

MSSM Student Welfare Committee “book report”

How Children Succeed: Grit, Curiosity, and the Hidden Power of Character

By Paul Tough

Report by Sharon Frost

About the book (by Amazon Books)

Why do some children succeed while others fail? The story we usually tell about childhood and success is the one about intelligence: success comes to those who score highest on tests, from preschool admissions to SAT's. But in *How Children Succeed*, Paul Tough argues that the qualities that matter more have to do with character: skills like perseverance, curiosity, optimism, and self-control.

How Children Succeed introduces us to a new generation of researchers and educators, who, for the first time, are using the tools of science to peel back the mysteries of character. Through their stories - and the stories of the children they are trying to help - Tough reveals how this new knowledge can transform young people's lives. He uncovers the surprising ways in which parents do - and do not - prepare their children for adulthood. And he provides us with new insights into how to improve the lives of children growing up in poverty. This provocative and profoundly hopeful book will not only inspire and engage readers, it will also change our understanding of childhood itself.

Thoughts provoked for MSSM

The major portion of this book recounts the anecdotes of several very dedicated, innovative educators and the strategies they are using both inside and outside of the classroom. Their students are from low-income, inner-city neighborhoods and many have had traumatic childhoods. It's true that most MSSM students do not share similar backgrounds. But what we can learn from these stories is how perseverance in the face of hardship and even failure can lead to a very bright future.

Tough contrasts the lives of these students who have faced multiple hardships with those from more affluent, privileged schools. In particular, he focuses on the Riverdale Country School, the choice for some of New York City's wealthiest families. The headmaster, Dominic Randolph, worries for his students. To quote him from the book, "...there was always this idea in America that if you worked hard and you showed real grit, then you could be successful. Strangely, we've now forgotten that. People who have an easy time of things, who get 800's on their SAT's, I worry that those people get feedback that everything they're doing is great. And I think as a result, we are actually setting them up for long-term failure. When that person suddenly has to face up to a difficult moment, then I think they're screwed, to be honest. I don't think

they've grown the capacities to be able to handle that." Randolph worries that in most highly academic environments in the US, no one fails anything.

What does all this mean? Young people are graduating from the very best institutions of higher learning with fabulous credentials and superior test taking skills. Yet according to research, there are fewer entrepreneurs coming out of our best colleges these days, fewer innovators, critics, artists and so on. And the reason for this is a fear of taking risks that could possibly lead to failure.

At MSSM teachers, administrators and even parents should do their very best to help students realize there is no shame in failure. Beyond this we need to demonstrate coping strategies to use in the face of setbacks. It is critical to emphasize the fact that when one door closes, new opportunities will open up. It is this type of character strength that will help to lead our students down a path of fulfillment and future success.