

Hanger Hall School for Girls

By Jennifer Schoolfield, New Head of School

In 1997, Howard Hanger began meeting with a group of middle school and high school educators to develop what they would envision as the “ideal learning situation for middle school girls.” They worked on this project because they all believed that the middle school years are an absolutely crucial time in a young girl’s life. At the time, there was no school for girls anywhere in Western North Carolina. The school would be non-sectarian, strongly academic, grounded in classics, highly experiential and active in community service. The school would have an underlying purpose to “open the world to middle school girls so that they might discover their gifts and find their place in the world.” There was also a foundation of low student-to-teacher ratio. According to studies done by the American Association of University Women, the student/teacher ratio is top of the list of what enables students to learn. Further studies have shown smaller classes help students feel more connected to each other and faculty members, fostering fewer cliques and feeling of isolation. Hanger Hall opened its doors in the fall of 1999 and with an average class size of 13, and we nurture both the mind and the spirit.

From the first day of operation, Hanger Hall has been focused on providing a rich and nurturing setting in which young women may begin to discover and delight in who they are and who they are becoming. That kind of discovery happens best in a community where people know each other, respect each other, and encourage each other.

Having attended an all-girls school from 3rd through 10th grade, I can attest to the incredible foundation that this schooling provided to me. Now as an educator and administrator, I have always hoped that I could find my way to an all-girls school that shared my beliefs in educating the whole child. I have found that Hanger Hall not only leads with a strong focus on academics but also on focuses intently on nurturing the social-emotional development of its students.

I have spent the last decade of my career working in schools with students diagnosed with learning differences. I was most recently the assistant head of school at Compass High School in San Mateo, CA. In addition, I have a master’s in counseling psychology from the University of San Francisco and have enjoyed working with students (and their parents!) on post-secondary pursuits in a small private practice.

Hanger Hall is a unique community. We are one of less than ten schools in the United States devoted solely to middle school girls. We feel that this emerging time of life merits extraordinary attention; and it takes a community of parents, teachers, friends, and family to give what is needed. Our middle school community is just that, a community of learners who share a love of learning and a willingness to discover new ideas and experiences that help to sharpen the skills necessary for success, both at Hanger Hall and beyond. Students use real-world issues to develop and hone the key skills of academic literacy in order to become thoughtful, creative, and collaborative thinkers and doers. Their experiences here prepare them for positions of leadership in the 21st century.

With the strong and essential support of a faculty of master teachers who truly love working with this age group, our faculty encourages students to take responsible risks, to discover who they are and what they love and to develop a passion for learning. They find true delight in teaching and are committed to awakening the natural curiosity in young minds. Many of our teachers have been with Hanger Hall for over a decade, resulting in one of the most experienced and dedicated faculty in Western North Carolina.

Because the middle school years are times of tremendous growth, our teachers create a curriculum that challenges, interests, motivates, and excites this particular age group. Our students are rarely passive in their learning; they are students who learn

by “doing,” both in and outside of the classroom. This means that they are artists, writers, scientists, athletes, and mathematicians who seriously enjoy using their emerging skills to solve, create, compute, and compete to be the best they can be, and they do all this in an environment that is safe, nurturing, and loving. The middle school curriculum also fosters the development of desirable attitudes and values and promotes the student’s personal growth. Positive reinforcement, recognition for jobs well done, and the development of self-esteem are paramount.

We are always open to creating partnerships with places that offer great experiences for our girls like UNCA and other local businesses. Power of The Purse, the arboretum, botanical gardens, and nature center are great places we have worked with. We are a nonprofit school and a grassroots organization, so we work hard to keep tuition affordable and have scholarships for many of our students. We appreciate all the people and places that support us financially and are always looking for like-minded people to partner with to support our students.

For potential students, we offer a shadow day where they will spend a day in classes and meet the faculty. Once they become

a Hanger Hall Girl, they will experience some amazing teachers and opportunities and become inspired. Our students love school, enjoy our community, and respect the support they get from strong women who are great role models and teachers. Parents can expect a supportive parent group and connections with teachers and faculty. We have a great parent education piece that helps families know how to support their children. Since Hanger Hall literally wrote the book on middle school girls (Howard Hanger’s book, *A Precious Window of Time*), we understand adolescent girls and how to support and nurture them and inspire them to be confident, independent, strong young women.

We have been filling up more quickly in the last couple of years, so it is exciting to find great families for the Hanger Hall community!

For more information, visit or contact Hanger Hall:
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Jennifer Schoolfield grew up in Chevy Chase, MD, moved to Pennsylvania for high school and attended UNC-Chapel Hill for College. She then moved to the San Francisco Bay Area in 1999 and just recently moved to Asheville in September 2018.

She and her family have lived in Asheville for nine months and love hiking together as a family with their 4-year-old daughter and dog Huey. They have also enjoyed the amazing restaurants and music scene that Asheville has to offer.

