

Challenge Success

Working towards healthier, happier and more confident students

By Andy Oldham, Assistant Principal for Teaching & Learning



A Note From Our Principal

Working with Challenge Success is an amazing opportunity for our Marist community. It provides us a chance to evaluate our students' needs and focus on what is most important — the student experience at Marist. To fully engage with Challenge Success, a crucial step is listening to our young learners, and coming to a greater understanding of how they view their educational experience. What challenges are they facing? What aspects of their education bring them joy? What can parents and teachers do to make students feel more engaged in the learning process? Our hope is that answering some of these questions will lead us to affecting change at Marist that will produce healthier, happier, and more confident students. I hope that you accompany us on this journey and watch out for updates as we continue to work with Challenge Success.

- Bob Fraley

What is Challenge Success?

Challenge Success is a non-profit organization affiliated with the Stanford University Graduate School of Education. They partner with schools and families to provide proven, practical, and research-based tools and strategies that promote well-being and engagement with learning and transform the student experience to create a more balanced and academically fulfilling life for all students.

For 50 years, from its earliest days with the Marist Brothers and Holy Names Sisters to today's entirely lay staff, Marist Catholic High School has been predicated on providing a disciplined and caring education to students of a variety of backgrounds and abilities. And by standard measurements of academic performance – standardized tests, graduation rates, college enrollment, college persistence and anecdotal information from graduates and past parents – Marist is providing a good education to its students.

And yet, there is also a growing sense of urgency that our approach to teaching and learning which has served us so well for 50 years may no longer be enough. Students and society have changed in many ways since the school was built on the Kingsley farmland in the late 60s. An emerging body of research indicates that good intentions, hard work and high expectations are no longer enough to help students thrive in the 21st century. Additionally, the landscape that today's youth has to navigate is filled with rapid change and the interrelated challenges of mental health, technology dependence, social media, decreased economic opportunities, increased competition and declining confidence and trust in traditional institutions.

When one considers what we know today about the development and needs of the adolescent brain, the pressure to succeed in narrow terms – good grades, good college, good job = lasting happiness – along with an unstable social and economic landscape, it should not surprise us that Marist students today are struggling with stress and mental health



Junior Esha Reddy, English teacher Beth Wirth, junior Cameron Kline, Marist counselor Shari Pimental, current parent Judith de Leon Chávez, Marist principal Bob Fraley, current parent Jill Cole '96, sophomore Bailey Cole and Science teacher Ryan Moser take a photo after lunch at the Challenge Success conference in San Francisco.

challenges in quite a different way than they did 20 or even 10 years ago.

Following in the footsteps of Marist's founder St. Marcellin Champagnat, educators at Marist are called to understand that "if you wish to educate young people, first you must love them." And there is no better expression of love than to listen to and accompany a young person — something St. Marcellin came to understand while he was creating a teaching order in France in the 1800s, also in a turbulent and rapidly changing society. As a student, St. Marcellin experienced firsthand the humiliation of abuse and not being listened to, and built his vision of schools on the opposite. Love first. Even 200 years later, his methods hold up to the research of the 21st century. How lucky are we to have inherited this charism that we must cling to?

To help us better listen to and accompany our students, we recently partnered with an organization called Challenge Success. They are a school-reform non-profit affiliated with the Stanford Graduate School of Education and have a strong track record of bringing together schools and the families they serve to improve the well-being and engagement of all students. Their methods and strategies rest upon a great deal of research and experience while remaining tailored to the existing strengths and uniqueness of each community.

A review of recent survey data of Marist students, gathered from Challenge Success, as well as from our most recent school accreditation process, reveals that we are being called to become more coherent, intentional, innovative, dynamic and relevant in our implementation of the Marist charism. We believe that Challenge Success will help us achieve these goals, while remaining firmly rooted in the Marist tradition.

When one explores the research findings that Challenge Success has uncovered about highly effective schools, a



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pattern emerges that reveals engagement, belonging and well-being acting in a reinforcing triangle. This finding also compliments what we have so long held up as a model of a Marist education: the development of the whole person – body, mind and soul.

Within this classic model, there is no hierarchy between the mind, body and soul. And yet at Marist, like many Catholic high schools, success often gets defined as maintaining a challenging course load, high grades and involvement in many co-curricular activities. And so the narrow narrative of success often gets reinforced (good grades, good college, good job = lasting happiness) and can be a primary contributor to the struggles with stress and mental health that we know interfere with healthy adolescent development.

Partnering with Challenge Success feels natural and complementary to who we are and who we wish to be. The pursuit to improve comes not so much in pursuing a new direction or "reforming" the school, as much as it looks to be a doubling down on who we are and have always claimed to be. Challenge Success' deep and reliable research base, combined with a framework that incorporates the voices and perspectives of students, parents, and schools, can help us build and expand upon the strengths that already exist at Marist and become a better, truer version of the school so many know, love and trust. ♣

Conference Impressions

Three current students joined Marist administration, teachers, counselors and parents this September on a trip to San Francisco for a Challenge Success conference. These are their reflections:



"The conference allowed me to reflect on our learning strategies at Marist and understand how they effect students. It is important that we work together with student and teacher perspectives to make education more impactful in and out of the classroom."
-Esha Reddy '24



"I hope that this program can help Marist make a lot of good changes to improve student life. Things like making work more meaningful and overall making school a less stressful environment."
-Cameron Kline '24



"I learned how much Marist works in the background on having the student voice heard. We have staff here that listen and prioritize us. They listen to all our concerns and help us achieve more as students and as people. I really hope that this program will help make the student body feel heard and motivated here at Marist."
-Bailey Cole '25