



DEER CREEK

PRIDE

Spring/Summer 2019

Mission

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

Will you support this community of learners?
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DEER CREEK CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

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PRINCIPAL'S POST

LISTENING TO OUR LEARNERS

by *Brian Verwolf, Head of School*

We have accomplished so much in the world through Christ-centered education, but there is still work to do. So how do we move forward, together?

Perhaps we should dare to listen to our learners and find ways to give them a voice.

When we ask questions, and when we're genuinely curious about what students say, we are communicating an authentic desire to get to know who they are beyond their test scores. The questioning and the quiet listening communicate our care for every student.

Deer Creek recently hosted a school-wide learning celebration. We do this at the end of every trimester. We worship and recognize students for outstanding academic and character achievements. My favorite part of

this season's assembly over all others was that it was completely led by our students—from the student who welcomed, to the student who offered a closing benediction.

To see these students step into those leadership roles, and to hear them give voice to the Academics, Faith, and Character they've been developing—that was an accomplishment truly worth celebrating.

This issue of the Pride provides a closer look at how that happens. ♥



A Community of Learners

BY MELANIE JONGSMA,
THE LANSING JOURNAL

CHICAGO HEIGHTS, Ill. (March 11, 2019) – “A community of learners.” That’s how Nanci Natale describes her fourth graders, and she reminds them of that description throughout their Monday morning math class.

The “learning” is obvious—the students are in the process of mastering a variety of problem-solving strategies and applying those skills to story problems. The “community” is also intentional. It’s why, explains Ms. Natale, we don’t interrupt, don’t laugh at mistakes, and don’t rush someone who needs more time to express his answer. “We are a community of learners,” Ms. Natale reminds the class again.

COMMUNITY

That sense of community is almost tangible throughout Deer Creek Christian School. In the hallways kids update each other on their weekend activities. In a third-grade classroom students introduce a visitor to Stanley, the class guinea pig. During second-grade Bible verse memorization, the kinesthetics include mutual hugs during a rhythmic chorus of “be kind and compassionate to one another” (Ephesians 4:32). A junior high bulletin board lists student goals that include “Being more open to people I’m not familiar with,” “To accept other people’s ideas,” and “Be a good sport”—all community-building basics. And every class has jobs, so that the kids experience the joy of work and servanthood.

LEARNERS

The learning is evident too. And in every classroom, the learning is

integrated rather than compartmentalized, actively owned rather than passively received.

In Ms. Natale’s math lesson, for example, she has taught a variety of strategies for adding double-digit numbers, and now the students are learning to choose which strategy they will employ for which problem. “What’s making you want to use a number line?” Ms. Natale asks Mayra, and Mayra has to pause and think about why that strategy makes sense, or why it’s most comfortable for her, or what the consequences might be of choosing that strategy instead of another. There may be one specific right answer to the problem, but there are multiple right answers to arriving at the solution.

In Kendra Oprondek’s first-grade class, the kids are reading about guide dogs—and the lesson involves not just reading skills and comprehension, but also awareness of people with disabilities, and a little bit of grammar (“‘Someone’ is a compound word!” exclaims one excited reader), and even some biology as the story relates the development of puppies into trained helper dogs.

Middle school Bible teacher Steven Harrison mixes vocabulary lessons with spiritual formation concepts.



“Just as this hydro flask is *indwelt* with water,” he says, holding up his water bottle, “likewise the believer is *indwelt* with the Holy Spirit—what does that mean?” Learning the new word leads to a discussion of spiritual formation, regeneration, and salvation.

THE DEER CREEK DIFFERENCE

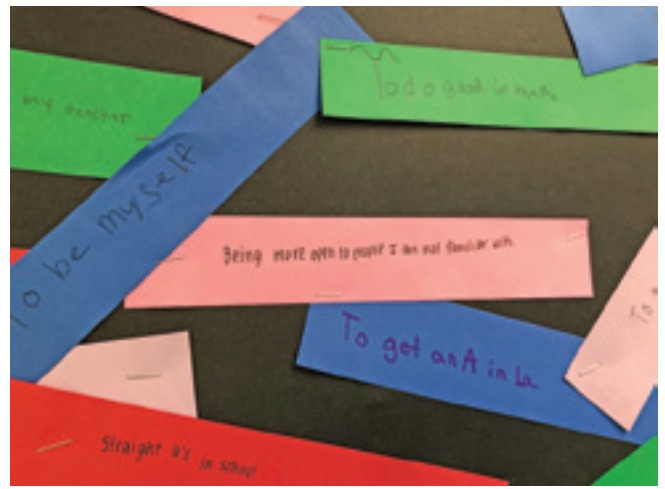
In Deer Creek classrooms, the emphasis is on learning rather than teaching. That difference is more than semantic. It means that success is measured not by how much of the curriculum a teacher gets through, but by how much knowledge and skill is internalized by the students. On a practical level, this means that Kellen and



In Dominique Harness’ second-grade class, the kids use physical movements to help with Bible verse memorization. While reciting Ephesians 4:32 – “...be kind and compassionate to one another” – they laugh and hug each other.



Fourth-graders in Nanci Natale's class are learning different strategies for solving problems.



Above: A display of student goals provides more evidence of the focus on Academics, Faith, and Character. Below: Steven Harrison teaches vocabulary during his Bible lesson.



Braylon can choose wobble chairs while they practice their writing, and Dominique Harness begins class time with music selected by her students. Rather than creating an "anything goes" atmosphere where kids are "free spirits," the emphasis on learning gives children opportunities to practice making choices—and to evaluate the results. That is, if Kellen's writing suffers as a result of his seating selection, he will be asked to make a different choice.

Learning-based education is not a new concept. Authors Russell Ackoff

and Daniel Greenberg discuss it in their 2008 book, *Turning Learning Right Side Up: Putting Education Back on Track*:

In most schools, memorization is mistaken for learning. ...In the educational process, students should be offered a wide variety of ways to learn, among which they could choose or with which they could experiment. They do not have to learn different things the same way. They should learn at a very early stage of "schooling" that learning how to learn is largely their responsibility....

Perhaps a focus on

learning is particularly important at a school like Deer Creek, where the mission is "helping children grow in Academics, Faith, and Character for Kingdom service." Walking through the hallways, sitting in the classrooms, listening to announcements, it is clear that Academics, Faith, and Character are not three separate things, and Kingdom service is not a distant career path. These kids are being equipped today to ask questions, to evaluate answers, to try new approaches, and to remember the feelings of others.

"We are a community of learners"—as Deer Creek teachers cast this vision in their lessons as well as their interactions, Deer Creek students are being transformed. Through community and learning they are mastering academics, growing in faith, and developing character that will equip them to be part of God's redeeming work in their communities and the world. 🇺🇸

First-grader Christian learns about guide dogs and compound words in one reading lesson.





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community of learners. :)
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FULFILLING THE MISSION *by Dr. & Mrs. Earl Ferguson, Founders*

I will never forget an evening in 1984 when about a half dozen interested people gathered around the dining room table at the home of Crete, Illinois, residents Jim and Cindy Carlisle. We had gathered that evening for the purpose of discussing the possibility of launching a preschool with the intention of it one day becoming a Christian grade school—preschool through eighth grade.

We all agreed that the Crete-Monee area had a good school system, but our desire was to launch a school where the lens through which children would be educated is a Christian worldview. We also agreed that teaching the Bible and Christ-like character would be paramount.

In short, our vision for this new school was that it's



mission would be to prepare future leaders for churches and communities. These future leaders would be thoroughly grounded in the Word of God, and their lives would display the character of Christ. This is why I love the current mission statement for the Deer Creek

School: “Academics, Faith and Character for Christian Service.”

My wife and I recently visited the school and were deeply impressed. What we saw were a lot of eager faces of happy children learning under teachers who believe the Bible is the Word of God.

Dr. Earl and Pat Ferguson, Founders of Deer Creek Christian School, pose with the Dr. Earl Ferguson Christian Living Award, which is given to a graduating student each year.

We came away with the feeling that for these teachers, this is more than just a job, it is a calling.

It was apparent to us that Deer Creek Christian School's current mission is in complete harmony with our original intentions for the school when we first sat down around the Carlisles' dining room table so long ago. Pat and I were delighted to have the opportunity to visit the school and were treated like we were special.

May God forever bless Deer Creek Christian School. 🇺🇸