Dear Parents and Caregivers

Last week I referred to an article, ‘Why Money Can’t Guarantee a Quality Education,’ written by David Gillespie and published in the Weekend Australian Magazine in January. I finished my piece with a quote from this article: a quote that endorses research findings on what really matters in improving educational outcomes for students. It’s an important one, so here it is again, ‘What I found during my research is that some things – teachers, principals – count a lot, while other things that most parents worry about – class size, school size, composite classes, fancy buildings – don’t matter at all.’ Basically then, it’s the people who make the greatest difference.

I hope we all can remember the experience of having an inspirational teacher; someone who made all the difference in our lives and to our learning. After over 40 years as a teacher, I still believe that most of us take up the profession with visions of being that teacher ourselves; the teacher who, through unwavering commitment, deep care and infectious enthusiasm, turns kids’ lives around by turning them on to self-belief, self-respect, communal responsibility and contribution, a love of learning and giving ones’ best effort especially when the going gets tough. In doing this, young ones become aware that they need not be at the mercy of their circumstances; that they have the wherewithal to create a successful, better or different life for themselves.

Studies continue to show that good teachers move their students’ learning forward at greater than a year’s learning for their year at school; that is, students’ achieve a greater than 0.4 effect size. At Stella Maris we aim for an effect size of, at least 0.6, which is basically one and a half years’ learning in the year. Yes, teachers do make a difference; that is our job, our responsibility and our privilege.

There are two other conclusions from the research carried out by David Gillespie to which I need to draw attention. The first is homework. Everyone has a view on homework; some parents love it and want plenty of it for their children believing that homework contributes to better learning outcomes. To other parents, it’s a nightmare and the source of constant friction at home. Well, the latter will be pleased to hear that research shows quite conclusively that there is little, if any, benefit in homework for students in primary school; ‘the latest work suggests it’s a complete waste of everybody’s time.’ Our own research, carried out last year, brought us to the same conclusion, thus prompting the change to the approach outlined at the recent Parent-Teacher Partnership session in the hall. Sometimes, there are surprising results when we hold to scrutiny, things we’ve taken for granted as being effective.

At Stella Maris we now advocate nightly reading (research strongly supports the benefit of this) and reinforcement of learning (eg spelling and number facts). Over and above this, home tasks will be built into the learning and teaching cycle which will provide immediate relevance, interest and motivation. Many of the home tasks will involve sourcing information as a flow-on from the day’s lesson or as a prelude to what is to come. Findings then provide the foundation for class discussion, sharing and focus as a lead-in to the next lesson. Project work will be undertaken at school, although the sourcing of information may be part of a home task. In this way teachers will be able to provide immediate feedback to support or redirect the students’ efforts as the task is taking shape rather than simply providing the summative assessment upon completion. This method also ensures that it is the student who achieves the assessment ratings and not Mum or Dad. If you could not make it to the parent evening and would like to learn more about our change of approach, then go to our website www.stellamaris.qld.edu.au and shortly you will find a narrated version of the presentation.

The second conclusion drawn in the Gillespie article to which I will draw attention, is the importance of stability in a child’s schooling. Research findings from 40 major studies reveal that the best results were obtained by those who hadn’t changed schools at all ‘and there was a direct relationship between (lack of) performance and the number of moves. Every time a child is moved, their education will be set back for three months, their reading and maths scores will decline, and they’ll struggle to keep pace with their peer group.’ The researchers concluded that the best thing parents can do for their children is keep them in the same school.

As someone who attended 16 primary schools across three States in the first four years of schooling, followed by a further two between Years 4 and 7, I know, firsthand, the impact that frequent moving of schools has upon learning. In fact it wasn’t until Year 5 when my family stayed in one place long enough to put down roots and settle, that I found my feet as a learner and started to close the gap.

Moving schools, of course, is not always avoidable and children mostly learn to cope (some better than others) but unnecessary movement should be considered very carefully.
Finally I will leave you with a description of what Gillespie calls ‘the perfect school’, that is, the one that delivers a high-quality education for children. ‘The perfect school will have a highly effective leader who engages the community and teachers… It will have a teaching culture of continuous learning. Teachers will approach their tasks not as under-paid, glorified child care but as an opportunity to improve their skills and their students’ outcomes. And the perfect school may do absolutely nothing else. It may accomplish these two things in a caravan on a mining site, in a sandstone building on Sydney harbour or in any possible location in between. What it looks like and what it costs are very likely to be completely irrelevant.’

He continues, ‘The truly exceptional school will provide a music program and it will teach at least one foreign language. It will teach children how to learn rather than just what to learn. It will use technology to ensure students have immediate feedback and teachers have the time to help those who need it most. Homework won’t be a priority but the school will work very hard at keeping parents in the loop. It won’t stream students academically, but it will accelerate the truly gifted. In other words, its perfection will be almost completely invisible to all but the participants. Its outcomes will in no way depend on the advantage or disadvantage the children bring through the school gate.’

So, parents, how do you think we are going against those criteria? For myself, I know we are on the right track and have our priorities in order. Are we there yet? Will we ever be? I don’t believe so and would be worried if we thought we were; we can always do better because the world is always changing and our students are worth the ongoing effort it takes to improve our practice. BUT we have a dedicated and hard-working staff committed to their professional learning and committed to bringing about individual student, class and school-wide improvement. I invite and welcome your feedback. Have a great week everyone. Glenda

DATE CLAIMER
June 25 - 27 Year 5 Camp

Prep Enrolment 2015 - Do you have a child ready for prep next year? Do you have friends who do? Well, it’s time to put in an application which can be obtained through the school office or online at www.stellamaris.qld.edu.au

We would be grateful if you could help spread the word. Applications, with supporting documentation, should be submitted by Friday 28 March with interviews taking place early in Term 2. It is especially important for existing families to get your forms in, so we know the number of places available for new families. Thanks everyone.

Dear Parents/Caregivers,

Wednesday week is Ash Wednesday, the start of our Lenten season, when the focus is on generosity of spirit in supporting those in the community who do not have the necessities of life. This feast day marks the beginning our Project Compassion Appeal for funds to support the poorest of the poor in developing counties.

This virtue is a guiding principle for many registered charities, foundations and non-profit organizations. We are called to do all we can to support the United Nations Millennium Development Goals http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals. The eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) – which range from halving extreme poverty rates to halting the spread of HIV/AIDS and providing universal primary education, all by the target date of 2015, form a blueprint agreed to by all the world’s countries and all the world’s leading development institutions to galvanize efforts to meet the needs of the world’s poorest. The UN is also working with governments, civil society and other partners to build on the momentum generated by these goals (summarized below) to carry on with an ambitious post-2015 development agenda:

1. Less poverty, less hunger, less disease;
2. More health, more education, more equality; and
3. Access to clean water, security and food for everyone.

It is no co-incidence then that the Virtue for this fortnight at the start of Lent is Generosity. Generosity is the habit of giving freely without expecting anything in return. Generosity can also mean spending time, money, or labour, for others without being rewarded in return. Often equated with Charity as a virtue, generosity is widely accepted in society as a desirable trait. Generosity is giving to others something that is of value to us. It is a quality of the spirit that calls us to share what we have. We also allow others to give to us – sometimes even more difficult for some people. Every gift is doubly blessed, bringing joy to the giver and the receiver. Generosity helps us to give time and attention to the feelings, needs and views of those around us. It springs from a sense of abundance and gratitude for the limitless richness of life. We give cheerfully without expecting anything in return. We are receptive to blessings. Generosity encourages us to share in the bounty that has been given to us.

During Lent at Stella Maris, we stand in solidarity with people living in poverty by raising money to support the Caritas Australia’s Project Compassion Appeal as well as through the school Walk-a-thon which will be held on May 9th (weather permitting) on the school oval. Caritas Project Compassion boxes as well as Sponsorship Cards will be sent home shortly with the students. Perhaps you might encourage your child/ren to contribute money by giving up some ‘treat’ during Lent. I thank you most sincerely in advance for whatever support you are able to give.

God bless, Judith.
MUSIC NOTES

QUOTE OF THE WEEK
“Music is the universal language of mankind.”
– Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, ‘Outre-Mer’ –

TIP OF THE WEEK - Keep a pencil with your music books and use it during home practice, lessons, and rehearsals to mark gentle reminders on your music, such as accidentals, dynamics or to watch the conductor. We all have good memories, but the pencil never forgets!!

MUSICAL NEWS - As an introduction and demonstration of commitment to our musical, students are reminded that all students wishing to be part of our 2014 musical are reminded to attend rehearsals as outlined below.
Year 5 – Mondays @11am in the Music Room
Year 4 – Wednesdays @11am in the Music Room
Year 6 and 7 – Thursdays @11am in the Music Room

CHOIR NEWS - Students wishing to join SM Singers, Stella Fellas, Year 2 Piccolo Choir, or Year 2 Piccolo Choir are asked to return their permission this week.
Piccolo Choir rehearsal will be for our Year 3 students, this Thursday afternoon from 1:50 – 2:20pm in the Music Room.

INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC NEWS - “Guitars to the Max” Workshop and Concert is on this Thursday at St. Josephs in Nambour. This event is for all guitar students who started tuition prior to the start of this year. Permission slips have been handed out and emailed and need to be returned by Wednesday at the latest. All students attending are to meet Mr Wynyard and Mr Clarke outside the Year 7 classrooms at 8.30am on Thursday morning in their formal uniform and with guitar, music stand and lunch. Concert will be at 4.30pm at St. Joseph’s and everyone is welcome to attend.

Thank you to all students who have joined our many school vocal and instrumental ensembles. They are all starting to sound fantastic! Remember that participation slips are to be returned to the Music Room or office ASAP and you need to attend on time every week or let your ensemble teacher know if you will be absent. ALL involved students are important members regardless of how large or small the group might be.

If you have queries regarding anything musical – please feel free to catch up with us before or after school, by contacting us in writing or via email.

Musically Yours, Inez Durrer
Classroom Music Specialist
idurrer@bne.catholic.edu.au

Todd Wynyard
Instrumental Music Coordinator
twynyard@bne.catholic.edu.au

MUSIC IN THE COMMUNITY - LEGACY & SCREAM Big Band will perform at Maroochydore High School on Saturday 29th March at 2 pm. Tickets are $20 pp, $40 for a family (2 + 2) and $10 for students 16 and under. Afternoon tea included. Tickets can be purchased from Legacy Laurel Clubs, Maroochydore High School on 5409 7333 or by visiting www.scrambigband.net. Enquiries, please phone 5443 2779.

Siena Catholic College

Year 7/8 Enrolments for 2015
Families considering enrolling their child in Year 7 and/or Year 8 at Siena Catholic College in 2015 are invited to attend an Information Session at the College on either Sunday 9 March or Monday 10 March. From 3:00pm on the Sunday, families will have the opportunity to view the College facilities followed by an Information Session at 4.00pm. On the Monday evening, the Information Session will begin at 7:00pm however there will not be the opportunity for a tour. If you intend to attend one of these sessions, please contact the College Office by either email ssippydowns@bne.catholic.edu.au or phone 5476 6100 to register - this is for catering purposes. This week College Principal, Mr Graeme Hight, and the College Captains spoke to Stella Maris Year 6 classes and distributed enrolment packages. Packs were left for students who were absent. Parents may wish to view the Siena website www.siena.qld.edu.au. Enrolment applications are requested to be submitted by Friday 4 April. Enrolment interviews will commence at the end of Term 1, and hopefully be completed by mid-Term 2.

LENTEN PROGRAM
PARENT REFLECTION GROUP

I would like to join the Lenten Reflection Group for parents in 2014 on Friday mornings at 8.30am. Please order me a booklet – price $8.00. (If you have already purchased a booklet please cross out the above)

______________________________________________________________ Signature

Please tear off the slip below and return it to the office by Friday 28th February
Teaching children about conflict resolution

It is possible for a child to learn how to sort out problems in a way that makes everybody happy. Often though, people deal with conflict aggressively, and try to convince other people that their way is the best by force or argument. Good conflict resolution skills do not seem to be used in most of the conflicts we see or hear about, (such as in the family home, in films and on television, in the school yard, on the news); however there are excellent ways of dealing with conflict that lead to a peaceful solution.

The following steps are useful in helping children find peaceful ways of solving problems with other people. You can change the way you ask the questions depending on the age of the child, but the general steps are the same for all ages.

Begin by letting children know that it is possible to find a good solution. Parents could say something like: “I’m sure if we all think about this we might find a way for everyone getting what they want”.

Help children identify how they are feeling, and help them to label and express their emotions. (eg ‘You’re looking cross – I’m wondering if you’re feeling cross, but also a bit sad and hurt, that you can’t join in their game’).

Help children to work out what they really want by asking them what they would like to have happen. Help them to work out what the underlying need is, (eg ‘You say you wish your friend would go away. I’m wondering if you are also wishing that you could help the group build the cubby’).

Help your child to understand the other person’s point of view and to learn how to take their perspective. Ask them what they think the other person might be feeling, or how they might feel if they were in the same situation. You could get them to ask the other person to say how they are feeling and what they would like to have happen.

Together, you could encourage the children to brainstorm different ways that they could solve the problem. Encourage them to come up with several different and interesting ways that they could go about it.

Help the children to choose the options that they think work best for everyone, and get them to have a go at putting them into practice. Stay around to see how they get on, and help them fine-tune the solution if needed.

Reading children books that teach conflict resolution skills through stories can also be helpful.

Christine Craig
Guidance Counsellor/ Psychologist
email: c craig@bne.catholic.edu.au