

Measuring Up

George Edwards returns to check up on Saint George's



George Edwards

Steve Gavin using a Smart Board to explain the Union's strategy in the Civil War to his 8th grade class



Nearly twenty-five years ago, George Edwards came to Saint George's as the sixth Head of School. He describes the school during his tenure (1985-91) as having "great academic ambitions, but not a lot of resources." Fast forward a quarter century and George is back at Saint George's, this time as a new member of the Board of Trustees. In his 30-year career in addition to his tenure at Saint George's, George was a teacher, debate coach, Head of the Upper School and Interim Headmaster at St. Mark's School of Texas in Dallas, Headmaster of Randolph School in Huntsville, Alabama, and until last year the Head of Epiphany School in Seattle. In February, he brought his unique perspective as the former head of five different independent schools to a day spent visiting Saint George's classrooms. Here's what he found...

I've evaluated hundreds of teachers at distinguished schools across the country, so when SGS Board president Wendy Start asked the trustees to spend time in the classrooms, I was interested to see how Saint George's would measure up.

I started the day in Steve Gavin's eighth grade class, where the topic was the Civil War, slavery, and the cotton economy. As a history teacher myself, I was astonished. Ten years ago I was doing this same material in an eleventh grade Advanced Placement class. Steve was just masterful, getting all the kids engaged and talking—even offering insightful responses—and this from eighth graders at 8:30 in the morning!

Then it was off to the Middle School meeting in the Dragon Room that begins each week. I saw the best values of Saint George's on



Carol Hinchliff gets kindergarteners writing at one of their stations

display. The high expectations the adults had for the students informed how they helped the kids interact as a large group. I witnessed a lot of respect by these Middle School kids for the adults, and the adults for the kids in return.

Next door in the Upper School Courtyard, my old friend John Nord—the only member of the current faculty from my days at the school—was making announcements to the students and staff. The sense of humor I remember from these gatherings is still there. (I once broke a watermelon with my head, but that's another story!)

Then it was upstairs to Chad Rigsby's room. As the Debate coach, Chad is doing a great job reviving the Debate program at Saint George's. I was very impressed with the 15 students diligently doing issue analysis and reviewing past debates. Their hard work really paid off, as the school will send two teams and an alternate team off to the national high school championships this year—the only students from the entire Inland Northwest to qualify.

From busy teenagers to busy kindergarteners, I trekked through the snow to Carol Hinchliff's class in the Lower School. There I got to roll around on the floor with the five-year olds and see them writing, reading, and playing word games at their "stations." Once again I was surprised at the level of work these kids were doing. Their teacher sat at a table talking with one or two students at a time, keeping the others on task, and displaying a mastery of her



classroom that was impressive to see.

That same mastery—before a very different audience—was visible in Josh Hayes' AP European History class. Back in the Upper School, I witnessed a very thorough discussion on the revolutionary spirit of Europe in the 1840's led by his Socratic questions of the class. It was obvious that the students had done their reading, and everybody was engaged and stretching themselves in some great conversations and dialog. I'm in awe of Josh, who took over another class last fall after you lost Deena Barber, and now prepares for three different AP classes.

So what did I learn from my day in Saint George's classrooms?

First, that this is one of the best schools in the entire Northwest. There is no comparison locally—it is the only asset of its kind in Spokane—and Saint George's is as good as any independent school in Seattle, including as renowned a school as Lakeside, and at a lower cost.

I also saw some significant changes since I was Head of School here, beginning with the amount of resources available for learning. In the first class I visited, I saw Steve Gavin using a Smart Board as part of his lesson, while we used to struggle to get light bulbs for overhead projectors! One third of the Lower School Library is now a computer lab, and in every class I saw a commitment to using technology as an interactive learning tool. Today's teachers are not afraid to master new technology and use it to reach a diverse group of learners.

Those learners now number over 400 students, up from the 220 to 270 at the school when I was head. And the ways the school uses its physical spaces to teach them is impressive. The basement of the Lower School was left unfinished when we built it, but the fifth grade and foreign language rooms have grown into it. The Middle School classes have all been remodeled, making them more functional and utilitarian. The new Upper School and theater are great learning environments. Even the stage in Metters Gym is being used as classroom space.

What hasn't changed is the focus on building relationships, adults to children and children to adults. You can talk about SAT scores and college admission rates all you want, but education is essentially about human relationships. It was true at Saint George's 25 years ago, and I saw it is true today.

This school also continues to balance a very traditional approach—excellent teachers in small classes—with some very innovative ideas. Back then it was about providing a demanding curriculum with few resources and doing more with less. Today you see that same spirit of resourcefulness in a variety of ways but especially in how technology is integrated into the curriculum.

Of course, some things never change. Students still gather for Middle and Upper School announcements and plan the next Valentine's Day dance. But the most important constant lies in something far more significant. For over 50 years, this school has built a reputation on challenging and caring for children. That's why Saint George's still holds a special place in my heart.

– *George Edwards,*
Trustee & Former SGS Head of School

Josh Hayes makes a point in his AP European History class



On the Web
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photogalleries](http://www.sgs.org/news_and_photos/photogalleries)

