

Alan Seibert (*Salem Magazine*, Summer 2007)

Cultivating Thinkers and Doers – Not Just Test Takers

As a child, my grades were important to my parents, but the first thing my father looked at on my report card was teachers' comments. My parents had complete faith and confidence in my school teachers just as they did my coaches, Sunday school teachers, and scoutmasters to provide me with instruction. Their primary concern was that I worked hard and used my manners in all things so that I would experience success in some.

We all have different gifts and aptitudes. Even with hard work, success often comes in varying degrees. My wife and I strive to teach our children that the best measure of success is the internal sense of accomplishment that you did something well. We want our children to work hard, use their manners, and make good decisions not because we will always be there to tell them "Good Job," but because they have learned to experience and cherish the feeling of self-satisfaction that accompanies a job well done.

For young people to appreciate these feelings, they must first experience success. This is one of the reasons a wide range of extra-curricular programs at schools (and still more community-based activities) are profoundly important. Students learn at different rates, excel at different things, and possess a wide-range of aptitudes, interests, and abilities. The more opportunities students have to discover success after hard work in one setting, the more likely they are to be able to transfer that experience and those feelings and resolve to work hard in another.

SOL tests measure student achievement in four "core" areas (English, math, science and social studies). Attaining a high level of competency in the core subjects is extremely important, but we must not forget that these are only four subject areas in a world where information is being created at an ever-increasing rate. The exceptional teachers who serve in Salem City Schools work to cultivate success in *every* classroom. Whether in a traditional classroom, an online (virtual) environment, a lab, a shop, a stage, a library, or on a playing field, Salem provides the resources necessary for committed and caring professionals to make meaningful contributions to the lives of our children.

Salem's commitment is evident in sports, clubs, the fine and performing arts, and in the provision of extensive career and technical education opportunities. A proven Character Counts program, outstanding collaborations with the Parks and Recreation, the Salem Police, and other city departments provide athletic opportunities, art camps and D.A.R.E. instruction. Every 6th grade student is sent to D.A.R.E. camp at no cost to the student!

Course offerings and extracurricular activities at Salem High School are so diverse that every 9th grade student receives a 30-minute, individualized Program Planning Conference that includes the parents and up to three professionals (one of the student's teachers, a school counselor, and a career and technical teacher). The Program Planning Conference seeks to both match a student's interests and aptitudes with many courses available at Salem High School and to help all students identify electives, sports, extracurricular opportunities, and clubs that they can participate in to enrich their high school experience and acquire additional skills.

As a parent, I am thankful for the many diverse opportunities for children to experience success because experience reveals that a student who is involved in something productive has less time to be involved in something that is not productive, or at worse, harmful.

As a citizen and as an educator, I am also thankful because I know that learning to win with grace, lose with dignity, perform with enthusiasm, create with passion, overcome adversity with hard work, master a difficult skill with practice, and accomplish each of these while building healthy and meaningful relationships with others will ensure that our students can do more than pass standardized tests . . . they will have experienced success and will endeavor to create more of the same for future generations.