



# September Staff Dev. Newsletter

A newsletter for the Seward Staff by Dr. Dominy

## Grit in the Middle of a Pandemic

One of the side effects of the pandemic is that we get to see the best of people and sadly, the worst of people. I have been so proud and thankful for the Seward staff and how you have embraced the challenge of teaching in a world we could never have imagined. I see people every day committed to helping kids reach their full potential, committed to their academic, and social-emotional needs. I am inspired by you and your determination to provide students a sense of normality and stability in a world that is far from normal and stable.


There are people in our world who will try to tear us down or slow us down with opposing views and contrasting opinions, but to me, grit means that I/We can persevere toward our goal of making every student, every day, a success even when it is hard, and a pandemic is hard! That also does not mean that we won't face setbacks, and we need to remember that it is OK not to be OK. We need to take care of each other, listen, problem-solve, and be empathetic to the needs of all.

In each newsletter going forward- I will highlight information regarding Grit. The summary below sets the stage for all of you as we embark on learning more about Grit and mental health in our PLC's and staff development days.

### Talent Does Not Equal Success

According to author Angela Duckworth, people generally assume that great professional success—winning awards, gaining recognition, and earning lots of money—is directly related to natural talent. Duckworth herself was guilty of this thinking when she taught middle school math. She automatically assumed that the students who showed the most aptitude for math would have the highest test scores in the class. In reality, the students who studied the most and worked the hardest were the ones who did the best. "I'd been distracted by talent," Duckworth admits.

After hundreds of interviews with successful people about how they had achieved "greatness," plus studies of West Point cadets and competitive spellers, Duckworth knew one thing to be true: talent has very little, if anything, to do with success. "I've never really viewed myself as particularly talented," says actor and musician Will Smith, who has won several Grammy awards and been nominated for an Academy Award. "Where I excel is ridiculous, sickening work ethic," confesses Smith. He would probably say that he began his career as a so-so rapper whose skills improved dramatically because



of the work he put into his craft. Like Duckworth's middle school math students, he made a consistent, concentrated effort to improve.

According to Duckworth, effort is more important than natural talent. She explains this in two equations: talent x effort = skill and skill x effort = achievement. Effort essentially counts twice, making it more important than talent. The equation also indicates that talent is multiplied by effort—the more effort put in, the more skill is generated. A child might be a naturally good speller, for example, but they won't win big competitions if they don't put any effort into practicing. They will be outperformed by students who have average natural talent and a drive to study and succeed.

## **Positive Teacher Pledge– Jon Gordon**

### **THE POWER OF A POSITIVE EDUCATOR**

When I think about the teachers who made a difference in my life I realize they were all positive. Mrs. Liota smiled every day and made me feel loved. Coach Caiazza believed in me while Mr. Ehmann encouraged me to be my best. Years later as I think about the impact these teachers had on my life it's clear that being a positive educator not only makes you better it makes everyone around you better. Positive educators have the power to transform lives and inspire young minds to believe they can and will change the world. In this spirit here are seven ways we can all choose to be a positive educator.

**1. Be Positively Contagious** – Research shows that emotions are contagious. Sincere smiles, kind words, encouragement and positive energy infect people in a positive way. On the flip side your students are just as likely to catch your bad mood as the swine flu. So each day you come to school you have a choice. You can be a germ or a big dose of Vitamin C. When you choose to be positively contagious your positive energy has a positive impact on your students, your colleagues and ultimately your school culture. Your students will remember very little of what you said but they will remember 100% of how you made them feel. I remember Mrs. Liota and her smile and love and it made all the difference.

**2. Take a Daily Thank you Walk** – It's simple, it's powerful, and it's a great way to feed yourself with positivity. How does it work? You simply take a walk... outside, in a mall, at your school, on a treadmill, or anywhere else you can think of, and think about all the things, big and small, that you are grateful for. The research shows you can't be stressed and thankful at the same time so when you combine gratitude with physical exercise, you give yourself a double boost of positive energy. You flood your brain and body with positive emotions and natural antidepressants that uplift you rather than the stress hormones that drain your energy and slowly kill you. By the time you get to school you are ready for a great day.

**3. Celebrate Success** – One of the simplest, most powerful things you can do for yourself and your students is to celebrate your daily successes. Instead of thinking of all things that went wrong at school each day focus on the one thing that went right. Try this: Each night before you go to bed think about the one great thing about your day. If you do this you'll look forward to creating more success tomorrow. Also have your students do this as well. Each night they will go to bed feeling like a success and they will wake up with more confidence to take on the day.

**4. Expect to Make a Difference** – When positive educators walk into their classroom they expect to make a difference in their student's lives. In fact, making a difference is the very reason why they became a teacher in the first place and this purpose continues to fuel them and their teaching. They come to school each day thinking of ways they can make a difference and expecting that their actions

and lessons will lead to positive outcomes for their students. They win in their mind first and then they win in the hearts and minds of their students.

**5. Believe in Your Students More than They Believe in Themselves** – I tried to quit lacrosse during my freshman year in high school but Coach Caiazza wouldn't let me. He told me that I was going to play in college one day. He had a vision for me that I couldn't even fathom. He believed in me more than I believed in myself. I ended up going to Cornell University and the experience of playing lacrosse there changed my life forever. The difference between success and failure is belief and so often this belief is instilled in us by someone else. Coach Caiazza was that person for me and it changed my life. You can be that person for one of your students if you believe in them and see their potential rather than their limitations.

**6. Develop Positive Relationships** – Author Andy Stanley once said, "Rules without relationship lead to rebellion." Far too many principals share rules with their teachers but they don't have a relationship with them. And far too many teachers don't have positive relationships with their students. So what happens? Teachers and students disengage from the mission of the school. I've had many educators approach me and tell me that my books helped them realize they needed to focus less on rules and invest more in their relationships. The result was a dramatic increase in teacher and student performance, morale and engagement. To develop positive relationships you need to enhance communication, build trust, listen to them, make time for them, recognize them, show them you care through your actions and mentor them. Take the time to give them your best and they will give them your best.

**7. Show you Care** – It's a simple fact. The best educators stand out by showing their students and colleagues that they care about them. Standardized test scores rise when teachers make time to really know their students. Teacher performance improves when principals create engaged relationships with their teachers. Teamwork is enhanced when educators know and care about one another. Parents are more supportive when educators communicate with their student's parents. The most powerful form of positive energy is love and this love transforms students, people and schools when it is put into action. Create your own unique way to show your students and colleagues you care about them and you will not only feel more positive yourself but you will develop positive kids who create a more positive world.

### A Positive Message for Teachers







**1st grade students taking our new reading screener- MAP Fluency**



**Mr. Janda taking his students outside for a "Face Covering break"**



**A variety of percussion instruments being used at SMS.**

