

Principal's Bulletin
2008-2009 Series #11
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Dear Students, Parents, Alumni, and Friends:

A LOOK AT EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS

Having watched many British and European films about students and school life, I have always been fascinated by subtle and sometimes major differences in approaches by educational institutions towards attaining the same objective—giving the best possible preparation for our children with careers and adulthood. The early Greek students from the aristocracy had mentors—students are sent to a “wise man” who teaches them how to think (philosophy), how to speak, listen, read, and write (rhetoric and communication), and some specialized skills like numeracy (math), geography, and history. During the medieval and renaissance periods, the common masses learned their craft from masters within specialized guilds during the medieval and renaissance periods, while the affluent sent their children to “schools” which specialized in purely scholastic training.

We inherited our educational system from the Americans who adapted the British module and gave it a more equitable character—general studies (languages, math and science, and humanities, plus physical education, technical education, and aesthetics), as opposed to specialized studies. As early as 16, British students have to choose three major areas (like math, science, history). In America, the choice comes later in college, and we all know that the first year in college is but a review of high school. The Philippines is one of the few countries that have only a 10-year preparation period (6 years in elementary, and 4 years in high school) to get our children ready for university life. The USA and other Western countries require 12 years which include Grade 7 and 8 before students proceed to high school. How did we wind up with 10? The effect of reducing the number of preparatory years can be disastrous, as students, being 15, 16 or even 17, are not mature enough to deal with college life and the independent adult lifestyle that goes with it.. Yet many of us do well and did well “id kassin”, even with a short preparation time; some even take pride in being “accelerated” if we were academically superior and more intellectually ready than others. Why then did the framers of our Philippine education system cut short the preparation time? Most probably, it was a question of money, or economics. But we can have the discussion about this topic at a later time.

One of the new things we launched this week in school is the “house” system, taken from the British educational system. A school is divided into “houses” vertically (a combination of 4th, 3rd, 2nd, and 1st year students), as opposed to horizontal division by grade levels (e.g. all freshmen belong to one division). The primary aim of this system is to allow free interaction among age groups, whereby traditions, ideas, advice about discipline, school spirit, and social integration are exchanged, taught, and inculcated among and within its membership. The benefits are tremendous—seniors teaching their younger brothers and sisters in academics, organization, and leadership. Sports teams and academic competitions are made more equitable (how can 1st year students ever compete with 4th year boys in basketball?). The “houses” also provide a “second home” within the school, resulting in closer bonding and identity. The “house” system is currently being utilized by many international schools like International School and Brent, to various degrees of success and effectiveness.

What sold me the idea to try it here at SMS, is to give our children an identity to which they can carry beyond their high school years. Listening to conversations during the alumni reunion, it is clear that being an SMS student is a major factor and a source of pride for the alumni. However, it is also true that as the school grew in size, students did not get to really “know” other students in other grade levels. By combining a vertical division (house system) of the school and retaining the natural horizontal division (year levels), students will have more opportunities to “know” and interact with another. The second motivation for me to initiate the houses system comes from my concern for the fast-disappearing dap-ay system in our community. Respect for cultural traditions and belonging to a dap-ay have been denigrated to ceremonial occasions and cultural gatherings. The “wisdom of the ages” which is transmitted from elders is no longer being heard by our children, and thus children are gradually losing their identity as Igorots. As schools have taken over the educational responsibilities of training our children, the dap-ay discipline now becomes a mere fond memory of our elders and our community.

For this reason, we at SMS aim to revitalize and continue the legacy of our ancestors. Last Monday, we divided the school into four “dap-ays”—Malingeb, Bilig, Matoba, and Losbon—to pay honor to the four major dap-ays in Sagada. In launching this new “institution”, 9 elders (men and women) from Sagada were invited to address the entire student body, and later on to each dap-ay, to explain the dap-ay system and answer questions about life in the dap-ay. Please note that we are using the names of the dap-ays and we have no

intention of supplanting the traditional ways of acquiring memberships in a real dap-ay. The dap-ay led by self-appointed student leaders have been conducting meetings to discuss the dap-ay motto and symbol, while others have initiated peer tutorials for their members. Our forthcoming intramurals this September is organized along the dap-ay system, and so will the Cordillera Day cultural presentations and competitions in December. Plans are on the way for “our dap-ay” members to render community service to the “real dap-ays.” Finally, the inculcation of traditional values will be continued by participating elders from the community in homerooms and special sessions. The faculty and I are extremely enthusiastic about the project which hopefully will be institutionalized as a landmark tradition at SMS.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

PISTA SA SANTA MARYA: In preparation for the “Pista Sa Santa Marya,” slated for August 25, a PTA meeting will be held in the school theater on Saturday, August 23 at 10:00 p.m. The sole agenda for the meeting is the organization of the workforce for the Pista. The tentative schedule is as follows:

7:45 a.m.	Assembly in Daongan; Kinder kids will assembly by George’s Inn
8:00	Santa Cruzan (parade to the Church)
8:30 – 10:00	School Mass
10 – 11:30	Cultural Presentations in the Quadrangle
11:30 – 1:00	Lechon Lunch
1:00 – 3:00	Lowland games for all.

The occasion is open to the general public.

Seven lechons have been solicited from the alumni and Board of Trustees for the occasion. The High School PTA members will sell the lechons by the kilo or smaller portions at a price to be determined during the PTA meeting. The Kinder PTA is cooking dinuguan and will also be selling other “kakanin” and drinks for the occasion. These will be the main sources of fund-raising for this year for both PTAs. All proceeds are earmarked for the PTA project which is the excavation and construction of the water cistern for the gymnasium.

Everyone is requested to bring their own cooked rice and cooked vegetables. However, for contingency purposes, the school kitchen will cook rice and sell portions to those who do not bring their own rice. The Kinder PTA is organizing their own “pot luck lunch” for the kindergarten kids.

Please note that Monday, August 25 has been declared a national holiday (All Heroes Day) which is normally celebrated on August 31. With the HS PTA meeting on Saturday, we will need parental assistance in the preparations during this weekend. This weekend is a three-day break (Monday, August 18 is Ninoy Aquino Day). This will be the time for out-of-towners to go home. During the following weekend, students and faculty are expected to help in the preparations.

REPORT CARDS are now available for pick up by parents and guardians. For students who are from out of town, report cards will be issued and the accompanying receipt must be signed by parents and returned to the school. I will share the results of the 1st Quarter grades analysis in next week’s bulletin.

Friday Night at the Movies continues tonight at 6:30 with the final episode of Star Wars.

Due to the three-day weekend, there will be no tutorials or sports practices this weekend. Members of the **Garden Club**, however, will continue their school beautification tasks at 8:00 a.m.

Next week, I will be calling for individual principal-parent meetings for students **who received failing grades in the first quarter**, particularly 4th Year students. Kym Ledesma will set up the appointments. Please be there if you are called.

Enjoy the three-day weekend, and students—**STAY OUT OF TROUBLE!** Congratulations to all who have received honors. Special mention to the Section 2-B, all of whose members made Honors or higher. Mr. Villegas is preparing a big “blow-out” to celebrate a job well done!

Dennis Gomowad Faustino
Principal