

## Q and A

### October 10, 2011

#### **Does SLES “teach to the test” in regard to standardized testing?**

No, our school does not teach to the test or restructure content so that our students perform better. We do use standardized test results when evaluating the effectiveness of our curriculum and, when warranted, we make curriculum adjustments. We also use individual student data as an objective measurement when implementing individual improvement plans for students. However, relative to skill and content instruction, “working/teaching” to the test does not occur at St. Luke’s as it does in many schools. We believe in using instructional time to develop skills and content knowledge rather than using instructional time to prepare for tests. For these reasons we are proud of our accomplishments relative to the standardized measures we have achieved.

For SAT and ACT (the primary college admission tests) we offer methodologies of how to take tests, and we do encourage students to seek every mechanism available to better prepare for the college admission process. St. Luke’s has substantially invested in the Naviance software program which provides significant support for the college preparatory experience, including practice ACT and SAT tests.

#### **Are we performing well on standardized tests?**

Yes. Our students as a whole are out performing their Student Ability Index (SAI) which means they are out performing perceived measurable abilities. An educator’s goal is to understand a child’s capabilities and stretch these capabilities so that the child performs at or above these measures. On average, our students perform significantly better than our norming groups and the results indicate that we are doing well.

- Last year our average **Stanford** for grades 1-8 was in the 76th percentile. Stanford tests are taken each spring.
- An additional measure of our academic excellence is our annual performance in the **Duke Talent Identification Program (TIP)**. This program seeks to identify potential academic talent and affords students the opportunity to participate in a variety of programs. 56% of the class of 2017 (current 7th graders) have qualified for this program. To qualify, students must score at the 95th percentile or higher on any subtest or composite score of a qualifying standardized test. On average 44% of our students over the last six years have qualified for this program.
- Recent results from the **EXPLORE** (college bound normed test) that students in grades 8-9 took this past fall indicate that 91% of our students exceeded national norms while 45% of our students scored in the top quadrant.
- Recent results from the **PLAN** (pre-ACT, college bound normed test) taken by students in grades 10-11 indicate that 41% of our sophomores and juniors are performing in the top quadrant which out performs three-fourths of college bound students.
- We have not received results from the **PSAT** (pre-SAT) which students in grades 9-11 took a few weeks ago, but we look forward to sharing more of our student successes.
- Individual student test scores will be prepared for distribution at a parent meeting for students in grades 8, 9, 10 and 11. This meeting will review EXPLORE and PLAN test scores. Information about the date, time and location of this meeting will be provided and distributed in the coming weeks.

**Can you elaborate on an earlier Q and A question relative to the importance of EQ for college and beyond?**

Recent research indicates that Emotional Quotient (EQ) may have as much influence on long term success in college and in life as SAI-Student Ability Index (IQ), or other traditional standardized measures. EQ is not a set numerical measure, but a variety of factors and influences that we must recognize as critical for the success of each individual, and in turn, our school. Work ethic, chapel, spiritual identity, effort, character influences, social factors and co-curricular activities (athletics, arts, etc.) are just a few of the many pieces that make up a student's EQ over the course of his/her academic preparation. The "informal curriculum" of the school is as pertinent to success as the schema/course of study.

Many college students face challenges beyond academic preparation. A major factor leading to college disappointment is not one's intellectual limitations or previous content knowledge; it is one's EQ. Do students fail a test because they did not have the baseline content preparation or did they fail the test because they were not disciplined enough to budget time? Do students make choices that make it difficult to focus? Do students know how to focus? Do students have an ethical baseline to make solid, life-affirming decisions? Do they choose their friends and acquaintances wisely? Do students know how to make and take ownership of their decisions? How many of these questions focus on academic preparation versus emotional quotient? A solid understanding of these needs differentiates what we are trying to do, perhaps more than any other facet, through the educational experience at St. Luke's.

**Does SLES have an Honor's Diploma?**

No. Each graduate of St. Luke's will matriculate to the college that best meets his or her God-given abilities, balanced with how each applies these talents through effort. A diploma from St. Luke's Episcopal School is an achievement of significant merit and it is important that each child feel as if this achievement is a unifying accomplishment as an entire class. Students graduate with honors when they meet the necessary criteria outlined in the Handbook. To differentiate curriculum would be contrary to our school's policy, except where necessary to either promote individual achievement in particular areas of interest or to promote one's admissions possibilities. St. Luke's curriculum is considered an honors track/program.

Tremendous time and resources have been invested to ensure that upon graduation our common goals for the next step of the educational journey are achieved. Please study our curriculum carefully and note that we have a graduated system of advanced classes that allow students to seek advancement beyond our competitive program of study. These opportunities increase at each grade level. Some courses have honors class distinction, and others follow the College Board Program of Students for Advanced Placement (AP). We currently have an early admissions relationship with The University of Alabama and are considering expanding collegiate relationships. For additional information on any of these programs, please visit the website.

**Are SLES students at a disadvantage not being able to earn an honor's diploma as most public schools and some independent schools believe the honor's diploma is necessary?**

No. Our students are not disadvantaged. There should be no impact on the students' college admissions process. Colleges rarely concern themselves with diplomas; in fact, most do not ask for one. Colleges are concerned with academic credits, final transcripts (grades) and making certain that all of their admissions criteria are met as students are accepted prior to graduation from high school. Most colleges are concerned only with grades and ACT/SAT scores. Colleges that seek additional information generally want to make certain that a student took the most challenging course work available. Many colleges reconfigure the grade point average (GPA) to level their admissions playing field, often not even considering the additional quality points,

honors or AP course entail. (Please see the Handbook for further explanation of how student GPA is configured.) These types of questions and discussions are why it is critical that dialogue with our college advisor, Ellen Blackwell, occurs. Differences in what each college expects and the consistently changing landscape in college admissions are significant. Mrs. Blackwell can help both students and parents better plan for college admissions.

**What is one of the most important things I can do to prepare for my child's success in college?**

Start encouraging your children now to do things for themselves. The more independent they are when they leave for college, the more successful they will be during the four years of college. Small lessons, such as how to do laundry, balance a check book and stay within a budget will bring huge payoffs as they transition from high school to college and beyond.

Hug your child often and tell them you love and are proud of them. Research supports what good parents have known forever. Your child needs your affirmation, appreciates it, and will benefit from it. Your child will value what they hear from you and what they see in and through you.