



January 2019

Dear Town School Parents and Guardians,

Happy New Year! I hope your 2019 is off to a wonderful beginning.

Every December 31, I'm tempted to get caught up in the frenzy of New Year's resolutions even though I know there is an abundance of evidence that they are rarely achieved. Research in brain and behavior science instead reveals that it is the compounding impact of our habits and self-narratives that really matter. But how do we set the foundation for those habits and stories? Where do they begin? What is it that sets our course and fuels us forward?



Developing fully-realized, healthy young people is a joyous and complex pursuit. Reports of boys falling behind in school in the United States and beyond (for example, see: [Why are boys falling behind at school?](#) *Financial Times*, December 2018) suggest that in addition to our school's intentional curricular and programmatic design, we need to cultivate path-setting roots within every Town boy. When our boys are scampering happily through the hallways, it is difficult to imagine them as any simple statistic, but it also is unwise to ignore patterns. Developmental psychologist and Director of the Stanford Center on Adolescence Dr. William Damon addresses this need to cultivate motivation and aim in his book, *The Path to Purpose: How Young People Find Their Calling in Life*. Dr. Damon believes that a clear sense of purpose inspires young people and gives them direction. He makes the case that high standards alone are not enough to support success. In his words:

Purpose is a stable and generalized intention to accomplish something that is at the same time meaningful to the self and consequential for the world beyond self. Purpose endows a person with joy in good times and resilience in hard times, and this holds true all throughout life.

Can a kindergartner have purpose? Dr. Damon distinguishes between goals we all can have regardless of age or timeline with a larger, more meaningful reason for our existence. True purpose, he says, has to be of consequence beyond the individual. Early life experiences set the stage for purpose to emerge, especially when those experiences are rich with exploration and learning linked with meaning. Our boys need to know why we want them to learn, why specific content may be connected to a path they can imagine for their future, and why their actions have impact on the world around them. Dr. Damon makes a call to parents:

I am entirely confident in asserting that the urgent project for parents today, in this world of increasing economic, cultural, and social uncertainty, is to help their children gain a wholesome sense of direction

that will carry them through the minefields of drift, confusion, apathy, anxiety, fear and self-absorption that threaten their generation.

I appreciate that Dr. Damon's book views young people with optimism and that he emphasizes the importance of grappling with challenges and taking risks as integral aspects of developing a sense of purpose. And on point with our Town community, he notes, "The closest thing to a prerequisite for a culture of purpose is a sense of community." What can we, the Town community, do more of to help our boys develop purpose? Dr. Damon outlines these key recommendations for parents:

- Listen closely for the spark, then fan the flames
- Take advantage of regular opportunities to open a dialogue
- Be open-minded and supportive of the sparks of interest expressed
- Convey your own sense of purpose and the meaning you derive from your work
- Impart wisdom about the practicalities in life
- Introduce children to potential mentors
- Encourage an entrepreneurial attitude
- Nurture a positive outlook
- Instill in children a sense of agency, linked to responsibility

As 2019 begins, I encourage you to set aside those short-term resolutions for age-appropriate versions of Dr. Damon's recipe for building purpose in your sons. In partnership with our intentional program design and the purpose your teachers carry into work each day, together we can instill pathways for achievement, happiness and meaningful contributions. May 2019 be a year when we all thrive!

Warmly,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lorri H. Durbin". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Lorri Hamilton Durbin
Head of School