

Yearbook letter 2013-14

As students get older the focus on being successful can feel like a pressure at times. The more I research what qualities most often make people successful the more I am reminded of the character strengths that our school values so strongly.

Consider the following:

In the late 1960s Walter Mischel performed an experiment called the Marshmallow Test, which analyzed the ability of 4 year olds to exhibit 'delayed gratification.' Each child was brought into a room, sat down at a table with a marshmallow on a plate, and told 'you can either have this treat now, or wait 15 minutes and have two treats.' All of the children opted to wait, but some couldn't. Some broke down in seconds, while others took minutes, and some were able to hold out the entire 15 minutes. Here's where this gets interesting;

When these children were later studied in high school those who could wait the entire 15 minutes did better in their studies, were less likely to have engaged in self-destructive behaviors that involved drugs, and had higher SAT scores. It might make sense that self-control, as exhibited as early as 4 years of age, would be a strong predictor of success, but it's not the best predictor. Read on!

Author / Researcher Angela Duckworth isolated two qualities that she claims are better predictors of outstanding achievement and success:

1. The tendency *not* to abandon tasks simply to move on to something else (not seeking something unique or novel in the face of completing a task one has already started).
2. The ability to see tasks through to their end no matter how difficult (also defined as perseverance, tenacity and perhaps determination)

Duckworth coined the term "grit" to embody these two qualities. She later defined grit as "the perseverance and passion to complete a long-term goal." She developed a test to measure grit that was not only simple but remarkably accurate in predicting success (the whole test of 12 questions takes about 3 minutes!). Shortly after its creation Duckworth gave the test to more than 1200 freshman entering West Point. All of these students had to complete "Beast Barracks" during the summer prior to their freshman year. It is a physically and mentally challenging series of weeks that prepare students for the rigors of West Point. West Point uses its own evaluation to assess these students called the "Whole Candidate Score," but it was Duckworth's grit test that better predicted those students who would drop out and those who would be successful.

Duckworth later demonstrated how Grit is an even better predictor of success than any intelligence measure that has ever been created.

Character is what these stories have in common. As researchers begin to study character we are finding that it is the sources of character that determine success. Because of this, character has long been at the foundation of what we do every day at BCMS. As our 6th, 7th, and 8th graders all move forward we hope that you remember that it is your foundations of character that will make you successful.

Becoming the best person you can be always, always, always means trying achieve our best more than comparing ourselves to others. We learn from others and we may even draw inspiration from others, but it is the inward look at ourselves and challenge that we accept to better ourselves that makes us a better person and sets us on the right path to success. The next time you feel pressured by success remember to look inward and try to identify how the task in front of you will make you stronger, wiser, and better able to take on other challenges. The more you do this the more often you will successfully put challenges behind you!

Thank you for a great, character-affirming year!

Mr. Klugman