

## **CHAPTER 5 – TEACHING AND LEARNING PERSONAL SKILLS: PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY AND WORK ETHIC (excerpt)**

### **WORK ETHIC**

When asked, “What do you think will help you achieve your goals?” the overwhelming majority of students said “hard work,” “work ethic,” “focus,” or “effort.” David (SHS) responded, “Hard work. I don’t really know what else there is to it.” When prompted to give more details, David (SHS) continued, “Do everything I need to do to the fullest capacity that I can do it.” Beyond that, he did not know more he could do. To be sure, students promote this individual hard work narrative because teachers demand a strong work ethic to persevere through daily stations, group projects, and classwide activities. Students respond by learning how to take good notes during lectures and labs and study every day to meet program expectations. Students believed a strong internal drive and work ethic were necessary to succeed. Quentin (WHS) described the “learning potential” in his engineering course as well as his traditional STEM and non-STEM courses. “[I]f I really want to work hard and learn a lot I can. There’s nothing stopping me except myself.” Students did not believe their individual success depended on others although they gladly sought out help from teachers and classmates and drew inspiration and guidance from family, friends, and their religious beliefs.

### **Willingness to Work**

Students describe a work ethic motivated by a strong personal motivation to complete their work beyond the desire to just earn good grades. In response to the question above, Will (WHS) sighed deeply and replied, “Hard work ethic. You know, staying hard in the class, studying as hard as you, not as hard as you can, but like you know making sure you get all the

studying you needed done, finished. Kind of opening your mind to different opportunities like you never know what you could be interested in until you try it.” Will (WHS) finds the program experience “enjoyable” because “you get to do your own thing and sometimes you like the stuff you’re doing like you find things that you’ve never really known before so it’s pretty interesting.” Students enjoyed the opportunity to explore different fields of engineering and different topics through their individual and group assignments. Xavier (WHS) liked that every day he had something to do. “We build our own parts and we have the 3D printer now so we can draw up our own things and 3D print out things that we like. It’s a lot of freedom to learn on our own.” Chris (HHS) also likes how the HHS magnet program allows him to explore through different projects and activities. “They don’t like, they don’t just hold you to a certain thing.” Ryan (HHS) recalled a computer integrated manufacturing project in which his team built their own assembly lines by coding robot arms to pick up an object at the same time a piston was pushing something else. He liked “building it and helping out in a team to...create something that we all put our hard work into.”

With respect to work ethic, Mr. Palmer said his students “run the gamut of normal teenagers.” Mr. Palmer said although some students “don’t wanna do nothing but skate by school,” others ask him to “double up on stations because they’re so enthralled by it all.” He recalled a conversation with one of his juniors when she was in 9<sup>th</sup> grade:

Student: “Can I come in during lunch and work on a different station?”

Mr. Palmer: “No.”

Student: “Oh come on Mr. Palmer. Why?”

Mr. Palmer: “I want you to have a mental break.”

Mr. Palmer said she was still like that as a junior and predicted that she would be captain of a robotics team as a senior. Students reported coming to the lab at the end of the school day to try to get back on schedule when they are behind. Ultimately, Mr. Palmer believed what students like the most about his courses is being able to “take charge of their education” saying, “I will teach them as little or as much as they want to know.”

The freedom to learn and the sacrifice it takes power through assignments and projects encourages students to take pride in their personal accomplishments. Tom (WHS) encourages younger students to work hard and put forth a complete effort because they will benefit from their experience. “I would say just go for it, try it, try the class and I mean it’s something that you really can’t not like.... You’re making a robot, you’re putting it together, you’re putting pieces together. It’s like a big puzzle. It’s like it takes time to do but once you’re done with it and you look at it it’s like ‘I made that, it’s kind of cool.’” Tom (WHS) used his dad’s company that buys, remodels, and resells cars in a metaphor representing investing work ethic and manual labor into the program.

Anything you do personally you respect it more than someone else I think. I think your personal achievements are better than looking at someone else’s work. Like in the car industry, you make a car, you see a really like a piece of crap and it’s like you build that up, you put time into it, you put effort into it, and then when you’re done you sell it. You make a three times profit and it’s a car that someone’s going to love when it could’ve just been a rust bucket sitting on the side of the road. So just go for it and try your hardest and go as far as you want to go.

George (PHS) liked doing his own work and seeing different concepts in action rather than just wondering what would help. “You see it and you build it and you make it from scratch yourself. You see it work in front of you.”