

Once a week, the Lethbridge Herald publishes a column written by a superintendent of one of five school jurisdictions in the Lethbridge area. This week's column is authored by Dr. Wilco Tymensen, Superintendent for Horizon School Division No. 67 and was published on November 28, 2018. CASS thanks the Lethbridge Herald for permission to post this article on our website.

The Pursuit of Happiness

At a recent College of Alberta School Superintendents conference, I heard David Irvine speak about authentic leadership and personal accountability. The next day a friend shared a motivational speech about happiness by actor Matthew McConaughey. Their close alignment made me reflect back to an activity where parents are asked to reflect upon what they ultimately want for their children and given the following 12 words: assertive, athletic, attractive, confident, content, happy, healthy, independent, intelligent, popular, successful, and talented. In small groups they must remove one word at a time to get to the one word that matters most. Happy has a tendency of sticking around to the end. Both David and Matthew spoke about the pitfalls of happiness, one being that when your goal is to make others happy, you give them the power but take away their accountability for the result. When children have no accountability they lack ownership and develop a sense of entitlement where they deserve things, just because. All they have to do to get something is act unhappy. It becomes your job to make them happy, not theirs. This has significant relevance for parents. Rather than helping our children build strategies to navigate problems and find success, those who want to make their children happy, often strive to remove obstacles. The pursuit for happiness means that children do not gain the confidence that comes from tackling obstacles. This lack confidence, this feeling of inadequacy, contributes to anxiety. Anxiety is an outcome that comes from the lack of confidence in one's ability to handle the demands of live. Happiness is an emotional response to an outcome. It is a cause and effect. It is not sustainable as every time we attain our goal it only changes our life for a moment, we pass one test, only to stress about the next. Happiness becomes the drug we chase. If happiness is what you are after, you will be let down frequently and unhappy much of the time. Joy on the other hand is not an outcome; it is what we experience when we do what we love, no matter the outcome. Doing the race, as opposed to winning the race. When you focus on the journey, on the joy of trying and learning, you have already won and will be happier. The next time your child is unhappy. Approach the problem as an opportunity. Reflect and focus on building your child's ownership by engaging in conversations about how they contributed to the problem, and what they can do to resolve it. Teach them that they are the architect of their life. Encourage your children to reflect upon their strengths that lead to their success, because we get better at what we focus on. Help your children so they spend time on the positive, what brings them joy, as that build their confidence, and lower their anxiety and ultimately bring about happiness.