

MAIN OFFICE NEWSLETTER

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HOW INSPIRATIONAL SPEAKER, CHAD HYMAS, IMPROVES TEACHING AND LEARNING (& Parenting Too!)

The faculty and staff at Fairhaven High School engaged in meaningful professional development with inspirational speaker, Chad Hymas earlier this month. We laughed, we cried, we learned. "Schooled" in the meaning of life, I definitely walked away with a greater understanding of how to help students grow during times of adversity.

After a life altering accident, Hymas learned how attitude, perspective and choice can make or break our everyday life experiences. He worked tirelessly to develop a mindset that gave meaning to his accident, ultimately helping him to serve a greater purpose in life. It was his father who taught him numerous valuable lessons like actions speak louder than words, that identifying with kindness matters and that if you don't like something, you have the power and responsibility to change how you react to it. The legacy of his father's impact on his life was a common thread throughout his talk, reminding us that as parents and educators we have a powerful impact on how our children learn and behave.

Hymas reminded us that as teachers we don't have to *say* we care to have our students *feel* that we care. He demonstrated this through an experiment with the audience using our cell phones. He asked us to write a text message to someone close to us, with one stipulation – we could not include "I", "me", or "my" in the text. His request was to let the other person know that they were appreciated, respected or simply on our mind without saying I love you. The responses that came back were astounding. Many of the recipients said, "I love you too!" or "this made my day." Without saying it directly, our messages conveyed love and sparked joy.

Next, we were asked to think about how this could be transferred to the classroom. How can our actions in and out of the classroom show our students that we care about their success? How can our interactions bring joy to learning? Maya Angelou once said, "I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel." We learned in Chad's experiment that our students (just as our text recipients did) would never forget how we make them feel. Relationships matter.

Hymas added another element of compassion that really hit home. He gave a bottle of water to a faculty member and asked him to take a drink. The faculty member easily opened it and took a sip. This ease represented a good day in the classroom, one with students who are able to learn without distraction or obstacles. He then asked the teacher to take a drink, but this time without using his hands. We shouted words of encouragement and advice from our seats as we watched him try to open the bottle with great difficulty. It wasn't until a faculty member got up, opened the bottle for him, and held it as he drank that Chad was satisfied that we understood his message. "Be willing to help, even when someone is not asking for it," he said. "Be awkward", he continued. "Do what others might not do." He reminded us that as teachers, we should take responsibility for all successes and failures in our classroom and to always lean in and help, whether or not a student is asking for it.

Chad's speech led me to reflect on my own parenting practices as well. We all too often put too much pressure on our children to be perfect. My eight year old has test anxiety, resulting in an 18% on her first timed math test. With tear filled practice and preparation at home, her second score was raised to a 26%. I took the opportunity to use a strategy that Chad taught us when I saw that she earned a 58% on her third test. I decided to celebrate her progress (even though it was still a failing grade) and I put her test on the refrigerator for display. When she asked me what I was doing, I said, "In this house we will celebrate effort and progress, not perfection." She was improving and we needed to show her that we were proud of her effort in order to help her get through this adversity. I am confident that she will continue to improve as a result. The practice and preparation is now without tears. Her progress has continued as the latest addition to our refrigerator now includes an 86! I imagine that there are not too many homes with 58% tests hanging proudly on the fridge, but I would encourage more parents to celebrate the small victories and reward effort as we help our children develop a growth mindset.

Chad Hymas has improved my teaching and learning (and parenting) through meaningful life lessons of compassion, perspective, finding worth in helping others, and celebrating progress. The best part...we can do all of it for free and we can start right where we are.