



We're starting the Terra Nova Tests this week. Every school in the archdiocese gives these to 3rd-7th graders. These are standardized tests in the content areas of reading, math, science, social studies, and language. Ever since the No Child Left Behind law went into effect we have had a huge emphasis on standardized testing in the public schools. In fact, by 2014, the public schools are supposed to have 100% of their students proficient in their state's tests. If not, they could be sanctioned and labeled as failing schools. Of course, there are as many loop holes in this process as there are bubbles on those answer sheets. But, it's the federal government's attempt to legislate smarter kids. Reminds me a little bit of their experiment with Prohibition. Remember how successful that was?

Standardized testing does serve some good purposes when the results are used properly. One of the most useful things we can do is compare the testing results in each grade with our curriculum and see if students are learning what we are supposed to be teaching them. This gets a little more complicated when you use a test that doesn't exactly match your curriculum. For example, if one of our grades scores low in multiplying fractions, we need to look and see if we have taught them that skill before they took the test. If we did teach them that skill and they still scored low, then we need to address the problem. If we didn't teach that skill before they took the test, then we shouldn't expect them to score well on it. However, it would still warrant some investigation. We would need to check when we do teach multiplying fractions. Maybe it comes later in the year or even in the next school year. If that's the case, how do our students score on the skill at that grade? If the students are learning the skill at that time, and we feel that our curriculum has a good scope and sequence, and is challenging, then we should accept that lower score.

Okay, I've read that previous sentence over and over. It is difficult for me to say that because I like to be the best. I like comparing the scores of our school to those of other schools. I have this competitive nature that wants to be the winner. My point is that the test score is not the be all and end all. And, as a Catholic school, those scores are not high stakes for us. Yes, we want the best education for our kids. Yes, we want them to be able to score well on those types of tests. But, please try and put your child's score in perspective. It is just one piece of data, a quick snapshot of how he or she was doing in school on that particular day.

So, when you come by my office and I'm showing you how we compare to those other schools, remind me of what I wrote this week.

Yours in Christ,
Jim Makey, Principal