

Principal's Letter May 28, 2010

Dear Parents,

The end of the year brings changes, some of them bittersweet. Robin Besagno, our art teacher for over 20 years, is retiring this year. Nancy Wright, our long-time teacher's assistant for first grade, is moving to Borrego Springs, California to be with her husband, who is running a business there. The long-term commute finally got to them! We will miss both of these talented, committed teachers of our children, and wish them the best as they move on.

We had a meeting last night for some of our parents to talk about the impact of reading throughout the summer months. It's information that everyone should know:

Summer Reading Slump

The staff at St. Francis of Assisi School has been on a year-long literacy journey as part of our post-accreditation plan to focus on reading instruction. We have worked with a coach from the Center for Educational Leadership at the University of Washington, and six of us attended the International Reading Association Convention in Chicago where the gurus of reading research and instruction presented sage advice on best practices for reading teachers.

Lisa, Diana and I decided to host this meeting tonight because of all that we have gathered through our research, and because of important information we have learned about summer reading loss. I read a book this year entitled *The Outliers* by Malcolm Gladwell, a writer for the *New Yorker*. Gladwell continuously reminds the reader that genius is not the only or even the most important component when determining a person's success. A common theme that appears throughout *Outliers* is the "10,000 Hour Rule". Gladwell asserts that greatness requires enormous time, and he used as an example The Beatles, who amassed more than 10,000 hours of playing time before becoming famous. To become good at something, you have to practice, practice and then practice some more. A major key to success is **Endurance**. Think about it-if we want our children to succeed, we have to encourage them to work through difficulties, to endure. We can't afford to have them "Take the summer off." It's not in their best interests.

**The more you read, the better you get at it;
The better you get at it, the more you like it;
The more you read, the more you know;
The more you know, the smarter you grow.**

Students who struggle with reading do not necessarily lose ground during the school year; they lose ground over the summer. Top students' scores rise slightly between the end of one school year and the beginning of the next. Conversely, the bottom 25% loses most of what they gained the previous school year, largely because of lack of exposure to literature during the summer. Children who enjoy and are successful at reading will continue to read, so the gap widens. One way to look at it is that there will be a three month advantage for the good readers by the end of the summer.

Principal's Letter continued

Remember-it's not necessarily the brightest who succeed; it is those who have been given opportunities, and who have had the strength and presence of mind to seize them.

How do we prevent the summer reading gap? The research gives little support to traditional summer school, but a great deal to summer reading-*reading to the child and reading by the child*. A study of 1,600 sixth graders in 18 schools showed that the reading of four to six books during the summer was enough to alleviate summer loss. Parent involvement and encouragement greatly enhanced a child's success. Parents-both parents, if possible-need to model the importance of reading to their children. Children learn not so much by what we say as by what we do.

TV and Reading:

Major research shows that there is a powerful connection between over-viewing of TV and underachieving. It takes both common sense and courage for a parent to turn off the TV. Seattle Children's Hospital research on 2,500 children revealed that for each hour of daily TV viewed by the child, the risk of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder by age seven increased 10%. Take the TV's and computers out of your children's room. If a TV is in a child's bedroom, that child watches 90 minutes more of TV daily. If a video game is in the bedroom, the child play 32 more minutes daily, and the availability of a bedroom computer doubles the usage when compared with a child who doesn't have it in the room (90 minutes vs. 47 minutes).

A 26 year study done by New Zealand researchers of 980 students came up with the following data:

TV viewing in childhood and adolescence correlated to achieving a bachelor's degree by age 26:

- 40% viewed 1 hour or less TV daily
- 31% viewed 1-2 hours daily
- 19% viewed 2-3 hours daily
- 10% viewed 3+ hours daily

Your Summer Plans:

At the end of each year, teachers will always tell their students to read throughout the summer. They mention it in letters home to the parents. But as Lisa, Diana and I reflected on how best to bridge the summer reading gap, we realized that we, the teachers, needed to give the parents more specific information so that they could help their children.

We need to talk to you about comprehension strategies that you can model to your children, about the importance of fluency for reading comprehension, about word attack skills, and about finding books at the appropriate level and interest of your child. We realize that parents are the primary educators, and that your guidance will go a long way towards helping your child become a proficient reader. There are easy steps you can take to make sure this happens.

Sheila