Ignite Learning with A Growth Mindset

SchoolKit Implementation

CASE STUDY

SCHOOL PROFILE

Stuart Hobson Middle School is a 423-student school with children in grades six through eight, located in the nation’s capital, the District of Columbia. Despite its location on Capitol Hill, approximately, 63% of students qualify for free and reduced-priced lunch. The school is comprised of about 80% African American students and 13% Caucasian. Many of the students who attend Stuart Hobson hail from South East DC, one of the toughest areas in the District.

OVERARCHING GOAL

Recognizing that middle school is a time in students’ lives where many have come to conclusions such as, ‘I'm just not smart,’ Stuart Hobson began a journey to transform the mindsets of its students, equipping them with the tools that they would need to be successful in middle school and beyond.

ACTION PLAN

Initially, there was no plan. What was present was a recognition of a promising program and a burning desire to provide students with what many so desperately needed, a curriculum that focused on empowering students to take control of their learning through the transformation of their beliefs. After reading Carol Dweck’s book, Mindset, Principal Dawn Clemens immediately recognized how Mindsets was remarkably relevant to her as a mother. With her daughters just having left for college, she knew she had to start implementing the growth mindset work and language with her students at Stuart Hobson but wasn't sure how. After attending a principal conference where Mindset Works staff presented, she watched the engaging videos and completed the online modules of MindsetMaker™, formerly known as the EducatorKit. She was sold!

Someone had beaten her to synthesizing Carol’s book into an amazing curriculum and she knew that this was exactly what her students needed.

At the principal conference that Principal Clemens attended, she was made aware that with funding by the Raikes Foundation, DCPS was able to offer a SchoolKit and Live Training to interested schools. The SchoolKit is comprised of and Brainology®, a program designed to teach students the growth mindset through brain science and learning strategies, and MindsetMaker™, an online professional development course for educators. The process started off rocky as she wanted to reach all students, but did not want to start with too small or too large a group.

In year 1, Stuart Hobson did not receive training until that December. All support providers, administrators and teachers were trained with Live Training and/or MindsetMaker™. Therefore, for the first year’s implementation it was a second semester offering where they implemented Brainology in four 7th grade classes with one teacher teaching part science and part Brainology. However, what began as a bumpy start turned out to be a great opportunity to learn, grow and improve upon their first year.

By year 2, Brainology was offered as a ‘Specials’ class, where students signed up for it if they were interested. During year 1, Mr Creef, the site leader, had been challenged to learn the program and teach it, as he had been a science teacher for about 15 years. He had even pushed back a little initially as he was being gently
nudged out of his comfort zone. However, it was through working through this challenging semester that Doug Creef recognized the significance of the program and its impact on students that he then owned the program and became one of its biggest champions. Thus, with a dynamic, enthusiastic teacher, Stuart Hobson was able to reach quite a few kids, who self-enrolled in the course.

Brainology was taught as a stand-alone 9-week course with six sections of 20-25 kids. The second cohort included approximately 150 students.

By year 2, Dawn Clemens was not only able to expand the program to reach more students, she was able to use her trained support staff to engage parents as well. What principal Clemens recognized was that if she was going to teach students about the Growth Mindset and the importance of effort, process and strategies at school, it was critical to have the messages they were receiving at home also be aligned. The parent engagement sessions taught parents about Mindsets and also introduced them to the language that encourages, communicates and fosters a growth mindset. As principal Clemens stated, “Language such as, ‘I love the strategies you choose’, ‘I love how you persevered despite the challenges’ and ‘I love how you came home and got right to work’, is what parents need to be communicating more instead of how smart their child is.” By the third year of the program, principal Clemens saw more ways that the program could be altered to better serve her students.

“I have just watched kids completely change their attitude toward the effort they are willing to put in. This program engages them so that it’s exciting for them. It is really exciting to see and they love it.” Principal Clemens recognized that many of her students had grown up believing that they couldn’t achieve what everyone else could, because they did not realize the power of the choices that they made nor did they understand the power of their brains. “If you can let students know that it is more the process, it is the grit and the perseverance and what you put into something that will grow your own mind... All of a sudden, they realize that what they can control is the effort that they exert and the strategies that they utilize.” However, in year 2, Dawn Clemens did not feel like the students who really needed to receive Brainology were getting it.

Because students self-enrolled in the class during year 2, what Principal Clemens noticed was the students who she recognized could benefit most from the program, were choosing PE or Art. So she thought, “You know what? What we really need to do is do this systematically.” So during year 3, they made the program mandatory. The course is now a transition class, where every 6th grader that attends Stuart Hobson Middle School will take it. That way principal Clemens knows that they will have this base knowledge that they will take with them to 7th, 8th grade and beyond. So now they've made it 6th grade and they are all required to take it along with some study skills and other courses. They are now working with both the parents and the incoming 6th graders.

RESULTS

As a result of the Brainology implementation, Stuart Hobson has seen a host of positive changes ranging from those in students to administrators. Principal Clemens stated, “The kids that I spoke to when I would just stop by that room [Brainology classroom], constantly, they felt empowered. When students realize that they have control over effort and what they do, once they've got that, they're off and running”. Principal Clemens went on to talk about the need for students to have a ‘no risk’ growth mindset environment. She describes this as an environment where it is not bad to make a mistake, a mistake is just an opportunity to learn. She went on to say, “I have just watched kids completely change their attitude toward the effort they are willing to put in. This program engages them so that it's exciting for them. It is really exciting to see and they love it.”

After Stuart Hobson's year 1 implementation in 7th grade science, school leaders expected an average gain of 100 points on student SRI scores. At the end of that year, on
average, 6th grade increased 214 points, 8th grade increased 150 points, and 7th grade increased 437 points. As they began to ponder on what had happened with the 7th grade students that year, they realized the only thing different was that the 7th graders received Brainology. As for the growth in the other grades, they considered that a testament to the growth mindset work the teacher had done with MindsetMaker™ to change their own mindsets.

After year 2, students had more growth in math I-ready than any other school in the District. The growth average for the District was 55% and Stuart Hobson was at 86%. In regards to SRI scores, they were number 1 again in regards to growth in the District. “I do believe that there was achievement growth due to this program,” stated Principal Clemens.

The Growth Mindset has also transformed Dawn Clemens as a principal. Once something new has been learned or introduced, they as a staff have about 2 weeks to practice. While they are practicing, it’s a ‘no risk’ environment, where mistakes are applauded. Principal Clemens recognizes that mistakes are how we learn and we need to reflect on them. Clemens stated, “In that respect, adults are just as afraid to make mistakes as children are. However, we are ‘lead learners’ in this business.” Thus, as Stuart Hobson is teaching a Growth Mindset to students, Principal Clemens has also taken this to her staff as she practices these beliefs as a leader and with her staff, continuously working on embodying the Growth Mindset.

CONCLUSION

Since the onset of the SchoolKit implementation at Stuart Hobson, they are continuing to spread the Growth Mindset message with 6th graders and their parents. As Stuart Hobson continues to see motivational and academic growth in their students, they continue to learn from year to year and aren’t afraid to make mistakes and changes to the program as necessary to ensure students are receiving what they need to be successful. Principal Clemens continues to provide Doug Creef with the support that he needs to successfully implement the program. They are truly teaching the Growth Mindset through the way they embody the belief.
About Mindset Works

Mindset Works was co-founded by one of the world’s leading researchers in the field of motivation, Stanford University professor Carol S. Dweck, Ph.D. and K-12 mindset expert Lisa S. Blackwell, Ph.D. The team translates psychological research into practical products and services to help students and educators increase their motivation and achievement.

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