



Indicator: The school ensures that all parents understand motivational competency (a growth mindset, the value of mastery, and connecting learning tasks with students' personal aspirations) and how they can enhance motivational competency at home. (6795)

Explanation: The evidence suggests that student motivation is driven by four categories of factors: competence, autonomy, interest, and relatedness. Families and schools must work together to embrace students' natural motivation but also work to develop greater motivation for learning by rewarding and celebrating effort and mastery. Through genuine involvement and care, partnership between the home and the school, and a focus on continual improvement, students can develop a growth mindset and have greater intrinsic motivation for learning.

Questions: What supports will teachers and the School Community Council provide for families to understand motivation and the development of a growth mindset? How will teachers partner with families about their students' learning? How will school staff work to foster a growth mindset throughout the school? What strategies can families use to build motivational competency at home?

What is the Motivational Competency?

The Motivational Competency explains why students engage with learning, how hard they will work on a particular task, and why they do or do not persevere to achieve their goals (Carreker & Boulware-Gooden, 2015; Headden & McKay, 2015; Redding, 2016). Usher and Kober (2012) identify four dimensions of motivation: competence, control/autonomy, interest/value, and relatedness. Toshalis and Nakkula (2012) write that, "we are motivated to devote energy to those activities in which we expect to succeed, and we subsequently tend to value those activities over others" (p. 10). If a student feels capable of accomplishing the task before them, they will be more likely to deeply engage in the work and persist.

This internal, or intrinsic, motivation also occurs when students truly enjoy or are interested in their work or goals (Redding, 2006). Carreker and Boulware-Gooden (2015) explain:

Motivation is wanting to do one task when there are competing tasks available. The learner believes that the task is important and has a belief in his or her ability to master the task through dedication and hard work. The learner persists even when mastering the task becomes difficult. (p. 8)

Many other factors affect a student's level of motivation – including their familial or social context, the classroom environment, and the degree to which teachers create an environment of mastery learning (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012; Headden & McKay, 2015; Redding, 2016). This concept of relatedness may not be as intuitive for teachers and parents to understand and foster collaboratively (Usher & Kober, 2012). Carreker and Boulware-Gooden (2015) outline a number of strategies that teachers can use to boost their students' motivational competency, including expressing confidence in their students' ability to complete and succeed in the work, sparking students' interest in

lessons by starting with a related but fun activity, providing encouragement and support for students to keep going, and allowing students to make decisions about project groups or topics. Redding (2006) also highlights ways that teachers can balance high expectations with a culture of caring, ensuring that students feel known, cared about, and recognized for their efforts.

Recognition for effort, as opposed to commendations for innate ability, is a critical piece of developing a growth mindset. Headden and McKay (2015) explain that students with a growth mindset “believe that with effort, their ability and performance can improve... The positive attitude prepares them for the realities of later life, helping them recover when their efforts fail to produce the outcomes they have come to expect” (p. 8). In contrast, students who have been rewarded and commended simply for being smart tend to have a fixed mindset, leading them to believe that their efforts are inconsequential and that they will simply either be good or bad at a given task (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012; Headden & McKay, 2015).

Consequently, teachers who focus on student effort and mastery of a goal, instead of performance on a test or a grade on a report card, are more likely to foster a growth mindset and consequently, higher levels of motivation, for their students (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012; Usher & Kober, 2012). This type of mindset can also be developed in the home, as a result of parental expectations, attitudes, and habits, making it even more important for schools to engage families in their children’s learning and provide them with strategies that they can use at home.

Why is it so critical for schools to inform families about how students are motivated?

Not only are parents equally responsible for helping their students build a growth mindset, but they are also a critical lever for instilling values about certain tasks and processes in schooling, both of which lead to motivation. Additionally, a student’s home life and the values instilled by his or her family can either help or hinder a student’s motivation levels. Students who face chronic stress in the home, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, are particularly susceptible to declining motivation for school and consequently, lower achievement (Headden & McKay, 2015). When families are informed about how outside factors can influence

students’ motivation for school and what strategies they can use to counteract that influence, they are better positioned to help their children engage in school.

Usher and Kober (2012) write that when a student’s goal – whether established by the student or not – is supported by the people important to that student, it will be more relevant and attainable for the student. Both teachers and families expressing care and personal involvement in a student’s life are shown to improve student engagement and motivation (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012; Kraft & Dougherty, 2013). Headden and McKay (2015) write, “students care when they feel cared about” (p. 15).

When teachers and parents communicate regularly and “partner to increase monitoring of student learning behaviors,” they “create a unified source of extrinsic motivation for students” (Kraft & Dougherty, 2013, p. 6). Toshalis and Nakkula (2012) express that when students can connect to both of these sources of caring adults, the extrinsic support they provide will gradually be internalized, providing more powerful motivation for the student to work hard and try their best.

Strategies schools can use to increase parental understanding of motivation

Just as teachers must be mindful of the types of praise and attention they give to students, parents must be as well. Yet families may not be aware that, for example, complimenting their child’s intelligence instead of their effort may be detrimental to the child and could lead to their child having a fixed mindset about learning (Usher & Kober, 2012). Schools must teach parents how to most effectively praise and monitor their child’s learning and work with them at home. This focus on family practices that can occur no matter the circumstances or family situation, is critical for families to understand the influence they have on building positive attitudes and habits for their children (Redding, 2006).

In providing workshops and supports to parents, families should understand that there is tremendous overlap between the curriculum of the home and of the school (Redding, 2006). When the School Community Council or teachers inform parents of these specific practices and behaviors that they can alter and adopt, families will be better prepared to foster motivation and support the learning practices happening at the school (Redding,

2006). Parents should understand that simple activities such as reading with their children at home, discussing what they are learning and reading, expressing excitement and pleasure about learning, communicating their expectations for their child, and embracing their child's natural instincts and motivators have a big impact on children's values and motivation about school (Redding, 2006; Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012).

References and resources

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