Hope as a Light in the Darkness During Transitions

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Hope is the belief that our future can be better than our past, and that we have a role to play in making that future a reality. This positive expectation of the future is grounded in three simple elements: Goals, Pathways, and Willpower. *Goals* are the cornerstone of our ability to hope. Goals can be both short-term or long-term. However, goals must be desired enough to motivate action. The nature of the goals we set drive the way we think about both pathways and willpower. *Pathways* thinking refers to the ability to identify strategies or plans on how to achieve our goals. The hopeful child can identify multiple pathways to the goal and can effectively identify alternative pathways or solutions to potential barriers. *Willpower (Agency)* thinking refers to the mental energy we deploy toward our goal pursuits. The hopeful child has the agency to self-regulate their thoughts, behaviors, and emotions when selecting and pursuing their desired goals. It is important to recognize that hope is a way of thinking and not an emotion. Because hope is a way of thinking about our future, it can be taught and learned.

## Hope is About Action:

### Think about how often we use the word hope in our everyday use. I hope it doesn’t rain today. I hope you are well. I hope you have a great day. In order to be considered hopeful, we must have both willpower and pathways for our goals. Neither willpower nor pathways alone is sufficient. For example, a child may have a strong desire to get good grades but lacks the ability to work math problems. Alternatively, the child may have the understanding of how to work the math problem but find themselves unmotivated to do the work. Both scenarios will result in failure or under achievement. A wish is when we desire an outcome but have no pathways to achieve our goals. Hope is about taking action to pursue your goals. A wish is a passive desire for a goal.

We believe that you can impact a child’s hope! Use the simple strategies of identifying valued goals, developing clear pathways and become part of the child’s team and encourage and nurture their willpower. How could you help a child find hope, enhance their hope or model hope in the classroom?

### Why Hope Matters:

Hope theory provides the foundation for understanding human behavior in the social environment and offers an evidenced based framework for educators, school leaders, and community stakeholders in an effort to create and sustain a positive learning environment. With over 2,000 published research studies, hope has emerged as one of the best predictors of goal attainment and well-being for both children and adults. This research has established that 1) Hope leads to positive outcomes, 2) Hope is a protective factor buffering against adversity and stress, and 3) Hope can be taught and learned.

In education settings, the science of hope shows that a child’s hope scores predict better grades, attendance, and graduation rates. Classrooms with higher hope children perform better in terms of chronic absenteeism, truancy, drop-out rates, academic achievement, and graduation rates even when controlling for social economic status. Children with higher hope are better at self-regulating their thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. They are better at setting goals, finding pathways, problem solving, and sustaining the willpower to pursue their goals even when faced with barriers and adversity. Hopeful children have better academic engagement as well as overall well-being.

Talk of transitions today are filled with uncertainty and fear. What will school look like next year? How do we stay connected with youth who may not have reliable technology during social distancing? What will be the outcome as we argue opening our communities or continue social distancing policies? Remembering hope can provide a light in the darkness during a transition filled fear and uncertainty. Hope leads to positive outcomes, hope can protect us during stress and adversity, and most importantly, hope can be taught.