

Middle School Parent Director Meeting December 7, 2011

Mr. Ceaser started the meeting off by introducing Sarah Shartzter, the 8th grade sponsor to discuss the 8th grade Endangered Species Project.

Ms. Schartzter explained that this project is the capstone to the KCD Middle School Experience. Students spend the time between Winter Break and Spring Break on this cross-curricular project. They will read the book, *Last Chance to See*, by Douglas Adams and mark Carwardine, which is a travelogue style piece on endangered animals. Following much research including contact with living expert, students much convince their fellow students and teachers why their chosen endangered animal should be protected and saved.

The Endangered Species event is both a process and a project. During the six-week project, there is a clarity of purpose and excitement among the students. In English, students mush write a 10 to 12 page paper in the first person. In Science, students much create a tri-fold brochure. History class requires students to collect notes on their animals' native country including laws and current events that affect the wellbeing of their endangered species. Computer class will give the kids the opportunity to contact an expert scientist on their chosen species in order to gain information and develop this relationship via email. The 8th grade will also spend day and a night at the Louisville Zoo. All of this culminates in a 10-minute persuasive presentation to the Eco Board on the week before Spring Break. The winning presenter gets a dress down day to earn money for their animal.

Next, Mr. Ceaser introduced Dr. Tanya Stockhammer who is a clinical psychologist who has been treating children, teenagers and their families for over a decade. She spoke to the group on adolescent organizational development. Her notes are below:

Organization

- The ability to establish and maintain a system for arranging and keeping track of important items
- Two components:
 - Internal
 - Managing Stuff
- It is an *Executive Skill*

Executive Skills

- Based in neuroscience
- The brain-based skills required for humans to execute or perform tasks
- Mainly controlled in the frontal lobe
- 11 Executive Skills

Response Inhibition Working Memory Emotional Control	Emerge 6 – 12 months	
Sustained Attention Task Initiation		Mastery in Elem School
Planning and Prioritization Organization Time Management		Mastery in Middle School
Goal Directed Persistence Flexibility Metacognition “bird’s eye view” (“how am I doing”)		Mastery in High School and Beyond

Middle School

- Tasks that develop over the course of middle school
 - Planning and Prioritization – Creating a roadmap to reach a goal and focus on what is important
 - Organization
 - Time Management – Estimate how much time one has, decide how to allocate time, keep track of time, and understand that time is important

Keep in Mind

- Children and Adults all have patterns of strengths and weaknesses in Executive Skills
- Our pattern may not match our kids’ patterns (our flexibility will save us)
- We develop these skills through a combination of biology and experience
- There is a large period of Brain development around ages 11 or 12 that primarily occurs in the frontal lobe but this development does not stop until the 20’s (Think David Walsh on judgement and decision making).
- Practice of executive skills will probably help solidify them – use modeling, teaching, and support but do not do things for them.
- The best learning occurs by doing and by making mistakes

- Doing and succeeding helps foster self esteem
- There is a continuum of ability in executive skills
- Kids will achieve these skills at different rates – range of “typical”
- 5th grade is different from 8th grade
- Executive skills are different than other academic and cognitive skills – kids can be smart but scattered

Ten Principles for Improving Executive Skills

(from Dawson and Guare, 2009)

1. Use active teaching rather than just relying on observation and osmosis.
2. Keep in mind your child’s developmental level and age.
3. Use external prompts and cues to develop internal skills.
4. Modify the environment, the task, or the interaction, if needed.
5. Use your child’s innate wish for mastery and control. (Have to do... before Want to do...)
6. Modify tasks to match your child’s capacity to exert effort.
7. Use incentives to support instruction. Praise is an incentive.
8. Provide *just enough* support for your child to be successful.
9. Keep supports and supervision in place until your child achieves mastery and success.
10. Remove supports and supervision gradually.

Helpful Resources

For Parents:

Goldberg, Donna (2005). *The Organized Student: Teaching Children the Skills for Success at School and Beyond.*

Canter, Lee and Hausner, Lee (1987). *Homework without Tears: A Parent’s Guide for Motivating Children to do Homework and Succeed in School.*

Dawson, Peg and Guare, Richard (2009). *Smart but Scattered.*

For Kids:

Fox, Janet (2006). *Get Organized without Losing it.*