

On a fateful day of spring 2003, our family won the lottery when we received a call that Pierce's name was picked out of many to attend the Alief Montessori Community School. My wife and I looked at each other and smiled, thinking to ourselves. Our golden dragon son is sure lucky. Two years later, our second son Ethan joined his brother. Three years after that, our daughter Phoenix followed her brothers' footsteps. Since 2003, we have been driving from Richmond to let our kids attend Alief Montessori. Unlike the Texas lottery that can get squandered, we believe that our prize from the AMCS lottery will last through our children's lifetime. How do I know that?

I know it because when T.V. or video games are taken from them they are sad, but when it is books, they are terrified. I know it when they tell us that books are way better than movies. I know it when they spend more time packing their books for vacation than their clothes. I know it when they play with other kids whether old or young, big or small, the other parents are happy because our children are respectful and well-behaved. I know it when their classmates think that they are geniuses when they know they are not.

How do the staffs and the teachers of AMCS do it, year after year setting the standard of excellence that many would dream of? As a concerned parent, I pay close attention to news about our nation's state of education. Simply, we're not doing as well as others. Per child, US spend more than any others in education, yet our students score near the bottom when compared to other developed countries. Experts offer many explanations: teacher's salary, lack of education standard, language barriers, poverty, lack of parents' involvement, racism, teacher unions, bureaucracy, income gap, etc. They might be right. If you believe what you hear from the media, AMCS shouldn't be where it is now, one of the best schools out of a thousand in Texas. If demographics are indicators of success, pundits would have you believe that AMCS is a failing school. It's amazing how it beats the odds consistently year after year. On a field trip several years ago, I got to witness the amazing diversity of our students. Little kids were speaking to their friends in Spanish, Chinese, Vietnamese, Arabic, Hindi, Urdu, and some others I am sure. Such a diverse group, yet the staffs and the teachers somehow able to make them all excel. They don't have the resources or the modern facilities like other schools. The students don't spend more time in the classroom; in fact, kids here spend less time in the classroom than a typical school. They get out two hours earlier every Friday. They have the same student teacher ratio as any other schools, if not more. They don't have bilingual programs. Yet year in and year out, the only thing they know is high performance. They continue to give out the lottery prizes to the many lucky students day in and day out. I once heard from someone, "anyone can make the simple things complex, but it takes a genius to make complex things simple." The true geniuses are the staffs and the teachers of AMCS.

I wonder about their secret often and I think I know what it is. They don't have two people, a teacher and an assistant, teaching in each class, as they have you believe. In fact every child is a teacher in his/her own way. Different grade levels are mixed together in the same class every day they are here. Teachers encourage the older students to teach the younger ones on concepts that they already learned. When asked, teachers often tell the student to ask a fellow classmate instead. Stephen Covey, the author of "The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People", one of the most popular books in last 20 years, said this "the best way to learn is to teach". He stole that lesson from Montessori. If you don't believe me, try it yourself. I live by this principle every

moment and can vow for its effectiveness. The kids here practice this secret principle each and every day. Not only do they learn better, they develop their leadership qualities: charity, generosity, sympathy, communication at such an early age that it becomes part of their DNA. This sort of stuffs will help them wherever they go for the rest of their lives.

In conclusion, to the current and past students of AMCS, be grateful with what you got here. Take advantage of your lottery prize, don't waste it. The nuts and bolts of math, science, and language arts you will master. You will probably know it better than your peers at the next school you attend. Don't be surprised if others think that you're a genius. More importantly, treasure the moment when you help your classmates. Making yourself great is not enough, make your classmates great, make your school great through sharing what you know. If you can do that, you will become a legend.

To the AMCS leadership team, especially Ms Nancy Chieu, I want to congratulate you on the beautiful campus. It's an incredible achievement. I am sure it had caused you many sleepless nights. We are grateful of your personal sacrifices. Thanks for the beautiful campus. AMCS was a great learning institution when there were just trailers and very old buildings. With the modern campuses, I am sure the level of success will increase leap and bound.

To the teachers and staffs, thanks for making our jobs as parents at home easy. You got this complex thing called "education" simplified... figured out. You are the true geniuses. Share your gifts, your system, and your teaching methods with others. Your students are great learner. They consume information and acquire knowledge more effectively than most. Here is challenge for you. Inspire them to transition from consumer of information to creator of knowledge.

To the public servants in the audience, you are the movers-and-shakers of Houston you can make great things happen for Houstonians. Don't let fate in the form of lottery winning or life circumstances determine whether a child will get a great education. Think of the kids whose names did not get picked. Think of the parents who want great education for their kids but don't know our school. Think of those who won the AMCS lottery, but had to give up because they don't have the means to get here. Great education should be the right of every child in Houston. Support AMCS, expand its resources. Advocate its mission. Share its success. Help other school adopt our AMCS' model. More than ever, our city, our state, and our nation need many schools like Alief Montessori Community School to be the model for all.