

Our Journey to St Stans

My name is Nicholas Dabrowski, and I have been a police officer in the Town of Adams for 15 years. I am in a unique position because I attended public school in our town growing up and work with all of the schools in our town. I routinely visit classrooms and spend time with children in both the public school and St. Stans. I was asked to share my experience with our daughter transitioning into a catholic school from the public school. Before I explain our experience with St. Stans, I must mention that I have great relationships with all of the teachers and administration in the public school. Nothing I am going to write is meant to be disparaging towards our public schools, because every educator I've had the pleasure of working with has been caring, supportive, and always had our child's best interest at heart. I know the teachers personally, in many of our schools, and we are fortunate to have such a great group of caring educators.

Mobil learning was difficult for our child. The year that followed was extremely trying. Nightly we would spend an hour or two practicing math and other things, that she was having difficulty with. We were doing our best to give her the help she needed, and every night our daughter struggled to find the energy to do the work, that was needed. From my time in the school, we noticed that she tended to do better with smaller groups and more attention to help with the questions she had. I spent time in my daughter's classroom and noticed my daughter was out of character, as she was trying to find her voice with 24 other children. My wife and I made the decision to check with St. Stans to see if they were accepting students, because our daughter for the first time ever, said "I don't want to go to school tomorrow." Prior to this she loved school. Some of this was our fault on trying to give her the help she needed and she just was tired.

My wife contacted St. Stans and asked if they were accepting students in the 4th grade. Within days we had a "shadow day" where our daughter attended class with the children in her grade level. When we talked to our daughter about the possible change, the first thing she said was "Dad, I'm not wearing a uniform." To her credit she was somewhat open minded to the change, but did offer some resistance. We just asked her to go to the shadow day and let us know what she thought. I'll never forget showing up at the end of the her "shadow day." The door opened and out came all the St. Stans children in their uniforms. I stood there nervous of what our daughter was going to say. I saw her walk down the stairs and start skipping down the sidewalk in her "normal clothes." Mr. Rogge, the principal at the time, asked our daughter "How was your day?" She enthusiastically said "Great!" She then asked me if she could come back tomorrow. Our daughter was back to the kid that looked forward to school.

Those uniforms that I mentioned my daughter would never wear, well she was wrong. Most nights now we have to plead with her to change her clothes to get into pajamas, because they are comfortable. Getting dressed every morning is a breeze because everyone wears the same thing. There are no battles that she wore that shirt this week already and that she has a closet full of clothes. To anyone that is thinking about making the change, there is a used uniform sale at the end of each school year, which drastically cuts down on the cost of the uniform for your child.

Our daughters class size is approximately 12 children. We met with the teacher prior to the school year, as we were nervous that she may be a little behind from where the children were coming into the school year. Our daughter's teacher, was fabulous and has been in constant contact with us regarding her strengths and her weaknesses. This relationship with the teacher has made us be better parents and tutors at home. Prior to this year anytime our daughter had homework, she dreaded it. It was a constant battle to do homework and the extra studying. Our daughter has homework every night of the week. She is required to read a minimum of twenty minutes and regularly has extra homework assignments. When she gets home she immediately starts in on her homework, as I hear her say "Alexa set a timer for twenty minutes." As soon as she's done with her reading she starts in on her other homework. I don't know what changed, but I think she knows every other kid in the class is doing the work, and I'm blown away the lack of friction there is on a nightly basis to complete the work.

Prior to this year our daughter was average student. As I said earlier she had some catching up to do, and she's by no means is she a straight A student, after the school change. Prior to St. Stan's our daughter would show us her grades. She truly didn't understand or appreciate the grade on the paper. She knew a 100 was an excellent score, but there were times she'd show us a grade on something and say "Well dad at least it's not a 50." This year I sit down and print up study guides, and she truly strives to earn good grades. She's faltered from time to time, but our refrigerator is currently covered with every great test score she's earned. She shows pride in her work, and understands that she needs to study to earn those grades. Seeing your daughter enthusiastic about a great test score is an amazing feeling, and something she really didn't celebrate before.

I was brought up Catholic, but am not someone that regularly attends church. My wife is not Catholic. This was not something that we were overly concerned with when we were making the transition. We were interested in the smaller class sizes, and getting the help that our daughter needed. There are some religion studies at the school, and the children will attend church from time to time. Religion has not been forced down our throat and it has not changed the way we live. It actually has enriched it. I can't tell you how many times I've had really interesting conversations about what she learned during her religion class. Our daughter hasn't shown any interest in going to church weekly, but she's taken some of the positive

thing's religion gives us. She uses the religious aspects of the school to make herself a more caring version of herself.

Over the last three years I have been part of the St. Stan's Field Day. I was invited to the Field Day because of my role in the community as a police officer. It's one of the highlights of the school year. Every year all grades of St. Stans head over to the field on Mill St and play games all day. Lunch is provided and a ice cream truck brings treats for the children. Every year I am amazed by how kind and respectful all of the children are. Pre-K through 8th grade all get along seamlessly. It's truly something special to see. The older kids helping the younger grades, and the younger kids looking up to older children. Respect and kindness are things we strive to engrain in our children. It's difficult when your child comes home from school to try and reinforce the values that we teach them, when much of your conversations are explaining the actions of others and explaining that the other children may not have the home life that they do. Since our move to St. Stans these conversations are less frequent because kindness, respect, and self-worth are echoed on a daily basis, and the children are all on the same page.

This year at St. Stans we were introduced to the tradition of the "Christmas Pageant." Our daughter was cast the donkey for the pageant. Hilarious, I know. She had a minor role in the pageant, which I expected as she is not someone comfortable with public speaking. As the pageant came closer, and it was only a day or two out, she showed interest in a more important role. We explained to her that this was not something that could happen, because they'd been practicing for the play, but that maybe next year she could play a larger role. The pageant was beautiful and the kids did a great job. Our daughter was amazed by some of the kids in play, specifically one of the older girls who sang in front of the whole church. Since that time we regularly hear our daughter working on her singing in the car and at home, and she's shown interest in playing a larger role, possibly, in years to come. Just the fact that she would entertain singing or acting in front of a church full of people, shows the comfort level and the confidence she's gained during her short time at St. Stans.

As I stated previously, we are fortunate to have the educators that we do in the area whether it be public or private schooling. I work and spend time in all of the schools in Adams. The teachers in the public school are some of the best educators I've had the pleasure of working with. They however, have a difficult job with the class sizes and trying to manage some of the difficult home lives that some of our children encounter. We chose to give St. Stans a try, not because anything was wrong with the public school, but because we thought she would flourish in a smaller class size and more individualized attention in the areas she needed work on. This weekend was the "Curriculum Fair." Each class from Kindergarten through 8th grade does a grade level appropriate project. The students then stand by their project and answer questions from parents, teachers, and members of the church. I stood by proudly to watch my daughter explain, excitedly, all that she learned about hydroponics. She knew some of the people asking

questions, but some were people she'd never met. She wasn't the nervous child I've seen growing up, talking to someone she didn't know. She felt safe and she proudly answered questions and explained everything in detail, about what she'd learned.

The thing I'll remember, which truly sums up the experience of the "Curriculum Fair" and the school in general, was that there was one child that was missing to present what they had learned. The young boy had a hockey game and wasn't in attendance for the fair. The young boy came into the "Curriculum Fair" with about fifteen minutes remaining. When the young boy walked in, all of the children were excited he made it. He sat by his project and explained what he had learned. The excitement that the boy made it in time was felt in the room. It was shortly after he arrived that a class picture was taken in front of their projects. I heard several kids ask about his hockey game and tell him, "We're so glad you made it." Seeing this really sums up our experience at St. Stans. The classroom truly is a small family and it was seen in that moment. Our experience at St. Stans truly has been exceptional. We have been welcomed with open arms, regardless of our religious beliefs. The staff and children are caring, respectful, and there is a family feel to the environment. If your child has had any of the issues that ours did, there is a home for you at St. Stans.

Nicholas Dabrowski