

Be Greater than the Average

Tammy Mangus, Superintendent of Schools



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Dear Member of the Monticello Community,

It's hard to believe that the first month of school is already behind us. What a stellar start we have had! In September, we launched our school year focusing in on our 2014-2015 Essential Habit of the Year: Being Greater than the Average. Each and every day, with every step we take, we want to make sure that we are reaching beyond ourselves.

Monticello students showed some spectacular, greater than average growth this past year on both the NYS assessments and the NWEA exams. NYS measures student growth based on Student Growth Percentiles or SGPs. The SGPs are calculated by taking a student's previous year score, matching the student's profile and starting score with similar students, and then measuring the average growth of those similar students who started at the same initial score.

As an example, let's pretend that scores on the assessments for grades 3 and 4 fall between 0 and 100 and that proficiency at grades 3 and 4 is a score of 65. A student in grade 3 scores a 39 on the assessment. To calculate growth in the 4th grade year, the student's 3rd grade score would be utilized. All students scoring at a 39 would be matched. After the students take the exam in the 4th grade, the growth of students at that same starting point would be calculated, and an average for growth amongst those students would be set. Therefore, if the students who started with an initial score of 39 on the 3rd grade test grew, on average, to a score of 50 the following year, a student who scored a 51 or higher would have "greater than average growth."

These sorts of growth calculations are great news for schools, students and parents. Gone are the days where we look only at proficiency, which never takes a student's starting point into account. I know most of us can relate to having been part of a class where we struggled with the content. I acknowledge that if I had to jump into a physics class, I would certainly start at a level 1, rather than proficiency. I would hope that folks would look at my growth, rather than my level of proficiency, in determining my abilities after a year of learning.

That is exactly what these new growth scores do. Instead of expecting everyone to be at the same level right out of the gate, they take the starting point of the student into account and look at growth, as opposed to proficiency. Regarding this, we here at Monticello have some VERY GOOD news to share. Our students in Monticello, when compared to students with similar initial scores, showed greater than average growth. In fact, on the ELA exam, 53% of our students grew faster than the average. On the math exam, 64% of our students grew faster than the average. Our teachers and our students clearly knocked it out of the park!

This growth is a great first step in helping to shift our mindset about how we acquire learning. We tend to believe that we are just good at something through natural born talent. Certainly, there are folks who have a knack for things, but all of us can get better at anything through training; all we have to do is try. Clearly our kiddos did just that and showed their amazing propensity for growth!

As we embark on October, let's continue to strive to be greater than the average each and every day (after all, we are Monticello :), but let's also dig deeper and build another new habit: to change our vocabulary. Let's erase the word "problem" from our minds and replace that word with "challenge." If there is a problem, folks attempt to fix it. However, a "problem" is one-dimensional. The end goal is simply to fix the problem, and if the problem persists, the situation can seem hopeless. However, if we remember that problems are simply challenges on our path to the end goal, we realize that we can overcome those challenges by attempting to solve the issues in front of us. If we can't, we simply need to find an alternate path to overcome the challenge and get to our desired outcome.

A great example of this is planning a trip. We plot out our course and set out to get from point A to point B. Along the way, we find that a bridge is out. The problem is clearly that the bridge is out. Certainly, we could sit and wait until the bridge is complete...that would solve the problem. We could build a makeshift bridge, but certainly, that wouldn't be advisable for safety reasons. Clearly the problem is out of our hands. We could sit there, stuck in our path, because the problem cannot be solved within our control...or, we could view this as a challenge, an obstacle on our path to point B. To overcome it, we find an alternate route, apply our learning for planning trips, and set a new course. This is exactly what we (both adults and students) must do as we strive to learn new things!

Let's build a new habit this month: Problems are nothing more than challenges, and challenges, when they cannot be solved, can certainly be avoided by finding a new path toward our greater goal. As we do this, let's ask ourselves this essential question: How far am I willing to grow?

Be well,

Tammy Mangus

Superintendent of Schools

The Parent University kick-off barbeque was a huge success! Thanks to everyone who helped make the day possible. Keep checking the web site and Facebook for upcoming events!

