

I strongly believe that all schools today have a responsibility to do more than to just educate children. Social responsibility, resiliency and community activism now must be taught along with reading, writing and arithmetic. A school's focus can no longer be on the subjects it teaches, but rather the children it instructs. The whole child is more important than his/her intellect alone. The ultimate goal of schools today needs to be to continually challenge the students while giving them the tools to succeed, not only in the classroom, but also in the world in which they live. This is why it is so vitally important for our children today to have a Catholic education.

When someone visits my school, they usually remark that the school "feels different". I tell them that Catholic schools do feel different because we have the privilege of acknowledging God's presence. Yes, all Christians know that God is ever present in our lives and that we are all made in His image, but Catholic schools are able to celebrate that; to weave it into the very fabric of the school environment. What makes Catholic education unique is that Catholic schools go beyond teaching "values". Values are often arbitrary and often simply reflect what society deems important. Catholic education is about teaching universal virtues. Prudence, justice, fortitude, temperance, faith, hope, charity, generosity, and diligence are just a few of the virtues that are taught in a Catholic school. These virtues are not just taught in a religion class or within a special program. The administration and faculty model these virtues and the students learn them through their coursework. For example, students can learn the virtue of diligence as they struggle and eventually master a difficult concept or class. Through service projects and helping other students in small ways throughout the school year students can learn about charity and generosity. Prudence is something the older children struggle with, and it is usually learned the hard way, but they have the opportunities to learn and appreciate the virtue within a loving and forgiving environment. This modeling begins with the leadership. It is imperative that the leader of a school models these virtues as much as possible every day in every interaction with the school community. A school leader can demonstrate justice while also administering mercy to the student who has fallen short in school expectations. A school leader can demonstrate faith by being willing to speak about his/her own efforts to deepen his/her personal relationship with God, to be the one to lead the school in prayer, to participate in Mass. The most powerful words a leader can say to someone in his/her school are "I am praying for you". Sometimes the leader will fail, but the lesson is in the witnessing of the leader continuing to strive to develop these virtues within himself/herself and within the school culture. No leader is perfect, what separates the great leader from the good leader is the one who will admit to the failings and renew the effort to begin again.

Catholic education is never about seeking perfection, that would set us all up for failure; but rather it is about seeking to become the best version of one's self. It is about encouraging those around us to always strive to be the best they can be as well. The "learning" usually takes place within the struggle. The administration, faculty, parents and students support one another as we all face the daily struggle to become better versions of ourselves in a society that often tries to dictate who we should be.

Education is in the middle of a paradigmatic evolution. As technology grows ever more immediate and complex, it has changed the way we communicate with one another as well as with the larger community. Technology has created a very "small" world that the students can navigate without ever leaving the classroom. The challenge that a school faces however, is how to transform the importance of having technology *in* the school to utilizing technology *for* learning. Technology can not only enhance a student's education, but used correctly, it can enable a student with learning disabilities to more easily overcome obstacles and keep them on level with students who do not have such daily challenges. Thus, administrators have to be aware of how they can assist educators to be able to assimilate their lessons with technology, but also give the teachers

the skills they need in order to make a student's learning experience both meaningful and engaging. Educators need to be aware that with this new shift of focus on technology comes a new definition of what it means to be "literate". However, just being literate is not enough students must continue to develop their curiosity, creativity and critical thinking without losing the basic skills of interpersonal communication. Technology has allowed students to form their own virtual communities in which it is safe to disrespect others of different opinions, to mock those who are different and to be unkind because in this virtual community they are faceless and protected by distance.

It is ironic that in a time in which there are seemingly endless ways to "communicate" the focus on personal relationships has been weakened if not forgotten. Catholic schools recognize that personal relationships are the cornerstone of successful educational institutions. We must never underestimate the importance of a child (of any age) being witness to adults working together for the benefit of that child. Education breaks down when only one partner in the educational process is attending to a child; be that the school or the parent. The relationships between the school and the parents must be fostered and protected. We are the role models for these children; sometimes we may be the only positive role models they may have. Caring, compassion and empathy are cornerstones to a meaningful educational relationship. The educational leader must exemplify these qualities when dealing with the faculty, staff, parents and students.

James Buchanan once said, "The test of leadership is not to put greatness into humanity, but to elicit it, for the greatness is already there." I cannot think of a better way to succinctly describe what defines a great leader. This is particularly true for an educational leader. Everyone within a school community has something within them that enhances the vision and mission of the school. It is the duty of the school leader to foster and develop those sometimes hidden strengths in both the faculty and the students if a school is going to thrive. If we are to have hope for the future, then we must develop leaders, both in our students and in our faculty.