Social Emotional Learning and Academic Performance

Educators and parents both work tirelessly to ensure that students reach their highest possible academic standard. Research indicates that enhancing a student’s social emotional learning also enhances their academic performance. Social emotional learning is teaching students to be aware of their emotions and the social situations of others. This can include teaching students about personality traits, decision making, time management, goal setting, problem solving, social skills, cultural awareness, conflict resolution, healthy relationships, and even career exploration.

At the beginning of the school year, school counselors collect data from students, parents, and school staff to determine the social emotional needs of each campus. School counselors then plan a balanced comprehensive school counseling program based on those needs. School counselors implement, monitor, evaluate, and continuously improve the comprehensive school counseling program throughout the year.

The purpose of the Counselor Newsletter is to share the social emotional learning that is taking place at Maxdale Elementary School. The newsletter will highlight the social emotional skills that students are working on so those skills can be transferred and applied to the students’ classrooms and the students’ homes. The goal of the newsletter is to build a communication bridge between counselors, educators, and parents.

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Character Traits
Respect, Responsibility, and Gratitude

Every month, students and staff at Maxdale Elementary School focus on teaching and practicing one specific character trait. During the month of September, students learned about and practiced the character trait Respect. During the month of October, students learned about and practiced the character trait Responsibility. During the month of November, students focused on the character trait Teamwork. Students will be focusing on Safety in the month of January.

Each month, teachers motivate and recognize students by choosing a Star Citizen who did an outstanding job of demonstrating the chosen character trait. These students are rewarded with a recognition certificate and the opportunity to eat lunch with a parent or friend on the cafeteria stage during lunch.
What is Growth Mindset?

*Teachers Encourage Continuous Growth*

Carol Dweck is an American Psychologist who has researched motivation and success for many years. Dweck’s research has led to strategies she believes will engage and motivate learners. Dweck’s most known contribution has been her findings about “fixed mindsets” and “growth mindsets”.

Dweck explains that an individual with a fixed mindset believes that people are born with a fixed amount of intelligence and a fixed amount of talent. Someone with a fixed mindset may not value practice because they do not believe that practice will improve skill. Individuals with fixed mindsets often view mistakes as failure. For this reason, they avoid challenges and feel badly when mistakes are made. They do not understand that mistakes are an important part of the learning process.

Dweck asserts that an individual with a growth mindset, on the other hand, believes that talent can be developed through practice. A person with a growth mindset believes that an individual’s intelligence can grow throughout their lifetime. They believe that an individual can become better at a skill through practice and persistence. They view failure and mistakes as part of the learning process. For this reason, a person with a growth mindset embraces challenges and healthy criticism from others.

Teachers and staff at Maxdale Elementary School dedicate the first several weeks of the school year to ensuring that all students understand the difference between a fixed mindset and a growth mindset. Students spend time talking about how having a growth mindset will affect their engagement, learning, and behavior in the classroom. Teachers incorporate growth mindset into their lessons, and they re-visit the concept throughout the year to remind students of their commitment to being a learner with a growth mindset.

There are many ways that parents can encourage a growth mindset at home. Parents can have daily discussions with their children about learning and about the brain’s ability to grow. They can remind children, especially during difficult assignments, that persistent practice will bring positive results.

Parents can assist their children in understanding the power of the word “yet”. When learning a new skill, students may say statements such as “I can’t do that.” The concept of growth mindset encourages learners to change the statement to “I can’t do that yet!” This paradigm shift in thinking asserts that learning is a process and that with enough practice and persistence, students can learn and accomplish anything.

Mrs. Mobley, a fourth-grade teacher at Maxdale Elementary School, states that parents can “help foster a growth mindset at home by praising the process instead of the outcome.” She asserts that this assists children in seeing how “their efforts lead to success.” Children should be able to see value in getting an incorrect answer and in receiving healthy criticism.

The most powerful thing adults can do to teach students about growth mindset is role-modeling what a person with a growth mindset thinks like and behaves like. When parents or teachers make mistakes, they can verbalize their thoughts, so the child understands what using growth mindset sounds like. If an adult makes a mistake or struggles with a concept, they can role-model not giving up. Real-life moments provide the best opportunities to teach and role-model growth mindset for children.

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Teaching Good Citizenship

One of the most famous quotes of all time is “My fellow Americans, ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country” by John F. Kennedy. Mr. Kennedy’s words speak to the heart of what good citizenship is. Wikipedia defines citizenship as “properly fulfilling one’s role as a citizen.” The counselors at Maxdale Elementary School define Good Citizenship by following the counseling guidelines presented by both the Texas Education Agency (TEA) and The American School Counseling Association (ASCA).

According to the guidelines presented by ASCA and TEA, Good Citizenship includes:
1) Students recognizing that everyone has rights and responsibilities in family, school, and community
2) Students’ ability to view and respect alternate points of view
3) Students’ ability to recognize and respect individual differences, cultural diversity, and ethnic diversity
4) Students becoming aware of how groups work together cooperatively
5) Students’ ability to communicate effectively
6) Students’ ability to keep and make friends.

Parents can assist in teaching their children about Good Citizenship by speaking to their children about the importance of obeying rules and law. Parents can further teach their children about Good Citizenship by speaking to them about or showing them real world examples of how citizens work together for the common good. Last, parents can assist their children in learning about Good Citizenship by teaching them how to show pride in their school, their community, and their country.

Rue Richardson, 2nd Grade Star Citizen