



ONE MEMBER'S VOICE

The Musings of a Middle School Assistant Principal

By Josephine Fields



As a middle school assistant principal, I chose to write this article because I feel that collaboration among administrators, teachers, parents/guardians and students is how students become successful. I do not understand how, at the most pivotal time in their lives, when hormones and “growing pains” are at their peak, families seem to loosen their support for their

students. I see the challenges teachers and administrators face to connect with some families. We hold parent-teacher conferences in a building of about 800 students, and less than 10 percent of the parents show up or even reach out to meet with their student’s teachers. We have various school activities, and again, it is a challenge to get a large number of parents to sign up and actively participate. My foremost thoughts center on the academic and social behaviors of middle school-aged pupils, as well as my inability to connect with their parents.

Most students are supported, nurtured, guided and cared for with great intent during the primary years. This evidence is noted in the students’ dress, actions, attitudes and behaviors. When students reach middle school, they exercise their emerging independence in positive and often not-so-positive ways. The middle school years are, in many cases, pivotal in a student’s academic career, often setting them on the trajectory of their future success.

- What does this administrator wonder about in relation to middle-school-age students? I wonder about many things, but my paramount thoughts are as follows:
- Why do some parents feel this age is the time to give their children “carte blanche” authority over their academic, social and even personal selves?
- Why do some parents think that at this crucial, transitional age or stage in their child’s life, they should be expected to “figure it out” and navigate these tumultuous teenage years without supervision?
- How can some parents give their child “keys to the castle” without creating clear parameters, measures, supports, expectations and consequences?

- Finally, how are teachers expected to teach and increase children’s academic knowledge without the support of parents/guardians?

I have strong reservations about how children will fare in high school and beyond without the needed guidance they require at this vulnerable age. How are teachers expected to do their job, when often times, the child is not supported, encouraged or held accountable at home?

As educators, we must stand firm and “control what we can control.” We must make school an exciting, encouraging and engaging environment where children want to go and where all children who enter know and understand acceptable behaviors. We should allow and even encourage parents to ‘parent,’ all the while creating a mutual understanding so children will be more successful in school.

My informal research of life experiences, professional conversations and personal conversations has led me to conclude that educational leaders should start with the “man

in the mirror” (Jackson, 1988). As building administrators, we set the standard for all school personnel. We should walk the hallways joyfully, greeting everyone as though they are our nearest, dearest friends. We should talk to staff, kindly inquire about their lives and offer them compliments. Modeling relationship building is paramount in developing the expectation we hold for our teachers. Because relationship building is so important, we live what we believe, providing our teachers a frame of reference they can use with their students. We may provide the students an example, which they can use in their own life. We can open up our schools and be willing to sit down and talk with families about learning. By forming relationships with families, they will know that the school is interested in working with them.

As I ponder why our students come to school and behave in specific ways, I am cognizant that implementing change in their homes is not in our purview or control. What we can

control is leading a building where teachers are valued, held accountable and encouraged to take creative, innovative risks. We can control the warm, encouraging environment we create for our students. We can control how we treat each other and the students in our building. We can control the environment by providing consistency, fairness and grace to all.

This is only one AP’s viewpoint on how to encourage our middle-school students to ‘show up’ and be their true selves. As they exercise their emerging freedom, we can help them set boundaries and develop positive habits and self-care that will benefit their academic, social and personal selves.

REFERENCE:

Jackson, M. (1998). Man in the Mirror [Song] Bad [Album].

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: *Josephine Fields*, an Assistant Principal at Pleasant Valley Middle School in the Pleasant Valley School District (Northeastern Pennsylvania). Pleasant Valley Middle School serves students in grades 6-8.

Ms. Fields holds a Bachelor of Science in elementary education, a Master of Science in reading and a Master of Science in educational leadership. “Control what you can control” is one of her guiding principles. According to Ms. Fields, “I wonder about many things, but I do not stay there. I collaborate with colleagues, read as much as I can and talk with my students and parents to learn how to move forward through my own musings.” She can be reached at fields.josephine@pvbears.org



**Building Leaders
at Every Level**

UNITED
JULY 15-17, 2024 | NASHVILLE, TN

THE NATIONAL
CONFERENCE
ON SCHOOL
LEADERSHIP

POWERED BY
NAESP & NASSP

Learn more at www.theunitedconference.org