

Reflections on the Saint Elizabeth School Breakfast at the Denver Art Museum

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Dr. Gregory Allen Robbins
SES Trustee

I'm always looking to refine my elevator speech about Saint Elizabeth's School. You know, the pitch you are able to make to someone about why SES is so important to support—in that brief, imaginary span of time you have with a captive audience, just after the doors of the lift have closed, while you ride up a few floors to your intended destination.

Pat Bassett, president of the National Association of Independent Schools, provided me with some new talking points last Wednesday during his keynote remarks at our breakfast held at the Denver Art Museum.

"We offer the four "I's," he said of private schools like Saint Elizabeth's. "We are on the cutting edge," of education "because of our independence, our interdependence, our inclusivity, our innovation."



Independence. Interdependence. Inclusivity. Innovation.

I was particularly interested to hear how Bassett elaborated on the characteristic of "interdependence" that distinguishes our mission. "We are intimately tied to our communities," he noted, "not separate from them. We work with kids, and families and neighbors, other agencies and other schools to enhance all of the educational opportunities available.

Hmmm. We're not engaged in a "winner-take-all" competition. It's not about denigrating the public schools or siphoning off their best and brightest. It's about working together, complementing a shared goal to serve our young people by meeting a diversity of needs.

"It's about balance," Bassett said, punctuating his point.

I'm down with that. I think others would be, too. That's a keeper.

Emphasizing "innovation" allowed Bassett to extol the freedom and flexibility schools like Saint Elizabeth's have to think creatively about curriculum. "We can be laboratories of experimentation," he said, "for finding what works, what works best."

I know that to be true of Saint Elizabeth's. At our last board of trustees meeting we had a wonderful presentation by Kim Frantz, our SES principal and lead 2nd-grade teacher, about the new math curriculum we are adopting, "Math Expressions."

"It is an approach," Ms. Frantz shared, "that I find more challenging, with homework every night. It is one that fosters parental involvement and responsibility in student learning."

She also noted that Math Expressions' significant technology component does not substitute "bells and whistles" for the tried-and-true equation of student + teacher + class engagement. Indeed, it finds a place for "paired" work in the classroom. For every element of the program, assessment is key, she stressed.

That's innovation at work! And, of course, everyone at SES knows how great our programs are in the visual arts, music, and the development of the whole person—mentally, physically, and spiritually.

Pat Bassett gave me additional language for underscoring just that point. He said private schools like SES are all about developing not merely the "intellectual quotient" (IQ) of our students, but their "emotional quotient," their EQ.

"Students equipped with both IQ and EQ," he maintains, "are prepared to be agents of change" in their communities. He went so far as to say, "Why, they're students who can make for a smarter school board!"

One of the most remarkable ways Saint Elizabeth's School brings all four of the "I's"—independence interdependence, inclusivity and innovation—together, Bassett concluded, is our flexible, ^(over)compassionate approach to tuition, our Family Commitment Plan. "It reflects a brave, profound, tangible commitment to social justice," he declared, a policy shared with only three other private schools in the nation."

In the nation... Little Saint Elizabeth's, after only four years, on the national stage!

Bringing his astonishingly perceptive and illuminating remarks to a close, Pat Bassett drew our attention to a column ("Psst! 'Human Capital'") written by David Brooks and published in The New York Times on November 13, 2005. Brooks' words served as a stirring encapsulation of what we're all about at SES. He wrote, "We now spend more per capita on education than just about any other country on earth, and the results are mediocre...the long-term gains are insignificant."

"These programs are not designed for the way people really are. The only things that work are local, human-to-human immersions that transform the students down to their very beings. Extraordinary schools, which create intense cultures of achievement, work. Extraordinary teachers, who inspire students to transform their lives, work. The programs that work touch all the components of human capital. There's a great future in Human Capital, buddy. Enough said."

Saint Elizabeth's is an extraordinary school. It has a great future! **Independence, interdependent, inclusivity, and innovation** are the keys that open the door to that future.

Before the elevator doors open, I ask, "And, wouldn't you like to come for a visit?"

St. Elizabeth's School is located at 3605 Martin Luther King Blvd., Denver, CO 80205. Private tours are available, please call 303-322-4209 or check the website: www.stelizabetsdenver.org