

March 27, 2012

From the Principal — *Lynn Main*

It's hard to believe that this Friday is the last day of the third quarter of this school year. Maybe it's because we had no real winter and spring is here with all the trees in bloom or just because time seems to be moving a lot faster as I get older. Most years March seems like it goes on forever with cold, rainy days. This year we are already wearing shorts to school and the raindrops have been few and far between. But Friday afternoon the teachers at Lafayette will be working on entering grades for this quarter and then most of us will be leaving for spring break.

A few weeks ago I read an article in *The Washington Post* about Zakir Hussain, an Indian percussion player who specializes in a particular instrument called the tabla. As a young man his father, a world famous tabla player at the time, gave him this piece of advice: "Don't try to be a master. Just try to be a good student and you'll do fine." As I read these sentences I thought what a great piece of advice for students in elementary schools. Almost nothing is really mastered in elementary school. Our real job is to prepare students for learning no matter when it happens. To be good students.

Addition and subtraction are a great example. You really learn those facts in K, 1, and 2. Practice, practice, practice. Time trials. Articles to count and group in lots of different ways and pretty soon you think you know how to add and subtract. Then in fourth grade – pow! Fractions appear. And you have to learn how to add and subtract them. And it takes a lot of convincing to get children to understand that it really is the same old addition facts they already know mixed in with some multiplication and division as you find common denominators and reduce to lowest terms. Throw in decimals and now things get even more interesting. Just when you think you have something mastered a new wrinkle appears.

Same thing in reading. Almost every child at Lafayette learns to read words with little difficulty. Almost every child at Lafayette has good vocabularies that really help them read at a fairly high level in a short period of time. But then comes the day when it's not just enough to have read something. Now the teacher wants to know what genre is a piece of writing, what is the author's purpose in writing something, or how a particular position is supported with evidence in the text. Questions that show up extensively in standardized tests. Reading hasn't been mastered. It will be constantly evolving for all of us every time we pick up something to read. We are always learning to read even if it's just the new texting abbreviations that drive me crazy (LOL).

So while we celebrate our students' accomplishments with informances and awards we also celebrate their hard work and effort. Those 100's on spelling

tests represent skill at spelling in isolation. The bigger test will be when the words are used in writing. Reading all the Harry Potter books by third grade is an accomplishment, but dealing with the themes of good versus evil, loss and discovery will take a lifetime to really understand. Elementary school is where we start so many things and master almost none. These are the years to learn to be a good student. To be organized and learn to practice. To read lots of different kinds of materials. To apply those beginning math skills to new levels. To use time wisely. To listen to and then follow instructions. When we help students learn those skills we get them ready for new experiences and new ideas. We get them to be great learners. And then some day they can be a master.