

FACULTY CULTURE AND THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

by John Heaton, Headmaster

Every week I offer “walk-about” for prospective parents who are searching for the right school for their children. As we tour I talk about classical education and our curriculum, and make comments about the things we happen to see from class to class. Perhaps you remember your own tour! As we move about the building, we rub shoulders with students in transition, or happen upon seniors in the lounge, busy with whatever they have before them. Inevitably one of the guests will comment about the students decorum, the order of the classrooms, and the sense that New Covenant maintains a culture of learning. Many visitors perceive an intangible quality in the student experience, and they want to know how that has been achieved.

We have long understood that the student experience is a participation in the faculty culture. A healthy faculty is at the core of the school, carrying out our mission every hour, every day. The way that we promote a culture of learning is to promote a growth-focused faculty, meaning that faculty professional growth and development is not merely a goal of our leadership team, but a cultural norm within the school. We know that faculty members who are growing and who are pursuing their own learning, will lead to a positive classroom experience. Life-long learning is a very real value that we seek to demonstrate to students. The outcome

is student achievement, satisfaction, and enthusiasm for their school.

There are several ways I and my colleagues pursue this. First, we budget significant resources to fund faculty learning initiatives, and we make use of other grants as well. Together this adds up to thousands of dollars each year. Continuing education takes many forms. For example, all of our teachers are members of the Society for Classical Learning, a professional organization that provides on-going education through conferences and online workshops. Many of our faculty members are enrolled in Classical U, where they take classes at their own pace. Four of our teachers are actively pursuing higher degrees in their fields, and one is a PhD candidate.

Second, we require that our teachers be engaged in on-going development. Not every teacher needs to go back to school for more education, but all must pursue a self-directed course of development in areas of interest that keep their skills sharp and their minds challenged.

Finally, we measure our efforts two times each year with a survey that takes a snapshot of the faculty culture. It's a profile instrument that allows us to reflect on how we believe our efforts provide predictability and support to our students. The results of the survey, proctored each fall and spring, are tabulated and the results are shared and discussed in a faculty meeting. Through these efforts, we elevate the importance of growth and development in our own lives, knowing that our own enthusiasm for learning will overflow into our classrooms.