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NEWS



Fresh Starts

JONATHAN CHAN, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Recently, I've been reflecting on the power of second chances and the opportunities we have to move past our mistakes or setbacks. Every Tuesday, I spend a portion of the day with our staff and students at Church Hill Academy. It's been a challenging school year for everyone, but each week I'm encouraged by the ways our students are learning and growing and the tremendous energy our staff pour into this work.

One Tuesday in late January, I spent most of the lunch period catching up with one of our teachers, Micaiah Presley, known as "Coach K" to students and staff. He's a jack-of-all-trades at the school, teaching P.E., art, and biology, all while pursuing a

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master's degree and serving at his church. Over some delicious tacos made by our school nutrition team, we talked about how the quarter was wrapping up and how students felt about upcoming final exams.

Coach K shared that he could see a new level of focus among his students as they prepped for their final, and he attributed it in part to a policy he and other teachers at the Academy follow. In many courses, students have the chance to replace their lowest test score with their final exam grade. For one student, this policy was giving him a chance to bring up an uncharacteristically low test grade and end the quarter with all A's and B's. Another student who had struggled in biology all year long was seeking extra help and redoubling his focus so he could do well enough on the final to pass the overall course. This policy is no free pass: because the comprehensive final replaces the lowest test score, it means they need to review topics on which they tested poorly earlier.

Coach K shared that without this policy, some students would get discouraged, lose focus, or even give up after doing poorly on a test. For many of our students, circumstances outside their control can impact them on a given day, no matter how diligent or gifted they may be. This policy provides an opportunity to try again and makes it clear that we believe our students have it within their power to do better. It reminds them that their worst grade doesn't have to define how they do in a class.

After the bell rang and Coach K left to teach his next class, I reflected

on the power of this practice, not just in biology class, but across the broader work of CHAT. In the After School Program, a similar approach to Coach K's helps students build resilience in the face of adversity. Students who become dysregulated or overwhelmed can visit the Calm Room and take a few moments to breathe, talk with staff or volunteers, and rejoin the rest of the group when they feel ready. Through it all, we remind students that no matter what just happened, they have the opportunity to try again and engage differently.

In my own life, and perhaps yours as well, I find I need this kind of reminder on a daily basis. As a younger leader, a new dad, and a husband, I inevitably make mistakes and fall short. The stress and chaos of these last couple of years have brought some of my faults and growing edges into even sharper relief. In those moments, it's easy for me to default to the worst thing you can do when you need to find a way forward—I stop trying altogether.

But in these last few months, as I've watched students move forward in the face of adversity, and as I've sought counsel and support from others, I've seen my own mindset start to shift. Ultimately I'm reminded that in Christ, no mistake or shortcoming leaves me condemned. And there's always another chance to start afresh, relying on the unceasing love and new mercies He offers to each one of us (Lamentations 3:22-23).



Leadership Lessons

February was a busy month in the After School Program! Students enjoyed a visit from the Richmond Fire Department's Station 11 crew and learned about the work they do to keep our neighbors safe. Firefighters gave students a fire engine tour and shared safety tips, and students got to watch how quickly crew members can put on all their gear before responding to a fire. We're grateful to Station 11 and many other partners who serve our community and create fun, enriching opportunities for our students.

February also gave us even more cause to celebrate the achievements and contributions of African American leaders, both past and present. Throughout Black History Month, Timón King (Program Manager) and Cass Michele (Family & Community Engagement Manager) introduced



students to activists and inventors who left their mark on our nation. Wrapping up the month, students participated in a special presentation of art projects and reflections from what they learned. But the energy won't stop there—you'll find the After School Program honoring Black heroes all year long.

Your generosity makes room for students to learn & grow in the After School Program. Give a gift at bit.ly/chat-donate.

Meet Timond

“My name is Timond, and I attend Church Hill Academy. I started working at On Point Prints in October and it’s a job I think others would enjoy. It’s actually a really fun job and pretty chill. I learned how to screen print everything from hoodies to onesies to tote bags. I also learned how everything works and how different materials can make or break the design.

Every Saturday we go to markets and sell our inventory, and we do pretty well. It helps me with customer service and communication skills. This job is one of a kind and I’m glad I’ve found it.”

**—TIMOND BILLIE, CHURCH HILL ACADEMY
JUNIOR & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
PROGRAM TEAM MEMBER**



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