



POCANTICO HILLS CENTRAL SCHOOL

LEARNING • ACHIEVEMENT • GROWTH • DIRECTION



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April 9, 2018

Dear Families,

Despite our shortened Spring Break recess, I hope you enjoyed the time to relax with your children before our final three months of the school year. The remaining months can feel like it moves at a frantic pace, and the words “finish strong” have come to mind in preparation for these final months. Indeed, I am reminded how such words are often echoed from the mouth of every coach to his or her players, encouraging each to maintain a strong effort through the entirety of a drill. Yes; it is the beginning of the end, and we can ask ourselves, “Are we ready to finish strong?”

As we continue to nurture a healthy school climate and consider the effort and perseverance that are necessary to “finish strong,” the important character trait—grit—is crucial for a successful finish to any worthwhile journey. Noted social scientist, Angela Duckworth and her recent book *Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance*, cites numerous research indicating the importance of discipline, perseverance and deliberate practice. Simply, effort counts. While her six-minute TED talk is certainly worth the time, I would highly recommend adding this book to your “to read” list. Ms. Duckworth is a former math teacher turned highly respected psychologist and social scientist at the University of Pennsylvania.

The only character trait I would place above effort is kindness. I am sure that we would all agree that how we treat one another is most important. Kindness comes first; everything else is prioritized beneath this most important core value. In my view, as both a parent and educator, these are the most important values—kindness and effort—we can model and in turn, instill in our children. The beauty of effort and kindness is that it teaches us to cope with failure as we improve with continued, sustained practice. We may fall short, but over time we come to celebrate our improvement because of our focused practice and the gratitude that we gain through our kind actions.



John Halligan, presenting a powerful message about kindness through *Ryan's Story* to our middle school students



As we continue to consider an emotionally intelligent school community, the use of the Anchors of Emotional Intelligence provides a framework for teaching such character traits and promoting pro-social behavior. Recently, our students in 5th and 6th grade completed a large-scale Mood Meter in their art classes with Ms. Morotti. The finished work is now displayed in the lobby of our building and will further support teaching students how their mind and body work in concert with one another to identify the many emotions that are experienced over the course of a school day. Building this emotional vocabulary will empower our students to understand how their emotions turn to actions as they fully recognize the full scope of their emotional lives.

Of course, the latter half of the school year includes both opportunities for celebration of our students' success and preparation for next school year. With that in mind, please be mindful of our weekly bulletin that is disseminated electronically each Sunday evening communicating important dates and events. While there are several events and dates that are specific to celebrating the graduation of our 8th grade students, I do want to bring to your attention our parent-information evening for the Washington D.C. trip on May 17th. Prior to this presentation, our 8th grade students will also be sharing their written work from their autobiography project with Ms. Tulley. Please mark your calendar for these two important events on May 17th.

Also, New York State assessments begin on April 11th and 12th with the ELA assessment in grades 3 – 8. Such testing provides one of many data points to assess students' academic growth during the school year. Please make sure your child has a solid night's sleep and a healthy breakfast each morning. The math assessment will be administered on May 1st and 2nd.

The spring marks much thoughtful work as it relates to teachers' placement of students for next school year. Ultimately, it is the child's teacher who should have the best sense of the most appropriate placement for the child for the following year. Placement decisions are best influenced by the healthy conversations that a parent may have with their child's teacher for the subsequent year. In turn, any specific information that is shared with a child's teacher must be communicated in writing on the parent-input form.

A letter with more details and the form are included in this communication and should be completed and returned to the office by Friday, May 11th, as teachers will begin the process of placement for next year soon thereafter. While a specific request for placement based on another child's experience who is not one's own is not appropriate, requesting a different experience for a younger child than their older sibling had with a specific teacher is reasonable. Again, we kindly ask that you ensure the completion of the parent-input form if there are any specific considerations we should be aware of.

Finally, as we prepare to "finish strong," we should be mindful that the journey through the school year challenges us to recognize that what our child may need at any given moment may be different from our own adult needs or past experiences. And, our willingness to withstand the temporary and fleeting moments of uncertainty or consternation ensures that our children develop the tools they need to begin to navigate their world. While each of our children, along with us as parents, will have different experiences, I am delighted that we are all on the journey together to reach the same safe destination.



I look forward to these exciting weeks and months ahead!

With Warm Regards,

Brent B. Harrington
Principal