

Caring Creates Resilience

Public, large-scale challenges create large-scale stress, and few would dispute that the past two years have been stressful. We, like all districts, were challenged with adversity. However, as a district and a community, we should look to not just survive, but to thrive when faced with challenges. The key question is, “how do we do this?”

Researcher Kelly McGonigal, who has studied stress and resilience, arrived at a remarkable (albeit simple) conclusion: caring *creates* resilience. This finding, while appearing so simple, is incredibly powerful.

McGonigal studied how individuals view stress and found that changing our minds about stress is essential. Viewing stress as a healthy sign that we are preparing to address a challenge greatly improves our response. She cited a study of 30,000 adults over an eight year period that asked two questions: "How much stress have you experienced in the last year?" and "Do you believe that stress is harmful for your health?" She found that those who saw stress as harmful had an increased risk of dying. However, those who did not view stress as harmful had the lowest risk of anyone in the study, even those who said they had little or no stress. She states that believing stress is bad for you is, essentially, bad. Of course. But changing how we view stress is the key to thriving.

Even more remarkable, she further analyzed stress, citing a study that looked at adults who stated they had high stress in the previous year and how much time they spent helping out neighbors, friends, and community members.

She found that, whether the stressor was a family crisis or a financial difficulty, those who engaged in caring acts for others were most resilient. She found that those who demonstrated caring, who acted on that caring, responded the best to stress.

This is important for our students. At Solanco, our students are engaged in many activities that demonstrate caring for others, such as food drives, kindness notes, and community service. All of these activities focus on caring and emphasize helping others, and they are a great way to overcome challenges in life.

This is also important for our faculty and staff. When faced with large-scale stressors, we look to acts of compassion for others. In doing so, we help others and also create a more resilient organization.

McGonigal’s research is both positive and hopeful—finding ways to demonstrate caring and compassion for others helps us (and others). We can actively take on challenges. We can act in ways that are caring for others, and in those actions we thrive.

Connecting with others creates resilience. Caring creates resilience.