

A Quality School

by Kathi Sittner

By definition, all schools aim to provide a good education to their students. This goal has even been mandated by the U.S. government through their “No Child Left Behind” laws. But some schools clearly stand out above the others. They simply have a better end result: students who test better, stay in school longer, earn more awards and recognitions, and who are more knowledgeable, engaged, and confident. What does it take to be one of these quality schools?

Without doubt, there must be a solid, sequenced, and relevant curriculum which is delivered cohesively from grade to grade. It must include both breadth and depth with a goal of competency and understanding. This necessitates an overall plan and adequate teaching tools (textbooks, workbooks, computer hardware and software, films, books, manipulatives, etc.). It also requires a common mission and understanding of the curriculum.

Certainly, a quality school must have effective, hard-working teachers who are committed to delivering the curriculum in an engaging manner. They are the front line in making sure that every child succeeds. They use a variety of teaching methods to reach all learning styles. They work hard to differentiate the curriculum for those who learn faster or slower than the rest of the class. They strive to make the curriculum relevant and fun.

Equally important is a committed and caring community of students, parents, teachers, and administrators who have common goals, consistent policies and procedures, and a cooperative spirit. When rules are known, accepted, and followed, time and efforts are not wasted, and things run more smoothly. When students know that their parents place great importance on education, support the teachers and the school administration, and expect that their children will do what it takes to get a good education, they will consistently work harder and accomplish more. A positive attitude can make all the difference! Finding enjoyment in the thrill of learning helps to motivate students to do more and try harder. After all, as long as we must work to learn, why not have some fun along the way?! Socialization and cooperation help to get students through the frustrations and challenges they will inevitably face.

Testing is important in a quality school. It is a tool which provides information about possible gaps and helps teachers, administrators, and parents focus on where a student needs help to improve or encouragement to excel. If accepted with a problem-solving attitude, testing can lead to positive strides in a student’s education.

According to William Glasser, M.D., as stated in his book, “The Quality School,” perhaps most important to a quality school is having an ethos of “quality” and “challenge.” Every student must be encouraged to focus on quality in everything he does. He must be taught to continually evaluate his work, to check and recheck, and to think about how things could be improved. He must learn to think about how information can be used, why it is important, and what its significance may be. He must be encouraged to “go beyond,” rather than to just accept the status quo. He must truly understand what quality is and must feel that it is important enough to put out great effort to achieve it. William Glasser states that “Quality can always be improved upon.” A quality school’s goals are set high and are continually revised to aim for the best as old goals are met and new ones are defined.

This is exactly what Hilldale School is all about: “Rising to the Challenge” is our mantra, and it means that we are continually working to be the best we can be. We are aiming to provide our students with the best overall education in the entire San Francisco area. Admittedly, this is a lofty goal, especially considering that we do not have the resources that most other public and private schools have. We have made tremendous progress, and we will continue to aim for the stars! We want our students to become confident and productive contributors to society, to be enthusiastic about learning, and to always aim to produce a quality product.