

An All-Girls Education

Competence  
Confidence  
Connectedness



**NashobaBrooks** 

An Independent School for Boys and Girls, Age 3–Grade 3; for Girls, Grades 4–8

# Competence



## Defining Rigor

The word “rigor” comes with an alarming array of official definitions: “severity,” “strictness,” “inflexibility,” “rigidity.” Why then, is rigor in education such a sought-after goal? Tony Wagner, of the Harvard Graduate School of Education, offers an explanation: “Rigor in the classroom is tied to the larger questions of what society will demand of students when they graduate, what it means to be an educated adult, and how the skills needed for work, citizenship, and continuous learning have changed fundamentally in the last quarter-century. Rigor has less to do with how demanding the material the teacher covers is than with what *competencies* students have mastered as a result of a lesson.”

Ted Sizer, perhaps America’s most famous contemporary education reformer, might have another word for rigor: *habits*. He has asked, “What are the habits of kids moving through the school, after graduation? Are they questioning? *Grappling*? Are they respectful of ideas of others, respectful of disagreement, of what they know and don’t know?” It has been two years since Ted Sizer and his wife and co-author, Nancy Sizer, came to NashobaBrooks to talk about the future of education, but their ideas continue to shape the way we teach and learn.

In the upper grades at NashobaBrooks, the all-girls environment calls for understanding the abilities, learning styles, and development of young women. We

“The student-teacher ratio of about fifteen to one is often even lower when a specialist in one or another area of curriculum is in the classroom working with students. I have two daughters who are very different learners and very different people, and the school has served them both well, paying attention to their individual needs and talents.”

— Parent of 2004 and 2007 graduates

encourage them to grapple, to think deeply and imaginatively, to be risk-takers, and, within an atmosphere of trust and safety, to build habits that will allow each girl to reach her highest level of competency.

The head of our math department, who came to our all-girls upper grades from a co-ed school, remarks on the difference between the two settings: “In general,” he says, “girls in co-ed classes were more tentative about problem-solving. When faced with a new problem, they were more afraid of making mistakes, and were less exploratory. There is less of that here, where girls are more willing to take risks. Our program, based on the guided discovery approach, is ideal for showing girls how to stretch themselves in math. Competence feeds confidence. Girls learn to represent themselves in a positive way.”

The habit of competence spills over from classrooms into the art and music studios, the stage, the playing fields. By the time a girl graduates from NashobaBrooks, she is an embodiment of our mission, which calls for “. . . the development of each child’s personal excellence in academics, athletics, and the arts.” While creating a painting, a play, or a musical composition, or while participating in one of the nine sports offerings, girls gain a unique understanding of other disciplines. The head of the creative arts department says, “We help students learn how to use the arts in powerful ways. They call on that power in their classrooms while learning about other things.”

Rigor at NashobaBrooks — quite the opposite of “inflexible” or “rigid”— is fluid, rich, and many-layered. The resulting competency reverberates throughout a student’s life.

### Layering Competence Over Time in Academics, Arts, Athletics

**Academics. . .** A 2004 graduate, who developed a love of writing and literature while at NashobaBrooks, was awarded a grant to spend the summer of 2007 walking seventy miles of the ancient Dingle Way in County Kerry, exploring the area’s

*earliest storytelling roots, and her own heritage.*

**Arts. . .** A 1995 graduate, who showed her gift as a musician while at NashobaBrooks, is the Editorial and Programming Associate in the classical music department of the New York City NPR station.

**Athletics. . .** A 1998 graduate and all-around athlete on NashobaBrooks fields, has recently moved to Germany to train for the Olympic Trials in triathlon in 2008.

“The thorniest impediment of equity for females is low self-esteem. Competence, confidence, and connectedness are the three critical components of self-esteem. If any one of the three is absent, it is impossible for self-esteem to be high. The three Cs can’t be taught; they must be experienced . . . [and] layered over time.”

— JoAnn Deak  
Educator and Psychologist,  
in *How Girls Thrive*





# Confidence

## Growing Leaders

According to David Sadker, American University professor noted for his work on gender bias: “When girls go to single-sex schools, they stop being the audience and become the players.”

Thus, when NashobaBrooks girls take on a service learning project, they do so as players, not volunteering for the sidelines, but for an active role. Seventh and eighth grade girls who volunteer at the House of Hope in Lowell assume responsibility for planning activities with the children who are temporarily living there. Not satisfied with merely raising money for this organization, these girls have become advocates for the homeless in Massachusetts.

When NashobaBrooks and other Concord schools were selected to pilot the national YouthGive project, upper grades girls at Nashoba took the leadership role. Of the 33 profiles in the final product (the first-ever catalog for student giving), 21 were written by NashobaBrooks students. The chief research, interviews and on-site visits were done by NashobaBrooks girls.

Service learning is a major conduit for leadership at NashobaBrooks, and recognizing this, Crossroads, a Metrowest community foundation, chose the school to participate in its innovative Youth in Philanthropy program. Crossroads is training Class Representatives

in grades five through eight to understand and evaluate non-profit organizations, and to assess needs in the wider Concord area. These girls elicit grant proposals from individuals or classes who request support for an organization. The Class Reps then assess the merits of each grant and decide how to disburse the funds.

All upper grades students benefit from a focused program of leadership training. They learn to define a problem or a need, envision change, gather partners and allies, research the issue, identify resources as well as barriers, brainstorm solutions, create an action plan, implement a plan for change, and evaluate. Leadership lessons come not merely at random moments; they are imbedded within the homeroom community, within small-group advisor meetings; as part of assemblies and presentations to the public. Leadership is integral to our curriculum.

Head of School Kay Cowan sums up leadership at NashobaBrooks: “Given the age level of our students, we do not have a formal student government. This is just as well, since we view leadership as action and a way of being, rather than just a position a student gains by appointment or vote. Our goal is to develop student leaders who will, for the rest of their lives, contribute to community: the school community and the world community.”

*“Thank you, NashobaBrooks! Thank you for hand-crafting my daughter and helping her discover her intellect, her sense of inner strength and morality, her courage to speak out, and her sense of humor. Thank you for helping her discover squash (no small feat given that she had turned up her nose at sports), forensics, and feminism. Thank you for each and every teacher, librarian, and technical advisor who spent time teaching and exploring ideas with her. And thank you for the time and thought you put into her selection of her next school. At each school we visited, NashobaBrooks was well-known not only for high academic standards but also for the strength of leadership the school provides, and for the level of care that you put into shaping each young woman.”*

**—Parent of 2006 graduate**

## Becoming Citizens of the World

Advancing global citizenship, a priority for educators today, might seem too mighty a challenge for a middle school. Because the ages of these students are not conducive to exchange programs in, or travel to, far-off countries, how can they find authentic experiences with the “other”? How can they develop true empathy? How to connect?

If we are unable to send our students out into the world, we can bring the world to them. Young people from Kenya and Ethiopia recently came to talk with students at NashobaBrooks, as part of their Africa-themed humanities curriculum. A Sudanese “Lost Child” refugee, who is now a senior honors student at Brandeis University,

spent a semester teaching seventh and eighth graders about the Sudanese crisis from a personal, in-depth perspective.

Two years ago, the principal of the Sisters of Notre Dame Primary School in Ilorin, Nigeria, paid a series of visits to NashobaBrooks, launching a partnership between the two schools. Subsequently, upper grades advisor groups were charged with finding funds to pay tuition for one year for one child at the school. The girls formulated questions about Nigeria, researched the answers, and presented their findings to their peers. The result: the girls raised enough money to keep not one, but fifteen students enrolled in Sister Jacinta’s school.

“My daughter was elected as one of the two Class Reps in her high school’s tenth grade. These are the only elected offices available for this class, and she will be a part of the Student Council governing body for the school. She sends her thanks for all of the public speaking opportunities she had and the leadership skills she learned at Nashoba.”

— Parent of 2005 graduate



When real-time connection isn't possible, technology bridges the gap. In 2007, NashobaBrooks seventh graders were chosen by the NAIS Challenge 20/20 Project to partner with the Cloud Forest School in Costa Rica. The specific "challenge" was for students at both schools to develop globally based, experiential curricula while learning first-hand about cross-cultural communication. The students shared ideas, data, and real-world solutions to deforestation, a problem that Concord, Massachusetts, shares with Monteverde, Costa Rica.

Global citizenship is a state of mind for the entire NashobaBrooks community, and when students graduate, they carry this mindset with them. They continue to connect. One graduate, Class of '93, recently completed a master's in international affairs at Columbia University, and currently works at the Center on International Cooperation in New York City, where she performs research aimed at improving international humanitarian action. She remembers a time at NashobaBrooks when the theme of an all-school enrichment program was Peru: "I thought, how can we spend a whole week learning about just one country? That probably opened my mind a bit to just how large and varied the world is."

"I can't imagine choosing a career that wouldn't in some way benefit the greater good. It is how I live my life."

— NashobaBrooks alumna

"I have NashobaBrooks to thank in large part for my daughter's curiosity, extreme confidence to explore new worlds, and the intellectual capacity to know that these problems run deep and that it will take many, many people, from all the disciplines, to work towards lasting solutions. I will always thank NashobaBrooks for continually instilling in its students the need to take responsibility for looking after the world and helping to make it a better place for all."

— Parent of 2006 graduate



## ALUMNAE LEADERSHIP ACCOMPLISHMENTS

(partial list)

- Student government at Middlesex School
- Student government at Northfield Mt. Herman School
- Student government at Phillips Academy, Andover
- Student editor of creative writing magazines at Groton School, Noble and Greenough School
- Editor-in-Chief of yearbook at Middlesex School
- Lead in school and student theater productions: Concord Academy, Groton School, and Middlesex School
- Boston Globe All-scholastic Art Awards: Cambridge School of Weston, Concord-Carlisle High School, Lawrence Academy, Lincoln-Sudbury High School, and Walnut Hill School
- Forensics team captain at Acton-Boxborough High School
- Sports captain: Concord-Carlisle High School, Groton School, Lawrence Academy, Middlesex School, Winsor School
- Participated in all-boys (extracurricular) tackle football at Exeter Academy and recruited 13 girls to completely integrate the team
- Teaching assistant at Woods Hole Science Center
- Peer counselor: Concord-Carlisle High School, Groton School
- Camp counselor, summer interns at Concord Academy Day Camp, Middlesex Summer Arts Camp, and NashobaBrooks Summer Center
- At various schools and colleges:*  
 Student radio station manager/DJ  
 Dorm proctor  
 Head of spring ensemble (music)  
 Founder of environmental club  
 Manager of college theater  
 Facilitated team at youth world cup (horseback riding competition)
- Honor roll:*  
 Concord Academy, Concord-Carlisle High School, Groton School, Lawrence Academy, Lincoln-Sudbury High School, Middlesex School, Noble and Greenough School, Northfield Mt. Herman School, Rivers School, Winsor School
- Active military service: US Marine captain, service in Iraq
- Model UN delegate

## ALUMNAE SERVICE ACCOMPLISHMENTS

(partial list)

- Peace Corps volunteer
- Vista volunteer
- Teach for America volunteer
- Volunteer at Pine Street Inn, Boston
- Teacher mentor, New York City public school
- Volunteer at homeless center, New York City
- City of New York in social services worker
- Volunteer in scouting programs
- Volunteer with Concord Youth Theater
- Volunteer usher at Lyric Opera Company, Boston
- ESL tutor
- Big Sister program
- Founder of environmental club
- Participant in City Year Servathon
- Tutor at elementary school
- Volunteer at rape counseling center, Cambridge
- AIDS awareness worker
- Great American Smoke Out coordinator at school
- Coordinator of an after-school program for elementary school in Somerville
- Earth Day coordinator at college
- Unpaid intern at NashobaBrooks Summer Center
- Outreach worker at the Boston Aquarium
- Founder and coach of middle school forensics team as high school senior



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