

Wellesley Middle School October PTO Meeting

May 16, 2014, 8:45-10:15 AM

WMS Cafeteria

Minutes of the Meeting

Mark Ito and Betsy Komjathy started off the meeting with an overview of Carol Dweck's book, *Mindset*. To paraphrase Dweck's website, "Mindset is a simple idea discovered by world-renowned Stanford University psychologist Carol Dweck in decades of research on achievement and success—a simple idea that makes all the difference. Teaching a growth mindset creates motivation and productivity in the worlds of business, education, and sports." A major focus of *Mindset* is that intelligence is not fixed.

-The book has been used for a number of years at WMS, originally introduced by previous principal, John Daria. Over time there was a change of faculty at WMS and so they are reintroducing to all faculty and encouraging a consistent focus on its core principals. (In the elementary schools, the principal of Fiske uses it as well.)

-The seventh grade students were recently introduced to the concept of a growth mindset through a workshop by Nadja Reilly, a clinical psychologist with over 15 years of experience specializing in children, adolescents, and families.

- Each panelist shared a favorite 'nugget' from *Mindset* and how it applies to their work with students and/or recommendations for how parents can encourage a growth mindset.

-Cathie Gordon, Assistant Principal, described that she previously taught 7th grade English so she was excited to see the 7th grade students learning and applying the concepts. She saw natural optimism in her students, however she saw ways in her current position to use the concepts in her disciplinary works. As an example, she sees plagiarism as an example of a fixed mindset. All cheating is a fixed mindset including copying homework. Kids who want that A+ and refuse to make mistakes aren't contemplating growth. What she likes about Middle Schoolers is they are still young enough to learn these lessons and make a fundamental change.

-Mimi Ferrick, Dept Head of Special Education, particularly liked a quote about whether lowering standards for kids, particularly those with special needs, (see p. 194), is appropriate. She felt that there is almost always a way to reach kids through high standards using process feedback.

-Kate Mahoney, Dept Head of Guidance was pleased the text is back. It is used in Guidance to help with many issues including depression, friend issues, bullying, shyness. She finds fixed mindsets lead to ruminating; growth is more change oriented. She often asks, "What is one thing you can take control of," in a situation where a kid is having trouble. In the pilot, kids did accurately identify where they had a fixed vs. growth mindset. Kate also shared that having friends who know this language often has a great impact because by middle school friends have powerful influence. They are looking at how students can use these concepts to support their friends in friend conversations.

-Adam Blumer, Dept head of Social Studies, looked at how students compare themselves to others. For example, kids who are you focused on other kids who are "worse off" – often a sign of fixed mindset.

Teachers should challenge kids and kids should occasionally fail, or school isn't doing its job. That process helps students maximize their potential.

-Tim Eagan, Dept Head of Classical and Modern Language uses these concepts when addressing kids who say, "I have no ability for language." Foreign language mastery has nothing to do with talent, it is all about contact time – as an example in Cameroon almost all the citizens are bi or tri lingual whether they have gone to school or not. He runs a Spanish class at the High School that is the standard curriculum but slower. His major emphasis is on grit and tenacity – the “ thinking” classroom. He focuses on students’ ability to process intellectual meta cognition - how do you reflect after the test? - why or why they didn't achieve? Every class ends with a 5 minute debrief. Sometimes learning is difficult – so he encourages students to seek resources and don't give up.

-Steve Rose – one of the School Psychologists – emphasized the concept of how to you get to growth from adversity? When something is not going right how do you help the frame that problem to leads to growth? Meeting standards build inner character and qualities. Much like a younger kid, where they stub their toe – we can rush to them, or ignore them or tell them they will be okay. This is a metaphor that applies to Middle Schoolers, as parents and teachers, he suggests we try to give them space and have a neutral reaction.

-Nadja Reilly: It's all about your internal dialogue or self talk. Are you stuck in a good limited/avoidant pattern or do you favor a growth mindset and see power and control where you are flexible and willing to try even if you might fail.

Conclusion: Grit and resilience are getting a lots of press. Read the book, or watch any number of You Tube and Ted Talks on the subject to help with this valuable construct around self-worth.

Ted talk: http://www.ted.com/talks/angela_lee_duckworth_the_key_to_success_grit