

Dear Germantown School District Families,

This message is intended to give you an update regarding the work that is going on with the District Initiative. After the first two Educational Summits which identified the direction our school community wanted the district to head in the preparation of our students for life after they graduate from high school, we have been busy implementing ideas that improve our instruction, designing learning experiences to deepen student learning, and developing in our students the tools they need to be successful in life.

The pathway on which we are embarking as a school district began with a definition of our core purpose as professional educators. At the first Education Summit in spring of 2014, the participants—who included parents, teachers, students, school board members, administrators, and community representatives—created the following statement:

The Germantown School District will be in the business of cultivating the ‘whole’ child. We will identify students’ passions and meaningfully co-create opportunities for students to pursue these passions. From these experiences, they will develop their strengths in order for them to reach their fullest potential and become productive members in an ever-changing world.

It was clear for everyone participating that schooling is about much more than learning academic content and skills. As important as academic learning is, it is also important to recognize that school is about joining with parents in helping children grow up to be thoughtful, caring, capable, hard-working, healthy human beings (the ‘whole’ child). The question, “What will benefit our students the most in their future?” became the driving force behind our work. In response to this guiding question, the concept of “Essential Success Factors” – or the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that are at the heart of what it takes for anyone to be successful at whatever they choose to do – emerged as what we could focus on to truly fulfill our district mission, “Empower and Inspire Every Student to Success.” The first Educational Summit resulted in five Essential Success Factors: Competent, Effective, Autonomous, Collaborative, and Capable in learning. The second summit whittled those down to three. We believe that by infusing the following Essential Success Factors into our teaching, your children will be better prepared to be successful both in school and especially in life after high school.

- **Learn HOW to learn**
- **Learn how to COLLABORATE**
- **Know THEMSELVES** – as learners, individuals, interests, strengths, motivators

So far this year we have been working on a number of things to put the vision of the Essential Success Factors into practice. First, we have been learning about and teaching our students about something called “Growth Mindset.” In contrast a “fixed” mindset results in learners limiting themselves in terms of their orientation toward learning by causing students to avoid effort, challenges and feedback, and shrivel in the face of setbacks and failure. Developing a “Growth” mindset opens learners up to the realization that they can continue to grow their intelligence and capabilities by embracing challenges, putting in hard work and effort, and learning from mistakes and feedback. We are seeing this as a key cornerstone upon which students can build the personal tools they need to be successful. If you would like to join with us in fostering a growth mindset in your children, I would recommend reading Carol Dweck’s book, “Mindset: The New Psychology of Success – How we can learn to fulfill our potential.”

We also have been continuing to improve our instructional skills to more effectively teach students, and we have been learning how to design and engage students in learning experiences that cause them to go deeper in their learning in order to learn how to learn and develop their collaboration skills. In fact, we will be holding our third Educational Summit on Saturday, March 4, 2017 to explore further what we are calling “Powerful Learning,” or the kind of learning that pushes students to think, understand, and deeply learn important concepts in the various subjects. More details about the summit will be forthcoming.

All in all, we have embarked on an exciting journey toward higher levels of excellence in education for our students. On behalf of all the teachers, administrators, and staff of the Germantown School District, we are grateful for the opportunity to partner with you in support of your children’s learning and development into capable, successful, caring individuals.

Sincerely,

Dr. Rick Grothaus
Director of Educational Systems
Germantown School District