

# STAFF DEVELOPMENT NEWSLETTER

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Image from National Geographic

## GRATTITUDE/THANKS

*In a great teacher's classroom,  
every student feels like the  
favorite. Todd Whitaker*

With Christmas over and the New Year upon us it is always a great time to think about the power of gratitude. Growing up during the farm crisis in the 1980's, I got to see first hand what it meant to give thanks for what we had. We always had food on the table, and a warm house, but I can remember vividly having to sell our family farm, moving to the hired man's house who we had to let go, and my mom and dad being "stressed out" about money as the bank overdrafts in the mailbox were a constant reminder of the tough times our family was going through. Christmas gifts consisted of a new outfit for school and one new toy to play with. As a child, I didn't see what I didn't have, but gave thanks and appreciated what I did have. My experiences as a child also helped me to be grateful for my everyday experiences of a loving family, food on the table, and a job I love. I fast forward to my own kids who we try to teach appreciation and gratitude daily, but feel like at times it is a losing battle. When most things our kids ask for are given and this is best seen at Christmas when it feels like we need a small trailer to haul back the gifts they receive from their grandparents. Even though it may be harder today to teach gratitude it is an attribute that we must instill into all kids and demonstrate ourselves.

Dr. Kerry Howells is one of the best researchers around the topic of gratitude and describes the power gratitude can have on students. In one of her interviews with a teacher, she describes how a 40-year veteran lived a life of gratitude as an educator. "Before every lesson, he would pause outside the classroom before going in to teach. He would close his eyes almost as if in prayer. He paused to be thankful for the opportunity to teach, reminding himself he was about to enter a class where there would be students brighter and more articulate than he was and who would be going on to achieve greater things in their lives than he ever would. He felt privileged to share the learning experience with them and paused to prepare himself to give of his best in this coming opportunity." Dr. Howells goes on to describes how gratitude should be practiced for its own sake, out of a sense of being motivated to give back and be a better person. The teacher did not need his greetings to be reciprocated by his students. Once we make our gratitude conditional on others and measure its impact in terms of how others respond, it becomes transactional and loses its power. When we can live a life of gratitude it helps us to live a happier life.

I would hope that all of us would have the goal of being happy! Gratitude is about seeing the positive things in life and not focusing on the negative things that can for some control our lives. We must continue to be intentional as educators and parents to have gratitude ourselves and instill in the next generation the importance of begin grateful. I hope that all of you have a great 2017 and I am grateful I get to work with all of you!

The school district of Seward, in cooperation with parents and community, affirms that all students will have the skills to become productive and contributing members of a global community. The district is committed to the development of each student academically, emotionally, socially and physically.

