



# ISC Views and Voices

“Education is not a preparation for life; education is life itself.” - John Dewey

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[www.indigosudburycampus.com](http://www.indigosudburycampus.com) (780) 929-6792 [indigoinfo@shaw.ca](mailto:indigoinfo@shaw.ca)

## Wonderful Year Three!

by Nicolette Groeneveld

Imagine a job where every day is an adventure and new delights are around every corner! Ric and I are blessed with just such a job; every day, we marvel at the magical environment ISC is!

Here we are in our **third** year, and just as last year, things feel different. Our new location is, of course, a big factor in how different things are! We are in an amazing setting—beautiful, open, bright, spacious and with so much land around us, Sudbury freedom takes on added meaning! As for joy, there are bunnies in the house, kittens in the barn, buffalo in the fields; there are stock pens to climb all over, endless fields to run in, and neighbors with horses! The buzz of activity has reached a record high with students playing pool, building cat con-

fashion studies. And, there are **chores!**

Without the daily custodial care we had at St. Andrews, cleaning has become the responsibility of all community members! Amanda and Nathen have devised a

year with Elk Island Home Education, and we are so grateful for how open, flexible and all-round wonderful the principal and facilitator are! They are both very interested in what we’re doing, eager to learn from us and dedicated to being as helpful to our families as they can! We feel very fortunate to have their support!

As always, we are also very thankful for the support of our families and for the people on our e-mail list! Anyone who is interested in visiting our new location is most welcome! Please do call ahead to let us know when you’d like to come; that way we can make sure Ric or I will be available to meet with you.



brilliant cleaning schedule that has all of us dusting, sweeping, mopping, vacuuming, sanitizing, wiping counters, and cleaning toilets! Between 1:00 and 3:00 every day, all of us—little and big—pull out our cleaning tools and do our job for the day. It’s awesome to watch every person doing his/her share—and that without complaining!



Another difference this year is the group of students we have. Twelve of our 23 students are new! Ric and I delight in how well they’ve all fit in, and we are thoroughly enjoying getting to know them—and their parents!



Finally, we have a new partnership this



dos, baking, playing games, reading, drawing, and doing courses from math, language and social to psychology and

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# Of This, I Have No Fear

by Larry Welshon—Staff Member and Parent, Alpine Valley School, [www.AlpineValleySchool.com](http://www.AlpineValleySchool.com)

A former colleague from my public school job asked me how my son Ethan was doing at AVS. He asked three questions: Was I pleased with his academic progress? Do we give him (and the other kids) any sort of achievement tests? Will I just let him be surprised when he "hits the ACT and SAT?"

After giving short answers to his questions, I reflected on how his questions illustrate the contrast between the way most schools operate and AVS's philosophy. Fear is at the root of all of his questions, and trust is the basis of my answers.

These questions illustrate the role of fear as a motivator for learning and a justification for testing in public schools, and offer an opportunity to contrast that mindset with the philosophy of Alpine Valley School.

"Are you pleased with his academic progress?"

The quick answer is, "Sure, he's doing fine." But the deeper answer is that academic achievement is of minor importance compared to Ethan's opportunity to grow and learn without coercion and fear.

When Tammy and I realized that we were going to be parents, we looked into every schooling option for our future son, and found that there were no schools in the area appropriate for our child. With our experience as teachers, we knew that fear in schools produces negative consequences. As our son grew toward school age, we saw the benefits of trusting him and following his lead.



All parents are familiar with this fear: "If I make the wrong choices as a parent, my child may end up a failure." Many

parents send their kids to public school because the fear of making the wrong decision makes them powerless to resist the inertia of the status quo. They would rather choose traditional school than risk the burden of a decision made with knowledge. But do I bear less responsibility if I do what the crowd does?

AVS parents chose this alternative for their children because they decided that its philosophy and structure match their kids' needs. Even so, it's difficult to give up our illusion of control and to turn away from a familiar system. For the kids, on the other hand, trust and freedom create empowerment and self-determination.



Back to the question. Even if I did care about "academic progress" per se, I would be wary of how it is measured. Achievement tests are, at best, only estimations of knowledge and skills. Despite "improvements" in testing over the years, the test makers still are looking for the ideal of "authentic assessment."

I know students who do very well on these tests who cannot have a coherent conversation about subjects that interest them. I also know students who fail these sorts of tests, yet are wiser and more full of common sense than many adults.

AVS parents trust that their children will learn these things just as they learned to stand, walk, and master their native language. We did not use fear to teach Ethan to walk and talk. His own internal motivation drove him to learn these essential skills. Can you imagine the damage we would cause children if we insisted that they roll over, sit up, stand, walk and talk on our timetable?

Compulsory reading, writing and math

cause great harm to many children. Recently I heard on the radio that 95% of the books sold in this country are bought by only 5% of the population. Perhaps this is related to the fact that most children were compelled to read. Given this country's low literacy rate, perhaps our education system should back off the use of fear as a motivator and try trust instead.

Teachers use fear to motivate students to read every day, in the form of implied threats regarding their students' future or their failing certain tests. Teaching reading has become an unhealthy obsession among educators; unfortunately, the kids suffer the effects.

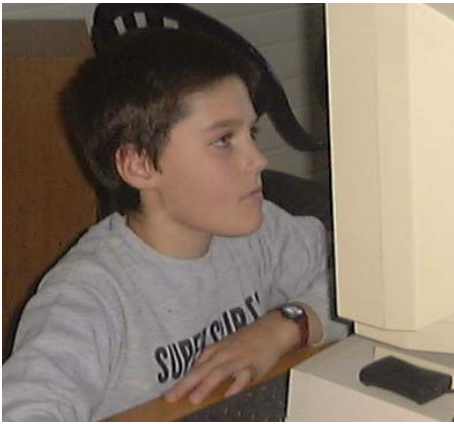
Based on recent newspaper reports, fear is also being used by the State of Colorado to compel school districts to raise reading test scores. Fear will follow the chain of command from the State Board of Education to local boards of education to teachers to students. Consider also the threat of tying teacher salaries to student test scores, or the threat of an entire school district losing its accreditation. The use of fear is everywhere.

One of AVS's greatest assets is the example set by Sudbury Valley School in Massachusetts over the past thirty years. SVS graduates were allowed to trust themselves from a very early age, and have created success in life in a wide variety of occupations. This form of education offers young people the opportunity to develop into lifelong learners who are able to decide for themselves what is important, rather than relying on the judgment of others.



*“Do you give the students achievement tests?”*

The short answer is no, we do not. We trust that students are discovering what they need, and that no test could ever measure the appropriateness of each individual’s path of development. In a school where kids discover their strengths and weaknesses very early on, fear does not have to be used as a motivator. They are motivated by interest, desire and curiosity.



By contrast, in a system preoccupied with assessment, fear is ubiquitous. The damage caused by traditional schools’ constant testing is significant in terms of children’s self-concept. Achievement tests cause even the most die-hard individualists to begin ignoring their own self-concept, replacing it with authorities’ arbitrary assessments.

Inappropriately, achievement tests are also used to reassure parents, teachers and policy-makers that the decision they made to subject children to traditional schooling was correct.

What matters in life -- whether you can do long division by hand or whether you know how to treat others fairly? Whether a kid knows the historical roots of the Constitution of Colorado or knows his own strengths and weaknesses? Whether one is punctual to required classes or is a self-starter? Whether a student can parrot back the latest politically correct



theory or is consciously responsible for his actions?

Of course, it is not as black and white as I imply. I do believe, however, that AVS students have more of an opportunity to develop their intellects, interpersonal skills and self-awareness. Personal freedom and the school’s democratic structure give kids practical experience that will serve them well in life.



The fear-driven acceptance of achievement testing denies human variation and accentuates what is deficient over what is excellent. How many of your adult colleagues have the exact same aptitudes and skills? The incredible variation among humans gave rise to the division of labor: I build houses better than I hunt, so I build for you and you hunt for me. Specialization and diversity enhance our quality of life.

When we allow children’s innate talents to surface, we marvel at what they do. Think of Albert Einstein and his opinion of traditional schools. He did poorly in school, and found it to be unbelievably stifling.

Constant testing reminds kids of their failures and weaknesses - or, for high achievers, makes them dependent upon others’ approval. Students’ efforts to improve are largely due to fear of failing on the next test. Tests and grades can also be corrosive to parents’ relationships with their children. Poor performance becomes a source of tension, concern, and disappointment, leads to overzealous intervention, and attacks the child’s self-confidence.

*“Will you just let him be surprised when he hits the ACT and SAT?”*

People who live their lives consciously are rarely surprised by anything that is

predictable. Students at Sudbury schools learn to live life consciously. For those intending to attend college, the ACT and SAT are predictable. AVS kids will, if anything, be surprised at how easy these tests are because they will approach them just as they have approached their lives while at AVS: they’ll articulate a goal, decide what they need to attain it, and follow through to make the goal reality.



Students in our school are motivated not by fear but by desire, curiosity, and clarity of intention. They know what they want and they go get it. Some kids may leave AVS without knowing for sure what they want, but they will be fully aware that they are responsible for their own lives.



Students at Alpine Valley School have time to explore their strengths and weaknesses. They are not burdened by conceptions of what others think is important. When they decide what they want, it will come from within - not because society, parents, or teachers decreed it.

When graduates leave AVS they will leave with a desire to pursue their lives, meet any challenge, and seek their happiness. Might they have a gap in knowledge here and there? Yes, just as we all have at various stages of our lives. When you are motivated by a deep personal desire to

make the best of yourself, all the structured curriculum of traditional schools doesn't amount for much when compared with self-knowledge.

Look around and see how much of society's motivation is based in fear, and how much damage that does to us all. Look at how much freedom we are willing to give up for an illusion of security. I am not willing to sacrifice my child's freedom to placate my fears.

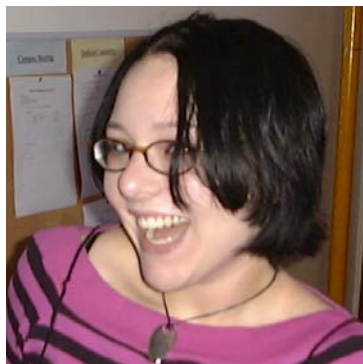
I want the best for Ethan. I want him to learn to be responsible for his actions and to be motivated by a desire to explore the world and to be productive. He will learn to be responsible for his life, and I'm quite sure that he will be happy after leaving AVS. Of this, I have no fear.

A comment from a new parent at the Circle School in Pennsylvania:

"What I notice is that I'm being asked to take back the trust I have placed in school as an institution and give it to my daughter. I like that."



Saran wrap rules again!



## School Year Calendar

**Thursday, November 11th**  
Remembrance Day

**December 17th:** Last day of school  
**December 20—31 inclusive**  
Christmas Holidays

**January 3rd:** Return to school

**Monday, February 21st**  
Family Day

**Friday, March 25th**  
Good Friday

**March 28th—April 1st**  
Spring Break

**April 4th:** Return to school

**Monday, May 23rd**  
Victoria Day

**Thursday, June 30th**  
Last day of school

"Power rests on the kind of knowledge that one holds. What is the sense of knowing things that are useless? They will not prepare us for our unavoidable encounter with the unknown."

Don Juan



## Wish List

We are currently in search of the following things:

- Regular snow shovel
- 4-foot wide shovel with two handles connected to a push bar
- Good quality trampoline
- Ping Pong table
- DVD player
- Snowshoes
- New or used hockey sticks, skates, helmets
- Cross-country skis with or without boots
- Firewood (to heat the Campus in case of an emergency)
- Snow blower
- Two 5-blade ceiling fans

And we are looking for the following people:

- Vegetarian/Vegan cooking instructor
- Mechanic or other person who is savvy in the art of disassembling and reassembling cars



Huge thanks to Amanda for sorting all the Lego, Connects etc and for bringing order to the Toys and Games room!

*Prepared by Nicolette Groeneveld*