When it comes to extracurriculars, our sports and visual/performing arts programs are often in the limelight.  So I thought I’d take the time this week to spotlight four other extracurriculars that serve to make our program as comprehensive as it is.

    MCS embarked on a new academic adventure with the introduction of robotics a few years ago. Robotics is one of our growing programs. Our goal is to use the motivational effects of robots to excite students about science, math and technology. As students take part in computer, math and science classes, they will work in teams to master robotic skills that will increase in difficulty as the year progresses. While learning how to work with a team and share ideas with each other, students will be integrating science, technology, engineering, the arts, and math (STEAM) skills. By using a “hands-on,” team approach to learning, our STEAM education will teach the students important STEAM skills, improve student’s problem-solving techniques and increase their ability to communicate and work with each other. Under the direction of their coaches, students learn how to use software to program their robots to complete simple tasks. As students work on each task, they work in small groups and through this build the skills needed to share ideas with others, communicate thoughts, and marry their ideas with other’s ideas. We also put into practice problem-solving skills taught in math and science. The amazing part of all of this learning through robots is that it will be so much fun! The challenges students face are exciting to overcome. Working with their classmates encourages them to participate without them even realizing that a lot of learning is taking place.

    Another program that enhances the offerings at MCS is Student Council. The Student Council aspires to accomplish the mission of MCS by giving students the opportunity to be active student leaders in preparation for service beyond MCS. The Student Council serves the school by providing opportunities for all students to be involved in school activities and enjoy their time as MCS students. At the beginning of each year, students in 6th-8th grades are encouraged to run for office as President, Vice President, Secretary, or Treasurer.

      MCS students are no strangers to a new venture, ham radio. Last year, with the help of area hobbyists, the youngsters studied for their license and participated in a couple of regional competitions requiring them to authenticate a large number of global contacts over a given span of time. Coach John Zabrinski believes it is a great way to learn about other cultures and people. There is a great fellowship in amateur radio. Ham radio operators are involved in emergency response scenarios, hospitals and even work with the National Weather Service. They provide information when other communication systems go down or are rendered useless based on geographic conditions. The aim of the club at the middle school is to get kids on their own ham radios to communicate outside of the state and even the country and show them the more personal use for the system.

 Coach Zabrinski also works with the school’s tech teacher, Julie Nathanson in coaching the MCS cyber patriot team. The *Cyber patriot* National Youth Cyber Education *Program* was created by the Air Force Association to inspire students toward careers in cyber security and other science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) disciplines critical to our nation's future.  In the MCS program, students train to compete in a Cyber patriot Competition where they are required to secure an image of a computer that is being used to run a fictitious company. Each team is tasked to find and fix operating system security defects and to make the computer function according to the company’s standards. Teams install spyware scanners, strengthen group security policies, find and delete hacking tools, and setup firewalls.  To solve some of the tricky technical challenges, teams must learn and engage with collaborative problem-solving skills.

    A recent national poll reveals that more than 90 percent of Americans believe in the importance of extracurricular and co-curricular activities in our schools. I have always been impressed by the high percentage of our students who participate in one or more extracurricular activities. I have worked in schools where that was not the case, where participation was viewed by a large segment of the student body as “not cool.”Our schools’ success in this area is attributable to several factors, not the least of which is a spirited, self-assured student body. I also credit faculty, directors and coaches for their many selfless contributions to the success of our programs. And certainly, involved families and a supportive community play significant roles in the abundant success of our students in their extracurricular pursuits.

   MCS is special, with high expectations for the quality and abundance of extracurricular offerings in our schools. MCS families have had their children involved in enriching activities from early ages. The associated time and financial commitments are notable. Extracurricular activities contribute to a child’s development and parents see and appreciate the return on investment. Of course, there is an additional outcome to bear in mind: For all of our kids, regardless of the activities they choose to pursue, this stuff is fun! Take it from a once-lanky kid from the Mt. Pleasant section of Providence who enjoyed his time on the stages and fields of Blessed Sacrament School and LaSalle Academy.

God bless

Dr F