



AIM HIGH PARENT NEWSLETTER

March Newsletter 2016

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We Want to Hear from You About the Parent Newsletter

Welcome to the third Aim High Parent Newsletter. Feel free to share this with your family and friends to let them in on what your achiever is up to during the school year.

We want to know your thoughts. Let us know topics you would like us to provide you with information articles. Any ideas you have on inclusions for you, your student or rising Aim High child are appreciated.

If you forward this newsletter to others, please use the forward button and enter their name and email in the appropriate boxes. You can also direct friends to our website to view the newsletter at [Aim High Parent Newsletter](#)

Best,

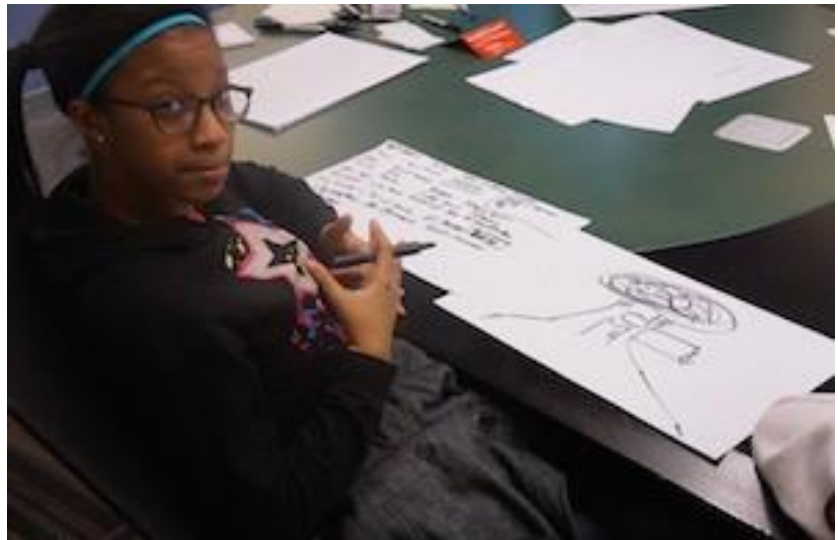
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February was Design & Build month at Christner and Clayco.

On Saturday, February 13 our Villa Crew went to Christner, Inc. in Clayton to learn about the world of architecture and associated careers. The Team" then set their minds and hands to designing and building their "dream (tree)house" with the mentoring of Christner staff.



On Saturday, February 30 the Priory "Crew" explored design and building at Clayco. One of the exercises was to create a concept drawing of a house for the Client--Lucky Charms Elf using design questions. The students sketched their ideas as they asked questions of what Mr. Charm wanted in his new house.



Aim High 2016 Saturday Dates and Trips



AIM HIGH

	JBS	Priory	Villa
March 12	Sigma-Aldrich Field Trip	Sigma-Aldrich Field Trip	Sigma-Aldrich Field Trip
April 9	Incredible Pizza Celebration		Incredible Pizza Celebration
April 16		Incredible Pizza Celebration	

Friday, May 22; 1 - 4 pm – Family Picnic at Turkish Pavilion Tower Grove Park
Friday, June 17 – First Day of Aim High Summer Program

Raising Intelligent, Self-Reliant Kids: Practical Advice in an Impractical Society

By Gina Fontana and Ralph Barrett, Educators

Have children changed?

“Kids have changed.” We have heard this statement repeatedly from educators, parents, and the media. However, in reality, kids haven’t changed; society, parents, and schools have changed. These changes have transformed the way our children play, interact, and learn. Fluctuations in social and educational norms have created issues beyond poor behavior in children. We have raised a generation of socially, cognitively, and physically underdeveloped children, leaving parents and teachers struggling to find solutions.

The US faces an epidemic of unparalleled proportions. The social concerns that must be addressed to help our children have three primary causes: abuse of technology, aversion to risk, and a decline in physical activity.

1. Abuse of Technology: Lev Vygotsky, theorist, teacher, and psychologist, stated that learning takes place through interactions with others. Children, therefore, must interact with other people and the environment around them in order to grow and develop into productive citizens. However, because of technology they are increasingly isolated from the world outside, relying on video games and TV to provide them with their social rules and norms.

2. Risk-Aversion: Risk taking is limited or non-existent when you are not interacting with others. With adults scheduling almost every aspect of their day, school age children are not given chances to simply play and make up their own games. They have little free time to just be kids and the free time they have is often spent in front of the TV or computer. According to the National Association for the Education of Young Children, there is a direct correlation between reading and risk-taking. Reading out loud means you are opening yourself to possibly be ridiculed or embarrassed. Children who never risk being vulnerable have a difficult time becoming fluent readers.

Risk has also been eliminated from our playgrounds. In the name of safety, the slides, swings, and merry-go-rounds of the past are gone. These items provided children with the chances to practice appropriate risk taking. Children could successfully navigate the “risky” playground equipment, gaining self-confidence and courage.

3. Physical Inactivity: The United States has become a still society—from the oldest to the youngest. Adults ride to work in cars, sit at desks, watch TV, play video games, and socialize on the computer. Infants spend up to four hours per day in car seats, carriers, baby backpacks, bouncy seats, and infant swings. Because of this, they do not develop the muscles needed

to crawl, which help with later visual perception skills, and the spatial awareness needed to copy notes off the board or read fluently.

Providing the Antidote: What can we do as parents to ensure that children are provided with the proper tools to succeed in today's society against these odds?

1. Provide Space and Time for Physical Activity: Movement is the catalyst for cognition. Physical activity influences the part of the brain, the cerebellum, which handles memory, attention, and spatial perception. Children need plenty of time and space to exercise their large muscles in order to be successful in school.

It is ironic that, in an educational world where we know many children are kinesthetic learners, we expect them to sit still at desks to learn. Movement increases the blood flow that carries important nutrients to the brain. Recent scientific investigations have proven that movement stimulates dendritic growth, even in Alzheimer's patients. Dendritic growth creates new pathways for information to be processed in the brain. Movement must be present in order for learning to take place.

Playing games also encourages social development. When children participate in sports they learn how to work on a team, compromise, lose gracefully, and offer encouragement and empathy to others.

2. Provide an Environment that Fosters Curiosity: A disposition for curiosity is the common characteristic found in inventors, scientists, explorers, and entrepreneurs. They are all creative people with a strong sense of wonder who are not afraid to take a risk. Steve Jobs, John Glenn, Bill Gates, and Thomas Edison, all innovative and resourceful people, who wondered what would happen if. . . . Curiosity is what education is about. Unfortunately, for many children, their developing sense of wonder is constricted by overly structured programs and testing in school.

An appropriate environment is crucial in fostering curiosity and wonder. Children should be allowed to explore, experience risk-taking, and create without the fear of ridicule or being hurt. As parents and teachers we can set up the environment to encourage wonder and creativity. This can be accomplished by providing children with open-ended materials such as flour, vinegar, baking soda, play dough, blocks, and finger paints. Let the children explore and experiment. What happens if you add baking soda and vinegar together? What happens when you use an eye dropper instead of a paint brush? Remember it is not the product we want children to be interested in, but the process.

Children must experience their learning in order to retain and comprehend knowledge. Imagine trying to learn to swim, or ride a bike, from a book or YouTube video without hands on experience! Experience is not just the best

method for teaching; it is the only method for teaching. The more a child is allowed to experience the thrill of exploring and experimenting, the more their disposition for curiosity and their love of learning will increase.

An environment that fosters creativity will also generate constructive play. Children who play with materials are gaining background knowledge in mathematical and science skills such as gravity, stability, measurement, fractions, and spatial awareness. When adults create an environment that allows children to build structures and take things apart, they are creating an environment rich in technology, mathematics, and exploration.

3. Bring Back the Arts! In the US, we have a traditional hierarchy of subjects taught in school with math, science, and literacy predominating. Creative arts fall at the bottom. We believe that the academic subjects are the most important to prepare children for the job market. However, we cannot predict what the job market will be like 20 years from now due to the fact that our world is changing so fast. It is of vital importance that children develop the ability to innovate, create, and adapt to future changes. Subjects such as music, art, and dancing allow children to be creative, take risks, and express themselves in innovative ways.

Kids must be seen as a whole and not educated only from the neck up. If we think that the purpose of education is to just develop the brain, we forget that there is a connection between the mind and body. If we only honor academic ability, we forget that music, art, and dancing, are part of the humanities. We must acknowledge that these subjects are an integral part of our culture and should be honored and encouraged. It is a myth that not everyone is creative. Each child has the potential for creativity unless it is educated out of them.

The Importance of Risk Taking

Why should we want children to be risk-takers? When children take risks, it builds resilience, develops an inner self-esteem, improves reading skills, and prepares them for their future. As an adult, risk-taking is an inevitable part of life. We need to be willing to take risks to speak in front of a group of people, attend a job interview, or join a new club. When we over-protect or criticize children in a personal way, we knock the capacity to risk out of them. If you are not prepared to make a mistake, you will never take a chance, experiment, or try something new.

As parents and teachers we only want the best for our children. We want to ensure that they have the skills needed to succeed as an adult. In order to help children, become productive adults we must allow children to engage in activities that are age and developmentally appropriate. The best education we can provide our children is experience—let them experience the world around them. We must allow children to be creative and take risks if we want them to grow into productive, well developed citizens.

Aim High Videos

With the help of the Nine Network's Public Media Lab we created the following two Aim High videos that shows what the summer program is all about. We are currently using them for recruiting new 5th grade students to start this summer. Check them out!!!



Take a look at these videos on our website:
<http://aimhighstl.org/our-program/>

What Parents and Students Told Us They Want in Aim High

1. Aim High students truly like and appreciate Aim High teachers, especially those who embrace student centered, hands-on/minds on learning philosophy and lead engaging lessons that are project based.
2. Parents and students want to learn about topics and gain skills that have real-life applications. Students don't want to learn things that they don't believe they will use outside of the classroom.
3. The elective courses are loved by students, but both students and parents said that they need to cover topics that build skills such as coding, computer illustration, robotics, math based sports, community based issues.
4. Aim High students appreciate any opportunities they have to take ownership of their experience. The students want to determine part of what is being taught and how. The parents agree that Student Voice is of utmost importance if we wish to develop leadership skills in our achievers.
5. Parents want to have feedback about what their child is doing during the summer program. The newsletters are ok, but they want to hear about specific behaviors their son or daughter does, especially those that they can reinforce with positive accolades.
6. Students who choose not to stick with Aim High for all four years do so not because of inherent failures within the program, but because those students were not committed to the ideals of the program from the get go. Sports or dance and other activities are of interest to the older achievers and result in some students to choose these activities.

The Aim High Advisory Program: Why Character Education?

At Aim High we challenge our achievers to strengthen their “character, self-confidence, determination, and initiative” through an academic—and *personal*—enrichment program. In the advisories students focus on five key character values: respect, integrity, motivation, compassion, and leadership.

While this advisory program is not unique, the Aim High approach goes a step further to ensure that students understand how embodying these character values benefit their future. For example, ninth grade students develop two crucial character traits *that predict success in high school*: **self-advocacy** and **self-confidence**.

Research shows that students’ reasons for dropping out of high school are not based solely in grades 9-12. Rather, the pathway to dropping out appears to start during the middle school years, and the often difficult transition from eighth grade to ninth grade is what dooms most future dropouts. The increased workload and pressure to do well means that the majority of students, including those who graduate from high school and go on to college, experience declines in grades and attendance during their freshman year. How smoothly students are able to make this transition is strongly related to their likelihood of earning a diploma.

Several factors that help students move more easily from eighth to ninth grade are:

- Strong academic achievement and sense of scholastic competence
- Good school attendance
- Healthy strategies for coping with problems
- Effective strategies for achieving a balanced academic and social life

Students who stay in school and graduate have more positive perceptions of their own academic abilities, and although all students encounter more rigorous course work in high school, those who believe that they can overcome academic challenges are those who tend to persevere and succeed. This is what is referred to as “Grit.”

Aim High’s advisory program will evolve in a few ways this upcoming summer. We will explore and model a process for ethical decision-making in advisory meetings. Our students have told us that the content we teach must have real-world applications—*otherwise they’re just not interested!* The updated advisory curriculum will integrate principles of character with critical problem solving skills in order to help students develop the habits they need to make positive decisions in their future. Students will practice decision making through role playing, discussion, and relevant but hypothetical “dilemmas” that teach them to be persons of character in every decision they make, no matter how big or small.

We also plan to integrate the character themes highlighted in advisory throughout the entire Aim High program. Whether in classes, at Physical Fun, or during lunch, we want to witness our achievers apply the moral compasses

that they are using during advisory. From skits at morning assembly to conversations on the afternoon bus ride home, our goal is to bring character education to life for Aim High students by embracing every teachable moment that we have!

So ... *why advisory? And why character education?* Because advisory and character education empower our students to keep aiming high! Remember ... ***It all comes back to you!***



STAY CONNECTED WITH AIM HIGH!

Aim High is on social media so you can always stay in the loop! We have a Facebook page and Twitter account that we regularly update with program information, pictures of student activities, and more. Use the links below to find us on Twitter and Facebook or click the icons below. No worries if you don't use social media sites. You can still view our information on either site without creating an account.

Twitter <https://twitter.com/aimhighstlouis>

Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/Aim-High-St-Louis-166574511442/>

