



Convocation 2014
Head of School Welcome Address

Our Core Values

Girls – this morning, and throughout the school year, you are going to hear about, talk about, and reflect on the meaning of integrity, respect, responsibility and inclusion. From interacting with you as you have brought your passion and energy back to school over the past few days, I know that many of you have already started to think about these four guiding principles that we should strive to uphold in all that we do. They are fundamental beliefs that will continue to define us and provide a strong sense of who we are as a community.

Where have these four values of integrity, respect, responsibility and inclusion come from? They have been a part of the fabric of Westridge for many years. They appear in the words we have written about ourselves, and in conversations about who we are and who we aspire to be. They are reflected in decisions we have made and actions that have been taken. They are values that should lift us up and bring us together.

And as we enter our second century and reflect on where we wish to go, the time seems right to reaffirm and recommit to these values that can be at the heart of all that we stand for – our core values.

Collectively, we also need to define what these values mean to us and to consider how they can guide our everyday thoughts and actions, and provide the framework within which we can wrestle with difficult decisions and hold ourselves accountable.

I always try to break things into “memory chunks” and to think of examples or stories to illustrate my thinking. So let me share with you some of the ways that I remember these core values and understand what they look like.

There are four core values. If you think of the Westridge “W” – you could write one value along each of the four diagonal lines that make up the letter.

Two of the values start with I; two with R.

As I think about the values, I like to start from what I call the “inside out” – starting with integrity, as it is very personal and introspective, then moving on to respect and responsibility, and ending with inclusion – a value that focuses on bringing everyone together. So for me, arranging the letters in “I-R-R-I” order makes the most sense.

The first “I” stands for Integrity.

Personal integrity is what you draw on as you come to grips with what is right and wrong. It’s that voice of conscience that we develop telling us that something doesn’t feel good, and the voice that spurs us on when we don’t just stand by and watch something bad happen, but have the courage to be an up-stander and to speak out.

Personal integrity is what we all need to continue to develop so that we make ethical decisions. It’s not always easy – and there are so many challenges and pressures – for example, those associated with academic integrity and ethical use of technology – pressures that I know you will discuss with your parents, teachers and classmates throughout this year, and for which there are guidelines in our *Student/Parent Handbook*.

Ultimately, integrity to me means acting with honesty and honor, and is best represented when one chooses to do the right thing when nobody is watching.

The first “R” stands for Respect.

Again – it helps me to start with the “inside out” approach. I know that when I was much younger and still in school, it was much harder than it is now for me to have personal respect. I was a perfectionist, and nothing was ever good enough, because I just couldn’t do everything right and I was never really happy about how I looked. Now I realize that I was my own worst enemy, and that if I can end each day knowing that if I have tried to approach things with an open mind, to do the right thing, to try to understand the other point of view, and to treat others as fairly as possible, I can respect myself, even though I may have made mistakes, or struggled along the way and have not yet found a solution.

Respect for others is a key factor in building supportive and trusting relationships. We respect others when we demonstrate that we value their opinions, even when we don’t agree. Civil discourse, where one can agree to disagree and not engage in character assassination of the other person, is sadly lacking in much of our public debate. I encourage all of us to change the tone and set an example!

Respect for others is also demonstrated by the way we present ourselves to the world – our physical appearance and our daily habits. And here I think a couple of specific Westridge examples can illustrate what this core value “looks like.”

I’ll start with uniforms! Respect for oneself and respect for each other in the community are the underlying principles that are guiding our revision of the uniform policy this year.

The issue of the uniform, as you know, can be a hot topic of debate and a matter for eye-rolling! However, in conversations that I have had recently with parents, student leaders, and many faculty, staff and administrators (particularly the gentlemen in our midst), there seems to be a sense of relief that we are more clearly defining our expectations. Girls, we don’t want you to lose your individual flair, but we do want you to work within modest and school-appropriate guidelines – so that your choices reflect well on you, as well as respect those

around you – many of whom in the past have felt acutely uncomfortable by some of your clothing choices, and who, for many understandable reasons, are loathe to speak to you about it.

And now to our campus. It is beautiful, and it needs to be respected and cared for – by us. Our hard-working maintenance staff members are not here to clear up after us – that is our job. Please clean up after yourselves – in classrooms and the dining commons. And if you see litter that shouldn't be there, which you have dropped or someone else has dropped, please pick it up – and place it in the appropriate bin – especially noting if it is something that can be recycled. We all need to be stewards of our environment – here on campus and in the wider world.

The second “R” is for Responsibility.

We need to take responsibility for our actions and consider the impact that we have on one another, especially when the impact does not match our intent. We also can't blame the other person for taking something the “wrong way.” It is our responsibility to inform ourselves, put ourselves in the other person's shoes, consider the consequences and if necessary, make amends.

We also need to learn how to become more responsible – to adopt coping strategies so that panic is not our default position. Take a deep breath, count to ten, ask a friend – before rushing to the conclusion that something can't be done.

And we need to be accountable – delivering on what we have promised, or saying sorry and then choosing to move on and not hold a grudge.

The “I” that stands for our final core value, is for inclusion.

I must admit I'm going to borrow from the Royal Bank of Canada here, as they seem to have a wonderful way with words:

Inclusion is the state of being valued, respected and supported. It's about focusing on the needs of every individual and ensuring the right conditions are in place for each person to achieve his or her full potential. Inclusion should be reflected in an organization's culture, practices and relationship that are in place to support (its diverse community members).

This makes me thing back to the occasions when I have entered a new community. When I moved to an all-girls high school and nobody spoke to me the first day. When I first started teaching at an all-girls' school, over 38 years ago, where the teachers who had been there a long time told me in all the sarcastic ways that they could, that I could only sit in certain chairs, not use their cups, and certainly could not participate in their conversations. My first week in Los Angeles where I had relocated with my family from South Africa via Connecticut over the course of less than half-a-year – I walked my young children into school, passing the principal and other parents – and nobody greeted us – it was one of the loneliest days of my life.

To be a truly inclusive community, we need to understand ourselves and take responsibility for understanding how others who might not have the same background or culture as we do are respected and supported. We need to understand how things that are said or done can be interpreted differently and at times can cause confusion or offence. We need to work hard to make sure that we all, no matter our background, feel safe and appreciated for who we are.

At this moment, Convocation, and the days that follow, I ask each and every one of you to make a commitment to making sure that each and every member of our community, especially new members, feels appropriately welcomed, respected and supported.

Now let's see if you can remember the initial letters of the four core values and what they stand for (ask girls to shout out).

What are the initial letters? (I-R-R-I)

The first I stands for? (Integrity)

The first R? (Respect)

The next R? (Responsibility)

The final I? (Inclusion)

Let's hold on tight to these core values and continue to reflect and to discuss and to live by them.

In the days and months to come, I look forward to hearing your stories about how you plan to uphold these core values and how you are using them, and will continue to use them to guide your thoughts, words and deeds.

Thank you – in anticipation of all of your efforts!