



ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI SCHOOL

Principal's Letter November 6, 2009

Dear Family,

We are sending home the results of the ITBS tests (Iowa Test of Basic Skills) today. Students in grades 1 through 8 take this test each year. The test is one indication of how we are doing as a school, and we use the testing results to help with curriculum planning and textbook selection. The ITBS test shows us how our students compare to other students in the nation who take this exam. I am very proud of the results this year. In last year's bulletin, I wrote that for the past six years, our students have consistently scored in the top 25% in the nation. This year, we jumped up five percentage points, indicating that our students scored better than 80% of the students across the nation who took this test!

Our mantra at St. Francis of Assisi School is, "Assessment drives instruction." Assessments such as the ITBS show us not only how a student is doing, but how we as teachers are doing, and what areas of curriculum we need to improve.

A few years ago, we decided to purchase the Saxon math series for grade 5-8 because test results indicated that our students needed a more comprehensive math program than the one we were currently using. The results have been very impressive. With the Saxon approach, students retain more of what they are taught, and when they come back in September, there is not the "math memory loss" that we had previously experienced. Students like the series, and many voice that they feel more comfortable with math now than in the past. The Saxon program promotes cyclical learning; once a concept is introduced, it is constantly reinforced in every daily assignment so that students have practice throughout the year. This is similar to the Singapore math approach which has proven to be very successful.

The subject we are focusing on this year is reading. We are looking at the components of reading- phonological awareness, phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension-and identifying the areas of strength and weakness in the curriculum. I am also bringing in a consultant from the Center for Educational Leadership at the University of Washington to work with the staff on reading. They will be doing observations in individual classrooms, and giving staff in-services on reading. We look forward to partnering with the University of Washington.

As you review your child's ITBS results, please keep in mind that it is just one indicator of how your child is doing. The ITBS is one type of measurement, and not all students do well with this particular type of test. We use various assessments including portfolios, reading inventories, classroom work, unit tests and teacher observation to get a more complete picture. The whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

In-parish status: Just a reminder that those parents who are paying the in-parish rate of tuition have a responsibility to attend mass, participate in the life of the parish and give financial support to the church. The suggested donation is \$15 per week or \$720 a year. (If you add this to the in-parish tuition rate, in-parish families are still paying over \$1,000 less than the actual cost to educate a child at St. Francis.) Parishioners have a responsibility to support the parish and its ministries. A new youth ministry program will be starting in June. The parish decision to support the youth ministry is truly a leap of faith, as collections are down. We appreciate their courage in the face of adversity, and we want to make sure that our parents understand the importance of sacrificial giving as part of their contractual commitment.

There are at least 40 families who have paid less than \$200 this year. If you receive a letter in the mail this weekend, please note that families who are not contributing will be moved to the out-of-parish rate. A second set of letters is going out next week. This is a justice issue.

Have a Great Weekend,

Sheila