



February, 2020

"The best way out is always through."

- Robert Frost

St. Catherine's Counseling

Letter to families

When living in Chicago, February always felt like the beginning of the winter to me. In a city that typically moves directly from winter to summer, most years the city would ask us to wait until June 1st for "spring" to bloom and give new life to the city. In that 4-month span, it was easy to isolate yourself; just hunker down, pass the time, and dream of warmer days. I still hold some of that mindset with me, no matter how hard I try to shake it.

Now that I am back home, one of the things I look forward to most is a beautiful PNW spring. But I am also trying to make more use out of these last dark days of winter here at school, knowing that they can teach us and our students wonderful things about ourselves. The bright, warm summer days wouldn't be what they are without the dark days of winter. Just as the warm feelings of joy between friends wouldn't be the same unless we make decisions to persevere through the challenging times when we aren't seeing eye to eye. I am especially grateful for all of you, the parents and guardians who build up resiliency and cultivate joy in our families each and every day, helping us bond together and remember that sunny days are right around the corner. As we continue through the 2nd trimester, I look forward to lessons on perseverance, grit, and gratitude for the present moment, understanding that every day can teach us something new.

Kevin Ward, School Counselor · kward@stcatherineschool.net

What has the school counselor been up to?

Classroom Lessons

With the start of the new year, I have made it a point to get into classrooms on a more regular basis, and the teachers have been awesome in supporting this. So far, it has been a blast to work with grades 1-3 on skill such as cognitive flexibility, perseverance, and the identification of feelings. We can learn these skills in a variety of ways such as game play, mock debates, deep breathing, and personal reflection.

With the 6th graders, we are continuing to add tools to our anti-anxiety toolkit. Everyone experiences anxiety, even younger kiddos. It has been great to speak openly and honestly to the 6th grade about it lately, (shout out to Ms. Acosta). Most recently, we took a look at our happiness levels. Are we as happy as we think we are? How do we cultivate a greater sense of happiness? It is interesting to see from past research studies that developing certain habits and soft skills such as expressing gratitude and social connection can help increase our levels of

perceived happiness and lower stress. And the best part? By working on this diligently, over time, our happiness levels *can* change! Longitudinal studies on happiness have shown that middle school students with the highest level of life satisfaction at age 12 wind up having higher salaries and stronger relationships in their 30's. Pretty neat. Even if we perceive a low level of life satisfaction, we can always begin habits to become happier. It has been incredibly fun to learn this with the 6th graders and to help them begin new habits.

What's Upcoming in Mental Health?



The first week of February is National School Counseling Week! I would like to use this week to simply say “thank you” for letting me be a part of this community. Not many Catholic schools have decided, or have the capacity to hire a full-time school counselor. Having the support, freedom, and encouragement to be creative and form relationships with the students at St. C’s has been incredibly impactful, and my hope is that it has been impactful for our students as well.

This week is also a good reminder to advocate for good mental health and school counselors in every school! Spread the word and help make mental health a normative conversation.

The next coalition meeting for *Prevention WINS (Works in Seattle)* is coming up!

The mission of Prevention Works in Seattle is to prevent underage drinking, substance abuse, and associated problems through education, advocacy, and networking with students, families, and the community.

Meeting Info:

Tuesday, February 4, 2020

9:00am – 10:30am

at

Hamilton International Middle School Library

1610 N 41st St, Seattle, WA 98103

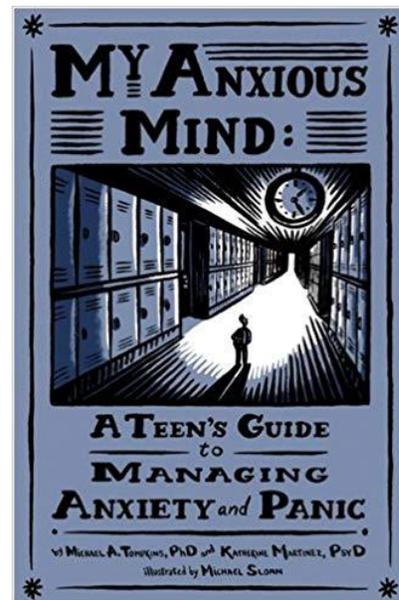
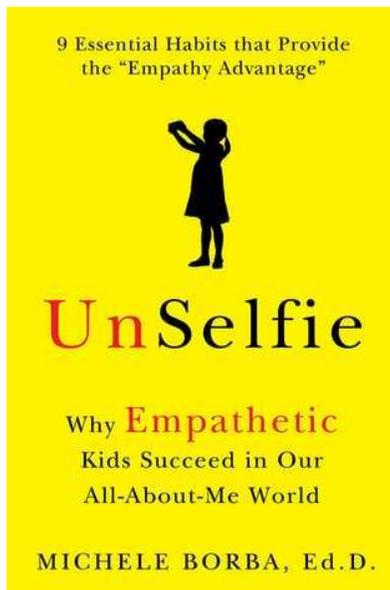
Please check in at the main office upon your arrival.

Book Shout-out – for parents!

Sometimes parents ask me how to cultivate empathy and self-expression in their households. Although there is no magical fix, it helps to have some good reading that gives you direction and reminds you that, just by being there with your child, you are often doing more than enough.

The first book is titled *UnSelfie: Why Empathetic Kids Succeed in our All-About-Me World* by Michele Borba. I like this book because of how Borba offers practicality and real-life suggestions.

The second book is titled *My Anxious Mind: A Teen's Guide to Managing Anxiety and Panic* by Michael A. Tompkins. Anxiety is certainly on the rise in modern day teenagers. It is great to be armed with knowledge to help our teens know and feel that they are not alone.



One last thing...

As I was reading more about Kobe Bryant following his tragic death, I came across a podcast he had created for kids, called "The Punies." Although I knew that Kobe had many creative projects since he retired from the league, I had never heard of this podcast. I think that in our digital age, anytime we can use technology to help our kids grow, that is a major bonus. Give it a listen if you are looking for something fun and beneficial to let your kids listen to while on the road or just hanging out. The podcast follows a group of friends who learn lessons on how to play sports the right way. You can find a link to the podcast here (<https://podnews.net/podcast/1425055063>) or anywhere you listen to podcasts!

