

## The Western Classics

---

### *Posts from EducationinAmerica.org*

Over the course of the 2008-2009 school-year CRC Education Watch Director Phil Brand is touring America by car, visiting a total of 100 schools, two in each state. Phil is posting his observations on [www.educationinamerica.org](http://www.educationinamerica.org). The schools featured in this month's Compassion & Culture are classical schools in the West, Casper Classical Academy in Wyoming and Logos School in Moscow, Idaho. These excerpts are taken from Phil's "Education in America" blog.

So far Phil has visited 45 schools in 22 states, driving across northern states from Vermont and Ohio to Minnesota, Montana and Washington. This winter he will wisely travel south.

Phil's visits have taken him to the Idaho School for the Deaf and Blind, the Red Cloud Indian School in Pine Ridge, South Dakota, a Montessori school in Bellevue, Washington and a two-room K-8 public school serving ten students in Greenough, Montana. In Minnesota he visited two unusual public schools: a charter military academy and an online school for 800 seventh through twelfth graders (students range from isolated rural students and teenage moms to gifted students and potential Olympians in training). He visited two Catholic schools in Milwaukee, Wisconsin that participate in the state's urban school voucher program and he went to a Cleveland Catholic high school that was

the beneficiary of the U.S. Supreme Court's landmark 2002 case that found taxpayer-funded education vouchers constitutional. Phil visited homeschoolers in Michigan and toured a charter school in Albany, New York that receives private vouchers. He went to a private academy in Vermont that participates in the state's unique tuition voucher system, which makes public schools unnecessary in some parts of the state.

This winter and spring Phil will visit schools in the south and southwest. If you would like to suggest a remarkable school to visit contact him "on the road" at [americanschoolstour@gmail.com](mailto:americanschoolstour@gmail.com). Phil will compile his observations in a book on American schooling at the end of the school year.

#### **Casper Classical Academy Casper, Wyoming**

"The day is done, and the darkness  
Falls from the wings of Night,  
As a feather is wafted downward  
From an eagle in his flight."

One of the girls in the 7th grade English class at Casper Classical Academy (CCA) murmured the opening stanza of this Longfellow poem. Each of the 28 students had to recite a poem in front of the class. For some the recitation, more scary than death, was barely more than a whisper. But effective communication, including public speaking, is important to CCA, which requires the student performances.

The name "Casper Classical Academy" conjures up images of an elite private school for a select few, says principal Marie Puryear. That is a misconception. CCA is a public middle school in this community of 50,000, the second largest city in Wyoming. (Cheyenne, with 55,000, is the largest.) CCA uses a classical education curriculum to educate its students. A classical curriculum requires the arts, Latin, logic and political discourse as courses of study,

*continued on page 2*



CRC Education Watch director Phil Brand is travelling the nation visiting two schools in every state and blogging their stories at [educationinamerica.org](http://educationinamerica.org).

## Western Classics

*(continued from page 1)*

along with more typical core subjects. CCA believes Latin boosts student's overall test scores and opens a window to another culture: "Studying the language, customs, and world view of a society from a different time and place is a mind-expanding experience." It also connects students to American heritage, illuminating Greco-Roman contributions to American life.

***Puryear said there were hard feelings when Casper first opened. Some blasted the school as "just for doctors' and lawyers' kids." But the perception of elitism has faded.***

This being Wyoming, not everything is classical in the Greco-Roman sense. I attended a "learning new things" class to start off the day. During a session devoted to Outdoor Survival, students learned how to tell if a bear was angry and ready to attack, how to repair a tent, and how to remove a fishhook from your cheek!

Casper Classical Academy opened 12 years ago, and now

has 108 students in grades 6-9 (middle school runs through 9th grade in Casper). Parents in the community wanted a middle school where their children could receive a "back-to-basics" education, with high academic standards, structure and discipline. The school district heard the demand—and not wanting parents to start a charter school—responded by making Casper an open enrollment district, or "district of choice."

As a district of choice, all schools in Natrona County have an open enrollment policy, which means that, subject to limits on capacity, parents may enroll their child at their choice of 31 public schools in the county. Under open enrollment, where a child lives does not determine where they go to school as it would in a neighborhood school system. The reason for the new system, says the district website, is that "there is no one school that meets the needs of all children." Each school can develop its own curriculum or school policy, and parents can choose the one they like best. "The diversity among schools has provided opportunities for each child to learn in his or her unique way and for parents to become more involved. We strive to be a system that works for every child, regardless of which school their parents choose," the Natrona County School District says.

Natrona County has had open enrollment and schools of choice for over a decade, and a majority of students now attend a school outside their residential neighborhood. But the move to open enrollment hasn't been universally welcomed. Many Casper residents would like to return to neighborhood schools, and even CCA, which would not exist without open enrollment, thinks there is a case to be made for some neighborhood preference.

The criticisms of public school open enrollment are many: busing students is costly; a sense of neighborhood community is weakened; parents "cherry pick" their child's school, creating a stratified system of good and bad schools. Some simply believe uniformity is a good thing. Puryear said there were hard feelings when Casper first opened. Some blasted the school as "just for doctors' and lawyers' kids." But the perception of elitism has faded as people become more familiar with the school and realize that CCA is "full of teenagers just like other schools." Indeed, CCA recently reported the Casper district's first case of a student using Meth.

Supporters of open enrollment point out that neighborhood schools create their own stratification problems: a poor family that can't afford to live in a nice part of town can't send their children to the public school that is likely

### **For More information Contact:**

#### **Logos School**

110 Baker Street, Moscow, Idaho 83843  
logoschool.com

Superintendent: Tom Garfield (208) 882-1226  
Yearly Tuition ranges from \$3,480 for elementary school to \$4,680 for high school.

#### **Casper Classical Academy**

920 S. Beverly Street, Casper, Wyoming, 82601  
casperclassicalacademy.com

Principal: Marie Puryear (307)-261-6181  
CCA is a public school, free to all in the Casper school district, subject to limits on capacity.

to be better there. As for a lost sense of community, Puryear says schools of choice can create community. “If we were a neighborhood school, it would defeat the whole purpose of our school, and destroy community and parent buy-in.”

One of the school’s teachers pointed out that when CCA opened, enrollment in public schools increased, because many homeschooling families in the region now felt there were public schools they could feel a part of. At the core of open enrollment, say supporters, is the conviction that diversity in schools better serves parents and students who have different wants and needs.

However, dueling philosophies of education have created some animosity between schools in the district. As a district, “we don’t work well together at all,” said Puryear, and schools don’t really trust the school district’s central office. Many school staff members regard district officials as talking heads who make a lot of money but don’t do much. Public school choice means schools actively compete for students and the funding that comes with them. That can create distrust and bitterness amongst schools. If a school loses students—as other middle schools have—then teachers are reassigned, sometimes to schools that aren’t a good fit for either teacher or school.

There are advantages to both neighborhood schools and schools of choice. No one wants a school system where a first grader must be bused across town because there are no spots left at the elementary school across the street. At the same time, it makes little sense to force a student to go to a nearby school when one further away better serves his needs. Parents should be able to send their sons and daughters to schools that work for them. We all aspire to a sense of community that transcends our individual differences even as we recognize that we form communities through interests and ideas that we hold in common.

**Timeless  
Wisdom  
Logos School,  
Moscow Idaho**

It’s 9 pm on a Friday night in

Moscow, Idaho. Gathered together in the living room of high school teacher Jim Nance are 25 juniors from his rhetoric class, watching the movie “Henry V.” Every year after the students read Shakespeare’s play, Nance has them over to watch the movie version, paying particular attention to King Henry’s motivational speech on the eve of the great clash with the French on St. Crispin’s Day. In class, Nance has his students prepare and deliver their own speeches about personal heroes. “All the great men of the past had heroes,” says Nance. “It is important not only to teach them about abstract ideas, but about concrete examples they can model their lives after.” Nance’s own hero is Leonardo Pisano, a famous mathematician. Students’ heroes ranged from Michael Jordan to J.R.R. Tolkein, Albert Einstein to Steve Jobs, pastors and family members.

Nance and his students are from Logos School, a classical Christian school serving grades K-12. The school opened its doors in 1981, with 18 kids in the rented basement of a church. Superintendent Tom Garfield, who has been with the school since the beginning, said the founders wanted a school for their children that was both classical and Christian, and distinct from government (public) schools. The school has grown to 250 students, and is a leader in the classical, Christian education movement. In 1991, Doug Wilson, a founding board member and teacher in the school, wrote a book entitled *Recovering the Lost Tools of Learning*, introducing Logos as a real-life example of the model. It sparked the interest of parents and educators around the country, and in 1994, with Logos as a charter member, the Association of Classical & Christian Schools (ACCS),

was formed. ACCS now lists over 200 member schools.

Logos was inspired by Wilson’s reading of a 1947 essay, *The Lost Tools of Learning*, by the English novelist Dorothy Sayers. She argued that there was something seriously amiss in modern education; we have, she said, “lost the tools of learning--the axe and the wedge, the  
*continued on page 4*



The Logos School Knowledge Bowl Team

# Western Classics

(continued from page 3)

hammer and the saw, the chisel and the plane—that were so adaptable to all tasks.” Instead, students learn an assortment of “complicated jigs,” specific, isolated knowledge, which have turned out to be very poor substitutes. We are failing in the “sole true end” of education, which is simply to teach men how to learn for themselves.

What set Sayers apart was her solution. Schools, she urged, ought to adopt “the mediaeval scheme of education... what the men of the Middle Ages supposed to be the object and the right order of the educative process.” At the heart of classical education is the Trivium, whose three parts are Grammar, Dialectic, and Rhetoric, in that order. Intended for the study of Latin, they actually instruct pupils in the process of learning. First, one learns the structure of language, grammar (hence, grammar school) “what it was, how it was put together, and how it worked.” Then dialectic, how to use language, make accurate statements, construct an argument and detect fallacies in argument. Finally, the pupil learns rhetoric, how to use language elegantly and persuasively. These steps—acquiring the building blocks of knowledge, analyzing how they are used, and constructing something beautiful and true from them—apply to all fields of study, not just language.

The Trivium also gives structure to a K-12 school because its three stages correlate with “singular appropriateness,” what Sayers recognized as three states of child development, which she called the Poll-Parrot, the Pert, and the Poetic. “The Poll-Parrot stage is the one in which learning by heart is easy and, on the whole, pleasurable.” A young child memorizes and recites easily, and “rejoices in the chanting of rhymes and the rumble and thunder of unintelligible polysyllables.” The Pert age, which follows, “is characterized by contradicting, answering back, liking to ‘catch people out’ (especially one’s elders).” People often say the last stage, the Poetic age, is difficult. The student is self-centered, expressive, and “rather specializes in being misunderstood; it is restless and tries to achieve independence; and, with good luck and good guidance, it should show the beginnings of creativeness.”

When I arrived at Logos school, I immediately saw the philosophy in practice. On stage in the cafeteria/auditorium, elementary (or grammar) school students were concluding a “speech meet.” Public speaking, the Rhetoric stage, is an important part of Logos at all grade levels, starting in elementary school but capped by a thesis presentation in

12th grade. Garfield attributes the success of Logos school’s mock trial team (10 state titles in the last 14 years) to the school’s classical training.

Everything at Logos (Greek for “the word”) is self-consciously built on the bedrock of Scripture (John 1:1, “In the beginning was the word...”). At first the school unsuccessfully used a pre-packaged Christian curriculum that it tried to mold to Sayers’ model of classical education. Eventually, it built its own curriculum based on original documents and “great books.”

Often this means old books. A C.S. Lewis essay that came to be known as *On the Reading of Old Books* states, “Every age has its own outlook. It is specially good at seeing certain truths and specially liable to make certain mistakes. We all, therefore, need the books that will correct the characteristic mistakes of our own period. And that means the old books.” It’s a philosophy rhetoric teacher Jim Nance believes in. “We use Aristotle, we use source documents a lot in classical education.” Then the old books and documents are studied and criticized from a Christian perspective.

Sayers’ view was that problems in modern education are not about education, but are by-products of confusion about culture and civilization. She believed modern civilization was burdening its teachers with the task of shoring up the “tottering weight of an educational structure that is built upon sand.”

Logos believes it has found a more nurturing soil. I visited a 12th grade civics class whose textbook was Russell Kirk’s *The Roots of American Order*. Tenth graders in literature class had finished James Fenimore Cooper and were reading Herman Melville—*Moby Dick*. The class was discussing a Melville character, Captain Bildad, in relation to the Scriptures, for Bildad’s namesake was one of Job’s three friends. The Logos school song is Shakespeare’s “Non Nobis, Domine,” whose lyrics hang on a banner in the gym. Superintendent Garfield said the basketball team sings it after every game.

Most parents of Logos students work for the University of Idaho or as farmers, the two largest sources of employment in Moscow. Annual tuition averages \$3,700 for K-12. The school supplements it with donations, and a cottage industry has developed: Logos sells its curriculum and administrative materials to sister schools and homeschoolers around the country. The income now accounts for about 20% of the school’s budget.

Terrence Scanlon, Publisher

Jill K. Lacey, Editor

Capital Research Center is a nonpartisan education and research organization  
classified by the IRS as a 501(c)(3) public charity.

CAPITAL RESEARCH CENTER, 1513 16th St. NW, Washington, DC 20036-1401 (202) 483-6900

Contact us on the world wide web [www.capitalresearch.org](http://www.capitalresearch.org)

Comments to the editor should be sent to [jill.lacey@verizon.net](mailto:jill.lacey@verizon.net)

Reprints are permitted provided citation is given to Capital Research Center