

# TRMS School Counseling Newsletter

## How Your Brain Responds to Making Mistakes: Why Mindset is Key to Student Success



### Inside this issue:

Productive Failure	2
Not Making Mistakes	2
Helping Students	3
Growth Mindset Redux	3
Grade Level Updates	4
8th Grade TRHS Info	5
Wellness Day 2019	6
Important T2 Dates	7

One of the most common fears expressed by students today is making mistakes. Students are afraid about being singled out, feeling “stupid,” or being unable to keep up with adult expectations. Recent neuroscientific studies of the brain, however, have revealed that making mistakes can be a valuable experience from a learning perspective. Essential to this learning is the mindset we encourage in our students regarding making mistakes.

Jason Moser, a psychologist at Michigan State University, wondered if how people responded to mistakes they made would impact how well they learned. Would people who chose to ignore mistakes — or got “stuck” on them — have a different brain response than a person who tried to figure out what went wrong? Moser’s 2011 study identified two different groups of people: “growth” versus “fixed” mindset. The first “growth mindset” group believed that intelligence is malleable and can be changed. The second “fixed mindset” group believed that intelligence is inherited and

unchangeable. Previous research had shown that “growth” mindset people will take more advantage of learning opportunities; however, people who think that they can’t get smarter because they are “bad at math” may not. This can lead a student to think it’s not worth bothering to try harder after she fails a test.

Moser gave both groups an easy and repetitive task during which he monitored brain activity. He found that the brain made two quick signals in response to a mistake: an initial “oops” response and then a second response that showed the person was consciously aware of the mistake and is trying to correct it. Both signals occur within a quarter of a second of the mistake. Moser found that the “growth mindset” group who believe they can learn from their mistakes did better after making a mistake. They successfully bounced back after an error and their brains producing a bigger second signal, indicating more brain activity and learning.

Another Michigan State University study, this time in 2017 by Hans Schroder, explored this brain response one step further by testing children, aged 6 to 8, and again mapping brain activity. This study showed that “growth mindset” students displayed MORE activity in LARGER areas of the brain for LONGER than the “fixed mindset” group.

What does this mean for our students?

- **The belief that mistakes are an opportunity rather than something to be ignored directly impacts the amount of brain activity and student learning.**
- **Even for people in the “fixed mindset” groups, making mistakes still resulted in brain activity! Making a mistake is neurologically more impactful than avoiding possibilities for mistakes.**
- **Adults can encourage “mistake friendly” environments that will better foster student learning.**

Tracy Antczak, School Counseling Administrative Assistant  
X4920

Amanda Huyler, Grade 6  
x4924

Zachary Champion, Grade 7  
x4923

Patricia Fanning, Grade 8  
X4925

Kelley Binette, Student Asst Counselor  
x4926

Leslie Pasquini, School Adjustment Counselor  
x4927

## What is “Productive Failure”?



At first, seeing the words “productive” and “failure” linked together can seem like an oxymoron. How can a student be successful while failing at the same time? For many parents, memories of public education can invoke thoughts of desks in a row, assigned seats in alphabetical order, and whole-class instruction. While “direct instruction” is still frequently used in classrooms by teachers, it is now more commonly the “opener” for a series of

classroom activities rather than the lesson itself. This is due to scientific research on how the brain learns best.

Rather than a whole class model, in which the teacher walks students through academic concepts, “productive failure” encourages students to struggle and, yes, fail at solving problems for a period of time on their own or in small groups. After being allowed to make mistakes, the teacher will then step in to help students analyze their failed attempts and find the correct solution.

While this sounds as though it could be anxiety producing for students, “productive failure” encourages the increased brain activity related to making errors. It also encourages “executive functioning” skills such as problem-solving, impulse control, emotional control, and organization. Students are more likely to remember material that they conceptualized for themselves rather than simply memorizing it. Plus, overcoming challenges increased self-confidence and “growth mindset,” which in turn makes students more willing to take risks and learning productively in the future.

*“Whether you think you can or think you can’t—you’re right.”*  
— Henry Ford

## Why Not Making Mistakes is the Biggest Mistake

What do our students miss out on when they either ignore their mistakes or attempt to avoid them entirely? Mistakes are a part of life — arguably a big part — and adults can think back on valuable “life lessons.” Here are some reasons why not making mistakes is the biggest mistake.

### 1) You lose the experience.

Students need to know what does — and *doesn’t* work. Experience is what sticks with all of us.

### 2) You can’t succeed without them.

Whether we like it or not, our failures can be the building blocks for future successes.

### 3) You listen to the negative voices in your head.

If you are afraid to fail, you will also miss out on doing some great things.

### 4) You miss the chance to become stronger and more self-confident.

“Productive failure” is an opportunity to find yourself and your abilities.

### 5) You lose out on the benefits of repetition.

Practice is the ultimate skill builder.

### 6) You think what happened in the past will happen in the future.

You can’t achieve success without experiencing failures. Nothing can ever stay the same, even if you want

it to.

### 7) You expect perfection.

Life is a series of imperfections. If you wait for perfection, you get “stuck.”

### 8) You let your negative emotions control you.

Negative emotions will hold you back from developing as a person and finding your own happiness.

### 9) You lose the chance to be a positive role model.

Being able to come back from mistakes shows others that it is possible, too.

### 10) You don’t grow as a person.

“You do you.” Follow what calls to you.

## Helping Students Respond to Perceived Failure

So now that we know mistakes are opportunities for increased brain activity and learning for our students, how do we support them on this hard work? It can be very difficult as parents to watch our children struggle and become frustrated and upset. Here are some ways that all adults in a student's life can help foster a "growth mindset" and a more productive response to setbacks.

**\*Change the learning environment.**

Some students may benefit from working with a parent or small group, and some might find this too emotionally challenging while they are struggling

and need more space to problem-solve.

**\*Encourage and model persistence.**

Studies show that persistence can be learned. As adults, we have a lot of power to influence our students' efforts by sharing our own self-conscious emotions, our stops and starts during problem solving, and our commitment to keep going.

**\*Encourage and model self-compassion.**

Adults can model the "ups and downs" of learning. We can teach self-talk such as, "It's okay to not know the answer right now" and "I know I will be able to figure this out."

**\*Build positive relation-**

**ships with our students.**

Studies have shown that positive connections with adults in students' lives increase their self-motivation and confidence.

**\*Encourage and model resilience.**

As adults, we may feel we are being helpful or compassionate by avoiding talking about ours or our students' mistakes; however, directly discussing what went wrong leads to more confidence and ability to "bounce back" and better application of coping skills to continue moving forward.

*"You need to give yourself permission to be human."  
— Joyce Brothers*



### Growth Mindset Redux



Sometimes it's helpful to remind your students that they have faced many daunting

challenges in their past, have failed many times over, and persevered to overcome truly amazing obstacles. The difference between then and now is that they were too young to be intimidated or worried by failure. They learned to walk, after many falls, slips, and bumps. They learned how to feed themselves, how to speak, and how to read. They employed the life strategies of

hard work, repetition, trial and error, and learning from mistakes to master some of the most difficult skills humans encounter. Reinforce with your student the notion that, whatever comes their way, "they've got this!"

## 6th Grade Update

Happy winter! As the temperature drops outside, the academic expectations in 6th grade rise. The first few months of 6th grade are all about students adjusting to their new school and making connections with classmates from the different towns. Teachers spent time establishing their classroom routines and slowly increased the workload. From the start of the second trimester to the end of the year, academics will be in

full swing!

We encourage all parents/guardians to check Google Classroom and PowerSchool regularly. This will allow you to keep a close eye on your student's grades and assignments. If you have any questions on how to setup a parent portal account please contact the School Counseling Office.

We also encourage all parents/guardians to sit down with their student each night to review assignments and

assessment deadlines together. For the second trimester, teachers are working on practicing and reinforcing study skills such as using flashcards and redoing assignments for practice. Please encourage your student to study several days in advance of an assessment and to break longer assignments down into chunks to further support these skills. If your student has questions, we encourage self-advocacy via email!

## 7th Grade Update

Now that the first trimester of 7<sup>th</sup> grade is in the books, I am sure you and your student have noticed the increase in expectations and workload compared to 6<sup>th</sup> grade. In 7<sup>th</sup> grade, students receive more homework and have stricter deadlines to turn in their homework. If your student says they completed their homework in school, this isn't true! Teachers may show a few examples of homework on the board to help the class understand the assignments, but completing an

entire homework assignment in school is very rare. We always recommend that parents/guardians sit down with their student each night and review Google Classroom and PowerSchool together to see what homework is assigned. 7<sup>th</sup> grade teachers review what is assigned for homework each day and allow time for students to write down homework in their agenda books.

Test and Quizzes are often more challenging in 7<sup>th</sup>

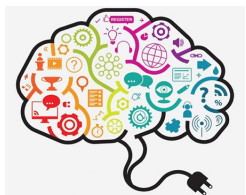
grade as well. Students who may have found success on tests and quizzes in 6<sup>th</sup> grade, without studying a lot of the material, are not having the same positive results in 7<sup>th</sup> grade. Setting aside more time to study and developing good study skills is very important to success in 7<sup>th</sup> grade and beyond. If your student doesn't perform well on a test, they do have the opportunity to take a re-learn. Re-learns involve a contract that students must fill out and sign before starting the re-learn process.

## 8th Grade Update

Eighth graders have already started their transition activities for high school with classroom guidance lessons. In November, students participated in an introductory lesson on high school and educational opportunities post graduation. As our students transition to and through high school, they will game more freedom and ability to make their own decisions, including classes and afterschool activities. For adolescents this can be exhilarating and

scary at the same time! We stressed the importance of being responsible for their learning, putting forth their best effort, asking questions, and being curious about future opportunities. In December, students were Introduced to the Naviance computer program. Naviance is used at the high school to help students with personal goal setting, future and career planning, and applying to college. Each student has their own account and we encourage

you to log in with your student to explore the many online tools available. In March, students will participate in another Naviance classroom lesson that will involve exploring further activities and become more familiar and comfortable with the Naviance program.



*"You don't learn to walk by following rules.*

*You learn by doing, and by falling over."*

— Richard Branson

## Attention 8th Graders and Their Parents/ Guardians!

Students will be starting the course selection process in January. Please see below for important dates. Please note that dates may change depending on snow days/delays. Parents will be updated in the event of any changes.

### Important Upcoming Dates

**Tuesday, January 14th:** High School counselors visit 8<sup>th</sup> grade classrooms to discuss the course selection process.

**Tuesday, January 21st:** Parent Information Night for parents of incoming freshman.

**Thursday and Friday, Jan 30th and 31st:** Course selection days with 8th grade teachers

**February 7:** Freshman course selection sheets due

*“You don't learn to walk by following rules. You learn by doing, and by falling over.”*  
— Richard Branson

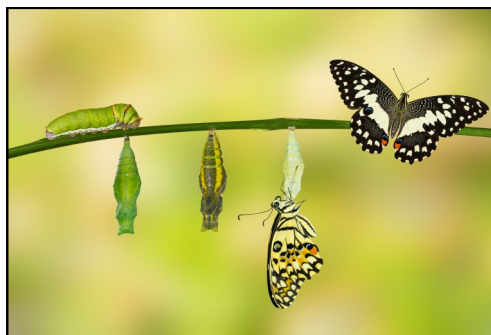
### Helping Your Student Transition to High School

Students transitioning to high school experience many of the same worries as they did when they transitioned to middle school: finding their way around a new school, getting to know new teachers, being around different (and older!) students, and will they be able to do the work. As with any transition, it helps to remind students that they have successfully adjusted to new settings in the past. Here are some things you can do to foster a successful transition to high school for your student:

man Orientation Night offered in August.

\*Encourage your student to form a good working relationship with their teachers. This includes asking for clarifica-

tion or help when needed. by participating in sports, clubs, and extracurricular activities. This helps students feel like they are part of their school community, and also exposes them to new experiences.



\*Stay involved with your child's education. Continue to ask them questions about their school day. Ask them to share the things they are learning, their interests, and future possibilities. Keep in contact with your student's teachers.

\*Take advantage of the Fresh-

\*Challenge your student to become involved with school

\*Enjoy the ride!



## 3rd Annual 7th Grade Wellness Day: Ivy Watts, Keynote Speaker

On Friday, November 22nd, Timberlane Regional Middle School participated in a Wellness Day for 7th graders. This social-emotional curriculum learning day was started 3 years ago in response to increasing levels of stress and anxiety reported by students. Because of the academic “leap” for 7th grade, staff wanted to provide practical skills and strategies to help support students. This year, Timberlane invited Ivy Watts, a former Division II All-American track athlete, to start the day as a keynote speaker. Ms. Watts shared

her journey of appearing to have it all as a successful athlete while struggling on a daily basis with her mental health. Both 7th and 8th graders listened to Ivy Watts’ presentation. Students asked great questions of Ivy and gave impactful feedback after she spoke.

Our 7th grade students then participated in various workshops exploring topics such as coping skills, executive functioning, and mindfulness. Students were also invited to watch a Student Panel of

combined middle and high school students who answered questions about what it was like when they were in 7th grade.

We never truly know what is going on in the lives of our students, but clearly it is a lot. At TRMS, we make it a priority to help students in every way we can, whether academic or social-emotional. Ivy spoke of the stigma of mental illness and empowering others to speak their truth. From the student feedback, it is clear that they received that message.

*“Find a way to learn something from every disappointment.”*  
— Laurie Nade



### Some Student Feedback....

“The assembly made me think about myself. I have all of those problems and it really made me think that I should bring it up more and share it so I don’t keep pushing it down.”

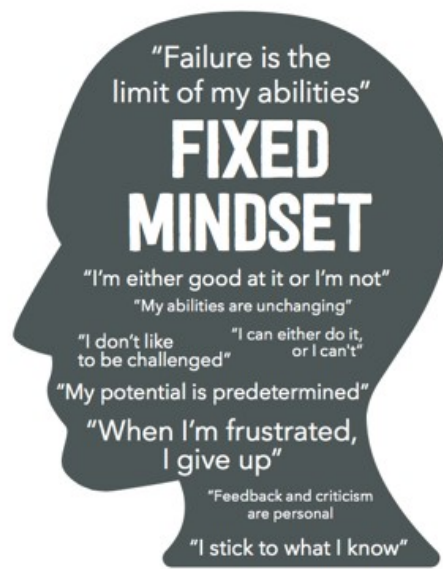
“The presentation made me feel a lot better about myself. I always try to do everything right but sometimes it doesn’t work and I’m mad at myself for it. It made me realize it’s ok not to get everything right all the time. It made me want

to talk about the things that are happening to me.”

“The assembly did make me think a lot. It made me think about myself and who I want to be. I have a lot of stress I carry around a lot, and I don’t talk about it because I feel like I’d just annoy everyone.... It’s so extremely hard for me to talk to strangers because I’m afraid that if I mess up, they will only see me as a freak. The assembly really made me think about my

mental stability. Do I have anxiety or depression? It’s scary for me to think about and for a lot of my life I’ve been pushing down who I really am.”





## Important Trimester 2 Dates

January 20th: No School

January 27th: Progress Reports Posted

February 11th: Professional Development Day/No school for students

February 14th: Ski Club starts

February 24th-28th: Vacation/No School

March 13th: Trimester 2 Grades Close

March 16th: Trimester 3 Begins

March 18th: Report Cards Posted

March 25th: Professional Development Day/No school for students