



"LOST IN WONDER" THIS HOLIDAY SEASON December 2015



Dear Parents and Guardians,

Like the singer Sam Cooke, I don't know much about biology. Despite this, I so enjoyed the conversations in our house as my children brought home their latest knowledge from the study of genetics. Punnett squares, homozygous genotypes, co-dominance, alleles, and other foreign terms were tossed around our house. I couldn't keep up, but dared not curb the enthusiasm. While my kids thought it true in all ways, when it comes to genetics, they were the smartest people in the house.

Genetics is cool. And brilliant. And like other fundamental explanations in science, elegant in myriad ways. It is the engine that enables all of life to evolve and adapt. One can imagine the Austrian monk Gregor Mendel sorting peas in his abbey. Neither he nor anybody else understood the implications of his discovery at that time. They lay fallow for many years, only to be picked up and developed by others decades later.

For our students, studying genetics makes them examine the world in new ways. They look at their physical features through a different lens and understand more deeply how closely tethered they are to those who have gone before them, and those who will follow. They learn that diversity in the scientific world is indispensable to its health. This can't help transfer into how they view the diversity they see and experience among their classmates. And, as our young scientists grapple with the possibilities of genetic engineering in whatever form, they must contemplate the ethical implications of their newfound knowledge. How could learning be any better than this?

Perhaps, I have forgotten my high school biology teacher's fervent efforts to teach me. It is more likely, however, that genetics, like many other subjects, are simply better and more completely taught now than when I was wandering through my adolescent years. Another possibility is that, like Mendel's work in the garden, my thinking about these topics and their relevance to my life needed to be awakened by the marvel of the next generation.

Sam Cooke was right – What a wonderful world it would be – if only we spent more time wondering about it and were more grateful for all its beauty. Here's hoping that you can spend some time this break with those you love, lost in wonder.

Sincerely,

Kevin Skelly, Ph.D.
Superintendent