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THE ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF EXCELLENCE

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## Cotton Center ISD Mission Statement

**“Our mission is to graduate all students with skills and values to successfully compete as life-long learners.”**

**E.L.K.S.**  
Excellence  
in  
Learning  
Knowledge  
and  
Skills

## How High Can You Reach?

The first part of the definition of excellence is as follows: to hold oneself to the highest possible standard. This leads me to ask a pertinent question. How high can you reach? When talking about the relentless pursuit of excellence, I mean a tenacious quest for your greatest dream. People of excellence are relentlessly pursuing a higher standard.

*The Man of La Mancha* had a song called *To Dream the Impossible Dream*. I believe that most do not even strive for dreams that are possible. We limit ourselves. But I like what Theodore Roethke said. “What we need is more people who specialize in the impossible.”

So how high can you reach? Often the impossible is the untried; hence, the difference between the impossible and the possible lies in a person's determination. There are countless stories of individuals who overcame incredible odds to accomplish what seemed like the impossible. But when they reached their goal, the dream no longer was impossible.

I like this story I read out of Mark and Angel Hack Life ([markandangel.com](http://markandangel.com)). “When I was a high school freshman, a 260 pound freshman girl showed up for track and field try-outs. Her name was Sara, and she was only there because her doctor said her health depended on it. But once she scanned the crowd of students who were trying-out, she turned around and began

walking away. Coach O'Leary saw her, jogged over, and turned her back around. “I'm not thin enough for this sport!” Sara declared. “And I'll never be! It's impossible for me to lose enough weight. I've tried.” Coach O'Leary nodded, and promised Sara that her body type wasn't suited for her current weight. “It's suited for 220 pounds,” he said. Sara looked confused. “Most people tell me I need to lose 130 pounds,” she replied. “But you think I only need to lose 40?” Coach O'Leary nodded again.

Sara started off as a shot put competitor, but spent every single afternoon running and training with the rest of the track team. She was very competitive, and by the end of our freshman year she was down to 220 pounds. She also won 2nd place in the county-wide shot put tournament that year. Three years later, during our senior year, she won 3rd place in the 10K run. Her competitive weight at the time was 130 pounds.”

For this young lady the only way she was going to discover the limits of the possible was to venture a little way into the impossible. To move her world in a positive direction, she had to first move herself.

If you never try anything, everything looks impossible. Sara thought pursuing track and field was an impossible task, but she saw beyond her own ability's perception. Will and Ariel Durant said that

the future never happens—it is created. This is what Sara had to do. She determined to perform the unexpected. Her only real limitations was the level of her desires. Because she wanted it bad enough, her boundaries became unlimited.

I believe one of the reasons for her success was because of Coach O'Leary's influence in her life. He held her to a higher standard than anybody expected of her, but it was not an overwhelming standard. Yes, his expectations may have seemed unrealistic at the time, and people of excellence are unrealistic to a certain degree. But because they don't judge themselves based off normality, they willingly try the impossible and often achieve it time and time again.

Never excuse yourself. Give excellence and not excuses. You cannot just build a reputation on what you are planning on doing. These types of people usually don't accomplish anything, and then make excuses for why what they wanted didn't happen. There has to be some determination behind it. Then, be willing to make some mistakes. Anyone who has never made mistakes has never tried anything new.

The poet John Whitier said, ‘The saddest words of tongue and pen are, ‘it might have been.’” Don't go to the grave with this as your epitaph. Be determined to make your dreams happen. Be someone who accomplished the impossible.