



HEADLINES

February 15, 2010

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Boys Adrift

A number of years ago I was leading a school review at a medium-sized rural boarding school in cottage country in central Ontario. As part of my usual drill, I was interviewing a group of parents about what they liked/disliked about the school and why they had chosen to send their children there. One mom took me by surprise. She had a son in Grade 10 (M5) who was a day student at the school. When I asked her what she would like to see changed, she gave me a shopping list (orchestra, drama, technology, etc.) "In fact", she said, "I only wish that this school could offer the range of high quality programmes and extra-curricular opportunities that our local public high school does."

Needless to say, I asked the obvious question namely, if the local high school was so great, what was she doing paying \$20,000 to send her son to an independent school? Her answer has stayed with me. It turns out that the local school, which did indeed have great programmes and teachers, saw only 33% of its graduates go on to post-secondary education. The prevailing culture was to hang out on the local corner, skateboard at the mall, and play video games. Her daughter, a senior at the public school, was an "A" student, member of the orchestra and on the school basketball team. She had already been accepted to five top universities and was waiting for scholarship offers. On the other hand, she was convinced that her son, left to his own devices, would be a card-carrying member of the 67% standing on the street corner. Their family was making a financial sacrifice to put their son in a school where the culture (98% to university) was about achievement and staying in school.

Fast forward to last week. Dr. Leonard Sax spoke to a packed house here at the school of over 200 teachers, both public and private and more than 400 parents. His message was a simple one, our boys are at risk. While he spoke about gangs, and video games, watching too much TV and just hanging out, the real messages were about teaching and parenting.

For Dr. Sax, our boys were beginning to drift off course not as teenagers but as primary students. He contended that the "sit still and pay attention" approach to teaching and learning missed the point with boys and, rather than helping them to focus on learning, it made them disengage with the process. Parents, he felt, compounded the problem by giving over too much of their sons' leisure time to relatively passive entertainment rather than active engagement in sports, games or other hands-on activities.

At Somersfield, our Montessori and PYP inquiry approaches help somewhat in this regard; but it is a broken front and we continue to need to do better every day and in every classroom to make all of our students know that school is for each of them, and not just for somebody else.

By the time boys reach Middle School, the challenge is to keep them engaged and believing that doing well at school is not only essential for later life, it is actually "cool". Through activities such as our House points system, honour certificates, Drama Festival, United Nations Day, Science Fair, and Arts Night; coupled with an active and inclusive sports programme we are trying to give all of our students the message that being active, involved, and successful at school beats any of the alternatives!



UPCOMING EVENTS

**Somersfield
For Haiti Week**
February 15th-19th

MYP Science Fair
February 19th

**Bermuda Math
Educators Network-
ing Meeting**
February 19th

**Somersfield PTA
Meeting**
February 23rd
6:30 p.m. Social
7:00 p.m. Meeting