

### WHY DO WE DO WHAT WE DO?

It almost sounds like a silly question, doesn't it? Why do we at Redwood do what we do? Though it may sound silly, that question is at the heart of everything we do every day. Why we do what we do helps us make the myriad of decisions we make every week. It is the "why" that guides us as we strive to improve everything we do so we can better meet the needs of all of our students.

**So, why do we do what we do?** We do what we do because:

- We believe every student can learn every day.
- We believe every student should leave high school knowing enough about themselves that they are confident and well-prepared to pursue a variety of career options.

Our district mission statement says, "Students will be prepared for engaged citizenship and able to contribute individually and collaboratively in order to address the challenges of a dynamic and diverse world." We believe the learning partnerships we establish with students will assure all students succeed and all students become clear about who they are, what their interests are and what possibilities await them.

### WORKING TOGETHER

Students benefit when schools and families are working together, so I will use these periodic letters to share with you some current educational and youth development research and current thinking. As a starting point, I want to share something our staff examined at the start of the school year.

Carol Dweck, an eminent psychology researcher at Stanford, has spent more than three decades of systematic research figuring out why some people achieve their potential while equally talented others



PRINCIPAL DAVID SONDHEIM

don't. **The key, she found, isn't ability; it's whether you believe ability is something that can be developed and learned or whether you believe ability is something innate and immutable .** Dweck has described this as the difference between a fixed mindset and a growth mindset. Her research has shown that students who operate from a predominantly fixed mindset are consumed with appearing successful or innately talented. Unfortunately, these students often approach challenges or difficulties as threats to their talent or natural ability instead of approaching them as learning and self-improvement opportunities. On the other hand, students who can accept challenges as opportunities to improve themselves are using a growth mindset and are more likely to work hard to continually improve their skills. These students are usually very secure and handle challenges in stride, leading the way to lifelong learning and increased success and happiness.

**So, how do we help students develop a growth mindset instead of a fixed mindset?** One of the

# ROOTS

NOT THE BARK, TWIG OR LOG

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A Giant thanks to everyone for welcoming me so warmly this fall as Redwood's new principal. I am so proud of the great work Redwood has always done and am excited to be working with a staff of professionals and a community that believe in continual improvement to better serve every student, every day. We welcome your thoughts as we move forward. Send thoughts and comments to: [input@redwood.org](mailto:input@redwood.org). If you're interested in discussing this issue of Roots, visit my blog at [rhsprincipal.blogspot.com](http://rhsprincipal.blogspot.com)

most powerful things we can do is be careful how we respond to young people about their work. Praising the processes young people use (effort, strategies, choices, etc.), instead of praising a student's talent or intelligence, helps develop a growth mindset. Feedback that labels or excuses the student develops a fixed mindset and makes the student less likely to be open to constructive criticism. As Dweck puts it, "Every word and action from parent to child sends a message. Tomorrow, listen to what you say to your kids and tune in to the messages you're sending. Are they messages that say: *You have permanent traits and I'm judging them?* Or are they messages that say: *You're a developing person and I'm interested in your development?*"

One common example of putting Dweck's work into action is a discussion around report cards with some lower than expected grades. Instead of focusing on the grades, try to help your student identify areas for improvement and help your student problem-solve how to make those improvements. This work will help improve your student's grades without making the grades the focus. Instead, the focus will be on the learning opportunity this challenge presents.

## SUGGESTED READINGS

Below are some recommended readings on student learning and development.

**Mindset: The New Psychology of Success;**  
Carol Dweck, Random House, 2006

**Nurture Shock;** Po Bronson and Ashley Merryman; Twelve; 2009



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