



ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI SCHOOL

Principal's Letter April 30, 2010

Dear Parents,

Several of us (Jill Cann, Lisa Sorenson, Diana Hautala, Chris Harris, Marian Christjaener and myself) just got back from the International Reading Convention in Chicago, and we're all feeling the stress of trying to catch up on the e-mails and phone messages that are inevitable when you're gone for a few days. But the stress is a small price to pay for the privilege of attending the convention. What an honor it was to be among the gurus of literacy, to be a part of a conversation about the history of reading instruction and the direction we should be going to ensure that all children are reading at or above grade level. We walked away feeling re-affirmed, re-energized, and filled with great ideas for next year's reading program.

This is the first year after our Accreditation visit, and we have made great strides toward the goals we set at that time to develop better intervention strategies for reading. We have done so much work on literacy this year as we collaborated with Grace Chiu from the University of Washington's Center for Educational Leadership. Grace observed, modeled, and gave feedback on lessons, looking at such key issues as fluency, vocabulary, phonemic awareness, phonics, comprehension instruction, and assessment. When teachers met in Professional Learning Communities each week, they planned lessons focusing on one of these areas, and reported back on results. It has been a year of continuous learning for the teachers, and we plan to continue on this journey during the 2010-2011 school year.

Currently, Lisa, Diana and I are working on developing a summer program for struggling readers. I have read a great deal recently about the Summer Setback; top students' scores rise slightly between the end of one school year and the beginning of the next. Conversely, the bottom 25% of students lose most of what they gained the previous school year. Average students (middle 50%) make no gains during the summer but lose nothing-EXCEPT IN THE WIDENING GAP BETWEEN THEMSELVES AND THE TOP STUDENTS! How do we prevent the traditional summer reading gap? The answer is simple-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. It was further noted that when schools required either a report/essay be written about a book read during the summer or that parents verify a student had read books during the summer, increased greatly the chances of the books being read. With summer quickly approaching, it is time to consider a reading plan for your family. The libraries have a summer incentive program for children. Does your child have a library card? That's always a great place to start.

Each fall, some parents tell us that their children have "taken the summer off." It's important to know that there is a price to be paid for this way of thinking. Spending even a half hour each day reading during the summer will have a significant effect on a student's reading ability. Plus it's fun! The goal should be to create life-long readers. It's in your child's best interests.

Have a Great Weekend,

Sheila