

## **Instilling Passion and Perseverance**

- Dana Bearce, Danielle Hermon Wood, Allyson Rosenbloom

Engagement in the learning process is a hallmark of teaching and learning at Bixby. As Benjamin Franklin said, "Tell me and I forget, teach me and I remember, involve me and I learn." Without engagement true learning does not happen. We don't mean that everything is always fun, but that we are working toward creating an environment in which students find learning meaningful, take responsibility for their learning, and find ways to extend and apply what they do in school in their own lives.

We know that this type of learning is a start on a long road that we hope will last their entire lives. Bill Fitzsimmons, the Deans of Admissions and Financial Aid at Harvard University, explained what he believes makes people successful as reported by Angela Duckworth in her book, *Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance*, "...Most people are born with tremendous potential. The real question is whether they're encouraged to employ their good old fashioned hard work and their grit, if you will, to its maximum. In the end those are the people who seem to be the most successful." (p. 236) Duckworth explains that "consistency of effort over the long run is everything." (p. 50) Grit has two components passion and perseverance. (p. 56) As a school, Bixby, through its small class sizes, subject area teachers, and mission to provide conditions to meet diverse learning needs puts in place conditions that supports students in their start on this road in building grit. This opportunity to find passion and work hard at identifying and achieving their own goals can be seen in classrooms all over Bixby and in some of the unique opportunities that Bixby provides. The two following examples give a clear picture of what makes Bixby special.

With the excitement over the new musical *Hamilton*, Bixby students found a passion for expressing their feelings through rap. *Hamilton* had been a catalyst for engaging student interests in many topics including history, music, and word play. Given this excitement, Danielle Hermon Wood, Bixby's music teacher, wanted to introduce her students to an earlier version of rapping in the genre of musical theater. The opening number, "Rock Island", from the musical *The Music Man*, is an earlier form of rap. When she first played the piece, the kids thought it was cool, but way too many words, and they would never learn it. She reminded them that Ms. Danielle

doesn't learn a 400 page Italian opera in two days; it takes time, patience, and practice. She let them know that she believed they could do it. With a positive attitude and enthusiasm, she was able to encourage them that they would take their time and learn it together, and that's what they did. Before she knew it, they were practicing on their own out in lower yard, on play dates, and while playing four square. This is a prime example of ways that students feel supported while they develop confidence in building new skills, and as they develop areas of interest and passion in which they take on challenges with agency and make new connections.

Our music and theater program is one way that Bixby engages kid's creativity and passion, and we see this type of engagement and agency all around the school. At Bixby, educators understand that each child comes with their own background knowledge, ideas, and interests. We try to give them opportunities to be exposed to many new ideas and concepts to give them a strong foundation, but we also want to ignite their own passions. One opportunity that students have to explore their interests has traditionally been through a concept called, "Free Time," which we recently renamed WIN, which stands for 'What I Need.' This has been a time provided to each student a few times a week when they can make their own choices about how to spend their time. Many students may join a class in which they have a special interest, others may make up a new game in lower yard, while others build a magnetile tower. At Bixby, this experience is valued as it provides so many ways to identify and extend personal interests and skills.

Believing in our own power to learn and master new skills is important According to Angela Duckworth, "When people think of the word 'drive,' they often think you have it or you don't, and that's where we're wrong. Drive is something that can be encouraged by a wonderful teacher, by a terrific classroom environment, by an awesome soccer team that you are on, and it can be squashed as well." At Bixby we set the scene for students to build a strong foundation that can take them wherever they want to go!

One learns by doing a thing; for though you think you know it, you have no certainty until you try.

- Sophocles

It's not that I'm so smart, it's just that I stay with problems longer.

- Albert Einstein