

# HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS: CREATING A CULTURE OF RESILIENCE AND STUDENT SUCCESS WITH 7 MINDSETS



In the nation's seventh-largest school district, Hillsborough County Public Schools (HCPS) in Florida, educators are transforming school culture and student outcomes through an intentional focus on resiliency, character, and life skills education. Central to this effort is their district-wide implementation of the 7 Mindsets curriculum, a mindset-based, PreK-12 solution that helps build the beliefs and skills students need to succeed academically and in life.



What began as a strategic move to align with Florida's Resiliency Education standards has evolved into a powerful model of whole-child learning. Since 2020, HCPS has partnered with 7 Mindsets to scale mindset-based learning across their schools. The results speak volumes: improvements in academic performance, student behavior, attendance, and overall school culture.

### The Challenge: Building Resilient Learners at Scale

Like many large urban districts, HCPS faced growing concerns about student well-being, behavior, and attendance—challenges that were only magnified by the effects of the pandemic. The district's Resiliency, Character, and Life Skills (RCLS) department, under the leadership of Julia Sarmiento-Cohen, sought to create a unifying framework that aligned with state mandates and addressed students' needs.

The district needed more than just compliance; it needed connection—not just with the students but also with the educators as well as school and district leaders. They wanted to move beyond fragmented efforts and implement a comprehensive, engaging curriculum that created a common language and culture of belonging across all schools.

### The Solution: District-Wide Implementation of 7 Mindsets

The Hillsborough County Public Schools-7 Mindsets initiative officially launched in 2020 with a phased rollout. Today, it includes 50 Foundation- and Readiness-level schools, each receiving tailored coaching and implementation support. The program includes:

- A PreK-12 digital curriculum aligned with the state's Resiliency Standards that builds a common mindset-based language across the district.
- Ongoing professional learning and coaching for educators and district leaders.
- A focus on adult well-being, helping staff reconnect with purpose and reduce burnout.

The 7 Mindsets curriculum isn't just focused on student outcomes; it also helps educators rediscover the joy of teaching and build stronger relationships with students and colleagues. Ginette Hoze, principal of Witter Elementary in HCPS, explained the impact of the mindsets on both her students and educators. "I believe that the mindsets have the power to transform the lives of students and teachers, because once you learn what the mindsets are, they truly become the fabric of who you are as a human being. And I think that is where the true power of the mindsets is."

## The Impact: Measurable Growth Across Key Metrics

In the 2022–2023 school year, more than 58,000 elementary students across 110 HCPS schools participated in a research study conducted by Dr. Clark McKown. The findings were compelling:

- **Academic Gains:** Students in 7 Mindsets schools outperformed their peers in schools not using 7 Mindsets in both English and Math assessments.
- **Attendance and Behavior Improvements:** Students in 7 Mindsets schools attended nearly one more day of school on average and saw up to a 17% reduction in suspension days.
- **Greater Confidence and Safety:** Students in high-implementation schools reported stronger self-efficacy and a greater sense of safety, especially among students with disabilities.

Most notably, the students who started the year with the most challenges—low achievement, poor attendance, or high suspension rates—showed the greatest improvements.



## Voices from the Field: Culture Transformation in Action Across HCPS

Educators across the district are seeing the difference:

“At South County Career Acceleration Academy, our culture goal is built around 7 Mindsets. This is THE most critical element we teach daily because without these mindsets in place, we can’t reach our learners academically.”

– **Jennifer Woods, Principal**



“After our first year of 7 Mindsets implementation, students reported they felt the positive energy of school increase—and for the first time in over six years, our school was awarded an ‘A’ grade.”

– **Andrea Simpson, School Counselor, Heritage Elementary**

Their stories reinforce what the data already shows: when students believe in themselves and feel connected to their schools, they thrive.

## Looking Ahead: Sustaining Momentum

HCPS continues to deepen its partnership with 7 Mindsets, committing to a multi-year expansion that includes enhanced coaching, professional development, and integration with additional supports like student success coaching and mental health programming.

With a long-term vision and the right tools in place, Hillsborough County Public Schools is not just developing students with higher levels of confidence, hope, and a sense of belonging, but building more resilient, connected, and purpose-driven educators and school leaders.

## About 7 Mindsets

Founded in 2009, 7 Mindsets provides transformative, mindset-based empowerment and mental health learning solutions for schools, districts, and organizations nationwide. The company offers multi-tiered curricula, professional development, and data measurement tools that empower growth and drive measurable impact. Its highly effective programs, validated at ESSA Level 2, have been proven to improve student engagement, behavior, attendance, and academic achievement, including in a 2025 independent research study. 7 Mindsets has been used by over 5 million students and educators in all 50 states, and in 2025, was named to the Inc. 5000 list of fastest growing companies in America for the third time.