

Family Matters 26, 2007-08
The Priorities of God, Family and Work

The success of our graduates is due in no small measure to the fact that they are raised in community of shared values. A shared mission allows us the blessing of being able to approach our work and our interactions with the relative assurance that we are agreed in fundamentals. It's this synchrony of purpose between home and school – the proverbial “village” model – that serves to enhance results for our students.

Our lifestyle priorities are such a defining element of our community identity that they tend to go largely unexpressed. But perhaps it's time to talk. I have recently observed us becoming a bit fractured by some of the disparate messages we are sending to each other and, ultimately, to our children, about the place of school in the hierarchy of life's priorities. It seems to be time to step back and reevaluate the way we message and model the priorities of God, family, and work.

Excusing children from their “job” of school is not something to be undertaken lightly. Understandably, there are special occasions and emergencies that come up once in awhile for any family. I once pulled my own children out of school for a special trip that could not be scheduled around the school calendar. We all savored it deeply, knowing that it would never happen again.

I have been disheartened of late not only at the volume of unexcused absences, but at the frivolity. It doesn't appear to be just special circumstances or those “once-in-a-lifetime” occasions that are pulling students away from their jobs, but rather, a shifting of priorities. School seems to be increasingly, often unabashedly, pushed to the back of a seductive line of competing options. More and more, we are witnessing parents support and even facilitate their children's abrogation of school responsibilities.

And frankly, planned absences during such critical times as standardized testing week or eighth grade retreat are pulling the whole community down. Can we agree that an absence from school is high-stakes? That it's unreasonable to ask the school to incur expense and inconvenience to administer make-up testing to a child absent without cause? And, most critically, that indulgence and convenience shouldn't “take skips” in the God-Family-Work line of priorities?

The things we value are invested with effort and sacrifice. And what we invest in is what defines us. Please reflect on your priorities and recognize that an education interrupted by many competing lures cannot possibly be as rich or as deep as one that is attended to fully. As a strong community working in concert with each other, we have the capacity to assure our children the very richest kind of education. Let's take full advantage of our blessing. Let's ground ourselves in priorities as we plan for the year ahead.