



### GLOBAL CONNECTION

Here's a nice thing about St. Mary's: a hundred people will show up at 7:00 pm on a weeknight to sit in our library, watch a documentary, and then talk intelligently about it. On April 30th, a big crowd of parents, teachers, and quite a few students viewed the documentary "2 Million Minutes." The title is a reference to the number of minutes of life a student has during high school, from grades 9 -12, and how students in various countries employ those minutes. The documentary, which came out in January 2008, follows six top-achieving students from three countries: a boy and girl from a large, highly-ranked public high school in Carmel, Indiana; a boy and a girl from a model high school in Shanghai, China; and a boy and a girl from a for-profit high school in Bangalore, India. The documentary is interspersed with statistics, interviews with educational experts, economists, executives of high-tech corporations, and public policy figures such as Robert Reich. There are some eye-opening moments in the film. Chinese students spend twice the time in school and in study sessions that their American counterparts do, the students in Bangalore, almost twice the time. Math and science instruction in the Chinese and Indian schools is conducted at a level of sophistication and intensity far beyond even the best American courses. Competition for spots in college and for secure careers is equally more intense. The film raises questions about America's economic predominance, and if we are preparing our children to compete under conditions of rapid globalization.

Discussion after the film ended was mixed. Some parents were shocked at the level of competition from China and India and left resolved to push their students even harder. At the other end of the spectrum, some people said that this was "Chicken Little" stuff, the sky is falling, and that good ol' Yankee ingenuity will always keep America #1. There was a whole range of viewpoints in between and tangential to those two reactions.

I left reassured in two ways. First, a hundred intelligent people, from ages 12-70 assembled, watched this important documentary calmly, and engaged in informed discussion afterwards. That made me feel great about the tenor of the St. Mary's community. St. Mary's is a place for informed, rational discourse. Second, pretty much everyone felt that our students receive an education that stacked up well against all three schools in the documentary – that St. Mary's is preparing their students to compete on a global basis. The results from our internationally-normed testing, the ISA tests, bear this out. Our sophomores, on the average, score above the #1 school system on the planet, Finland's.

In this issue of The Messenger, in addition to the usual great articles and updates, you will find a few more articles that touch upon this "2 Million Minutes" theme. One of them has to do with St. Mary's Advanced Placement offerings (p. 3). The other is a profile of St. Mary's senior Mengzhe "Ashley" Li, an international student from Beijing. Enjoy the reading!

