Dear Parents,

As an educator at Bedford Junior High School, I am continually looking for ideas to help our students value life-long learning and see their own role in achieving their personal goals.

I was really excited to come across Standford professor of psychology, Dr. Carol Dweck’s research on developing growth mindsets. Dweck’s successful book, *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*, has led to her being interviewed numerous times on television and national public radio and she recently wrote an article for *Educational Leadership* titled “Even Geniuses Have to Work Hard.”

In her thoughtful *Educational Leadership* article, Dweck says, “Teachers who strive to design challenging, meaningful learning tasks may find that their students respond differently depending on the students’ assumptions about intelligence. Students with a growth mindset, (students who believe that they can develop intelligence over time), may tackle such work with excitement, whereas students with a fixed mindset (students who believe that intelligence is an inborn trait) may feel threatened by learning tasks that require them to stretch and take risks.” Here at BJHS, we want students to “sweat” when they learn and to see academic risk-taking as exciting. So I am working hard to help your child develop a growth mindset.

Dweck’s work is having a great impact on the way I am teaching your child at BJHS. Since she also has valuable information for parents in her research, I want to share some of what I’ve learned in her groundbreaking work that you can use to help your child grow into a self-resilient, life long learner.

Dweck says, “Parents think they can hand their children permanent confidence – like a gift – by praising their brains and talent. Guess what? It doesn’t work. In fact research shows that this kind of praise has the opposite effect. It makes children doubt themselves as soon as anything is hard or anything goes wrong. If parents want to give their children a true gift, the best thing they can do is to teach their children to love challenges, be intrigued by mistakes, enjoy effort, and keep on learning. That way, their children don’t become slaves of praise. They can build and repair their own confidence.”

Below are some of Dweck’s suggestions that parents can use to foster a growth-mindset in their child:

1. *Don’t praise ability* – Praise your child’s ***effort,*** the strategies they used, the choices they made, their persistence.  (You didn’t quit when you were learning to ride your bike. If you keep practicing your times tables, you’ll have those down, too!)
2. *Avoid labels.* Praising for effort sends the message that your child has the power to improve and change. Constantly labeling him/her "smart" gives him/her little control over changing how he is perceived. Be mindful of labeling yourself ("I can't do my taxes -- I'm terrible at math") and others ("Your gymnastics partner is such a klutz").
3. *Teach about the learning brain* – teach your children from an early age that the brain is a muscle that can be strengthened with practice. This sends the message that they can directly “grow” their intelligence, which may empower unmotivated students.
4. *Lose the guilt.* Parents often praise their kids to make themselves feel good, or to protect their kids from failure. But it's critical for parents to help their kids to learn to cope with setbacks and to help them focus on ways to improve.
5. *Downplay speed* – “Parents should also emphasize that fast learning is not always the deepest and best learning,” and that “students who take longer sometimes understand things at a deeper level.”  Albert Einstein famously stated that he was slow to learn – that’s why he pondered the same questions year after year.
6. *Have your child set their own age appropriate goals for being an effective student* – For example, your elementary child might set a goal to try three times before he/she asks you for help. In middle school, your child might set a goal and develop a plan to remember put his homework in his backpack and get it to school each day. In high school, if your child’s struggling in science class, she could set a goal to meet with a study buddy once a week or find great science websites to help her review for tests.
7. *Teach your child about growth mindsets* – As obvious as it sounds, simply gaining consciousness of the growth mindset can have positive effects. Dweck and her colleagues have developed a curriculum: [http://www.brainology.us](http://www.brainology.us/). You can get ideas from her website or check out her book from us at the media center.
8. *Share your own learning and personal challenges* – Let your child know about
	1. an area in your life where you used to be inept and are now are proficient. Dweck says these discussions encourage your child not to be ashamed to struggle with something before they are good at it.
9. *Make your child stretch*. Encourage your child to take challenges; don’t let them coast to success. Dweck says, “[Easy successes] can create the fixed mindset belief that you are smart only if you can succeed without effort.” Also, present challenging tasks as fun and exciting. When your child succeeds because they didn’t give up, say things like, “Great! You tried different ways, you followed the clues, and you found a strategy that worked. You’re just like Sherlock Holmes, the great detective. Are you ready to try another one?”

If you would like more information about Dweck’s work you can check out her site, [www.brainology.us](http://www.brainology.us), read her book , which can be checked out at a local library.

Thanks for all you do to be a part of this learning community.

Sincerely,

Ms. Debbie May

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