

# Classroom Education Inspires Strong Opinions

By Sarah Wetzel  
For the Plain Talk

*Editor's Note: This is the second of a three-part look at Education in Vermillion and the Differences in What Its Kids are Learning.*

Education is an ever-controversial topic especially as it deals with our children which is something most parents hold dearer than anything.

Depending on where you stand, the modern public education system has the potential to be a blessing or the bane of your existence.

Either way, something all can agree on is that education in general has changed over the years.

"Basic skills have and always will be important but teachers are doing more in today's classroom to engage students and give them opportunities for a greater level of participation in their learning," said Dr. Mark Froke, Superintendent of the Vermillion School District. "I remember the straight rows of desks in my own grade school classrooms as compared to the functional and flexible learning environments that we see today."

"The obvious difference is technology," said Aaron Fader who teaches 8th grade history at Vermillion Middle School. "There is a lot of technology that both teachers and students have available today but didn't years ago. This has helped teachers create interesting ways to teach material and for students to learn."

Froke has also noticed the increase in technology.

"Computers weren't part of my education as a youngster," he shared. "Now, we have a technology rich environment with computer labs, iPads, and Smart Boards which enrich a child's education and increase their level of personal involvement. There is no question that teachers still need to be in charge of their classrooms but they strive to facilitate learning rather than always be the person who delivers knowledge to the students."

The students themselves see the benefits of technology in the classroom. "Recently we got iPads," said Katie Kost, a Junior at Vermillion High School. "It seems the first couple of weeks we got them we were really distracted playing with them but after awhile it becomes a better tool of learning."

Not all changes have been improvements, at least from Fader's point of view.

"Budget cuts and inadequate funding levels have caused schools to drop learning opportunities (classes) once provided to students," he said. "Take Vermillion Middle School, for example. I have been teaching here since 1998 and I've seen a foreign language, 8th grade reading, accelerated learning, middle school team-teaching, a librarian and guidance counselor cut. Not to mention the loss of a middle school shop class the year or so before I started teaching here. This is a serious loss of student opportunities."

So the question is, is modern classroom education where it should be?

Fader does not think so.

"For starters, I believe that we have lost the expectation that people have a responsibility to become educated members of society," he said. "Students are allowed to fail and are socially promoted to the next grade. People feel a child's self esteem will be damaged if they are held back regardless of whether the student meets grade expectations. Teachers have been told that the courts have gutted school authority in regard to retention or that school can't afford costly court proceeding if a parent challenges the decision to hold a student back."

According to Fader, the result of these actions throughout elementary school result in middle-school students who have learned they don't have to pass their classes.

"This creates a difficult atmosphere where teachers are trying to educate students that know there are little to know consequences for failing to acquire the skills or knowledge we are attempting to impart to them," he said.

Regardless of challenges, Froke said teachers are doing their absolute best.

"I believe our school personnel are working extremely hard to get students ready for their next level of education and life in general," he said. "Teachers and administrators recognize the importance of moving away from lower-level knowledge or base education that served our industrial economy very well over the past decades. Now, students need to acquire higher level thinking skills to function well in a technology and information environment of the twenty-first century."

Kayla Stammer, a Junior at Vermillion High School, is currently seeing the result of those efforts as she takes college-level classes through the school.

"[The courses] haven't been too hard so far so yeah, they've done their job," Stammer said. "Throughout the years we've learned time management and studying and you definitely see that through the college classes. You need to manage your time better. Through school we've learned how to do that."

This is the goal according to Froke.

"The idea is to better prepare students for a new world of work than we are accustomed," he said. "Teachers are preparing students to be researchers, critical thinkers, problem solvers and be able to work in a collaborative environment. They are also preparing students to be resilient and flexible to adjust and be able to handle occupations that don't necessarily exist today. Therefore, students must be able to learn how to learn. As always students need to be effective communicators with both the spoken and written word."

Fader said he has a similar focus in his history class.

"I try to focus on three things: cultural literacy, critical thinking and written expression," he said. "I feel that it's important for students to understand why our society is the way it is. What do we believe and why do we believe it? How has our past affected the present day United States? Through this I attempt to form critical thinking and writing skills through my lessons and activities."

Considering her personal future, attending school is vital according to Kost.

"I feel like if you want to go to college you have to have a better pre-education," she said. If we don't make it through college we won't have a career especially if we want to go into the medical field. I think entrepreneurs make a lot of money not going to college but that is a riskier job."

One challenge teachers often face is how to teach to a variety of learners.

"Every person is different on the way they learn but I think that the way teachers present the information can make the students so they want to learn," Stammer said.

According to Froke, this is what the district is all about.

"Teachers are always striving to engage students and help them become active learners," he said.

"Teachers are always trying to make connections to those things that have meaning for the students in real life. The main thing we have going for us in the classroom are teachers who have a deep sense of caring for their students and love what they do."

Fader agreed.

"There is no best way to learn therefore I attempt to use an eclectic variety of lesson plans and activities to reach the varied interest and abilities of my students," he said. "The biggest impediment to this is what teachers are allowed to expect of students."

Fader referred back to his comment about students who move on to the next grade regardless of if they have met standards or not.

"Now imagine that you have multiple students in your class who've failed previous classes and been passed on or habitually fail to do homework with little or no repercussions," he said. "For teachers it can be frustrating to try to have consequences for the failure to do assigned work."

According to Fader, at the Middle School, a Homework Study Hall program has been implemented where students are kept after school to complete unfinished work. This can sometimes be problematic due to conflicting priorities.

"What if a parent disagrees?" Fader said. "What if a parent would rather have their child at an athletic practice or game rather than facing the consequence of failing to do assigned work? Have a few arguments with a parent about that issue and you'll soon find yourself teaching to those children who want to learn and whose parents are willing to let you place expectations on them."

Cooperation seems to be required on all sides to make public education work.

Sometimes, especially from the view at the front of the classroom, the task seems impossible especially with a shortage of two very valuable resources: time and funding.

According to Fader, budget cuts hit teachers hard especially as standards are constantly raised.

For an extended version of this story visit [www.plaintalk.net](http://www.plaintalk.net)

# Silver Threads

Are you aware that there is an Oasis just waiting for you to discover at 320 West Main Street in Vermillion known as Main Street Center?

Would you like to get out of the house, have a nice noon meal prepared for you and enjoy the company of friends? You need not be a member to enjoy a \$4 meal, which includes beverage, bread and fruit, and the cost is \$6 if you are below age 60.

You would be welcomed and assisted just call 624-7868 to reserve a meal. Stay after lunch if you like and play cards, Mexican Train Dominoes, scrabble, pinochle, hand and foot, or see a movie on Fridays.

Ask for a tour of the center to see the exercise studio, computer lab, library and the gift shop (including many items crafted by members).

Also if you need a greeting card (half price) you will find it here.

Membership is only \$35 per year for adults 40-year-of-age and older.

Call 624-8072 for more information on activities and use of the Center.

Many of you don't know that the Main Street Center and Dakota Senior Meals are two non-profit programs sharing one building. Both programs are grateful for the donations of items and money received from individuals, organizations

and local businesses. Dakota Senior Meals members have dwindled due to required home care (meals can be delivered to your home by our wonderful volunteers).

Please call 624-7868 if you would enjoy being a part of this program.

Some members have gone to assisted living and of course, loved ones have passed away.

We also encourage you to watch for "April Showers" when the kitchen is the recipient of coffee, pepper, paper towels, napkins, garbage bags, dish soap, laundry detergent, Clorox, and cleansers.

Keep an eye out for a complete list of useful, welcomed supplies.

One lucky donator will receive a "May" flower.

Many thanks to all who donate garden produce, always welcomed and used.

Also watch for our 3rd fundraiser rummage and bake sale to be held in June.

Start now to clean out garage, basement, closets and drawers. Your donations will be welcomed.

Also, remember if you do not care to drive, Vermillion transit will deliver you right to the Main Street Center's door and take you home when ready. Call 624-7433 to arrange a ride.

-Courtesy of Nila Fostvedt

## SCHOLARSHIP APPLICATIONS AVAILABLE

First Dakota National Bank announces the 2015-2016 FirstChoice Scholarship applications are available.

Sixteen \$1,000 scholarships are awarded annually to high school seniors or college students attending a post-secondary accredited American college, vocational technical school or university.

Applicants are judged on leadership, school and civic involvement, satisfactory scholastic progress and demonstrated financial responsibility.

All applicants must have a FirstChoice Checking account to qualify. Applications need to be postmarked by March 9. Contact any First Dakota location for an application or download at [firstdakota.com](http://firstdakota.com). Here are some of the

incentives for applying for the FirstChoice Scholarship.

- The cost of college tuition and housing is expensive.

- The FirstChoice scholarship is a great way to help pay for school – it is \$1,000 you don't have to pay back!

- First Dakota is making an investment in you to help pay your educational expenses.

- If you don't apply – you don't get the chance to be awarded a FirstChoice scholarship. If you do apply – you have a chance.

First Dakota was founded in 1872 and holds the first bank charter issued in all of Dakota Territory. It has 16 full-service banking locations in 12 South Dakota cities. It also has six loan production offices throughout South Dakota and Nebraska.

For more information contact: Susie Frick, First Dakota National Bank, (605)665-4981

- Courtesy of First Dakota National Bank

## FITNESS

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they both participate in competitive sports.

McKenzie plays year-round soccer.

"We sometimes have tournaments," she said. "We had one in December. We do indoor and outdoor tournaments."

Though McKenzie said she plays all positions, forward is her favorite.

Jack, in addition to football and baseball, is a champion wrestler, having won a state title and three national titles.

"Last year I won two national titles and this year I'm just doing a couple of local tournaments," Jack said. "My dad always says that once you've wrestled everything in life is easy. That's what's made me better in football and baseball with the conditioning and strength."

According to Jack and McKenzie, you don't have

to be on a sports team to count miles for the school's program.

"You can even dance or clean your room and vacuum and stuff," Jack said.

So why is exercise so important?

"It's important because when you exercise you get fit and you stay healthy and strong and skinny," McKenzie said.

Jack agrees.

"You really can't do much in life if you don't exercise and be healthy," he said. "You'll live a lot longer in life."

Both McKenzie and Jack point to inspirational figures in their life who have motivated them to have an active lifestyle.

"My brother pushes me to work harder and my dad encourages me too," Jack said.

As far as McKenzie's family support goes, they're literally pros.

"My mom is a personal trainer at the wellness center," McKenzie said. "My dad inspires me to

work out because he was in the army and is always telling me to stay fit and be active.

"You should exercise because you'll stay healthy longer and you'll live longer and you'll be happy."

To those who don't currently have a habit of exercising, Jack gives some words of advice.

"You would feel a lot better after you work out because you feel good after you exercise," he said.

"If you don't exercise and eat healthy then you'll get out of shape and you can't do anything much like you can't go in your backyard and play soccer

with your kids."

Jack and McKenzie also know that living a healthy life includes making healthy eating choices. Even when you're craving junk food, there are some nutritious substitutes.

"I really like apples and peanut butter," Jack said. "Peanut butter is like your candy and apples are good for you too."

"I like eating strawberries and powdered sugar," McKenzie said.

To those who don't currently exercise but don't know where to start, Jack said it's ok to start small.

"Go on a walk or walk your dog or play with your dog, or kick a ball in the

yard," he said. "Don't just sit at home and watch TV. Get up and be active."

Exercise doesn't have to be miserable according to McKenzie.

"Ride your bike around the block and just go

outside and play and have fun instead of playing on your iPod," she said.

Even in cold weather, these kids recommend sit-ups, push-ups, jumping jacks, cleaning your house and playing with your dog.

### Shrove Tuesday Pancake Supper

**Tuesday, February 17**  
**5:00-7:00 pm**

Free will offering  
St Paul's Episcopal Church  
Corner of Main & Linden  
Vermillion, SD



Native Voices at the Autry and USD Theatre presents

## STAND-OFF at HWY #37

By **Vickie Ramirez** (Tuscarora)

Directed by **Jon Lawrence Rivera**

Producing Artistic Director  
**Randy Reinholz** (Choctaw)

Producing Executive Director  
**Jean Bruce Scott**

Join us for post-show discussions with the cast and production team after every performance

**Autry**  
at THE AUTRY  
Theatre Company

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH DAKOTA

## STAND-OFF at HWY #37

In upstate New York, on the border of the small town and the local Haudenosaunee reservation, a young National Guardsman of Tuscarora heritage has to choose between upholding the oath he took to defend his country and protecting the traditional lands of his people.

**WAYNE S. KNUTSON THEATRE**  
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Feb. 19 – 21 at 7:30 p.m. and Feb. 22 at 2 p.m.  
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USD Students with ID \$5  
To Purchase Tickets: 605-677-5400 or [www.usd.edu/theatre](http://www.usd.edu/theatre)

Native Voices at the Autry, a constituent of Theatre Communications Group (TCG), is made possible in part by grants and support from:









This event is partially sponsored by a generous donation from the First Bank & Trust and the USD Student Government Association. Additional funding for this production is generously provided by: Office of the Provost, Office of Diversity, Sanford School of Medicine, USD Center of Excellence in Minority Health and Health Disparity, College of Health Sciences, Beacom School of Business, School of Education and College of Fine Arts

If you are a person with a disability and need a special accommodation to fully participate, please contact Disability Services at 605-677-6389 48 hours before the event.

**Attention Pleasant Valley Township Residents**

### Pleasant Valley Township Annual Meeting

Tuesday March 3rd, 2015 7:00 pm  
at Clay Rural Water System

Agenda items include election of officers and receiving quotes for gravel, blading, mowing and snow removal.

Full agenda available at:  
<http://sites.google.com/site/pvtownship>

For more information, please contact:  
**Brandi Johnson, Clerk**  
**30630 Frog Creek Rd.**  
**Wakonda, SD. 57073**  
**Brajohns76@wildblue.net**