

Catholic Education Draws Parent Educators

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When her daughter was in second grade, Sharon Webster made the switch from public to Catholic school. She was a public school teacher and valued public education for its diversity and strong academics. Webster was willing to sacrifice that for an integration of faith in her daughter's education and school community.

She found superior academics and more at St. Eugene School in Fox Point. That was 1982. "I quickly began to see St. Eugene as a hidden gem," she said.

More than 30 years later, Webster is still an active part of the school community as the STEAM director and algebra teacher and notes that now, in the 21st century learning environment, "We still have this awesome sense of faith and family. We just keep getting better and better."

Today at St. Eugene School in Fox Point, more than 13 percent of the school parents are teachers at either grade school, high school or college levels— including two that teach at St. Eugene.

"Educators can sometimes be a hard sell," said Principal Rebecca Jones. "They know what makes a good school. It tells me that we are doing something right."

Noticing the unique perspective educators have on the classroom experience of students, Recruitment and Marketing Director Emily Fleisch asked those parent educators why they chose to send their own children to St. Eugene, and discovered that the academic rigor, "front and center" Catholic identity, and unity with the parish were key to cultivating a strong school atmosphere.

Eric Blaufuss, the fifth-grade teacher and fourth-grade math and science teacher, was impressed by the student-to-teacher ratio at St. Eugene — 9:1, making it "much easier for a teacher to build those really strong and supportive relationships in that sort of setting," he said.

After exploring three other schools, Blaufuss found the "staff, faculty, and especially students were exceptionally warm and welcoming at St. Eugene. It was amazing to see how comfortable and confident the students are. The student-led tours thoroughly impressed us." The school atmosphere was "infectious" and the community "very warm."

"Students as young as second grade have introduced themselves to me and tried to make me feel welcome at the school." Blaufuss said, "It just feels like a great place to send your kids to school. It looks holy, safe and fun."

After enrolling his daughter, Blaufuss was thrilled to discover a rare job opening at the school, he said. "It was definitely somewhere that I dreamed of teaching. It was an obvious choice."

Paul Fleisch also noted the connection between teachers and students. "I know how important that is to the learning process. They [St. Eugene teachers] are invested in the students and so the students invest themselves in their own education." The teachers, he said, are "very engaged in professional development in an authentic way." The strong community feel of the school, he said, "props students up for success."

Megan Renner, a teacher at Dominican High School, chose St. Eugene because of the St. Eugene graduates' preparedness for high school. "Specifically in math, since I teach math, many students from St. Eugene's are placed in an honors level math their freshman year. They are very well rounded both academically as well as outside of class. Most importantly, they are overall just good, caring people."

Principal Jones' daughter graduated from St. Eugene and notices she is more prepared to be successful academically and in extracurriculars than her peers who attended other grade schools, she said. "All of those seeds were planted at St. Eugene."

For former high school math teacher Kate Junk, choosing a school for her children meant asking colleagues, comparing ratings, and touring the school before her family put an offer on their house. "What we really wanted for our children was a strong, vibrant faith community that encouraged our children to be their best selves."



▲ Sharon Webster. (Submitted photo)

"Living in Fox Point, we have high quality academic public schools, but the character development and strong Catholic identity at St. Eugene cannot be matched," said Junk. The Archdiocese of Milwaukee recognized St. Eugene School with the Exemplary Recognition Award for mission and Catholic identity, academic excellence, innovative programs and educating the whole student.

Webster, who has taught at St. Eugene for 33 years now, said, "As a Catholic, I wanted our faith to be infused in my children's daily lives. As an educator, I knew the importance of a caring and nurturing environment as an ingredient to maximize growth. I feel so blessed to have found an environment that offered all of this and more."

"All four of my children received a top-notch education, experienced diversity, embraced our faith, and forged lasting friendships. I fell so in love with the school that I began teaching there when my youngest started kindergarten; 30 years later, I am still in love with going to work every day. I continue to hope that I am helping other parents to realize their dreams for their children," Webster said.

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explicitly taught and integrated into every content area, discipline and program in our schools.

Sustained by Gospel Witness

We will "sustain our mission" by daily personal prayer and reflection, remembering that we can only give to others what we possess and value ourselves.

Shaped by Communion and Community

"See how they love one another" will be the first observation by every visitor to our schools.

Thus, the mission of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, to "Proclaim Christ and Make Disciples through the Sacramental life of the Church," is at the heart of our ministry in the Office for Schools. Everything we do is aimed toward "making disciples of all."

St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, patroness of Catholic schools, pray for us!