

Autumn Spirit 2015

Dear Coleytown Families,

We are off to a great start at Coleytown this year! The first six weeks of school have been focused on establishing strong classroom communities where your children will learn, grow, and play this school year. Teachers have been creating these communities through the framework of our Social Skills curriculum, including the establishment of routines and expectations for the classroom and the daily inclusion of Morning Meetings. Buddy classes are meeting throughout all of the grades to begin to create the strong relationships between older and younger students. To facilitate schoolwide community building, we have already had two Town Hall Meetings, a PTA general meeting, and two excellent Back to School Nights.

Our second Town Hall Meeting for this school year was held on Monday, October 5. The focus of this Town Hall Meeting was Mindfulness. In September, our Safe School Climate Committee met to draft a community goal for Coleytown for the 2015-2016 school year. Our goal is below:

If the CES staff incorporates mindfulness strategies into daily routines, then students will become more resilient and self-reflective. If students are more resilient and able to be more self-reflective, then they will demonstrate a greater sense of empathy and compassion within the CES community.

Our staff began to explore the value of including mindfulness strategies into the educational setting last year. Dr. Kim Kassay, School Psychologist, and Joyce Evans, P.E. Teacher, facilitated some faculty meetings related to this topic. This year, as a schoolwide goal, we are learning about this topic together with the staff, children, and parent communities.

What is mindfulness? In *Mindfulness: A Guide for Teachers*, by Dr. Amy Saltzman, she defines it as follows: "Mindfulness is paying attention to your life, here and now, with kindness and curiosity. One of the primary ironies of modern education is that we ask students to "pay attention" dozens of times a day, yet we never teach them how. The practice of mindfulness teaches students how to pay attention, and this way of paying attention enhances both academic and social emotional learning." Later in the article she notes, "Over 30 years of research with adults has shown that Mindfulness decreases stress, depression, anxiety and hostility, and enhances executive function, compassion, and empathy. Related studies show the self-compassion has academic benefits, especially when dealing with perceived failure."

In Linda Lantieri's book Building Emotional Intelligence, she describes benefits from children and adults practicing mindfulness: "Increased self-awareness and self-understanding; greater ability to relax the body and release physical tension; improved concentration and ability to pay attention, which is critical to learning; the ability to deal with stressful situations more effectively by creating a more relaxed way of responding to stressors; and greater control over your thoughts, with less domination by unwelcome thoughts."

The book The Mindful Child by Susan Kaiser Greenland says: "Classical mindfulness practice focuses on the cultivation of three areas: attention, wisdom, and values. Adapted for secular use

with children and teens, they are the new ABC's of learning: attention, balance, and compassion. By learning both attention skills and a compassionate worldview, children are introduced to tools that could help them live a balanced life.”

At Coleytown we have started to explore the concept of mindfulness with both staff and students. Each faculty meeting begins with a different mindfulness exercise that staff can use for themselves and with their students. At the Town Hall Meeting, Dr. Kassay and Mrs. Evans discussed the definition of mindfulness, showed a video of students in action, and facilitated two mindfulness practices with the entire CES community. Students will be practicing using “*mindful bodies*” and “*mindful listening*” across all settings in the school day. I encourage you to ask your child(ren) about these two mindfulness strategies and have them show you what they look like as well.

In addition to our Town Hall Meeting, we were so fortunate to have Linda Lantieri visit the Westport Public Schools on Monday and Tuesday of this week. She facilitated five different workshops for parents and staff members about mindfulness practices and the benefit for students, staff, and parents. I have heard from some parents that their workshop was incredible! We will continue to use Linda’s book Building Emotional Intelligence as a resource for our work this year.

Please be on the look-out for an invitation to some parent workshops for the Coleytown community related to the topic of mindfulness. We hope to include all members of our community in this important goal this year.

Sincerely,

Janna