

JSS State of the School Talk, May 10, 2017

It is with great enthusiasm and appreciation that I welcome everyone. I must thank all the parents, the volunteers, teachers, the parish staff, the Parents Association, the School Advisory Committee, Father Paul, Mr. Justin Burke, everyone, because it is through your dedication and hard work that the 2016-17 school year has been a remarkable success! Your children, our JSS students, are outstanding, as you would expect, and their politeness, the respect they always demonstrate, and their love of learning, is a reflection of the love they receive at home.

I must share with you that I am honored to have one of the best jobs in the world. One of the best things about being an educator is that I have the responsibility of catching students doing the right thing. And when I do, I share words of affirmation, such as “Thank you for being so kind and generous to your classmate.” Or, “I can see that you are a really good friend because you are so considerate.” And it is so nice when the students reciprocate. Last week I received several notes from students saying “Mr. Stewart, you are the very best principal.” Or, earlier in the school year, during recess, a kindergarten student came running up to me with a big smile and said, “Mr. Stewart, Mr. Stewart, guess what?” I hear this question often, and it usually means they have something very important to tell me. “What?” I replied. “Mr. Stewart,” she said, “You look just like my grandpa.” “Well, thank you. That was very nice of you to tell me that,” I replied. I thought about her comparison and my immediate thoughts were she must be looking at my gray hair, and relieved she didn’t compare me to her great grandpa. But the more I thought about her comment I realized she had just shared with me the greatest compliment. You see, grandpas and grandmas are super heroes to kindergarten students. And it is a privilege to be a respected grandpa, a super hero. It will always be a privilege to serve you and your children.

I have a question for everyone: “What is your most important contribution to humanity?” Or, stated another way, “What is your most significant achievement in life?” I know that the JSS community is blessed with many hard working parents whose professional responsibilities include saving lives as doctors, or emergency medical responders, or protecting the lives of all citizens as members of our armed forces, or as teachers inspiring our children. In fact, everyone here contributes in a positive way to humanity by being a JSS parent, and perhaps right now, right this moment, you are in the process of creating the most significant achievement of your life.

You are all here tonight, not because it is a requirement, not because your children will receive free dress this Friday, rather, you are here tonight because everyone shares a common goal. The goal is to ensure that your children have an outstanding education. Your decision to choose JSS affirms your commitment to the importance of education, and in particular, a faith-based education. As parents, you have many decisions to make, and sometimes, the most important decisions in our lives require us to make sacrifices. The decision you have made to send your children to Junipero Serra School does indeed require sacrifice. Much is asked of you to send your child to JSS.

The sacrifices you make to ensure a Catholic education for your children are a passionate affirmation of the importance of faith and educational excellence in the development of your children. Today, there is an urgency for Catholic Education to be a leader, for us to be leaders. As we live our faith through our examples of love and service to our school community, we are teaching our children to be responsible, to be respectful, to become future leaders, whose positive actions will be a direct result of today's educational experience. So I believe, that your greatest achievement is and will always be the spiritual and educational formation of your children. Through Catholic education, we create a partnership to make manifest the glory of God in your children, our students.

The traditions established and celebrated by the Junipero Serra School Community during the past seventy-one years, define the legacy of JSS, and will continue to inspire and confer upon our students the importance of a faith-centered life. Catholic Education demands that we study Catholic Theology and apply it to our lives and it is defined on a daily basis at Junipero Serra School. For example:

Catholic Education is the joy and challenge of learning, and the privilege of praying together every morning.

Catholic Education is celebrating the Eucharist by giving thanks to God at our school Mass.

Catholic Education is being a 6th grade student and taking the hand of a kindergarten student and walking with them to Mass.

Catholic Education demands that we teach our students that a fund raiser here at JSS does feed hungry children.

Catholic Education demands our participation in providing tents for the homeless.

Catholic Education is performing with your classmates in a Christmas Program.

Catholic Education is praying during the Stations of the Cross to understand the Passion of Christ.

Catholic Education demands that our students learn that the greatest gift we can give our children is an education, an education that inspires students to live in faith.

Quoting from the Reverend John Jenkins, President of Notre Dame University, he states *the challenge of wrapping together our faith-based heritage while further strengthening our academic excellence is a rare opportunity and for me a special dream*. I offer to everyone here tonight that Father Jenkins' words define the essence of Catholic Education here at JSS, for both our children and for us as adults. As a school community, we share in the educational experience and we co-create the teaching and learning for our children that instills the power of prayer, our belief in God and the Holy Spirit, and that the Gospel of Jesus Christ, of love and forgiveness is at the heart of everything we do at school, at home, and at work.

My message tonight is three-fold:

1. First, to thank you for your commitment to Junipero Serra School by sharing with you evidence of God's love through the spiritual and academic growth of your children.
2. Second, to share with you important progress on the school's commitment to academic excellence.
3. Third, to share with you a vision for JSS.

It is my goal to nurture, to extend, and to revitalize, Junipero Serra School's tradition of academic excellence. We live in an era of accountability in which student learning and student improvement must be identifiable and measured through academic standards and student learning expectations. As a school, we are committed to establishing high standards for our students, and for our faculty and staff. Junipero Serra School is blessed by a team of educators, who have always embraced teaching as a vocation, truly as a calling. I am inspired by the passion and enthusiasm for teaching as demonstrated by the faculty and staff each and every day.

Our academic goals include the continued fulfillment of the JSS School Improvement Action

Plan. At the beginning of the school year, the faculty came together as a team of educators to renew our commitment to achieving academic excellence. Through an emphasis on surpassing academic standards with a greater depth of understanding, Junipero Serra School students will continue to demonstrate excellence and teachers will continue to seek professional development, specifically related to the school improvement plan, to improve student learning. Continual improvement is the hallmark of a highly effective school.

The School Improvement Action Plan includes the following goals:

1. To strengthen the JSS curriculum through improved curriculum continuity in all the grade levels
2. To create a professional development plan for staff in Catechetical training, CCSS (Common Core State Standards) implementation, and new technology.
3. To Improve the JSS course of study for high achievers through development of advanced curriculum and electives program.

Our teaching and learning goals will include a rich integration of technology into the curriculum as a means to learning, for the acquisition of important skills, and to learn the skills of problem solving. To achieve these important objectives, I will empower teachers to seek innovative methods of using technology as a learning tool. I will empower teachers to provide even greater access for students to learn and use technology in a responsible, ethical, and intentional manner. We will always seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit to use technology to further the beauty of the human spirit.

By supplementing classroom instruction with specific tools designed to address student improvement, or to promote a greater understanding of the current curriculum, JSS students will learn a greater sense of autonomy and responsibility for their academic success. For example, earlier this year, through a recommendation by one of our parents, Mrs. Cordoba studied and then implemented a software coding program call Scratch. Scratch, developed by MIT students, is an introductory programming language and is most popular with young students between the ages of 9 and 16. However, you will be interested to know that Scratch is used at Harvard as the introductory programming language for some of the science classes.

Our vision for JSS must include at least the following:

- To establish Junipero Serra School as the premier leader in delivering educational services to all learners, including diverse learners
- To maintain and expand the role of the great work that Michele Handel has done for many years
- To maintain and expand the role of our Reading Specialist teacher
- As the School Improvement Action Plan compels us, to create an advanced curriculum, including an electives program that is challenging, relevant, and engaging
- To continue moving forward on the Action Plan, and to map the entire curriculum. We have defined science as the first subject in this process
- To create enrichment classes that become a component of the JSS Extended Care Program
- These enrichment programs will include a Science Club, a Homework Club for older students, and the Homework Club that was started for the younger grades during the current school year
- I also envision a Scratch Club forming at the beginning of the 2017-18 school year.
- We will move forward with technology but always knowing that the most important mandate is love and compassion.

Junipero Serra School has developed and maintained an excellent extracurricular athletic program for students in grades 6, 7, and 8. These athletic programs are an important opportunity to nurture the physical development of our students and to create opportunities for friendship and teamwork. The after school enrichment programs, along with the athletic programs are not meant to compete with each other for students, but rather, to complement each other and to provide opportunities for all students throughout the school year.

Junipero Serra School has always emphasized teaching to the whole child, recognizing the importance of nurturing an appreciation of the beauty of the fine and performing arts. Indeed, through the vision of a very dedicated parent, this parent community, through the participation and hard work of many art docents, implemented the Art in Action program. Let's give a big round of applause to all of the art docents whose tremendous work has inspired all JSS students.

For the 2017-18 school year, JSS will hire a part time art teacher. However, we ask the parent

volunteers to return to the art classroom as volunteers to enjoy the program they have started, without the headaches associated with this year's responsibilities.

For the 2017-18 school year, I seek your support to expand and create the beginnings of a robust and meaningful music program. Mr. Michael Blackburn will initiate the following programs:

- 1st and 2nd grade students will learn to play the pentatonic flute
- 3rd grade students will learn to play the recorder
- 4th grade students will learn to play the violin
- 5th and 6th grade students will form a strings orchestra
- 7th and 8th grade students will form a choir.

Accessibility to the arts will differentiate JSS as an educational leader, and will truly benefit the academic growth of all students. We must foster and expand the learning of the fine arts, performing arts, and facilitate an appreciation of art as a vital element to create friendships, to honor cultural values, and as a unique expression of the beauty of our lives. How do we measure student growth in the arts – with our hearts. Art touches our soul.

I appreciate the faculty's desire to seek continuous improvement through professional development seminars. The entire faculty and staff benefit through collegial exchange and educational dialogue. Most importantly, the students benefit through the implementation of new ideas, methods, and our teachers' awareness of a greater understanding of the needs of all students. During this school year, our teachers participated in seminars and webinars which included the following:

- To implement teaching strategies to enhance math instruction through a greater understanding of the common core standards
- To understand and to implement positive discipline methods
- To learn the methods and best practices for teaching science and technology
- To learn strategies for working with our diverse learners
- To implement and facilitate independent math instruction through the Mathletics online

learning software

As we look to our future success, we will also seek help from our past. By reconnecting with all Junipero Serra Alumni to seek their support, we can expect our past educational successes to generate additional academic opportunities, encouragement, and support.

Through visionary leadership within the school community, and a renewed commitment to our core values, Junipero Serra School will continue to provide academic excellence in a Christ-centered environment for another 70 years. We are called by God to embrace hope. We are called by God to celebrate the unlimited potential in ourselves, and most importantly to inspire hope, and to rejoice in the unlimited potential within each and every child. We are called to join you in a partnership and play an important role to help you educate your children so that your greatest achievement will one day be a JSS student whose leadership in the world is defined by simply stating, I went to JSS.

Thank you for being here tonight and for sharing this important message. And, please do not forget free dress on Friday.