

Blog entry by Notre Dame Mission Volunteer Sarah Moran at St. Peter Claver School, Kroonstad, South Africa



Dec. 31, 2010 -- Americans and Europeans who have traveled to this continent often speak of the relaxed and fluid nature of “African time” in comparison to the fast-paced and productivity-driven “Western time,” but these past months have flown by as if I were in New York City. The school year ended on December 10th, when the St. Peter’s 9th graders took exams from the provincial government in every subject, two of which, Maths (as they say here) and Technology, I teach. Incredibly, although St. Peter’s is one of the higher performing schools in the township, last year’s 9th grade class largely failed in several subjects. Since it is a private school and funding is contingent on performance, St. Peter’s scores were critical this year. Soon after I arrived in March, only one of the 59 9th graders had passed the first quarter Maths exam. The students and I set a shared goal that every one of them would improve their score by at least ten percent on the fourth quarter exam. Some days, the students complained, “Maam Sarah, you are working us to hard!” And sometimes, after serving up a sizeable portion of homework several days in a row, I even thought perhaps it was unfair to require as much of them as was required of me in a private American high school. But we kept a sense of humor and fun about it. When we learned about speed, distance, and time, I took the students to the soccer pitch and every student (including one in a wheelchair) took their turn running from goal to goal and then calculated their speed in meters/second and kilometers/hour. They loved learning about probability because we turned the classroom into a gambling hall for several days.

In early December, they took the provincial exam, and we came very close to meeting our goal. Nearly every student improved their scores, and this time, about a third of them passed, which was incredibly encouraging. I can’t describe the joy I felt when student after student came up to me after receiving their marks with smiles and hugs and expressions of mingled surprise and happiness. Many told me they never knew they had it in them to achieve so much.