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# LSDS NOTES

## Walter Parker featured at LSIDS Meeting

Dr. Walter Parker of the University of Washington will be a featured speaker when participants from LSIDS schools gathers in Seattle on January 26–28, 2006.

The recent University of Washington College of Education Publication, *Research that Matters*, says that “Parker’s argument for working more purposefully in schools to promote citizenship rests on three assumptions:

1. Democracy (rule by the people) is morally superior to autocracy (rule by one person), theocracy (rule by clerics), aristocracy (rule by a permanent upper class), plutocracy (rule by the rich) and other alternatives.

Democracy, writes Parker, better secures liberty, justice and equality.

2. Democratic ways of living together, with the people’s differences intact and recognized,



are not given by nature; they are created. And that work is undertaken by people who have a shared set of goals and social commitments.

3. Engaged citizens do not materialize out of thin air. People do not naturally grasp such knotty principles as tolerance, impartial justice, the separation of church and state. Those moral, social and intellectual achievements are hard won.”

Parker will elaborate on these and other arguments during the January meeting.

Dr. Parker is a professor of Education and Political Science. Earlier, he taught high school for ten years in Denver, Colorado, and was a Head Start volunteer as well. His books include *Educating the Democratic Mind* and *Teaching Democracy*. He works with school districts across the nation and in Asia on ways to implement a more rigorous, but also more thoughtful and engaging, democracy curriculum.

Background reading will be provided for Dr. Parker’s sessions.

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League of Small  
Democratic Schools Notes

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*If you have items to submit for future newsletters, please email them to:*

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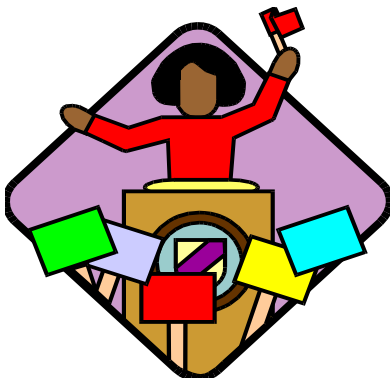
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# What is a Small Democratic School?

## Observations of LDS Schools at Work

What is a democratic school? This is a question best answered by looking at what students, teachers, and administrators in such schools do.

Academics, teacher relationships with each other and with students, student voice, and time together combine to define small democratic schools.



This fall Tony Smith, Northwest regional coordinator for the League, reported on his visits to several schools. The following excerpts from these reports provide a glimpse into life in a small democratic school and, thereby, provide a partial answer to the question.

Tony gained some insights regarding academics and small democratic schools from his visit to Whatcom Day Academy. After visiting that school in Bellingham, he reported that at the after school staff meeting, faculty, parents, and the university partners, spent time discussing what it means to be a democratic school and a member of the League, as well as time spent on brainstorming a list of possible all-school assemblies.

School principal, Susan Donnelly, identified two areas of focus for the school's work with the League: How we are as a community, adults modeling and students participating and experiencing; and how our curriculum might include additional components addressing democracy, "an academic program in a setting that nurtures students' humanity."

Another element of the academic program



was evident from Tony's visit to Lincoln Elementary in Olympia. Tony said that the principal, Cheryl Petra, mentioned that the school had a current focus on sustainability and collective work, an idea of stewardship of the planet that included recycling, the garden project, composting, the concept of organic food, and an awareness of the impact of such activity on the planet's resources. From such varied evidence as a school-wide assembly, student conversations, teacher comments, and the organic salad Tony had for lunch, he felt that the community at Lincoln was owning and practicing these themes.

*Continued on page 3*

## LSDS Schools at Work, continued from page 2

Student and faculty voice are important in a small democratic school. Tony's report on Westside Village Magnet School in Bend, Oregon, demonstrates this. Right before nine o'clock, a group of elder students gathered around principal Wendy Winchell and shared ideas for upcoming projects and for research they'd like to conduct. It was clear from these first fifteen minutes that students at Westside are respected, honored, and valued as individual human beings.



Relationships are also critical. Adults at the school seem to work every moment to help students make decisions and choose courses of action as democratic citizens; and adults and students alike seem to serve as stewards of this community where each individual is respected and honored.

Time for adults to work



together is essential for a small democratic school. The day Tony visited Westside was an early release day, so after students went home at two o'clock, adults gathered in the cafeteria for a meeting.

Having been to many, many, staff meetings, Tony was struck by how cohesive the group seemed to be, working together on the agenda and on a number of projects happening at the school. He also noticed the same focus on students as individuals that he had seen earlier, and the comment was made, "It's all about respecting the child." And he thought "yes, it truly is."

Student voice provided Tony insight regarding Lewis and Clark High School. He observed that student praise for the school was substantial. "There's less wasted time here," said one student, "I can just go to work and get

stuff done." Another student added, "You can't just sit and do nothing."

These students have also become engaged with their school. As one noted, "I never would have thought I'd be involved in ASB and student government—but I am here."

Teacher caring was another positive for students: "Teachers here talk to you like they care, not like my old school, where they just taught to get their paycheck and looked down at you." Another student added, "Here you can ask anybody anything—the teachers are more like friends."

During his visits Tony found many such examples of educators and students at work. In the next newsletter we will look at more evidence as it comes from reports on visits to other schools and from the annual reports submitted by schools for 2004-2005.



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Agenda for Education in a  
Social and Political Democracy



## Common Characteristics of LSDS Schools

- **Democratic purpose:** LSDS schools believe the primary purpose of schooling is to develop in young people the knowledge, skills, and dispositions students require for successful participation in our nation's social and political democracy.
- **Student achievement:** Students in such schools are successful academically and socially.
- **Ongoing professional development:** All members of the school community engage in continuous learning.
- **Approaches to learning:** These are schools that use a wide variety of approaches to learning including engaging students with parents and other adults within the community.
- **Small size:** They are small schools – small enough so that faculty members can gather as a group for dialogue.

*LSDS Meeting Scheduled for January 26-27-28 , 2006,  
at the Institute for Educational Inquiry in Seattle, Washington*

**NOMINATE  
A SCHOOL TO BE  
A NEW MEMBER  
OF THE LEAGUE OF  
SMALL  
DEMOCRATIC  
SCHOOLS**

Know a school that should be a member of the League? Send the name of the school, the principal's name, email address, and phone number to the appropriate regional coordinator:

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