "best" for Arlington students.

Despite these deterrents, many students feel that there still lies an undercurrent of antagonism, uneasiness, and distrust between students from "both sides of the tracks." Woodlawn junior Amy Lovett says many people she encounters are "automatically against Woodlawn." She believes that the defensive attitude writ-

tened in some Woodlawn students can be attributed to many W-L students' misinterpretation of Woodlawn as a threatening rival rather than a mere alternative.

Woodlawn junior Peter Coffey, who was a sophomore at W-L, says Woodlawn has a wide variety of people and is suited for a self-motivated student, but stresses the fact that "it's not the right way for everyone - just a necessary alternative." This personal view is upheld by junior Mike Broder, also a former W-L student, who feels that the system is more advantageous to "the student who wants to do more for his own education than relying upon the teacher to do it." Self-discipline and responsibility were cited by other Woodlawn students as important assets to success in the system.

Of all the reasons why the students switched from W-L to Woodlawn one particular opinion (or general consensus) glares out in the face of conventional schools: the teacher-student relationship. Every student who was asked cited this as his primary reason for "splitting the scene."

They feel that a much more personal relationship exists at Woodlawn. Transfer junior David Mosher was bothered by the general non-concern of the teachers at W-L. Woodlawn senior Alan Tron states that he regards W-L as a fig factory: feed me input and throw me in another class." He is quite satisfied with friend to friend atmosphere between students and teachers at Woodlawn. Though this criticism may sound harsh, it was acknowledged that many W-L teachers undoubtedly have the potential to become more involved with the students, but the largeness of the school makes it inherently difficult to do so. It is felt that the difference in relationships merely stresses the need to have another choice to turn to.

The thing missed most about W-L by those students who switched schools is unrelated to academics: social life. This pertains not as much to athletic events, clubs, or other activities, as it does to old friends and acquaintances. Amy Lovett says, "You start to miss people you've known since elementary school."

A number of students have recently switched to Woodlawn-Hoffman-Boston from Washington-Lee for reasons similar to those previously stated in this article. Among them are seniors Wayne Logan, Colleen Blackburne, and Chris Jones; juniors include Kevin Guile, David Utter, and Cris Price.

A concrete illustration of the incompatibility between the Woodlawn system and an individual personality is seen in the decision of W-L senior Gerraine O'Day, who left Woodlawn for W-L this year and cited her primary reason for the departure as the addition of Hoffman-Boston to the Woodlawn program. She also felt that her academic performance would improve with externally applied pressure and discipline.

Making a comparison of the courses in the two schools, Gerraine finds that English is more complete at W-L, including a wider variety of lessons, whereas Woodlawn's English courses concentrate on specific fields. She also finds the assignments much more formal at W-L, which she believes will also be formal in college. Regarding society, Gerraine finds many separate groups at W-L having "bad feelings" for one another - this contrasts with the friendly, relaxed atmosphere at Woodlawn. Having attended alternative schools for four years since jr. high, Gerraine feels it is good to have experienced both systems.

In both school systems, the individual student is first and foremost; the school should be selected and judged according to his needs alone.