

Headmaster's Report
For the Month Ending December 31, 2004

I. Overview: Bringing Out the Best in the Boys of SAA

Toys on the shelves. Manipulatives spread out on the tables. Phonograms on the wall. Name cards on the chalkboard. Cubbies with nametags. Baskets filled with crayons and markers. A brown grizzly bear and a white polar bear sitting on the shelf anxious to go home with a different boy each weekend. Boys in white shirts and little blue shorts playing and working at activity centers. Welcome to the Pre-K cottage!!

The Pre-K classroom is a place where there is much activity, because each day is a day filled with new adventures. As with all Academy boys, we begin our day with the big boys in chapel...what a great way to start the day as an important part of the Academy's family! Then it's off to the classroom. It's not unusual to find the boys sorting M&M's, writing numbers and letters in shaving cream on the tables, and dancing to "The Freeze." The Pre-K cottage is always active with movement and laughter, as four and five year-olds learn best this way.

Orton-based phonics, number recognition, and counting come alive as we learn about themes such as nursery rhymes, farm apples and pumpkins, holiday traditions, seasons, bears, and stories from books. As we journey through the year, the boys love to show us all that they have learned. Parents are often amazed at how much our boys are learning. For example, the boys can explain how food moves through the digestive system and can tell you what the smallest bone in the body is and where it is located. When your Pre-K boy asks you that question, are you ready with the answer? Do you know?

Kindness, helpfulness, and honesty are also time-honored traditions in the Pre-K cottage. The boys are always willing to lend a hand to a friend, run a special errand for a teacher, or hold the door open for others. We truly are a family. The younger boys also benefit greatly from interaction with the older boys. We have 5th grade lunch buddies, 6th grade reading buddies, 7th grade peer tutors, and 8th grade writing buddies. There is nothing more heartwarming than watching the big guys connect with the little guys. The Pre-K boys really admire and look up to the "Big Boys."

The world of Pre-K is an exciting, active and wonderful place to be. Please come and visit us!¹

Pre-K teachers Connie Haiduk and Tanya Weis create an environment that is perfectly designed to meet the needs of little boys. As Connie and Tanya know, little boys learn in very special, gender-specific ways.

For years teachers have understood that girls and boys learn in gender-specific ways, but no one could explain why this was the case. Now we have PET scans of boys' and girls' brains and teachers can see how differently those brains are set up to learn. Positron emission tomography (PET) and MRI technologies provide an inside view of children's brains, revealing structural and functional differences that profoundly affect the ways boys and girls learn.²

"New brain imaging technologies confirm that genetically templated brain patterning by gender plays a far larger role than we realized. Research into gender and education reveals a mismatch

¹ Connie Haiduk and Tanya Weis, SAA's Pre-K teachers, describe their program and their classroom.

² Educational Leadership, November 2004, "With Boys and Girls in Mind", Michael Gurian and Kathy Stevens, pp. 21 & 22.

between many of our boys' and girls' learning (styles)" and the institutions empowered to teach our children.³

Here are some examples:

- Girls, in general, have stronger neural connectors on their temporal lobes, resulting in "more sensually detailed memory storage, better listening skills, and better discrimination among the various tones of voice."⁴
- The memory storage area in the brain, the hippocampus, is larger in girls, increasing their advantage in the language arts.
- The prefrontal cortex is generally more active for girls and develops at earlier ages; as a result, "girls tend to make fewer impulsive decisions than boys do."⁵
- "Girls have more serotonin in the bloodstream and the brain, which makes them biochemically less impulsive."⁶
- Boys tend to use more cortical areas of the brain for spatial and mechanical functioning, while girls generally use more cortical areas of their brains for verbal and emotive functioning.⁷

"The female brain experiences approximately 15 percent more blood flow, with this flow located in more centers of the brain at any given time."⁸ As a result, the female brain generally tends toward stimulating activities, like reading and writing – activities that involve more complex texture, tonality and mental activity.

These are just a few of the brain qualities that help us understand why girls are positioned to outperform boys in reading, writing and verbally-intense activities and why little girls often exhibit a higher level of self-control.

Research also reveals biological differences that result in behaviors and learning styles that are distinctive for little boys. For example,

- Many little boys want to move objects through space or they just like to move their arms and legs.
- It is more likely that little boys are physically impulsive.
- Most little boys don't multitask as well as girls do.⁹
- "The male brain is set to renew, recharge, and reorient itself by centering what neurologists call a 'rest state'.¹⁰ Perhaps you've noticed your favorite little boy drifting off when he should be more focused on an academic task that involves lots of words. "Boys seem to do better with symbols, abstractions, diagrams, pictures and objects moving through space than with the 'monotony of words'.¹¹

For years America's schools have been geared toward those tasks that come naturally for little girls: reading, writing and verbal exercises – all performed while sitting still and paying careful attention. For years schools have ignored or even frowned on more active learning strategies that complement the learning styles of little boys.

³ Ibid, p. 22.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid, p. 23.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

As you read our Pre-K teachers' description of their classroom, it is obvious that The Academy understands little boys and crafts a learning environment that meets their distinctive needs and brings out the best in the boys of SAA.