

We Are Mustangs – Report to the Community

“In Native American and First Nation cultures, significance was nurtured in communities of belonging” (Manitoba Education and Training, 2002). The staff at Minnetonka School could not agree more.

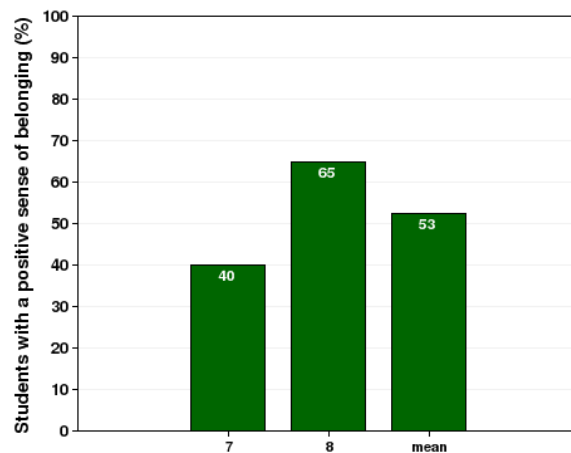
Students will not be successful at learning to read, write, apply math skills, play music, develop physical literacy and learn about our country and our past if they do not feel safe and connected to the school.

Our school identity is shaped by the history, traditions and symbols that are unifying for all that have passed through the hallways of our school. It is not rare to hear former staff and students remark that they are “Mustangs for Life”, and the staff has worked hard the past year and into this school year



to ensure that all feel connected as a Minnetonka Mustang. Much like we in the province rally around the symbols and ideas of the Jets, Bombers or the Bison, the Mustang is a symbol that bring us all together at Minnetonka School. We started with simple things like a Mustang clothing order, Mustang Wear Fridays, and putting our logo in more places in the school (nameplates and common spaces).

Staff identified this a worthy goal by looking at OurSchool student survey data that indicated that only 53% of Gr. 7/8 students at Minnetonka School had a “positive sense of belonging” (See chart to the right). While the percentage was higher at the Gr. 4, 5 and 6 level (71%), staff were concerned that this was a low as well.



Last year staff worked hard to build better connections between students and the school, and students from different grade levels with each other. In order to increase these connections staff developed Active Start Wednesdays, Mustang Days, a larger focus on cross-grade collaborative work and the

development of a simple school code of conduct that is concise, identifiable for all and could be used a common language of “What Mustangs Do”.

Active Start Wednesdays allow students in all grades to participate together in fun and physically active activities that start the day off positively. “Exercise affects the brain on multiple fronts. It increases heart rate, which pumps more oxygen to the brain. It also aids the bodily release of a plethora of hormones, all of which participate in aiding and providing a nourishing environment for the growth of brain cells.” (BrainHQ, 2019). Further to these benefits, students are working together to achieve active goals. The older students can model appropriate behaviour for the younger students, and more importantly for the pursuit of our belonging goal, students get to see other students outside of their classroom and build safe relationships and familiarity with others, thus increasing the connection to each other and the school.

Like Active Start Wednesdays, Mustang Days are another fun way to get the school working together and celebrating being a Mustang. Various themes are selected, there is a fun, inclusive, low risk activity that students compete in, a hot lunch, and celebrations of all the participants after the competition is done.

Codes of conduct are often wordy documents that are difficult for staff and students to remember.

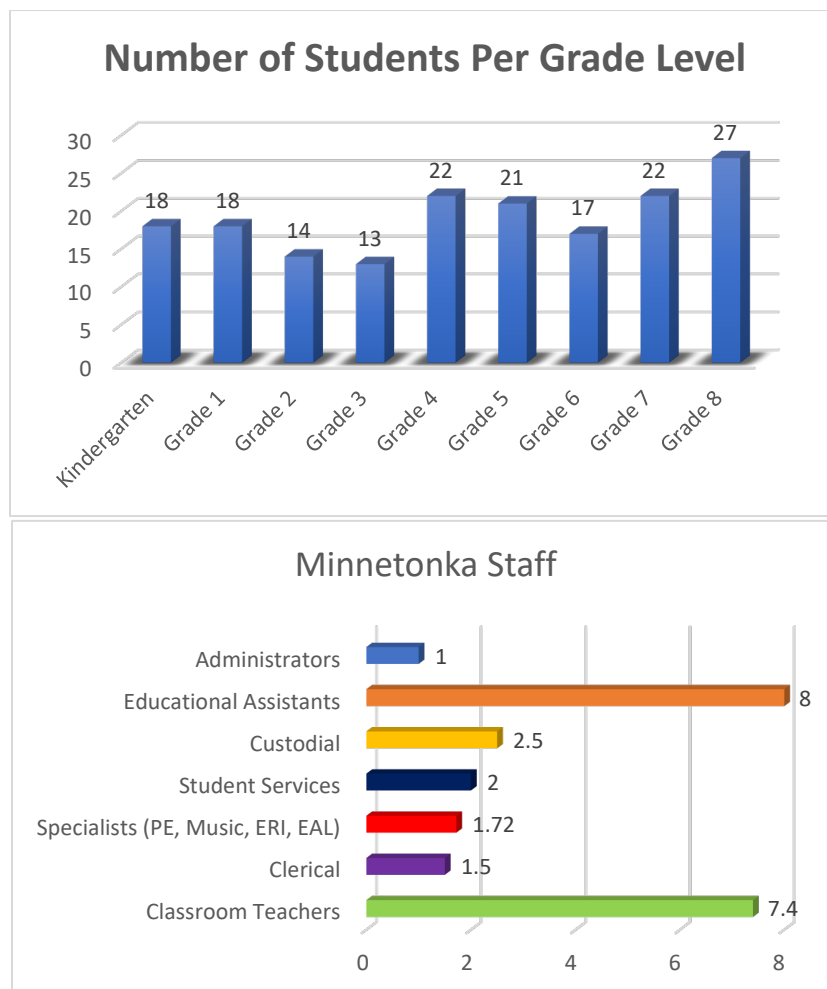
While these documents are necessary to the functioning of the school, it was decided to boil down the key elements of the code into simple language everyone can remember. Borrowing the ideas, with small modifications, that former U.S. President Barack Obama used to pine, the Mustang Code was born. Mustangs will: Be Kind, Be Useful, Do Their Best. You will often see these terms on our Twitter hashtags, the language of staff and students, and coming soon, on the walls of the school. This language will often be used when problem solving conflicts or when guiding students to make positive decisions.

Students will be encouraged to consider if their actions are kind, useful and their best. This common language is another example of unifying strides aimed at increasing the sense of belonging at Minnetonka School.

It is hoped that we will see an increase in student's self reporting of positive sense of belonging to Minnetonka School. While having one hundred percent of students feeling connected and belonging to the school is always the ultimate goal, we hope to see our numbers rise to 80% during this years OurSCHOOL survey in May. As (Brendtro, Brokenleg, & Van Bockern) state; we want our students to experience "belonging in a supportive community, rather than being lost in a depersonalized bureaucracy". It is our hope that once this supportive community, focused around the Mustang, common positive language and working together, is formed, students will be much more successful in achieving the academic goals that they are asked to demonstrate in the classroom.

We are Mustangs! #BeKind #BeUseful #DoYourBest

Minnetonka By the Numbers:



Works Cited

BrainHQ. (2019, October 20). *BrainHQ*. Retrieved October 20, 2019, from Physical Exercise for Brain Health: <https://www.brainhq.com/brain-resources/everyday-brain-fitness/physical-exercise/>

Brendtro, L. K., Brokenleg, M., & Van Bockern, S. (2002). *Reclaiming Youth at Risk (Revised Edition)*. Bloomington, Indiana: Solution Tree.

Manitoba Education and Training. (2002). *Circle of Courage Philosophy*. Retrieved April 10, 2019, from Education and Training: https://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/cur/cardev/gr9_found/courage_poster.pdf