



September 2016



## *The Order of Learning: First Things First*

Dear Parents:

Priorities and the sequence in which tasks are completed are paramount in many professions, and a variety of educational models exist for parents to choose from that vary significantly in their approaches to the *order of learning*. From Montessori, or child centered, to Waldorf, which is highly structured, and every conceivable variation in between, the school investment choices for busy parents can be daunting. Educational leadership publications are replete with the latest recommendations on new teaching and learning strategies, as well as techniques born in response to the most current criterion and norm referenced test scores, and such decisions often contain a heavy emphasis on the *order of learning*. Interestingly, educational testing

and measurements reports reveal massive deviations in validity and reliability in standardized testing that costs American taxpayers between \$20 to \$50 billion per year nationwide (Baines & Stanley as cited by Breiner, 2015). At Prince, we are keenly aware of the value of standardize testing, and we employ it *with moderation*. In 2015, the average American public school student took eight standardized tests, and some took multiple days to administer. This loss of instructional time does not include time required for students to practice filling out demographic data sheets critical in federal and state reporting for compliance with NCLB, IDEIA, Georgia Milestones (formerly CRCT), *et cetera*, nor the school pep-rallies held to get teachers and students “excited” about standardized testing

(Strauss, 2015; Kubiszyn & Borich, 2013).

Prince's biblical foundation and Christian worldview approach to teaching and learning provides a *proven holistic system* that educates the student scholastically (head training) and morally (heart training) in a manner that has withstood millenniums of societal change. Central to our educational process is the importance of the *order of learning*, or more specifically, the fundamental premise that simpler concepts are taught first. Educators routinely make reference to Bloom's Taxonomy, which classifies educational learning into hierarchical levels of complexity - and for good reason. As a midsize, independent, PreK-12 Christian school, we have the advantage of making modifications to our curriculum, like the *order of learning*, in an unprecedented way compared to our peers in the public schools who must contend with the bureaucratic stipulations of county, state, and federal agencies. While such institutional approaches to education can promote efficiency on a broad scale, the processes in these larger systems are often mechanical, autonomic, and repetitive by necessity, and therefore institutionalize and impersonalize the teaching and learning process. While the primary reason parents partner with Prince Avenue is to provide a Christ centered environment, which is counterculture to the pluralistic progressive agenda permeating our nation's schools, flexibility, like modification to curriculum and the *order of learning*, is another.

In a world where knowledge is now easily obtained through SMART technology, the need to memorize facts and figures in middle and high school is questionable, but memorization of scripture, identifying parts of speech, and multiplication tables provide the building blocks for the higher order reasoning, analysis, and synthesis that will follow. This technique sometimes conflicts with Western society's child-centered parenting approach. Like the busy world around them, parents who advocate for higher forms of learning first are often impatient; too often they discard the importance of the *order of learning* and want to bypass it, immediately, for more complex thinking skills. In doing so, they have placed *the order of knowledge over the order of learning*; a combination that often produces temporary results at the expense of foundational stability. Jesus cautions us in the book of Matthew about the perils this type of hasty decision making and the fate suffered by the foolish man who took the easy path building his house upon the sand that resulted in its eventual destruction. Today, educators like M. Cothan warn us, "Progressives see no rea-

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son they can't build their infrastructure of learning by bypassing the foundation and beginning with the roof first" (2016). Putting first things first, like building upon a firm foundation of scholastic rigor that includes selective memorization, especially in the early years, takes time and patience. Thank you for your continuing partnership in Christian education and your investment in tomorrow's leaders for Christ.

Warm regards and in His Service,



Col Seth Hathaway

Head of School

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#### References

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