

And that's a wrap!!! County fairs in the Twin Creeks District in Norton, Decatur, Sheridan and Graham counties have come to a close. Display cases, ribbons and supplies are tucked away for another year and offices are scrambling to get State Fair entries submitted for exhibits in early September in Hutchinson.

4-H members enroll in project areas in October and work throughout the year to learn about their projects either as a self-study or by attending local and area workshops. The county fair is the culmination of their learning experiences throughout the year in doing the best they can in a final product to enter at the county fair.

When 4-H members enter an exhibit at the county fair, they are inviting feedback from project area judges in evaluating their product. Our 4-H program uses the Danish system of evaluation. This system evaluates each entry on its own merit. A Purple ribbon indicates "Outstanding on all standards". A Blue ribbon "Exceeds minimum standards, minor improvements can be made". A Red ribbon "Meets minimum standards, needs improvements". A White ribbon "Fails to meet minimum standards".

Our youth do an exceptional job in entering top notch exhibits, but at times our 4-H exhibit buildings are filled with many purple and blue ribbons, very few red ribbons and white ribbons are almost extinct in the 4-H world. Our members have an opportunity to visit with the judges in a consultation evaluation format. Judges are able to ask the 4-H members questions about their entries: how was it assembled or ingredients in a recipe, how much time was involved, where did they get the idea, etc. The information received in the interview process sometimes weighs heavier than the quality of the product itself. Judges are able to determine the extent of the work that was completed by the youth.

Some of today's parents struggle with allowing their youth to do their own work in fear that it might not meet the highest standards. Don't take this the wrong way – every youth needs guidance and assistance from their parents, project leaders and volunteers. But at times, my thought is that we are doing our youth a disservice in not allowing them to get less than the best on work that they have actually completed on their own. As parents, we want to ensure that our youth is the best, so we sometimes assist a little too much in making sure that everything is perfect.

The key word today is 'grit' which means sticking with something for a long time. It's approaching life like it's a marathon – not a sprint. Grittier kids are more likely to solve problems, to achieve goals and to graduate. Talent doesn't make us gritty. IQ doesn't make us gritty. In fact, they often diminish it. With talent and smarts, kids easily assume they can coast on their abilities. In one study, Dr. Duckworth found that smarter students actually had *less* grit than their peers who scored lower on an intelligence test. This finding suggests that, among the participants (all students at an Ivy League school) those who are not as bright as their peers "compensate by working harder and with more determination." Dr. Duckworth believes that we, as adults, need to get grittier about building grit in our kids.

Grit applies to our 4-H members as well. Several common-sense thoughts on grit include: 1) The more we do for them, the less they learn to do for themselves. 2) The easier life is for them, the less they naturally develop grit. 3) The more we prescribe for them, the less they're apt to develop grit. 4) The faster their solutions come, the less they tend to develop grit. 5) The more resources we give them, the less resourceful they become.

During the past month of county fairs, I have witnessed both ends of the spectrum with parent involvement and 4-H members in completing their project exhibits. Some younger members were needing more assistance from parents who were playing the 'hands-off, this is your project' scenario. And other older 4-H member who were highly capable of doing their own work were receiving parent coaching from the sidelines. At some point, we need to allow our youth to be accountable for themselves and complete their own work.

It is perfectly acceptable to receive a red ribbon for an exhibit or performance. That is a standard level of achievement. If parents assist youth with the anticipation of receiving a purple ribbon for their efforts, it makes it difficult to have any learning experiences. If you are always at the top, what is there to strive for? How can we instill grit in our youth if they don't have to work for their achievements?

Our county fairs are just one aspect of our 4-H program. We instill 'grit' in our youth when they are involved in decision making skills through judging contests, club office positions, public speaking opportunities, community service projects and a wealth of other learning experiences throughout the year.

Congratulations to all youth in the Twin Creeks Extension District on your accomplishments, big and small! And a huge "Thank You" to all of the volunteers who gave of their time to make each county fair a success. These events truly would not be possible without the support of our communities!

This article was adapted from Tim Elmore's "Growing Leaders" Weekly Digest.

Please contact Patsy Maddy at your local Extension office to find out more about "Inspiring Kids To Do" through our 4-H program, the nation's largest youth organization. General information can also be found on our website at www.twincreeks.ksu.edu and 'Like' our Facebook page at K-State Research and Extension Twin Creeks District.

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