



Science/Engineering Magnet High School



Blue Ribbon School 2005-2011



To whom it may concern:

Taylor managed to find the one school in America where he'd be the odd man out, and he was as good for us as we were for him. He bridges some very different worlds found in highly selective institutions, and I think he'd be a fabulous resource for any such community.

On one hand, Taylor is brilliant: I've been in advanced academics and working with extraordinarily talented students for 15 years, and Taylor is, without a doubt, among the strongest students I've ever worked with. His faculty for language, in particular, is extraordinary: he's one of those analytical/verbal people—he thinks like a philosopher. He can read anything, however archaic or abstract, and never misses nuance or tone. He enjoys cleverness with language—not the easy cleverness of puns but the intricate interplay of sound and meaning that make a sentence or a phrase perfect. He writes flawlessly—his natural voice is straightforward and organized and efficient. His scores reveal a similar aptitude for math and science, though I really think even there he's a word guy—his thinking, his understanding, is verbal in nature. His work ethic is beyond reproach: every assignment done flawlessly, tests studied for, cello practiced, community involvement accomplished. He makes busy look easy.

On the other hand, Taylor is defined by his Evangelical Protestant faith, and he very much belongs to a suburban, affluent Evangelical community. I'm talking church Sunday morning and Wednesday night, Young Life and Fellowship of Christian Athletes. This is a pretty common community in America, but it's not common at this school, for a variety of reasons: our student body is poor, urban, and minority. We are a STEM magnet with a decidedly secular feel. What with one thing or another, we have more openly gay atheist boys than evangelical Christians at this school, and more kids would admit to being undocumented than being pro-life. When 14-year old Taylor got here, straight from a little parochial white-flight school in the suburbs, it must have felt like he'd arrived in Gomorrah, but with a Freshman Calculus class. But instead of running for it (which I think he seriously considered), Taylor adapted—and the way he adapted is a testimony to his character and the key to why he will be such an important asset in an academic community.

For one thing, Taylor always brings his full intelligence and analytical ability to bear on his faith. There are strains of Evangelical Protestantism that discourage active and sincere questioning, but that is not Taylor's way. He questions everything, and he always embraces nuance and tone. So when he was suddenly immersed in an environment that challenged rather than reinforced his faith, he didn't feel threatened—rather, he appreciated the chance to really explore his own beliefs in a new context. Furthermore, his analytical nature means he is able to compartmentalize and to appreciate people that are truly different than he is. I, myself, could not be more different than Taylor in this way—I pretty clearly lean far left, and I know I've used cuss words in front of him he probably never even heard before—but we've always had a relationship defined by mutual respect and an honest willingness to learn from each other.

Second, he's a really nice young man who makes friends readily. I've watched him develop deep friendships with students so very different from him—racially and socioeconomically, of course, but also ideologically. He has really high and specific ethical standards for himself, but he doesn't worry about other people. He's used these last four years to learn about worlds he didn't know existed, and it's made him humble and thoughtful. We've had other, similar students in his position that didn't react as gracefully: suddenly being the minority is jarring, and some students react with resentment. Taylor, though, understands his own situation is a shadow of what many of his classmates face in other contexts, and rather than become bitter, he's become sympathetic and wise.

In many ways, college is traditionally the place where students like Taylor have the opportunity to learn what Taylor already knows—how to get along and work with people that are different than themselves. Taylor will be a catalyst for that process: he can move comfortably in literally any company, and he can translate between very different people—and teach them to connect to each other. If I were putting together a group of students for a long term research program and I was worried about group cohesion, Taylor is the person I'd select because he would be the model and the architect for mutual respect and cooperation. Also, he could write the paper.

Taylor thinks he's going to be an engineer. No one here believes him. He'll get the engineering degree, but it's clear to us he'll end up doing something larger than that: his skill set is too large, his interests and passions too broad, his gifts for working with people too profound. I don't know exactly what he will do—entrepreneur, author, large-scale project manager?—but it will be remarkable. He'll be a huge asset to your community from day one, and be a credit to the institution for decades after. He carries my very strongest recommendation. If you have any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Amanda Ashmead, Humanities Chair

aashmead@dallasisd.org

214.226.3958

Ms. Tiffany R. Huitt, Principal

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1201 East Eighth Street • Suite 216 • Dallas, Texas 75203 • Phone: 972.925.5960 • Fax: 972.925.6016 • www.semagnetschool.org