



March 2019

Strategic Planning: Academics *Customizing Learning Not Standardizing Teaching*

All students have different learning preferences, but schools standardize the way they teach and test all too often. As a result, many students with both the ability and aptitude to master content fail to do so because the method the teacher uses to deliver information does not coincide with the student's learning preference; this may lead to frustration, or worse, self-doubt about intelligence and ability level. If we agree that students learn best using a customized approach, why do schools continue to standardize the way they teach? That, and other topics, are the subject of this month's LINK.



Think back to the days when we attended school. Information was presented, learned, tested, and then we moved on. Typically, it often did not matter if we got an A or an F; the teacher had to cover new material based upon the pacing requirements established by some administrative authority. This monolithic style of teaching and learning was born out the *normal school* approach from educational architects like Horace Mann, our nation's father of public education. Designed to teach to the preferences of the "common learner," this method is alive and well in today's public schools with their high student to teacher ratios that educate the largest number of students for the least amount of money. Our low 12:1 student to teacher ratio and consistent pursuit of customized learning approaches to meet the needs of our learners stands in stark contrast to the monolithic structures prevalent in today's public schools. To combat this challenge, public schools are leveraging new online learning

programs that embrace concepts like *disruptive innovation*, an approach that uses proprietary, intuitive "smart knowledge" that adjusts the depth and breadth of the on-line material presented to the learner based upon the speed and accuracy of the student's work. While effective in meeting the needs of talented and intrinsically motivated students, it simply cannot compete with the quality of education provided by the rich, holistic teaching and learning approach provided in schools like PACS whose highly qualified faculty and low 12:1 student to teacher ratio uses technology to *complement* instruction. Of course, this says nothing about the benefits of being in a school environment that puts an emphasis on healthy face-to-face interactions between students. One mother who recently toured our school stated how refreshing it was to see our middle school students interacting with one another in the cafeteria at lunch time, which was very different from her son's public school where students were absorbed in their smartphones during lunch.

At PACS, we are very selective in our curriculum choices and how we integrate technology at various grade levels. In the lower school, Abeka Math introduces new content while also reviewing prior skills; Shurley Grammar teaches students how to identify parts of speech and the proper use of the spoken and written word; and our new science lab emphasizes hands on exploratory learning. We are also very careful in our incorporation of technology for lower school students, knowing that technology has both positive and negative impacts on the brain development of young learners. If you are a parent of a primary grade student (Pre-K through first grade), I highly encourage you to familiarize yourself with the results of current studies that discuss the negative impact prolonged

periods of screen time is having on the brain development of young children.

In middle and high school, we use a careful selection of Christian and secular texts and authors to prepare our students for the rigors of college. When examining classical secular works in the humanities, our teachers use supplemental materials like *Progeny Press* that provide instructional guides to examine progressive authors' themes from a Christian worldview. The use of one to one devices for our older learners combines the benefits of a skilled classroom teacher *and* cloud-based applications in our educational processes. Routine inquiries of our young alumni reveal they are not only ahead of their college freshmen peers scholastically, but in the area of integrated on-line learning as well. As a parent of two recent PACS graduates who are currently in college, I can attest to this fact on a personal level.



There is much more I could share with you, like our decision to shift our standardized testing instruments next year from the TerraNova 3 to the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) as so many top-quality schools are doing. Amongst the many improvements in using this new platform is the ability for parents and students to

see test scores in longitudinal form so they can examine student performance year to year on the same report.

While many academic discussions center on a student's grades and grade point average, rigor, and standardized test scores, at Prince we understand that these are simply a means to an end, and the end itself is a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. We are deliberate in our decision to hire subject matter experts (the majority of which have advanced degrees) who must also be professing believers, and our published standardized test scores and the caliber of the colleges and universities our students gain acceptance to is a clear indicator of the quality of education we are providing through our partnership with you.

Thank you for your continued investment in providing a quality college preparatory education built on Christian values to your child. In a society whose expanding embrace of secularism and humanism continues to erode its social fabric, our school stands as a refreshing alternative whose foundation of biblical principles provides a solid, unwavering foundation to educate the next generation of Christian families – that now is true strategic planning!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Seth A. Hathaway".

Seth Hathaway
Head of School

Other Letters from the Head of School:

- [Strategic Planning: Scripturally Based Discipleship](#)
- [Strategic Planning: Discovering and Following God's Agenda](#)
- [Strategic Planning: Building Upon our Vision and Mission](#)