

Keep Kids in Class:  
Building Positive School Climates  
April 11th, 2016



MASSACHUSETTS APPLESEED CENTER FOR LAW AND JUSTICE



# The Power of Mindsets: Creating a Positive School Climate

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# A commencement speech at Stanford University

To appreciate the impact that past events have had on the direction of our professional and personal lives

An experience in 1973 that was a major catalyst for me to adopt a strength-based approach in my work as an educator and psychologist

# The power of mindsets

Mindsets: The assumptions and expectations we have for ourselves and others that guide our behavior. Mindsets play a powerful role in impacting on all aspects of the climate and culture that is created in schools—mindset theories should focus not only on academic achievement but on relationships and social-emotional factors as well

# The power of mindsets

A theory of mindsets that includes social-emotional factors has been proposed by Shawn Achor as described in his book *The Happiness Advantage*

Achor: happiness precedes success rather than happiness being the outcome of success

# The power of mindsets

In *The Happiness Advantage*, Achor defines happiness in the following way: “As the experience of positive emotions—pleasure combined with deeper feelings of meaning and purpose. Happiness implies a positive mood in the present and a positive outlook for the future.”

# The power of mindsets

The studies cited by Achor have major implications for effective teaching and interventions in schools, including the following belief:

The reinforcement of positive emotions and purpose in both staff and students plays a significant role in how effectively children and teens learn and thrive in the school setting

# The power of mindsets

What is the mindset and accompanying strategies of educators, administrators, and other staff in schools that enhance learning, motivation, and resilience in students?



# The mindset and strategies of effective educators

To appreciate the lifelong impact that educators and others have on students: The presence of what Julius Segal called a “charismatic adult” --an adult from whom one “gathers strength”

# A frequently posed question about charismatic adults

“I want to be a charismatic adult in my school. What do I say or do to become one?”

The answer is rooted in the mindset we bring to the school setting

But I have also been asked another question

# A frequently posed question about charismatic adults

“If there are charismatic adults are there others who are anti-charismatic adults?”

Some exercises to do at staff meetings to help us to appreciate the impact that charismatic and anti-charismatic teachers and other school staff have on students

# The mindset and strategies of effective educators

To create “motivating environments” that nurture learning, student engagement, intrinsic motivation, and resilience: Deci’s focus on basic needs that apply to administrators, staff, and students—guideposts for action

# The mindset and strategies of effective educators

1. The need to belong and feel connected (and let's add the word welcome): When any member of the school environment feels alienated, learning and achievement will be compromised and anger and resentment will become dominant features--positive relationships provide the foundation for learning

2. The need for self-determination and autonomy, which are significant features of a sense of ownership, self-discipline, and resilience: What input and choices do all members of a school community feel they have? Do they believe their voice is being heard and respected?

3. The need to feel competent: To identify and reinforce each student's "islands of competence"
  - a. Do we help students recognize that mistakes are expected and accepted and that mistakes and setbacks are experiences from which to learn rather than feel rejected or defeated?

3. The need to feel competent: To identify and reinforce each student's "islands of competence"
  - b. Do we provide opportunities for "contributory activities" through which students believe they are making a positive difference in their world, thereby nurturing a sense of purpose and meaning?