



DEER CREEK

PRIDE

Fall / Winter 2017

Mission

Deer Creek Christian School partners with families to help children grow in **Academics, Faith, and Character** for Kingdom service.

Will you help us as we learn?
www.deercreek.org/giving



DEER CREEK CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

Preschool–8th grade
330 W. Highland Drive
Chicago Heights, IL 60411
www.deercreek.org
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 [facebook.com/DeerCreekChristianSchool](https://www.facebook.com/DeerCreekChristianSchool)

PRINCIPAL'S POST

WHAT IS LEARNING?

by Brian Verwolf,
Head of School

Are you honest enough to admit that you're still learning? Wow, that takes vulnerability.

Learning is a continuous process for us at Deer Creek. If we are careful, we can notice what we are learning. This is the call to constant transformation "through the renewing of your minds" (Romans 12:2). God never stops shaping us, but we have to pay close attention to what he is asking us to learn.

At Deer Creek we are passionate about learning—and not just student learning, but organization-wide learning. We have become intentional about facilitating a culture of learning that builds persistence, collaboration, critical thinking, problem solving, communication, and independence within our entire community. Our we-aren't-there-yet mindset from teachers and leaders will impact our students in powerful ways.

We will know that we have created a culture of learning when the focus

of our decision making shifts from teaching to learning.

It sounds simple, but it's not. Adults like to focus on...adult problems. At the same time we say we focus on the kids, our actions and words may send an entirely different message. How often do we focus on actual learning? How can we engage students in a way that encourages them to participate deeply in their own learning process?

Students learn what they *do*—so let's make learning engaging.

Social relationships determine learning—so let's create a classroom that includes peer-to-peer interaction.

Effective activities are built around big questions—so let's make sure that the outcomes of these learning activities are really important, not only in the official curriculum, but also in the lives and interests of the students.

Thank you for spending time with us today by reading this edition of Pride. We want this newsletter to be a learning tool as well! Read on to see to how the focus on learning is impacting decisions at Deer Creek. ♥

WAYS OF LEARNING AT DEER

WHAT'S IN A STANDARD?

by Harriet Potoka,
Deer Creek Board Member
and Director of the Center for
Christian Urban Educators

Imagine you have just been hired to teach a sixth-grade class. While there are a variety of textbooks in your classroom, there are no clear expectations for what students should learn and be able to do at the end of sixth grade. How will you plan your lessons, evaluate your students' progress, and report to parents? How will you know that what you expect of your students will prepare them for the next grade? And how will you know that what you determine they should learn is as rigorous as what other sixth-grade students in a school across the city are learning?

And now imagine you have been given a concise, written description of what your students should be able to do and learn in each subject area—a set of educational standards.

Educational standards serve as guideposts for schools. Teachers, parents and students use them as a tool to focus on what students are expected to learn. By matching what is taught in the classroom to the standards in each subject area, students and their parents will know what teachers should be teaching,

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Educational technology

Mixing academic software with traditional instruction—“blended learning”—is moving from high schools and middle schools to the early grades, even reaching 3- and 4-year-olds. We're integrating personal devices in meaningful ways to enhance learning.

Multi-age learning

A successful multi-age classroom involves students of different ages and achievement levels. Co-teachers plan instruction and assessment fully expecting and celebrating diversity within the class.



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Relationships and relevant learning

When we invest time in getting to know our students—not only academically, but also personally and socially—we can build customized learning environments and curriculums. Relationships help us create environments that remove distractions, stimulate questions, encourage creativity, and make learning stick.



Flexible seating

Classroom environments should be conducive to open collaboration, communication, creativity, critical thinking, and movement. This simply cannot be done when kids are sitting in rows of desks all day! In Deer Creek classrooms, you're likely to see pillows, balls, standing desks, or carpet. Students determine where to go so their best learning can happen.



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what students should be learning, and what they will be tested on.

Educational standards also reflect articulated sequences with the learning expectations of one grade level building on those of previous expectations at a lower grade level.

Standards are not the same as the curriculum of the school. Standards describe broad learning expectations and content categories, but they do not tell teachers how to teach nor to a great extent *what* to teach. For example, this reading standard states that students should be able to “determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings,” but the texts used to teach this standard are determined by the school and/or the teacher.

The Deer Creek Board is enthused about moving to a standards-based program at Deer Creek. As teachers become adept at aligning students' learning to the standards, it will result in a higher level of learning for our students. The use of standards will also help our teachers streamline instruction as they utilize teaching strategies deliberately focused on agreed-upon standard learning targets. ♥



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ACADEMICS, FAITH, CHARACTER

LEARNING BEYOND OUR WALLS

*by Steve Blom,
Development Director*

As Mr. Verwolf pointed out, it can be really difficult for us to say “I’m still learning.” It’s even more difficult in a culture that celebrates autonomy and self-sufficiency. But in saying we are still learning, we recognize our need for each other, so we can continue to grow together.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ flips our culture’s worldview on its head, calling us to realize that we have actually been created to need him and each other.

At Deer Creek, we’ve come to learn the amazing power in saying “We can’t do this by ourselves. We need others to help us.” This year,

Deer Creek has been invited into the Bright Promise Fund network of schools in the Chicagoland area.

The mission of the Bright Promise Fund is “to strengthen and sustain partner Christian schools by generating new sources of revenue so that more families may experience the benefit from urban Christian education.” Each year, the Bright Promise Fund raises



a significant amount of money from individual and corporate partners and distributes these funds to network schools to be used for tuition assistance.

Another benefit of joining the Bright Promise Fund network is that we will be tied into the Center for Christian Urban Educators. C-CUE will provide tremendous support and encouragement for our learning as an organization through regular school leadership gatherings, professional development, and collaboration of resources. Deer Creek will become a better school for our students because we recognize the joy in saying, “We need others to help us.”

To learn more about the Bright Promise Fund check them out at: www.BRIGHTPROMISEFUND.org