

Lessons from 40 Years of Education

As principal of St. Charles for the last 11 years, I want to tell you that your choice of Catholic education here at St. Charles is an invaluable investment not only in your child's future but in society as a whole. My years of experience in and out of educational systems have taught me that the education chosen for our children puts them on a path that will lead them to reach their potential. The unique ability to speak about God and mold our lives according to correct principles found in our faith and the gospels, alone, gives our children an edge in an ever changing world.

The St. Charles' philosophy of education and process of education in academics also sets our students apart from others who choose other venues of education. I am an avid reader and was pleased when a teacher approached me and showed me an article concerning education. The teacher's words to me were a confirmation of what we do here and how well we do it. She said, "Sometimes I wonder if what we are doing is worth it, or least if it is the right approach and then I read the article and I know for sure St. Charles is on the right track."

The Wall Street Journal published an article from Louis V. Gerstner Jr., a former CEO of IBM and chairman of the Teaching Commission (2003-2006). After 40 years in education and many attempts on reforming education throughout time, he concluded that despite decade after decade of reform efforts, many K-12 schools have not improved (Gerstner, 2008). He admits some schools have advanced but the educational system as a whole is still failing.

Mr. Gerstner explained that after spending billions of dollars on commissions and task forces, countless experiments and analyses, educational leaders have the research and evidence available to determine what to do to improve and

advance school improvement and student achievement. He outlined them as follows:

- 1) Set high academic standards for all our students, supported by a rigorous curriculum.
- 2) Greatly improve the quality of teaching in our classrooms, supported by substantially higher compensation for our best teachers.
- 3) Measure student and teacher performance on a systematic basis, supported by tests and assessments.
- 4) Increase “time on task” for all students; this means more time in school each day, and a longer school year.

In our school, the ability to improve and advance academics and student achievement ranks among the best. regarding the four tenets above, I would like to remind everyone how we are meeting them and will continue to meet them for many years to come.

Tenet One

It is my personal experience that if you hold all to a high standard, it will be reached. Maybe not all the same time or even the same year but it will be reached. Based on this understanding, St. Charles sets the highest of expectations in all academics and high expectations for conduct. Along with academic rigor and insistence on excellent citizenship, our curriculum has included a full fine arts and foreign language program for the past 10 years. I’ve had young adults return and tell me they are music majors, architects or bi-lingual teachers to name just a few successes.

Tenet Two

Over the past 10 years, teachers have been provided exposure and training to the “latest” educational theories and strategies and continue to hone their skills to meet the needs of their students. Pay has increased significantly allowing us to maintain a low turnover of faculty and offer consistency.

Tenet Three

Student and teacher performances are monitored by me regularly through classroom observations, monitoring of lesson plans and grading, reviewing and signing each progress report and report card. Assessments and standardized test results assist me and the teachers in making instructional decisions. The decision to assess students twice a year through DRA has created opportunities to better meet student needs. The ITBS is given to all students 3rd through 8th to give us a picture of where students are and where they need to focus their efforts. Additionally, our new program, SRI provides teachers and students with a snap shot of their progress in comprehension

Tenet Four

“Time on task” has never been an issue as we attend class for 6.5 hours daily. Literacy programs thrive due to minimal interruptions during the morning hours for K-5. Three years ago, we adopted the block schedule for middle school to allow time for instruction as well as application of key concepts and skills. The amount of time affords the opportunity to move information into long term memory and practice using knowledge and skills with the teacher available to answer questions.

As the principal, I am pleased and proud to know that as a community of educators, parents and students we have and will continue to set and meet the highest of standards thereby providing our students the tools to succeed, but more importantly send children in to the real world with the potential to make the world a better place. Thank you for being a part of that team!

Go Cardinals!!!