

THE CLASSICAL ACADEMY EXISTS TO ASSIST PARENTS IN THEIR MISSION TO DEVELOP EXEMPLARY CITIZENS EQUIPPED WITH ANALYTICAL THINKING SKILLS, VIRTUOUS CHARACTER, AND A PASSION FOR LEARNING, ALL BUILT UPON A SOLID FOUNDATION OF KNOWLEDGE.

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PALMARIUM

2024 Parent Survey Results

1,352 parents participated in TCA's annual Parent Survey which concluded at the end of February. Over a 22-year period this marks the eighth highest participation rate. After reaching all-time highs in many areas last year, the results for 2023-24 were still strong with shifts back to historical norms. Strongly agree indicators for both **academic prep** and **character** were at their second highest over a 10-year period (only topped by last year). Overall positive response rates approached 90% (highest to date) and parent strongly agree responses outnumbered the strongly disagree indicators by a factor of **79 to 1** (5-yr avg in this area is 66 to 1). Thanks to all that participated for the feedback this year. [More results pp. 9-12.]



U.S News & John Irwin Awards

Recently **U.S News & World Report** released their 2024 rankings of the top high schools in the country. After analyzing nearly 25,000 schools the rankings list **TCA High School** as the #1 rated school in District 20, the #2 school in Colorado Springs, the #9 school in the state of Colorado, the #86 charter school in the country, and finally the #465 ranked high school nationwide. This ranking equates to our school being rated in the **top 2% of all high schools in the United States**. Such honors are made possible by the tremendous contributions of the TCA community collectively - parents, students, and staff across all grade levels. *Note:* since College Pathways does not offer Advanced Placement courses (but instead PPSC classes) it is not fully considered for the top rankings. Additionally, the Colorado **John Irwin Awards** "given to schools that received an Exceeds Expectations rating on the Academic Achievement indicator . . . reflecting exceptional performance in Math, English Language Arts, and Science" were awarded to **TCA Elementary, TCA Junior High, TCA College Pathways, and TCA High School**. Only 15 of the 44 District 20 schools were lauded. TCA is honored to account for 27% of the 15 district recipients and to have the only two district high schools so recognized. Thanks to everyone who made such results possible.



In this final issue of the 2023-24 school year you will find some recaps of previous staff October Conferences (focusing on our **educational philosophy**) and an article about our **Beyond the Book Club** efforts as we enter our tenth year of this effort. Additional TCA-wide highlights from this past year are included as we culminate another successful school year.

The Editor

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SEVEN SCHOOLS • THREE CAMPUSES • ONE VISION

Teaching Kids *How to Be, Not What to Be*

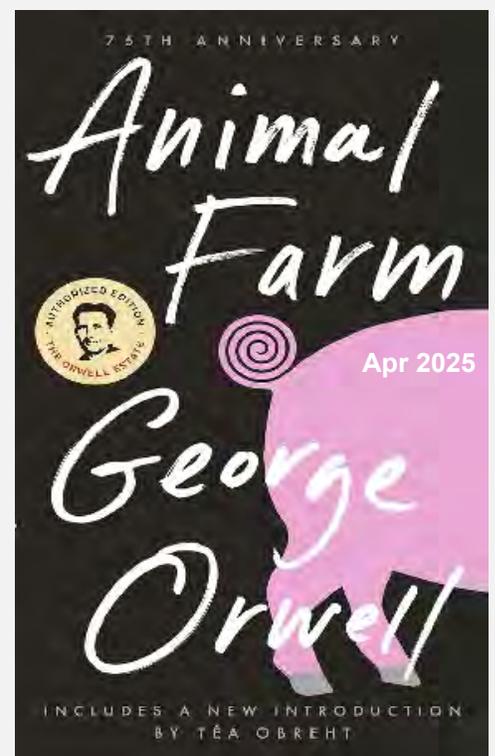
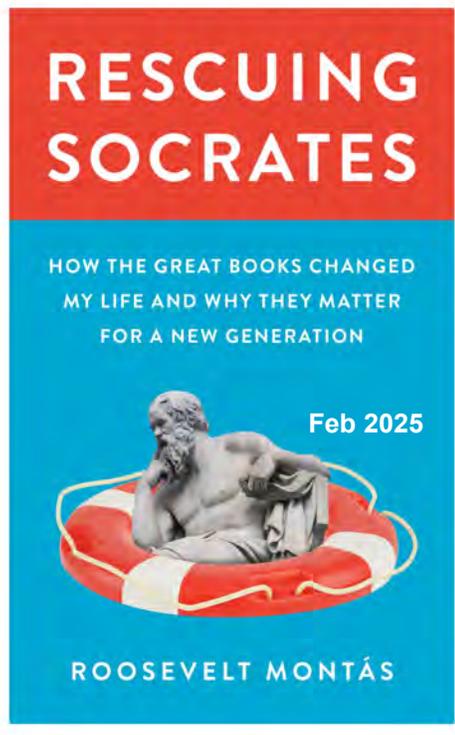
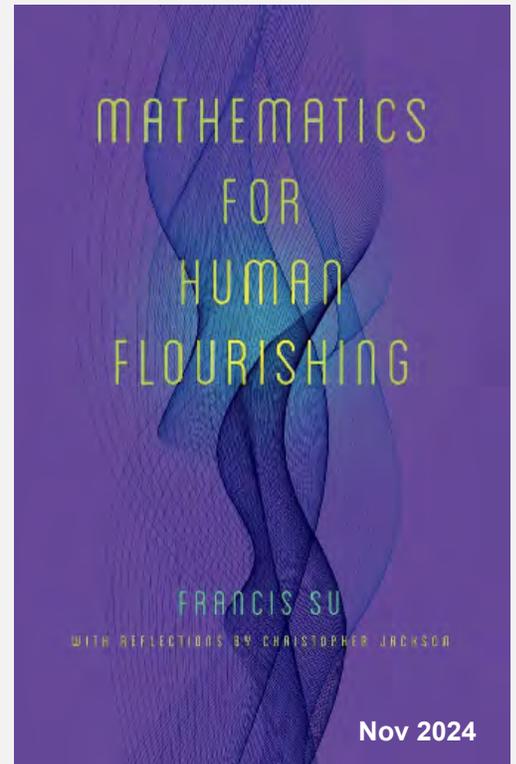
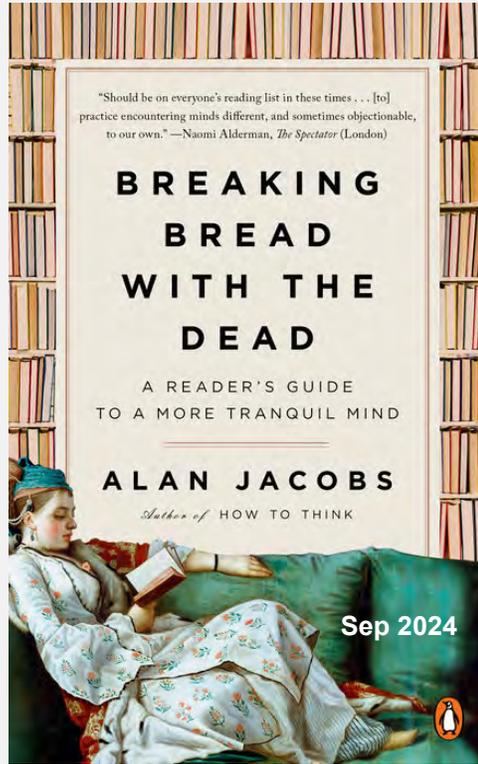


Ten Years Engaging Minds

2024-25 marks the tenth year of the *Engaging Minds: Beyond the Book Club* effort at TCA. We have four titles selected for next year (*shown to the right*) including one repeat all-staff read. Dr. Montas will be joining us in February 2025 to address staff on his journey with the great books and liberal education. When this endeavor began a decade ago, little did I know the longevity of the effort and the impact it would have for our staff and me personally. Over the course of this year I've heard from many of you about the personal impact some of the selections you read have made personally and professionally. I asked Darren Wilson to share about his experience with the book studies over the years (*see next page*). If you'd like to join us for one of the studies next year send an e-mail to me at wjolly@asd20.org and I will add you to the RSVP request list that goes out around three weeks before each of the book study dates. We meet for 90 minutes in the North Elementary Library (Pikes Peak Room) from 4:30-6:00 pm on the selected afternoons.



Beyond the Book Club



SELECTIONS 2024-2025

I considered starting this essay with the dramatic revelation that TCA's **Beyond the Book Club** has changed my life, but I don't think that I will. It's not that the statement isn't true, for it is. But I want my overall focus to be bigger. In the words of a former boss, my changed life is interesting, but not compelling. So let me begin again.

Read different.

That's where I want to start. That's what I hope to convey in a compelling manner. When I consider the words read different, two immediate meanings come to mind. First, we should read different things. And second, we should read things differently.

I drew this phrase from two distinct sources. The first is a poster that hangs above the door in my classroom. It shows Kermit the Frog leaning on Jim Henson's shoulder with the words, 'think different'. Those of us who are tied tightly to the tenets of language might bristle at the non-grammaticality of the phrase. We feel it should be 'think differently', but that's a huge part of the poster's intent.

The second source is the thought by French philosopher Simone Weil, "*every being cries out silently to be read differently.*" I discovered this quote on the first page of ***Mathematics for Human Flourishing***, by Francis Su, and now, many months later, I'm still struggling to fully process it, still wondering how I can incorporate its simple message into all that I think and say and do.

Which brings us back to TCA's **Beyond the Book Club**. A little more than five years ago, while reading ***Quiet***, by Susan Cain, I suddenly and surprisingly discovered I was an introvert. For me, this was a profound revelation that led to significant personal growth. Looking back on it, I now realize that the book had allowed me to read myself, and hopefully others, differently.

In the spirit of full disclosure, my initial interest in the book club had nothing to do with lofty goals such as read different. Instead, it simply appealed to my appetite for three of life's most basic needs: *books, free books, and nontrivial discussions with actual adults.*

It's taken me several years and two dozen book-club selections to gradually reshape my mindset about reading, but that's okay. I strongly suspect that's been part of Wes Jolly's nefarious plan all along—luring us with the powerful scent of free books and intending us to change along the way. Or maybe it's just a liberal arts thing.

What matters is that we allow ourselves to change. We live in a world filled with painfully strong opinions that are formed and reinforced through powerful echo chambers. But there is an equally powerful antidote: read different. Every year, we have books in the club from disparate genres, such as social issues, teaching and learning, literature, history, and sometimes science or math. Sure, it's nice to select and read a (free) book on a topic we're interested in and then to come to the meeting and share why we thought it was a truly great book, but there's an even better way.

What if we selected a book that we normally wouldn't consider reading? And what if we struggled to actually read it and maybe, despite our best intentions, what if we never finished it? But, what if we then decided to come to the meeting anyway and listened to why some people loved the book, and why some didn't like it, and why some found it difficult to read? And what if the following year we picked another difficult book and maybe we pushed a little harder and got through more of this book than the previous one? And what if we kept trying year after year and ended up learning one or two things about who we were or perhaps who we would like to be?

Beyond the Book Club has changed my life.

Not only did it introduce me to books I might never have read, but it has also taught me to read those books differently. It has bolstered my ability to do the work of learning when it comes to reading books. It has taught me that reading great books allows us to become part of the conversation, not to blindly agree or disagree with the ideas presented, but to think about and discuss them and, in that process, to learn how to read ourselves, the world, and others in a better light.

Beyond the Book Club is a marvelous gift that enables and encourages us to read different. And, in case I didn't mention it, **the books are free.**

Snapshots Math Results 2023

in support of accolades on page one

2023 Annual State Assessment Results

DAS Dashboard Rating	CMAS MATH (all tests taken paper/pencil each year)																							
	2021-2023 percent met and exceeded expectations						2021-2023 mean scale scores						2022/2023 test participation rates											
	TCA	D20	State	Rank vs D20	TCA	D20	State	TCA Participation	D20 Participation	State Participation														
	21	22	23	21	22	23	21	22	23	21	22	23	91.7	92.0	92.8	93.8	94.0	94.2						
	75	71	55	52	55	39	40	2	1	of 23	766	764	737	738	749	752	737	738	92.8	93.8	94.0			
	54	67	68	44	46	49	29	31	33	5	3	of 23	751	759	761	729	732	733	93.7	88.0	92.7	93.5	93.8	
	64	66	52	53	35	37	7	4	of 23	759	761	736	737	751	752	736	737	90.3	93.8	92.9	93.4	92.7	92.8	
	61	61	59	36	44	44	24	26	28	1	1	of 11	757	755	755	727	728	730	91.7	87.2	87.5	89.7	89.0	89.8
	51	46	38	42	25	26	1	4	of 11	751	748	730	731	742	744	730	731	85.2	88.5	83.1	85.1	84.9	85.5	
+	39	49	38	42	25	26	4	3	of 11	740	743	730	731	742	744	730	731	88.0	81.0	83.1	85.1	84.9	85.5	
	34	44	49	44	52	49	30	32	33	741	744	754	732	744	750	749	730	731	87.0	80.4	73.3	77.0	78.7	79.5
+	61	58	52	44	52	49	30	32	33	752	753	747	732	744	750	749	730	731	82.5	68.9	73.3	77.0	78.7	79.5
DAS Dashboard Overall Rating	Green																							
DAS RATING CRITERIA:	Scores at or above the district average and solid performance ranking compared to other D20 schools.																							
	Scores below the district level and above the state level, but for no more than two consecutive years. Also examine trend and comparative ranking.																							
	Scores below the district level for three consecutive years or below the state level in any year.																							
TCA Math [Elem + JH]	<p>NOTE: The larger number in each column represents the last assessment year (2023). Numbers for TCA displayed throughout the chart in green indicate areas where we exceeded D20 scores and items in red indicate areas where we scored lower than the district. All top 2 rankings are marked in green in the "Rank vs D20" column. TCA's participation rates exceeded that of the district in 3 of 8 assessed Math areas (6 of 8 last year). The 7th and 8th grade CP JH scores have a green + overall rating due to the fact that the percentage of students <i>meeting or exceeding expectations</i> surpassed the district by 6.4% and 3.5% respectively, but the average mean score for the grade was slightly lower than the district average for the 2023 testing cycle. 8th grade JH traditional math score results are coded as a green for the first time in three years, after two years as a yellow rating due to consecutive years scoring below the district in <i>meeting or exceeding expectations</i> and overall mean score. The overall DAS rating is green due to overall performance in 8 of the 8 individually rated areas meeting the green criteria (requires 6 of 8 to meet green criteria collectively). This chart reflects a combination of Elementary and Junior High Math ratings, when also including traditional High School and College Pathways High School, Math is rated green overall due to scoring green in 14 of 14 areas in 2023 (75% or 11 of 14 needed for green score).</p>																							
Elementary																								
Junior High																								
CP JH																								

R. Sojourner: During the Founders panel, we talked a little bit about our mission statement. I want to ask you one question about it. What does it mean to develop “exemplary citizens?” I have heard lots of different versions of this answer, and I would like to hear yours.

B. DeMeyer: From my perspective it is that my children are “adulting” well. That they are contributing outside of these four walls. That they are finding their passion. That they can hold down a job [Becca starts to laugh]! And be great people. That they put others before themselves and cherish the relationships that they have.

And I think a big part of this is that they became very loyal people from being at TCA. That runs deep. Their loyalty underpins the kind of person that they are supposed to be, they should be. That they do their best to strive toward that quality, and I feel like I did an okay job as a parent. I know that my kids being here was that extra piece. You all [gestures to the audience] did come and assist me in my journey in parenting and I could not ask for anything more.

M. Sutton: I think that an exemplary citizen—when I view what we are trying to do—is educating these kids so that they become adults who feel like they can act on their environment rather than it always having to act on them (so they do not feel like a victim). And to be in alignment with the Titan’s Creed. I mean, if you can be an adult that is living that, I think that our world would be better off.

R. Sojourner: Thanks, Matt. Thanks, Becca. Anybody else?

B. Casson: I think adulting well, is really the chance for students to have the “exemplary citizen” experience. I would have to check with Bley Kueck [TCA’s Senior Latin Instructor], but I think

“exemplary” comes from “Exemplum?” Which is something worthy of imitation. What is interesting, is that once they are adulting, they are not worthy of being distinctive because they are “elite,” or they are “privileged,” or they are “smart.”

Jim [Kretchman] talked about the head and the heart and that is the unique approach here. I think it is a catalyst for the kind of thing that “exemplary,” would be worth - of being imitated. There would be a yearning to imitate those people when they are out in the world.

J. Reed: So, I think our focus on developing “exemplary citizens,” this is so important. To put it quickly, you have heard these things before, and this was a shift in my thinking from the early days. I say it this way, “Commas are a bonus.” Content does not

piece of advice to someone who is transitioning into TCA as a young staff member, what will you tell them?”

J. Reed: So, I can’t give the same disclaimer that Jim Kretchman gave about not being an employee here. Obviously, that is not true. The opinions expressed by Jeremy Reed may not necessarily reflect, etc., etc.

I would tell that administrator or that teacher, “Know the philosophy. Learn the philosophy. Love it. Do it. Or find a place that shares your philosophy.” There are so many places that are not us. And there are very few places that have anything approaching what we have. I remember, I would call my parents, who were both teachers, (and my grandparents were teachers). I don’t know why I thought I would be a pediatrician or anything else. I would call them and tell them our worst story, my worst story from the year. “You can’t believe this happened!”

I was either getting support or gossiping with my parents. But anyway, I would call them, and they would have a story from that day that was worse than my “Worst of the year” story. And that was a blessing. I mean, what a great perspective I was given there, but my point is there are so many places that you can go, where you can find your fit. So, I would say to that person, “Your job is not to change this place, to fight it, to make it fit you. Your job is to find that place that fits you.”

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TCA's CORE VALUES DOCUMENT

[transcribed from October 2022 all staff conference]

Passions Conference 2022 Teacher Interviews

matter nearly as much as virtue. I think being “exemplary,” you need to be virtuous. We [teachers] work so hard to put these lessons together so our students will intellectually levitate. But in the end, they are going to forget most of what we teach them. They will remember how they were treated. And so, “commas are a bonus.” Virtue will come out, too.

R. Sojourner: Nine years ago, as I was transitioning into my job as president, I had a conversation with a superintendent friend of mine who was transitioning into retirement. I very distinctly remember asking him, “Give me one piece of advice that I should carry with me throughout all my years at TCA? What is the one thing you can tell me and help my staff?”

So now I will ask you, “Someday, a long time in the future when you are transitioning out of TCA, after you finish your career here,” the only career that you have ever had, Jeremy, and you are giving one

And so, I would say “Of course! Love kids!” I assume if people are being hired here, they love kids. So, you might want to make relationships, but I would say you better know the philosophy and you better love it, and you better do it. Otherwise, why are you here? [audience claps]

B. Casson: This is quite a question, the retirement question. I would say in addition to Jeremy’s thoughts, embracing the blunders. Embrace “blunder.” Invest in people and embrace the relational part. One of my colleagues, I can’t remember who it was, way back said, “Teaching is an island,” and I am not sure if the pronunciation is an isthmus, or it is an archipelago? But it is a collection where people who are waiting around you to constantly kind of fill and pour into you as well. And that is what I would say.

I think we constantly see an island, a challenge of having that Mr. Holland’s Opus moment, or various exciting moments in the classroom. But I think the ability to kind of connect and seek out help and have people pour wisdom into us is obviously important over the long term.

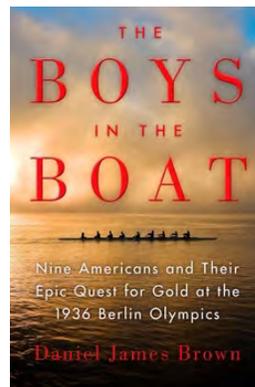
A. Luongo: I guess that what I would be sharing at retirement might look different with many more years of experience under my belt. But I think one thing that I have learned thus far, is just to remember that students are more than “just a student.”

I have mentioned it before but extending grace and not always holding hard and fast to the rules and the “letter of the law” can also be an important lesson for them. And can deepen their character in ways that just following the rules doesn’t always achieve. And of course, there is a lot of value in following the rules, but being in relationship, and viewing them as more than just a student.

M. Sutton: I think the big thing for me, if anybody has ever been to the training I do on behaviors, I start with the relationship piece. Build those relationships just like we have been saying.

And I like how you said [gestures to Amber], you know “being flexible,” I think is what you were getting at, is to be flexible, offering grace, you know, standing for what you believe in, being aligned in philosophy here at TCA, but really having that foundation of good relationship, and wisdom.

B. DeMeyer: I was thinking the same things you were, Jeremy; about that idea that we are all in the boat. I think it is Mark Wertheimer quote, “We are rowing together.” And I think when we are all rowing together, when we are all moving in that same direction, when we have that same idea in mind, we can get so far. And when that one oar is trying to turn us around, it causes difficulty. Be here



for the right reasons. Be here because your heart tells you this is where you are supposed to be. Be here because this is where your mind tells you this is a philosophy you can be 100% apart of. Be here because of the people. Be here and be present every day. But you’ve got to know the “why,” otherwise it is not going to be a fun journey.

R. Sojourner: In 2047, we will celebrate our 50th Anniversary. If we were to create a time capsule today, and you were to put a note and a book in that time capsule—what would the note say, and what book would you put there? It is a great segue because Sherry Wilkewitz asked me to share this. She would put the *Boys in the Boat* in that time capsule, because of all the talk in that book about “Swing,” when everybody is working in concert it is almost unimaginable what you can achieve. And she wanted to speak about all the teams that she has worked with, when the teams are working, they’re in swing. It is an amazing journey. It speaks to the Wertheimer quote. Let’s start with you Becca.

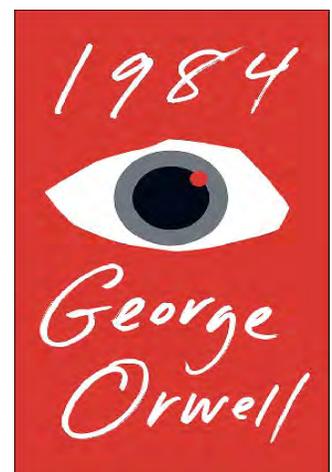
B. DeMeyer: *Little House in the Big Woods*. That is my first memory of TCA being in a modular class-

room. Loving every minute of it. And wondering, “What happens if there is a tornado?” But, that book to me tells the story of the past. I think that is illustrated by listening to Jim and Mary [Kretchman] and the Browns today. I feel like we need to remember what happened so that we can do the good work for the future. So, my second grade heart says, “Pull that book out and remember the fun that was had during very difficult and challenging times and the joy that those moments brought. And then, looking towards the future, for the joy that is to come.

M. Sutton: So, this was a very difficult question for me. I figured I would flip a coin right before I put this book into the time capsule. It would either be *1984* or *Brave New World* [audience laughs]. But the note being a little more positive (theoretically), that goes with that. The book being a more cautionary tale, I think, and the note saying, “First of all, congratulations! If you are reading this, it is the 50th Anniversary so you are still here, and something is working.” But also, just encouragement to stay the course. Keep reflecting on that Core Values document and the Titan’s Creed. They are explicit in what we believe in. Keep abiding by that. Thank you.

A. Luongo: Yeah, I focused on the note that I would place in the time capsule. I feel honored to be a part of the school that perceives Truth, Beauty, and Goodness and places

[continued on page 8]



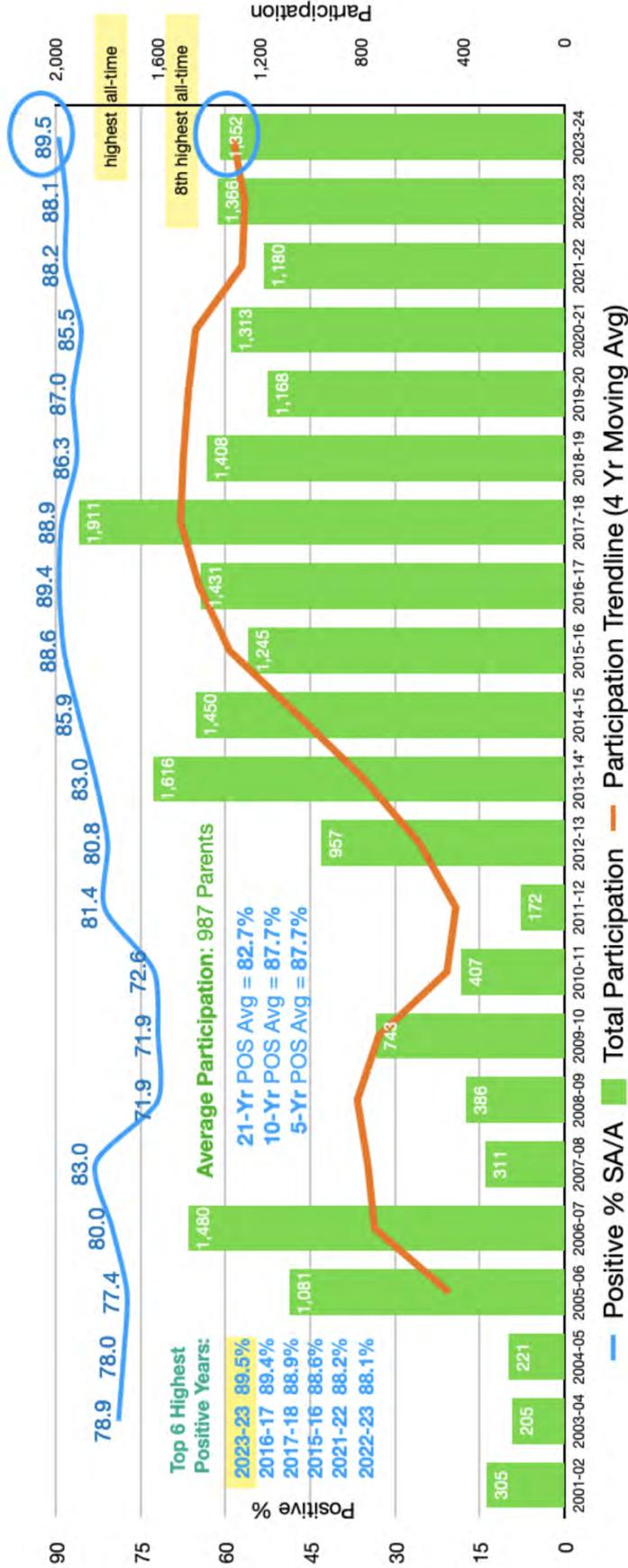
[transcribed from October 2022 all staff conference]

Snapshots ◇ Parent Survey - Participation

results presented to TCA Board - May 2024

Historical Participation & Positive Response

This was a new slide three years ago. Data from the past 22 years was gleaned to produce the overall participation numbers per year and a positivity rating overall. Those positive response statistics had been captured many years ago — showing the combined strongly agree / agree percentages on common TCA questions (including homework and uniform in years asked).



PARENT SURVEY: Participation Numbers and Positive Ratings (Strongly Agree / Agree) Percentages on TCA-Wide Questions (includes homework and uniform in years asked)

Snapshots ◇ Parent Survey - ‘Best Thing’ results presented to TCA Board - May 2024

Question 1: If I were to name the best thing overall about TCA, it would be.

1,532 distinct answers were tabulated for all schools combined. The **Top Ten** answers are listed below.

The Top Ten in order of frequency cited were

(% of parents listing this topic as the best thing about TCA - ranking versus last year):

Top 4 areas: 60% of parents listed as best thing (59% and 58% last two yrs) 919 responses	Teachers/Staff	28.9%	[ranked #1 last year and every year]
	Community	12.3%	[ranked #2 last year]
	Academics/Quality Ed	10.6%	[ranked #3 last year]
	Character	8.2%	[ranked #4 last year]
	Curriculum/Classical	7.8%	[ranked #5 last year]
	Core Values/Values	5.0%	[ranked #6 last year]
	Culture	4.4%	[ranked #7 last year]
	Class Sizes	2.7%	[ranked #8 last year]
	Partnerships	2.2%	[ranked #9 last year]
	Families and Students	2.0%	[ranked #10 last year]

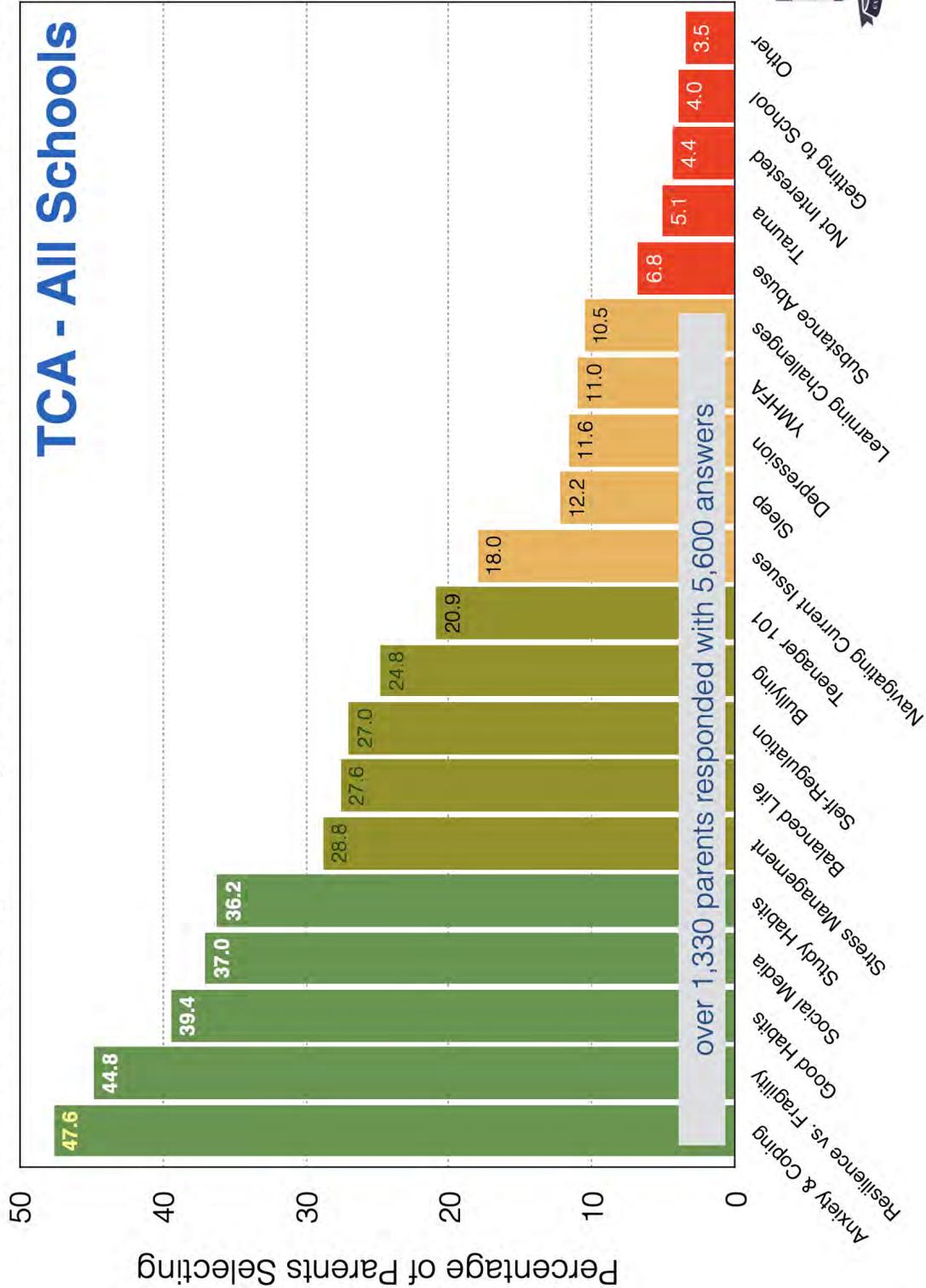
Top 10 areas:
84% of parents listed as best thing (85% and 83% last 2 yrs) 1,288 responses

* the 244 other responses (roughly 16% of total) were reflected in 56 different categories

Snapshots ◇ Parent Survey - Wellness

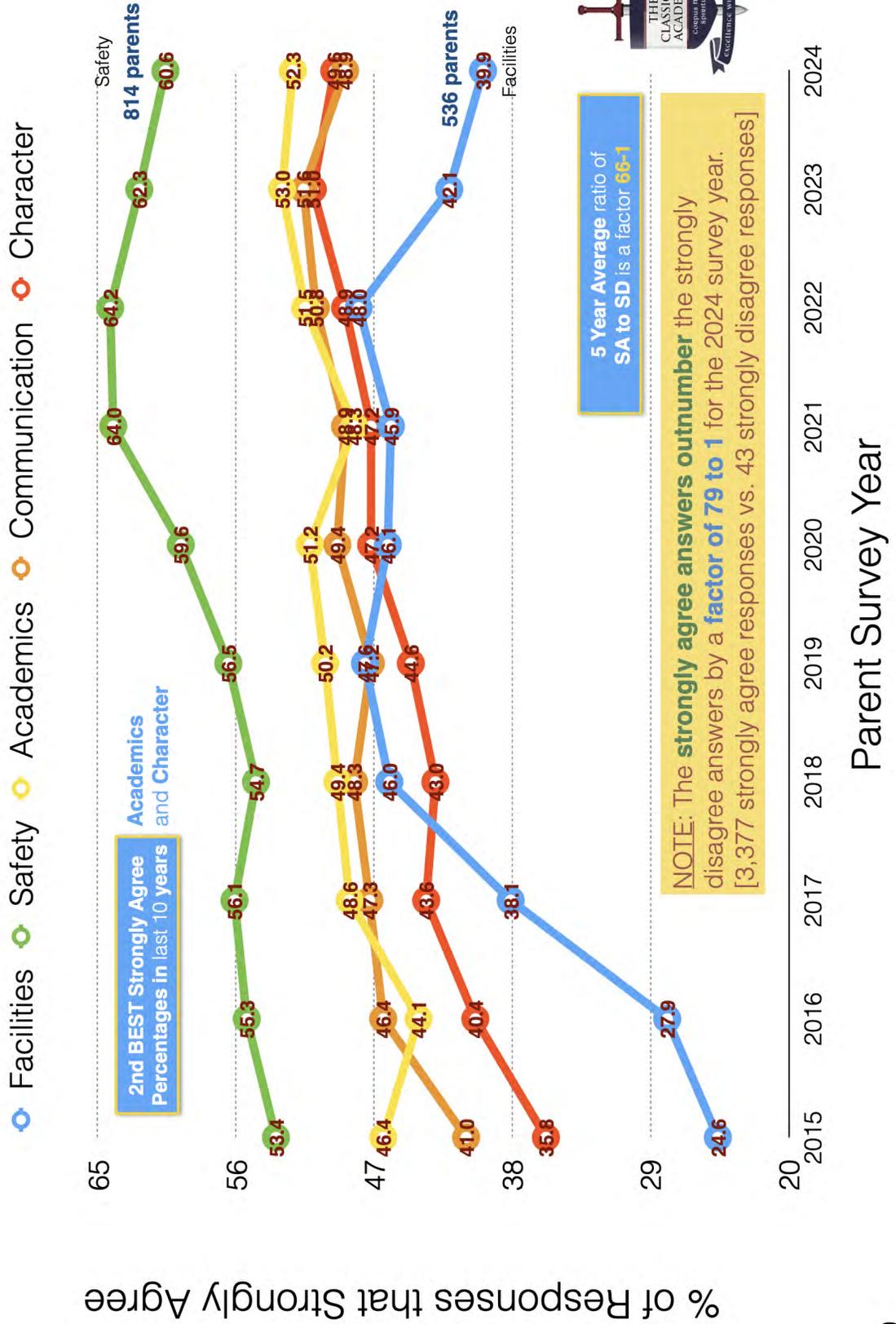
results presented to TCA Board - May 2024

Question 7: In our efforts to partner with parents, in support of student's wellness, what topics listed below would you like TCA to prioritize via Parent Academy training or resources on the TCA website? Select top 4.



Snapshots \diamond Parent Survey - 'Strongly Agree' results presented to TCA Board - May 2024

Strongly Agree Comparison Year-over-Year



I'm here because I opened my big mouth.

I'm here because last year, during our 25th Anniversary presentation, I said, "Get on board with our philosophy or...leave." This was the inspiration for having me speak today, but that's a heck of a topic for me, a guy who is usually giving speeches about "joy" and how to "be the bee." I mean, it's likely that a few of my close and lovingly snarky friends in the audience are playing Reed Speech Bingo, and if I add "Bros Karamazov" to "joy" and "be the bee," someone is close to winning.

But, I'm willing to be a bit "darker" or to step on a few toes because our philosophy is part of what makes TCA exceptional, and darn near singular. And, I LOVE it! It is one of the biggest blessings in my life.

Allow me to be clear: I am so very thankful for the many blessings in my life. My mother is my hero. She did what my father couldn't or wouldn't. She taught me what joy is. My wife is my dearest love. She did what no other woman would do. She saw me, and (for some reason) liked what she saw. She taught me to speak Truth in Love. My children are gifts requiring much responsibility. But, they teach me at least as much as I teach them, and my journey with them is an adventure rivaling even those including the Tolkien names they bear, though with fewer orcs.

But after these blessings, these people, it's my school, our school, that has given me direction and given my efforts the opportunities and the boundaries that have made these last 23 years into not an occupation, but a vocation. My school completed what Hillsdale started, allowing me to put the Great Works and the enduring ideas into practice.

If you'll indulge me for a moment, I need to talk about Hillsdale. Hillsdale is another exceptional place. Taking no money from the government, ensuring that the college is always free to pursue Truth, Beauty, and Goodness without encumbrance... Hillsdale, the first school in America to prohibit any discrimination based on race, religion, or sex... spoiled me with opportunities that I took for granted at 18 and only partly appreciated as I walked across the stage at graduation. It offered me the Truths found in the Great Works of Western Civ and the Judeo-Christian tradition. It offered me not only the opportunity to read great books, to see great plays, and to (nearly) fail BIO 200, but also to sing for Margaret Thatcher and meet my wife. The great men and women at Hillsdale gave me a liberal education that I am exceedingly thankful for.

My point? After 5 years, yes 5, I thought for a moment, until the aforementioned BIO 200, that I was going to be doctor... after 5 years, I was concerned... concerned that I would never find a school with which I would agree on a philosophical and pedagogical level. Honestly, I assumed every day would be a struggle, if not an outright disappointment.

But, then, I found The Classical Academy... A somewhat-fledgling charter school, with no permanent building, no 11th or 12th grade, and far too many dirt roads and parking lots. But, after talking with Merlin Holmes, the high school principal in 2001, I knew I had found my place, an exceptional place, a place also dedicated to the Great Works and ideas that have stood the test of time, also dedicated to the liberal arts, and equally dedicated to the Socratic Method and being relational with its students.

Truly, I LOVE this place. It's a place worth loving, worth protecting, and worth preserving. I LOVE this place because of what makes it special, what makes TCA TCA. I LOVE it so much that I must charge you with the following: We must follow the TCA Core Values. We don't get to subvert TCA. It is not ours to subvert. It is ours to love.

And, I use that word intentionally, even though I know it makes some uncomfortable. We must love TCA by loving, studying, and employing the same great ideas and great texts that have stood the test of time, the very ideas that our founders put into our Core Values. This is the only way that we will all work together for the good of our students.

To illustrate this idea, I'd like to use a word we use somewhat often in our English classes: *hamartia*. It's the Greek word from which we get our English word for SIN. It is often mistranslated as tragic flaw, but what it really means is "to err," "to miss the mark." It's an archery term. And, it suggests that whenever we do a thing, when we aim at some telos, we aim at goodness and excellence, but we may miss. This means that *excellence* and *virtue* are actual realities. They exist. The standard exists. When we miss, we don't hit a different target called, "evil." No such target exists. We simply miss the standard, to the peril of ourselves and those around us. For what it's worth, this is not some new, bold idea. It seems to have roots in Plato, being developed by Plotinus, who said that virtuous things are real beings and that "Evil is found in the non-being." The Christian church, East and West, from John of Damascus to Augustine also agrees, with Augustine saying, "For what is that which we call evil but the absence of good." For what it's worth, the Transcendentalists here in America agreed. Emerson says, "Good is positive. Evil is merely privative, not absolute: it is like cold, which is the privation of heat. All evil is so much death or nonentity. Benevolence is absolute and real." All that is to say, when we aim at good, we aim at a real target. What we call Evil is Hamartia. An errant shot. And, as we go about this attempt to educate

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and cultivate moral students, we must aim carefully. The good news for us (and certainly our students) is that the founders gave us a truly Awesome target. They set before us the values of dignity and respect for all, of a free people and a free market, of a liberal education resting in Classical ideas, gained through a Socratic approach. And, the fruit of hitting this target's bull's eye is the creation of virtuous citizens who have attentive and discerning Minds, capable and healthy Bodies, and hopeful and humble Spirits.

This is our target! And, you may NOT change it!

You may not cause our arrows to fall on empty ground because you chose to move or cut holes in our target.

Such intentional acts of subversion and dissent are not mature, nor are they good. Now, I'm not saying they're always intentionally deceitful. In fact, some of the scariest and most threatening moments come from when one thinks they are doing good. Take the story about students coming to a board meeting to defend *The Brothers Karamazov*. As, I'm sure you've heard before, probably from me, years ago our literature was challenged. It went all the way to the board...but so did I, so did several teachers, and so did over 60 of our students. It was literally standing room only. After I gave an impassioned speech, the students gave a much more meaningful message to our board as they wordlessly held up their copies of *Bros K*, silently declaring their love for a good book.



And, that's the headline... "Good Literature Defended." But, what can be lost in all of the "Hurrah for Karamazov" is the fact that who we are came under fire that day. An all-too-meaningful shift of our target was proposed that day. We prevailed, and we prevailed by aiming at the goodness prescribed in our Core Values.

Such acts of subversion and dissent are also not humble, and we must be humble. We who choose to be here must sit humbly before the Truth, Beauty, and Goodness set before us. We must love those things. And, while it is certainly human nature to rebel, to chafe against seemingly harsh constraints, to reject a hard-to-hit bull's eye, it is good to remember the paradoxical relationship between rules and freedom, between rules and opportunity.

Let's take the game of Chess as an example. Chess is a game of (relatively) few, but harsh, non-negotiable rules. The playing area is a strict 8 by 8 grid of black and white squares. Each piece has its own specific immutable manner of movement. At first approximation, this seems constraining, but these fixed rules are what actually offer up the incredible freedom and the nearly infinite number of unique games of chess that can be played. The

unchanging guidelines offer meaningful choice. Without them, there is no game...no good game anyway.

The same is true with education at TCA and our Core Values. We have a fairly strict set of whats, hows, and whys. And in those rules is found the meaningful and fruitful education we have to offer our students. The rules set by our Core Values enable our rich education by imposing boundaries for us and our students. Think of the time saved and educational injuries avoided by the (seemingly) lack of freedom. Think of the virtuous habits formed by the (seemingly) small target. It's also how we know when we've won. Or, if the game metaphor is breaking at this point, the Core Values are how we know when we've succeeded. This Core Values document is the foremost measure of our success, now and in the future. You may disagree, but, if so, you're playing a different game, with different pieces, and our beautiful board is in disarray and makes no sense.

To be clear, this does not mean that there is no room for revision or review of our practices at TCA, as long as it is guided by these Core Values. In fact, right now, the English department has the privilege and burden of reviewing what and how we teach in English classes. We will take a year to review, as other departments have done, and there is room for change. But, when we change something, IF we change something, we must ensure that we are following the Founders' wishes and not our preferences. If we're gonna take a book out, we need to ask, "Is what you're replacing it with better? More Classical?" Because, if not, what are we doing? To stay on track, we must be humble, submitting ourselves to our philosophy. In the end, there is room for change left, there is room to play, but we must play by the rules found in our philosophy.

A recent example of this is the class I teach with Bleys, *Artes Liberales*. As we've joined Civics and AP English, we've found, time and time again, that the best ideas, the ideas that have most stood the test of time are ubiquitous...and by further embracing a liberal arts approach, we have joyfully discovered that Plato, Dostoevsky, our Founding Fathers, and Joseph Conrad can all sit around the same table and have a single conversation with our students. It's fascinating; it's also MORE Classical, MORE liberal, not less.

Regardless, I have good news for all involved. If this document, these values, are for you, well, then I have a beautiful place for you. If these are the things you love and you want to work together with us, you have arrived, and that's good, because, if you want this, good luck finding it elsewhere. And, if these values are not for you, well, then the world is your oyster. For it is not a carefully aimed arrow but a wild shot from the hip that hits a school with ideas contrary to ours.

One more caution: if you are here because the students are kind and the parents are supportive and the class sizes are small, you are doing it wrong. The Classical Academy exists to assist parents in their mission to develop exemplary citizens, not to make you comfortable. Remember, not only is it not all about you, it's not at all about you. We are here to assist them by loving the good. Our happiness, and theirs, is real and will emerge, but only as the final telos, the chief end realized by teaching the good class.

So, let's be grateful for our founding parents and their vision. Let us be grateful for the Classical texts and methods. Let us be grateful for our TCA culture and our tradition of Classical education. Let us be more than grateful, let's ENJOY it.

And, if we enjoy it, our passion will spark a love of learning that will enable and inspire them to read whatever they want to read.

I've always been told, if you want to have something to say, you better be reading something, and something Classical. And, as I was preparing for this, I thought, why not re-read something Classical that I truly love but had nearly forgotten. My Nostalgia-filled memories turned again to Hillsdale, where I first encountered the utterly lovely book of Science, Michael Faraday's, *The Chemical History of a Candle*. What a book! Of course, it makes sense that I would love it, because while it is a book of Science, it is devoid of Math that I am unable to do, and it is devoid of Scientific jargon that I am unable to understand. Instead, this book is a book of lectures Faraday prepared for juveniles, another reason why it's just my speed. Regardless, if you'll give me, Faraday actually, just a few moments, I'd like us to look at his opening words. As he welcomes us to the *Chemical History of a Candle*, he says, "I have taken this subject on a former occasion; and were it left to my own will, I should prefer to repeat it almost every year—so abundant is the interest that attaches itself to the subject, so wonderful are the varieties of outlet which it offers into the various departments of philosophy. There is not a law under which any part of this universe is governed which does not come into play, and is touched upon in these phenomena. There is no better; there is no more open door by which you can enter into the study of natural philosophy, than by considering the physical phenomena of a candle. I trust, therefore, I shall not disappoint you in choosing this for my subject rather than any newer topic, which could not be better; were it even so good."

What bold claims! No Law which governs our Universe is absent from the *Candle's Chemical History*?! No newer topic could be better?! Even if it were so good?!

He hooked me!

But, there's even more for the dabbler-in-science like me to enjoy. In lieu of the math I cannot do, in lieu of overly nuanced descriptions of complicated (and foreign) processes, what I found in Faraday was a man who absolutely loved what he studied, and a man who found beauty in the processes that govern the simple burning of a candle. In fact, in this short book, he calls the candle beautiful no fewer than 59 times! Oh, how different from how I was taught science as a kid. I was taught laws and theories, but we spent our time defining bold words in the textbook, not marveling at the beauty those words described. And, my imagination was never captured then as Faraday did now by questions like, "Why doesn't the candle immediately melt the wax all the way down? That question may seem embarrassingly simple, but I'm 45, and I was riveted, thinking, "Wait, yeah, why doesn't it?" And, then, suddenly, I had read the whole book, and not a bit of it felt like anything resembling homework.

Forgive me for geeking out a bit here, and forgive me for getting anything not precisely correct, after all I'm a fan of the candle, not an expert, but a candle really is a beautiful thing. Do you know why the candle doesn't just immediately, or at least very quickly, burn straight down? It turns out that the wick has to heat the wax into a liquid to burn, and the candle's own heat causes the air around the candle to rise and the rising air cools the outer parts of the candle. So, the candle remains solid, except for the wax in close contact with the flame, and the candle burns in such a way that the portion which stays solid forms a perfect cup to hold the liquid fuel. And this is essential, because the cup must be level, for as Faraday puts it, "the same force of gravity which holds worlds together holds this fluid in a horizontal position, and if the cup be not horizontal, of course the fluid will run away in guttering. You see, therefore, that the cup is formed by this beautifully regular ascending current of air playing upon all sides."

Who talks like this?! "The same force that holds worlds together?!" I mean, wow... Do you hear how much he loves and admires the Beauty of the candle?

Um, shoot, I apologize if I've been going on too long about the candle, when really my point is only two-fold. Our founders knew two things that I see in Faraday. We must endeavor to recognize and pursue Beauty, and it is the old books, and the old things, like a simple candle, that will most joyfully get us to Truth, Beauty, and Goodness. Alan Jacobs, author of *Breaking Bread with the Dead* certainly agrees. He prefers the old, the time-tested, and has no hesitation in sharing them with our current day children. *Breaking Bread with the Dead* is absolutely full of reasons why it's good to read old books, but one of the most applicable is, "When you expose your kids to something that wasn't packaged with them as the target audience in mind, you are broadening their horizons." And, that is what we do when we give them these opportunities to meet mind to mind with an author from the past. We broaden their thinking, and we give them the ability to have empathy, because what we give them with Plato, Melville, or Faraday is not an inheritance of ash but a treasured flame, a light in the darkness and a warmth in a harsh, cold world.

Let's be like Faraday. He found his joy in a simple candle, and while I read his book, it seemed like Faraday's joy for the candle compelled him to tell me about it. It reminded me of C.S. Lewis when he says, "I think we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment." Faraday loved his beautiful candle, and he loved to tell others about it. Let's be like that. Let's be so enamored with our material and our Core Values that our joy found within these halls of TCA is not complete until we tell others about it.

At the very least, let's not grumble about being bound by our core values.

In fact, by embracing our core values, we'll find our hearts and minds captured not by what we're bound to, but what we're bound for. Thank you. - Jeremy Reed

The Purest of Love

