

## REACHING FOR THE STARS

By Sister Brenda Walsh, Racine Dominican

In a recent issue of the local newspaper, the Racine Journal Times, the Racine Unified School District outlined its academic achievement goals through the North Star Program. The ideal is to have all students be college or career ready at graduation. At a recent program on social issues which we organized to take a look at area education, Dr. Shaw, our School Superintendent said that “in addition to academic achievement, students need a spiritual and moral grounding” as a very important aspect of education in order to prepare students for life and work. He emphasized that teachers must have a vision of social justice and a moral purpose to help students develop values for responsible living and have the courage to put them into practice and live their lives with purpose, hope and meaning. This will take a continuous effort of family, school and community.

This makes me wonder why the furor over President Obama’s address to children in their own classrooms? He encouraged reaching for the stars not only in academic achievement but also in preparation for life and work. Carolynn Myss noted author and lecturer said that America has continued to “dumb down education” by limiting it to academic success. Beyond academic achievement, it calls for students to learn to make good life choices, to resolve conflicts before they escalate to violence, to distinguish truth from lies, to respect oneself and others no matter what their race or place of origin. These values are first learned from adults in the home, classroom and community. They are caught as well as taught and if learned well, well carry over into whatever life path people may choose in their adult lives.

If this is what we expect and value, why are some so infuriated by the President’s address to children in their schools calling them to responsibility?

Is it because it will challenge us to look beneath the surface and live according to deeper values?

Does racism play a part?

Is it a political contest?

This is a good time to reflect on the issue. What can we do to prepare present and future generations to live life with hope and meaning and make their contribution to the common good of society?