

Making the Case

December 2008

I've been reflecting lately about "Making the Case for MCP." How is what we do here absolutely distinctive? In what ways does the experience we offer here at school measure up and even surpass the financial commitment parents make on behalf of their students? How are we continuing a legacy of excellent Catholic education on the Central Coast through the work we're doing today at Mission? Can we answer these questions to our stakeholders with certainty and confidence? What follows are some of my reflections for how Mission Prep today provides, *Education at a Higher Level*.

1) Our Culture of Care

In addition to our rigorous college prep curriculum, the school's "Culture of Caring" is evident in every aspect of adult-student interaction, and it provides for a family atmosphere for the students.

The faculty and staff of MCP provide a level of dedication and commitment to their students that is exemplary. Because of their content expertise, pastoral sensitivity, and high school savvy, not to mention that 60% of our faculty members have over 18 years teaching experience, our students' needs are met in exemplary ways. Tutoring is available from every teacher after school for an hour each day. We have Assistant Principals for both Academics and Student Activities, emphasizing that our students' studies and campus culture here are both crucial dimensions of their 4-year experience at Mission. Students for whom academics are particularly challenging avail themselves of a six-week review session with their Parents, Advisor, and Administrator to implement strategies for accountability and success.

Last year, almost 20% of families received Tuition Assistance in the form of grants, work-study, and scholarships. Prior to school beginning this year, we awarded about \$115,000 of tuition assistance for families. And as our economy proves more and more challenging and parents have struggled to keep up with tuition payments, we've been responsive to our community members' needs in a fair and consistent fashion, twinning pastoral care with fiscal responsibility.

The commitment we've made to student safety – both in the seismic retrofit of the 1927 Historic Building, and in the implementation of a comprehensive Health, Safety, and Emergency Management Plan -- is another sign of our care. Adult educators and students alike have undergone training this fall in the protocols necessary to keep us all safe in the event of an accident or crisis situation.

Our commitment to facilities extends far beyond safety, to the enabling of programmatic excellence. In this regard and in many others, the Parents Association, Board of Regents, and Boosters work tirelessly to support their students and affirm the work of the faculty and staff.

Our athletic facilities are some of the best in the county, featuring our state-of-the-art athletic field designed by an NFL turf-builder, as well as a beautiful indoor gymnasium. Every classroom is equipped with Smartboard technology and Edline is our web-based classroom communication tool. Additionally, we have a wireless laptop cart for use in our classrooms, a fully equipped computer lab, a faculty computer lab, computer banks located in all science classrooms, and digital video technology in the Leadership classroom. Our current plans anticipate moving forward in a year's time with the extensive remodeling of the historic building, equipping it with the technological sophistication to continue educating our students for success in the modern world.

2) The Formative Involvement of Our Students

Studies have shown that students who are involved in school activities like sports, clubs, and the arts are much more likely to enjoy their high school experience than those students who don't. Involved students are more likely to volunteer in their communities, less apt to get into trouble, more likely to attend religious services, and they get better grades. Over 70% of our students participate in at least one sport and over 50% of our students attended the first dance of the year. Success is "cool" in and out of the classroom here at Mission Prep and this is a cultural feature of our school that we all want to continue. We have 13 clubs here at MCP that are all student initiated and student-lead.

Among many examples of our vitality, we have a growing Performing Arts department, with offerings in musical theatre, pep band, dramatic plays, as well as band and choral class. The drama club recently completed a successful run of the musical, "Little Women," presented to packed houses throughout their 6 performances.

Our MCP's Girls Varsity Basketball team has won 16 CIF sectional championships in a row. Four MCP students in 2007-8 were named CIF Scholar-Athlete winners on both divisional and statewide levels. After our Underwater Robotics team finished first in the California Regionals, Mission College Prep won a berth to compete last summer in the 7th annual International MATE ROV Competition. Our team was 9th overall among 27 high school teams, finishing first in the presentation section.

Oh yeah, and because we have Jordan, we're advocating for every one of our athletes to... Run like a Girl... of course! At the Olympic Trials last summer, MCP senior Jordan Hasay ran to a tenth place finish overall, smashing the national high school record along the way. Then she won the Jesse Owens Award for being the

top female high school track athlete in the country. This fall, Jordan lead the Girls Cross Country Team to the CIF Central Section (Div V) title for the eleventh year. Jordan was the individual champion for the CIF Central Section (Div V) and State for the fourth consecutive year. Jordan and her teammate Annie Mooney (2011) came in 1st and 2nd at the Division V State CIF championship. The team came in sixth at the Division V State CIF level. Jordan then won the Foot Locker West Regionals for the fourth consecutive year. Jordan won the Foot Locker National race for the second time in four years.

When our freshman class journeys up the mountain to paint the ‘M’ every fall, or when our seniors and graduates walk on the school seal in the Mosaic Lobby, or when our student body gathers after a game to sing the *Alma Mater*, we become more pointedly aware that Mission students are the inheritors of a legacy of Catholic education that has formed leaders and people of character for 132 years in San Luis Obispo County. To be shaped in such a tradition and among such distinguished alumni is a coveted opportunity.

3) Our Compelling Academic Record

There has never been a time in our nation’s history where college admissions have been more competitive. There will be 3.2 million high school graduates in 2009 (the most ever) all competing for admissions. And yet, over the past 7 years, our students’ acceptance rate into colleges and universities is over 96%. In the past two years, 100% of MCP graduates were admitted into colleges and universities, receiving 1.3 million dollars of scholarship and grant money. The average award, among 54% of the senior class, was over \$35,000. Because this is such a critical time for our students and families, we have appointed a full-time staff person supporting our students’ college admissions process and invested in a state-of-the-art portfolio tracking system where

students prepare seamlessly for college admissions throughout their four years here at MCP.

Our AP results are the gold standard for measuring academic quality because they measure proficiency not aptitude in various subject areas. Among 180 Advanced Placement Tests taken across 8 subject areas here at MCP this past last spring, our students scored a highly impressive 88% pass rate. We saw a 5% increase over last year's results with 15% more tests being taken by our students than ever before. Because we uniquely require every student in our AP classes to take the test, our results demonstrate singular excellence throughout our curriculum and radically set us apart from other schools that do not require their students to take the test. Test results are the only uniformly consistent and valid measurement of the quality of the AP Course being taught. We're very proud of our excellent teachers and their motivated students.

The admissions department at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo informed me that we were *the most competitive high school* from Santa Barbara to the Bay Area for Cal Poly last year. Mission College Preparatory had over an 80% admission rate among 44 applicants. Cal Poly was the third most competitive public school in California last year.

For all of last school year, a staggering 105 students earned a GPA of 4.0 or higher for both semesters – that's 37% of our student body *over* a 4.0 throughout the entire year!

Six of our seniors were identified among the 50,000 highest-scoring participants of some 1.5 million entrants in the 2009 National Merit Scholarship Program. And from those students, one National Merit Semi-Finalist has been named, scoring among the highest 16,000 student scores nationally. MCP senior Kellie Fryer now awaits further results.

4) Our Catholic Faith and Leadership

In October, our senior class attends the 4-day Kairos retreat in order to promote their personal conviction. I've heard parents say that the single most compelling reason they send their child here to Mission is because of Kairos. And after attending last year and witnessing firsthand the impact of that spiritual experience among our students, I understand. Our retreat curriculum extends throughout four years, culminating with the senior experience.

We educate for faithful leadership when every class serves monthly at People's Kitchen, or when one fourth of our school travels to Mexico on our Esperanza summer trip to build houses, or when students do beach clean-up projects or provide resources to the food pantry and children's outreach center every year.

Students create and 'own' clubs and activities, supported and mentored in appropriate ways by professional educators. They are peer leaders for their classmates in spiritual activities, they design and implement community prayer services, they initiate better campus communication through daily Video-Announcements, and they clean up the Café Royale after break and lunch everyday, picking up trash, wiping down tables, and straightening up. They take ownership of their campus and demonstrate responsibility in forming campus culture. The Associated Student Body (Student Government) believes they are responsible to facilitate the creation of community and lasting memories among their classmates. For these demonstrations of the school's motto, "Becoming Women and Men for Others," as well as the countless others not listed here, we should be proud that what goes on here at Mission among our student body is culturally distinctive in our time.

Of course, our spiritual formation here at Mission is rooted in the celebration of the Eucharist together. The past several years, we have been increasingly utilizing the proximity and the beauty of the Historic Mission Church across the street for the celebration of our liturgies. Sometimes, as with our Senior Parent Mass this fall,

we worship in the gymnasium, but we believe it's important for area Catholics to see our students at 12:10 Mass and to sing and pray with them, witnessing their youth and idealism. Important, too, for our students to participate in the community faith of the parish.

Our fundamental mission is very different from other schools... *and it is quite simple: to love every student and every family in our care here at MCP....* It is not easy, but it's simple. I want families to feel that they are treated with dignity in every discipline situation, for example, and that their child is unique and personally validated in our school in every aspect of their experience. I want for everyone to feel a real partnership in this educational ministry we undertake for our students. We can do better than ever if we're willing to commit to one another and to God more richly here at Mission Prep. Thank you for all you do to help facilitate these connections!

J. D. Childs