

The approaching school year often causes deep reflection. As a school leader, I often ask myself questions meant to set the course ahead. What support will my staff need in order to maintain their focus, strength, and level of excellence throughout the year? How can we enhance the experiences students will receive? Is our instruction preparing students for the future that they will encounter?

This year, I began the year thinking about connections, acceptance, and the power of positive relationships. In my readings this summer, I shared with staff an article I read expressing concern over depression in older citizens. The author contends that this is the result of isolation, a lack of places to socialize with people their age, and their inability to remain connected due to their limited social media skills. While I believe that seniors are more isolated than in years past, I do not agree that mastering social media platforms would properly address this issue. I would argue that our youth, from pre-teen to young adult, are the most proficient group in social media use; yet, they have the highest rate of suicide in our nation. Sadly, the numbers are alarming. And, it begs the question: Are connections, created through technology, enough to sustain our social nature?

We know that face-to-face personal connections bolster positive feelings in all humans. Yet, we rarely consider this need with the gravity it deserves. Mindfulness and meditation, skills we are teaching our children to cope with the “noise” of the world, are independent activities. We need the deliberate intention of building face-to-face relationships with others.

Schools, by their very nature, can be training grounds for strengthening accepted social skills, honing appreciation and acceptance of each other, and weaving connections between each other that have potential to be long lasting. As a learning community, we need to take the time to build and model our own face-to-face relationships. Whether it is greeting someone new at pick up or introducing yourself at a school gathering, our own adult network of connections support the social tendrils our children are exploring. Our own acceptance, welcoming, and encouragement of each other is under scrutiny by our youth.

Together, let's commit to building and strengthening strong, healthy relationships between and among each other Winthrop's focus this year. Not only will we and our children benefit, but also perhaps the future of our culture will as well.