

From the Headmaster

GARHETT WAGERS



Cate Stamets, '28, gets ready for the ring toss at Field Day



Garhett Wagers
Headmaster

Why is the school here? I believe we are here to help children learn about two things; the world, and themselves.

Teaching is about environment setting. We, teachers and parents, are called to create an environment where a child can learn these two things. At St. Mark's, we believe that partnership in this endeavor is essential to the development of the whole child. As part of our children "making meaning of the world," they are looking to see if there are patterns, consistencies and inconsistencies around them. When things are predictable and consistent, they gain comfort and will begin taking risks that lead to learning and discovery of self. When unpredictable and inconsistent, the child spends more time testing the environment, rather than testing him/herself.

Learning about the world happens through the lens of subjects, such as math, reading, science, religion, etc., and, it also happens through the lens of socialization with others. Learning does not happen in a vacuum. We can't just open the top of a

child's head and pour in the knowledge, and send them on their way.

So, as our children interface with math, reading, science, religion, one another, teachers, and their parents, they are evaluating what the world means to them, and who they are in it. "What am I good at? What comes easily to me vs what is hard for me? How do I evaluate and navigate dealing with these things?" They are learning about themselves and the world, and, they are best served when we let them figure these things out; sometimes without help, sometimes without words, and sometimes without confirmation that their effort is correct.

In *The Genius in Every Child*, Rick Ackerly says, "Discipline is the business of education. Everything a child does is behavior, and all behavior takes place in the same brain, which is, moment to moment, in the business of linking up all of its parts. Education is the lifelong process of learning and practicing the disciplines of making it in the world."

Unfortunately, discipline, as it is most frequently defined, is often negative. One definition I found is: "The practice of ensuring that people obey rules, by teaching them to do so and punishing them if they do not."

Obey and punish! Is obedience what learning is about? Maybe learning to obey. I think we want more. We want discernment of what is real or imaginary, just or unjust, fact or opinion.

I think we should view discipline differently. Here is one way; "developing a skill or working toward a goal through the use of self-control." Or if we look at the origin of the word, from disciple, which is a student or follower of a learner or thinker.

If we view discipline as something we do to ourselves, rather than something that someone else does to us, we learn how we can best navigate the world, with a mindfulness that we are, ourselves, in that world. This is how agency is developed.

Each person is unique, so one size fits all strategies are not best. Seeing, knowing, and meeting our students where they are, in partnership between parent and school, while honoring the third member of this partnership; the child. This is the ideal, creating the atmosphere in which learning the disciplines of self can happen.

When you're in it, it's hard to know if it's working. Sometimes, we might think it isn't. However, my experience tells me to trust this and stay the course. Years of alumni success have demonstrated this plan is ideal when viewed through the lens of the long game.

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