



# Springfield Middle School Robertson County Innovation Academy



715 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue West ♦ Springfield, TN 37172 ♦ Phone (615) 384-4821  
Dr. Grant Bell, Principal ♦ Ms. Amanda Mounts, Asst. Principal ♦ Mr. Patrick Carneal, Asst. Principal

## “We are EPIC!”

### *The Jacket's Buzz*

October 15, 2018

*“Providing a well-lit path in the pursuit of purpose and happiness.”*

*“Every single day, we will strive to ensure that everyone is safe and respected; and that ALL scholars are responsible for working to master ALL standards.”*



*“There is nothing on this earth more to be prized than true friendship.”*

**Thomas Aquinas**

<b>Monday:</b>	8 <sup>th</sup> grade Trip to APSU & TCAT
<b>Tuesday:</b>	Faculty Conversation 7:30 Science & Social Studies Fall Benchmark Assessments
<b>Wednesday:</b>	Science & Social Studies Fall Benchmark Assessments
<b>Thursday:</b>	Science & Social Studies Fall Benchmark Assessments Benchmark Make-ups
<b>Friday:</b>	Choir Trip to APSU Special Olympics Bowling

#### **Bus Duty:**

<u>Monday</u> Language Arts	<u>Tuesday</u> Related Arts	<u>Wednesday</u> Math	<u>Thursday</u> Social Studies	<u>Friday</u> Science
--------------------------------	--------------------------------	--------------------------	-----------------------------------	--------------------------



Our annual Title I & Family Engagement Meeting turned out to be a magical night filled with music performed by our choir and band. There was an art “gallery walk” as well. Drama scholars sang Christmas carols to promote their production of Disney’s *Elf Jr.* in December. Thanks to Title I Chairperson Shawn Jones for planning all the festivities.







# Family Resource Center / Parent Center OPEN HOUSE



**October 25<sup>th</sup> 3:30 – 4:30**  
**700 Bransford Drive – Inside Bransford Elementary**

**First year teachers and teachers new to Robertson County are invited to:**

**Meet** Mrs. Lisa Cobb, Parent/School/Homeless/Foster Care Liaison and  
Ms. Danielle Frazier, FRC and District Diversity Coordinator

**Learn** what these agencies do and the services that are available to your students and to you as a  
first year teacher

**Visit** the International Room and the food/school supply area

**Gather** information about these support services:

- homeless and transition assistance (McKinney-Vento Law)
- food/clothing/housing/ assistance for families
- eyeglasses for students
- connections to community services
- parent transportation for school related meetings
- social workers
- parent workshops
- diversity information for teachers and students

**Special Guest** - Meet Mrs. Donna Scott, owner of ***Buzz In Auto Wash*** in Springfield. Mrs. Scott is an  
ambassador for Robertson County Schools through her generous donations for students and  
teachers.

**REFRESHMENTS and DOOR PRIZES**

RSVP by email to Ms. Carol Stinson by October 19th if you plan to attend.

# Chili Cook-Off!

A decorative banner featuring the text "Chili Cook-Off!" in a stylized, black, outlined font. Below the text is a row of six red chili peppers with green stems, each set against a yellow starburst background.

Congratulations to Meredith Davis for her winning bowl of chili! SMS had a staff chili cook-off during PTC's. A little home cookin'...







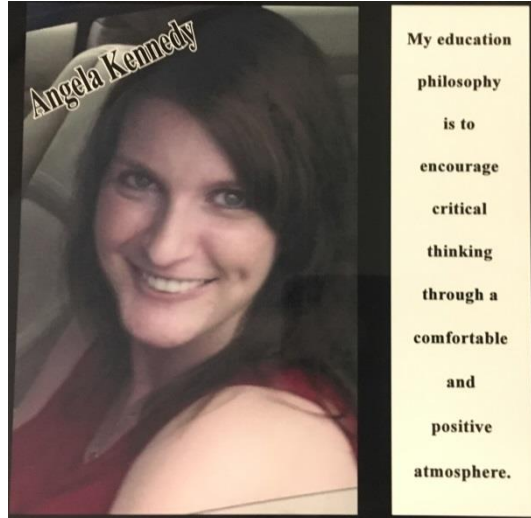
# Yellow Jacket Football



Our Yellow Jackets fell to Greenbrier 12-7 in the Robertson County Football Championship. We are proud of our young men and coaches for all their hard work this year, finishing 6-2 for the season. Now its basketball time!



# Staff Member of the Week



Name : Angela Kennedy

Grade : 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Grade

Subject: ELA

Hometown: Clarksville, TN

Family: I live in Clarksville, TN with my husband, Daniel, and our two children, Dylan (13) and Allie (12).

Education: I have my Master's in Instructional Teaching at Lipscomb University, Bachelor's at APSU and currently working on my Doctorate in Education.

How did your career lead you to Springfield Middle School? I started in Metro schools and learned about the wonderful relationships that SMS develops with the scholars. I knew I wanted to be a part of a school that puts so much emphasis on building relationships to develop student achievement. This is my fourth year at SMS, and I love it here!

What do you love about our school and children? I love that SMS has such a great staff and the support that is offered at the school. The children know that we all care about them and prove in many ways that they love to be at school every day. The scholars strive to achieve greatness every single day so I love that they are excited to learn.

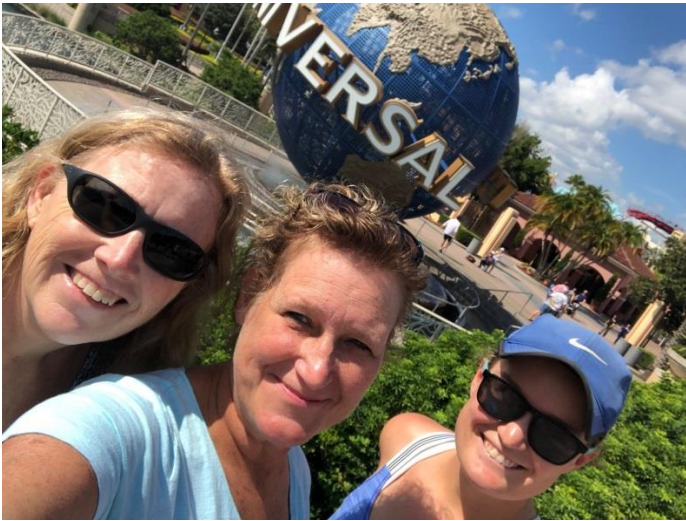
What is the most challenging aspect of your responsibilities? The most challenging aspect of my responsibilities is making sure that every scholar gets what they need. I never want to let any of them down, and I strive to give them my all every single day.

Personal Philosophy of Education: My personal philosophy of Education is to encourage critical thinking through a comfortable and positive atmosphere. I strive to trigger curiosity and interest in my subject area through my passion for the subject. By building confidence in my scholars, I believe that any child can achieve greatness in Language Arts.

What is EPIC about SMS? Everything is EPIC about SMS, but specifically the staff and the scholars. We all work together as a team to master the standards every day and to make sure the scholars have fun learning.



# Jackets on Fall Break



Mrs. Richards- Universal Studios



Mrs. Merchant(Caleb)- Kentucky Down Under



Ms. Mounts (Harper) - Graceland



Mrs. Merchant (Caleb)





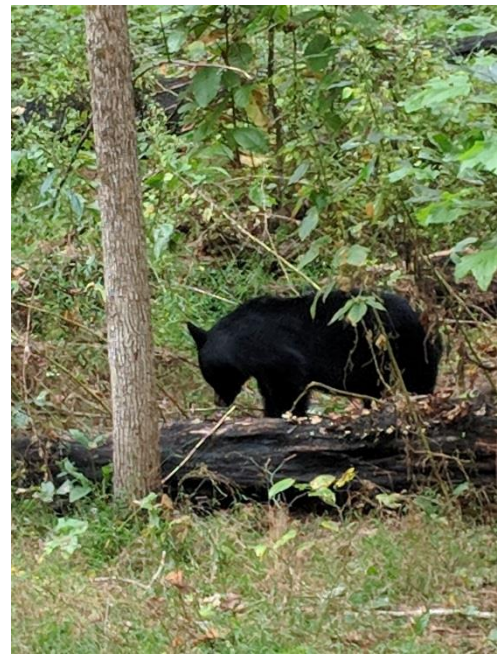
Mr. Arnow- Florida with parents



Ms. Henderson(Jacob)- PCB



Mrs. Coffey- The Coffey Beans



Lori Proffitt- Gatlinburg (that's not her)



Mrs. Proctor- Outer Banks (the end of the bike ride??)





Mrs. Smith and family- Cumberland Falls



Mrs. Henderson- PCB sunset before Hurricane Michael





Mrs. Pervine- Myrtle Beach

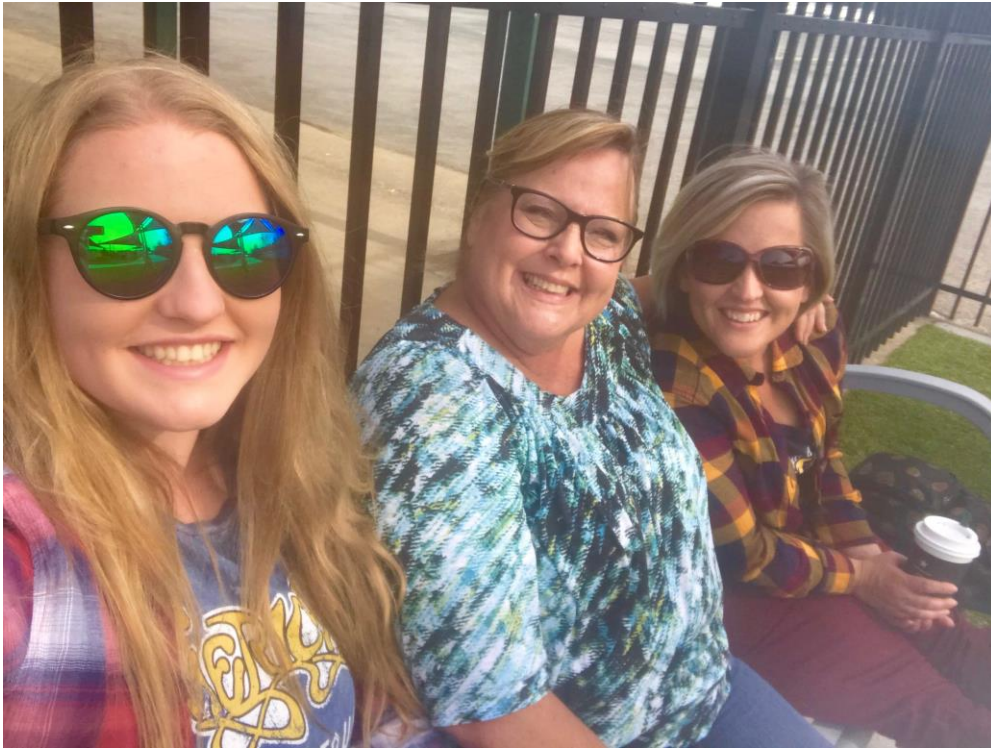


Mrs. Jones- Great Wall of China



Mrs. Church (Emily)- Tuscaloosa, Alabama





Mrs. Caton- Antiquing in Hendersonville



Mrs. King (Israel)- at the Donut Palace





Dr. Bell (Chandler) at Bay Point Golf Course, PCB  
48 hours before Michael



Coach Matherley- North Pole Expedition



**And the best fall break picture goes to....**



**Ms. Kayla Richards with  
Anthony William, born October 11th at 9:29 pm**





Shout out to Wesley for winning the Ice Cream party PBIS drawing!

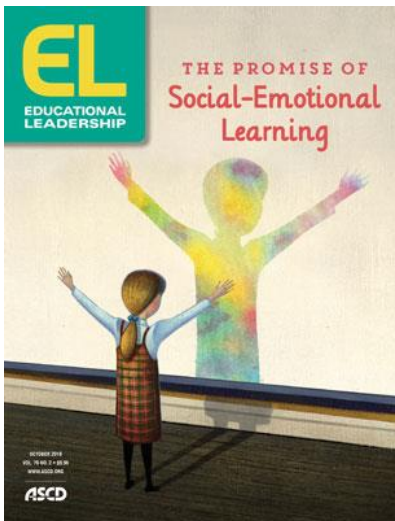
Mrs. Pervine's lunch class sure did enjoy the sweet treat!



# Lagniappe



EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP



October 2018 | Volume 76 | Number 2  
The Promise of Social-Emotional Learning Pages 22-28

## Nine Competencies for Teaching Empathy

Michele Borba

An educational psychologist and parenting expert offers advice to school leaders.

Empathy is at the core of everything that makes a school caring, a teacher responsive, and a society civilized. When empathy wanes, narcissism, distrust, aggression, bullying, and hate rise—and schools suffer. We are currently in the midst of an educational crisis. American teens are now 40 percent less empathetic than they were three decades ago (Konrath, 2010). While we are producing a smart and self-assured generation, today's students are also the most self-centered, competitive, individualistic, sad, and stressed on record.

Recognizing that students need more than academic rigor and test preparation to succeed, a growing number of schools are turning their focus to social-emotional qualities like empathy. But which practices enhance empathy and how will principals know if teachers are implementing them effectively? I've spent the past decade combing for answers to questions like these and am convinced that we can solve the empathy crisis. But to begin making



headway, school leaders must create the right culture, vision, guidance, and professional training so teachers can succeed. The first step is helping teachers understand why empathy must be an integral part of any classroom and school.

## The Empathy Advantage

In today's interconnected world, empathy gives students the edge they need to lead meaningful, productive lives, providing what I call the "empathy advantage." Once seen as a "soft" skill, empathy helps us understand and feel *with* others. That's why *Forbes* urges companies to adopt empathy and perspective-taking principles, and the *Harvard Business Review* named empathy as one of the "essential ingredients for leadership success and excellent performance" (Goleman, 2014).

Empathy—or the ability to understand others' feelings and needs—is also the foundation of a safe, caring, and inclusive learning climate. Students with high levels of empathy display more classroom engagement, higher academic achievement, and better communication skills (Jones et al., 2014). Empathy reduces aggression, boosts prosocial behaviors (Eisenberg, Eggum, & DiGiunta, 2010) and may be our best antidote to bullying and racism (Santos et al., 2011).

## Planting Seeds of Empathy

Rather than a one-dimensional trait, empathy comprises nine teachable competencies that I identified while writing *UnSelfie: Why Empathetic Kids Succeed in Our All-About-Me World* (2016). Each competency is suitable for students from kindergarten through high school (as well as adults) and can be taught. Together, they can serve as a principal's guide for empathy education.

Educating for empathy is not about using a toolkit or a one-off program; it requires ongoing, embedded work guided by strong school leaders who are empathetic themselves (see "Principles of Effective Empathy Education"). This work must be based on an understanding of the nine competencies, strategies and practices that cultivate them, and students' needs. Gauging success won't come from a grade or score, but from a student's response. Look for smiles, engagement, joy, and even tears: lessons in empathy can be life-altering.

So what are optimum ways to help teachers understand and embed these competencies into their daily practice? Let's look at how empathetic schools are approaching this work.

### 1. Emotional Literacy

Before students can empathize, they must be able to read emotions. Students who can recognize feelings are better adjusted emotionally and are more popular, outgoing, and sensitive (Goleman, 1995). They also score higher academically and are more resilient (Gottman & DeClaire, 1997). But researchers warn that today's digitally focused world is reducing students' abilities to recognize human emotions and jeopardizing their empathetic capacities (Uhls et al., 2014).

Empathy thrives in environments that prioritize face-to-face connections, so a key step for school leaders is to help teachers create classrooms that nurture meaningful interaction and engagement. Look to see if furniture is arranged to encourage communication, with desks positioned in a semi-circle to allow each student to see every peer, or in small clusters, enabling students to work closely with one another. Notice also if students have opportunities to share ideas and discuss lessons. Watch to see if teachers are *with* students and building caring relationships, or if they're sitting behind a desk disengaged.

Then note if students are learning to read and identify emotions. First graders in some classrooms I've observed have a morning ritual of pointing to how they feel on a chart of facial expressions reflecting various emotions. A music teacher has students identify their feelings before and after each recital. A science teacher regularly assigns students to spend 30 minutes alone in nature without their smartphones, log their feelings, and even reflect on how briefly unplugging increases their emotional awareness.

Also, look for practices that teachers can use to help students identify how others feel. Middle school students can do daily "emotion check-ins" by observing a partner, asking how they are feeling ("Are you frustrated?"), and offering support if needed ("I'm here for you"). Paired sharing, discussions, and class meetings are other ways to increase students' sensitivity to emotional cues, nurture caring connections, and learn emotional literacy.

## 2. Moral Identity

A child's inner value system, or moral identity, can inspire empathy, shape character, and motivate compassion. A key step is helping students define themselves as people who value others. Kids are more likely to learn moral identity when adults model, instruct, and expect them to care about others (Oliner, 1992). That poses a problem in our culture, with its increasing void in moral role models, but educators can play a central role in helping students develop strong ethical compasses.

I've seen this being done in countless ways. Teachers have students create class mantras such as "We help each other." High schools require seniors to write graduation essays on who they are and what they stand for. Third graders memorize weekly kindness quotes, and then choose one for their personal mantra. "Finding your mantra helps you discover what you stand for," a teen once told me.

For a quick assessment to see how you and your staff are modeling moral identity, ask: "What do we stand for? How are we expected to behave?" It is important to watch your behavior in front of students. As one group of 6th graders reminded me, a teacher's actions, not a motivational poster on a wall, matter most.

## 3. Perspective Taking

Perspective taking is the cognitive side of empathy and is crucial for today's students. Whether it's connecting students across the globe through technology, debating an issue from various



sides, or seeing the American Revolution from the British point of view, perspective taking can stretch students' horizons and lead them to question assumptions. Research also shows that the most memorable lessons are often based on this third empathy competency (Heath & Heath, 2008).

Stepping into another's shoes (literally or cognitively) helps kids understand others. I once visited the classroom of an English teacher whose test for *Romeo and Juliet* uses paper shoe cutouts depicting each character. Students step onto each cutout and explain the plot through the character's views and feelings.

We tend to empathize with those who are "like us" in social-economic terms. Teens in a North Carolina school told me their science teacher widens their awareness by encouraging them to participate in a 24-hour hunger strike (with parental approval) to understand poverty. Many of these students now volunteer at a food bank because they know what hunger feels like.

Restorative discipline practices help students who've hurt or upset their peers develop empathy for their victims. In a Kansas middle school, I observed two boys who'd been suspended from class for a heated debate in which each accused the other of "messing with my stuff." They were individually required to complete a "think sheet" that had them describe the conflict from the other boy's view. Asking kids: "How would you feel if that happened to you?" can do wonders to stretch perspectives.

#### 4. Moral Imagination

Educators intuitively know that books can transport students to other worlds, but now science proves it. Reading literary fiction like *Wonder* or *The Grapes of Wrath* can enhance empathy and help us to feel *with* the characters (Mar, Oatley, & Peterson, 2009). Emotionally charged films and images can also prompt empathetic feelings and even encourage charitable giving (Barraza et al., 2015).

Kindergarteners might watch *Dumbo*, use puppets to depict the elephants and crows making fun of him, then talk about how they'd feel if they were Dumbo. An art teacher might use riveting paintings to help students grasp different artists' perspectives.

Books can also help kids explore lives and beliefs different from their own. "A *Long Walk to Water* moved me," one middle schooler told me, referring to Linda Sue Park's novel. "I learned Sudanese kids are like me, but lack opportunities. I talked my class into raising money to get them a well."

#### 5. Self-Regulation

Self-regulation allows kids to keep their emotions in check and recognize others' feelings, empathize, and then calmly think of how to help. It also boosts academic performance: Managing emotions is a better predictor of academic achievement than IQ (Lehrer, 2009).

If they are too distressed, kids shut down their empathetic instincts because they can't think clearly enough to help. Regulating feelings starts by teaching children how to recognize their stress triggers and signs before they're in overload. That's why calm-down corners, mood rooms, and stress boxes (which contain sensory objects like stress balls or fidget spinners) are popping up in schools from coast to coast.

I've watched 1st graders practice belly breathing and high schoolers do yoga to stay cool. Many educators embrace mindfulness meditation because it is proven to reduce stress and nurture empathy. Visitacion Valley School in San Francisco introduced a twice-daily, 15-minute ritual in which students choose to sit quietly or meditate. As a result of this practice, suspensions decreased by 79 percent, while attendance rates and test scores have improved (McFadden, Sandler, & Fieldstadt, 2015). Quiet time has been an effective strategy in this middle school because each student chooses what works for him or her and practices the self-regulation technique until it becomes a habit.

An unprecedented rise in youth depression and anxiety make teaching this fifth competency all the more urgent.

## 6. Practicing Kindness

Being kind is what helps children tune in to other people's feelings and needs, trust more, and become more "we" oriented and less "me" oriented. Each kind act nudges kids to notice others ("I see how you feel"), care ("I'm concerned about you"), empathize ("I feel with you"), and help and comfort them ("Let me ease your pain"). Practicing kindness can also change children's self-image and behavior. If a child sees herself as kind, she is more likely to act kindly.

Kindness is strengthened by seeing, hearing, and practicing kindness. I've seen kindergarteners give one another morning greetings with smiles, handshakes, and eye contact. In Bremerton, Washington, "Kindness Ambassadors" meet their peers at the school entrance with friendly greetings. Students at Pleasant Prairie Elementary in Wisconsin give each other high fives during passing periods. Encourage simple kindness routines like these with your students.

Kindness also jump-starts a cascade of beneficial effects not only for the receiver, but for the giver. One Minnesota educator encouraged students to do two kind things each day and discovered the kids actually seemed to become kinder. A psychology teacher had students chart their kind acts for six weeks. The kids realized they were happier, probably because they noticed how much recipients appreciated their caring deeds. Aesop said it best: "No act of kindness, no matter how small, is ever wasted." A leader's job is to ensure that students take those words to heart, especially in today's increasingly uncivil environment.

## 7. Collaboration

Empathy is never a solitary act: It's only when we let go of our self-centeredness and feel *with* others that our hearts open. Working together on common goals can help students make that



crucial shift from "me" to "we." These cooperative experiences sensitize students to those who may be different or have conflicting interests. This competency also broadens students' social spheres, preparing them for a diverse world.

Teamwork projects can strengthen students' abilities to encourage others, resolve conflicts, and disagree respectfully—important aspects of empathy.

Many collaborative practices support empathy education *and* academic growth. Cooperative learning enhances achievement and boosts empathy skills like listening for feelings and perspective taking (Dean et al., 2012). Conflict resolution helps students work together to solve problems. Jigsaw-type learning activities can reduce racial conflict, help kids learn to care about each other, and improve test performance (Walker & Crogan, 1998).

## 8. Moral Courage

Moral courage is the inner strength that motivates children to act on their empathetic urges and help others despite the potential consequences. Demonstrating moral courage is not always easy, but children who do so stick their necks out for justice and compassion. They are upstanders—the empathetic elite—who stand up for others because they know deep down it's the right thing to do. Acting courageously increases students' resilience, creativity, confidence, willpower, and school engagement—and is teachable.

Mobilizing moral courage may be our best hope to stop cruelty and violence in schools. When kids intervene, it stops bullying more than half the time and within 10 seconds (Hawkins, Pepler, & Craig, 2001). Train your staff to teach upstander strategies so students learn how to safely assist bullied peers or those treated unfairly.<sup>1</sup> Then create opportunities for kids to practice those strategies so they become habits. I've watched students role-play upstander skills, teach them to younger kids, and present them to peers in assemblies. Strategies like debate, engaging class discussions, Socratic dialogue, and civic discourse also help students find their voice and practice speaking out.

Lessons that help kids recognize that even ordinary people like themselves can do extraordinary things are invaluable. They can be found in history, through the stories of figures like Gandhi or Nelson Mandela; in fiction, through characters like Dorothy Gale or Harry Potter; or in real life, through examples of heroism from veterans, first responders, or whistle blowers. Keep a box of news articles about heroes and encourage students to find more, then lead discussions about how courage helps us do extraordinary things. Kids need heroes to inspire their courage.

## 9. Growing Changemakers

Encouraging students to help others can activate empathy and help them see themselves as changemakers: individuals who make positive changes and inspire others to follow. Giving—not receiving—is what makes kids happier, healthier, less stressed, and feel better about themselves (Luks & Payne, 2001). Every student, regardless of zip code, has the potential to make the world a better place, *if* we provide the right experiences.

School service projects, whether bringing toys to a community shelter or delivering books to a senior home, can help children see the world through others' eyes. And they can be valuable learning experiences. A Seattle 2nd grade teacher's yearly science, math, and service project is to assign each student one square foot in the school's garden. They graph their plot, plant their vegetable of choice, and tend it; but the peak moment is when they hand-deliver their harvest to a local soup kitchen. "The look on their faces makes it all worthwhile," she said. "They realize they can make a difference."

This ninth competency helps children understand they can improve their world by taking action. And they do so not for trophies or to look good on résumés, but because they are driven by the passion of their hearts. These are the graduates we need, and it starts with empathy.

## Educating for Humanity

Above all the benefits described, empathy makes our students better people. It is what will help them live one essential truth: *We are all humans who share the same fears and concerns, and we deserve to be treated with dignity.* School leaders have important work to do. What will be your next step in making empathy education a reality for your students?

### Principles of Effective Empathy Education

Effective empathy education requires seven core principles guided by strong, empathetic school leaders.

- 1. Ongoing** Educating for empathy is not a one-time lesson, but a continual focus.
- 2. Woven-In** Empathy competencies are integrated into content and interactions, not tacked on.
- 3. Meaningful** Instruction is authentic, touches the heart and mind, and stretches "me" to "we."
- 4. Internalized** The goal is for students to adopt empathy competencies as lifelong habits.
- 5. Student-Centered** Students' needs, not curriculum, drive the lessons and experiences.
- 6. Respectful Relationships** Empathy breeds in a culture of respect and caring.
- 7. Empathic Leadership** Empathy is modeled, expected, and core to a principal's vision, purpose, style, and interactions.

### Guiding Questions

- › Do you agree that we are facing a crisis of empathy in schools? What examples can you cite from your own school?
- › Do any of Borba's nine competencies for empathy seem particularly lacking in your school or district? What practical steps could you or your school take to boost students' skills in these areas?
- › In what ways do you and your colleagues model empathy in your school? In what ways could you improve your efforts?



## References

- Barraza, J. A., Alexander, V., Beavin, L. E., Terris, E. T., & Zak, P. J. (2015). The heart of the story: Peripheral physiology during narrative exposure predicts charitable giving. *Biological Psychology*, *105*, 138–143.
- Borba, M. (2016). *UnSelfie: Why empathetic kids succeed in our all-about-me world*. New York: Touchstone.
- Dean, C. B., Hubbell, E. R., Pitler, H., & Stone, B. (2012). *Classroom instruction that works: Research-based strategies for increasing student achievement*, 2nd edition. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.
- Eisenberg, N., Eggum, N. D., & Di Giunta, L. (2010). Empathy-related responding: Associations with prosocial behavior, aggression, and intergroup relations. *Social Issues and Policy Review*, *4*(1), 143–180.
- Goleman, D. (1995). *Emotional intelligence: Why it can matter more than IQ*. NY: Bantam Books.
- Goleman, D. (Summer 2014). What makes a leader? *Harvard Business Review OnPoint*, 24–33.
- Gottman, J., & DeClaire, J. (1997). *The heart of parenting: How to raise an emotionally intelligent child*. NY: Simon & Schuster.
- Hawkins, D. L., Pepler, D. J., & Craig, W. M. (2001). Naturalistic observations of peer interventions in bullying. *Social Development*, *10*(4), 512–527.
- Heath, C., & Heath, D. (2008). *Made to stick: Why some ideas survive and others die*. NY: Random House.
- Jones, S. M., Weissbourd, R., Bouffard, S., Kahn, J., & Ross, T. (2014). *How to build empathy and strengthen your school community*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Graduate School of Education.
- Konrath, S. (2010, May 29). Empathy: College students don't have as much as they used to, study finds. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*. Retrieved from [www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2010/05/100528081434.htm](http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2010/05/100528081434.htm)
- Lehrer, J. (2009, May 18). Don't! The secret of self-control. *The New Yorker*. Retrieved from [www.newyorker.com/magazine/2009/05/18/dont-2](http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2009/05/18/dont-2)
- Luks, A., & Payne, P. (2001). *The healing power of doing good*. NY: iUniverse.
- Mar, R. A., Oatley, K., & Peterson, J. B. (2009). Exploring the link between reading fiction and empathy: Ruling out individual differences and examining outcomes. *Communications*, *34*(4), 407–428.
- McFadden, C., Sandler, T., & Fieldstadt, E. (2015, January 1). San Francisco schools transformed by the power of meditation. NBC News. Retrieved from [www.nbcnews.com/nightly-news/san-francisco-schools-transformed-power-meditation-n276301](http://www.nbcnews.com/nightly-news/san-francisco-schools-transformed-power-meditation-n276301)
- Oliner, S. (1992). *The altruistic personality: Rescuers of Jews in Nazi Europe*. New York: Touchstone.
- Santos, R. G., Chartier, M. G., Whalen, J. C., Chateau, D., & Boyd, L. (2011). Effectiveness of school-based violence prevention for children and youth: Cluster randomized field trial of the Roots of Empathy program with replication and three-year follow up. *Healthcare Quarterly*, *14*, 80–91.

Uhls, Y. T., Michikyan, M., Morris, J., Garcia, D., Small, G. W., Zgourou, E., Greenfield, P. M. (2014). Five days at outdoor education camp without screens improves preteen skills with nonverbal emotion cues. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 39, 387–392.

Walker, I., & Crogan, M. (1998). Academic performance, prejudice, and the jigsaw classroom: New pieces to the puzzle. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, 8(6), 381–393.

Endnote

<sup>1</sup> Resources for teaching upstander strategies.

Michele Borba is an educational psychologist, former teacher, and international speaker to educators and parents. She is the bestselling author of 24 books, including *UnSelfie: Why Empathetic Kids Succeed in Our All-About-Me World*. Follow her on Twitter.





# 13 Tips for Success from a Middle School Principal

Get advice from a veteran educator on how to help your child succeed in middle school and beyond.

---

By [Scholastic Parents Staff](#)



---

Although your middle schooler is becoming more independent and is increasingly involved in activities outside the family, you should and must remain the most influential person in his life. Through your involvement in school and extracurriculars, you can do much to help your child

believe in the value and importance of education, be enthusiastic about learning, and achieve academic success.

As a middle-school principal, a big part of my job is to help parents support their children emotionally as well as academically. Here is my best advice for parents of preteens:

1. **Help your child manage homework time.** Encourage her to aim high and always do her best work. Check with teachers to see how much time should be necessary to complete homework. See what your school offers to help you help your child, such as an agenda planner or some other homework reminder system, and/or a Web site with helpful links.
2. **Show interest in your child's studies** by **talking with him daily about what he's learning and doing in school** (don't take "nothing" for an answer!). If you know your child has a project for science, get involved. The same goes for cheerleading, sports, and music — any extracurricular activities.
3. **Discuss ideas and feelings about school, studies, and activities.** Be realistic about what your child can and should be able to do. Don't expect great grades or high test scores if she isn't capable. That expectation will only cause unnecessary frustration.
4. **Read and review with your child the information that schools and districts provide.** Be familiar with the pupil progression plan, course offerings, student handbook, etc. All these will help you and your child successfully weave your way through the maze called middle school.
5. **Contact counselors, administrators, and teachers periodically.** Find out what your child should be learning, how she is progressing, and how you can help. Be a full partner in your child's education.
6. **Be sure that he attends school on a regular basis.** Even if he is absent for illness or another valid reason, he needs to keep up with his studies. Call the school if your child will be missing a day, and find out what he needs to do to make up for it.
7. **Encourage her to pursue interests and make friends through extracurricular activities.** Be certain, however, that she selects no more than a few activities so she has adequate time for schoolwork. You must help her find a balance; this will take compromise and patience.
8. **Know your child's friends.** Who does your child hang out with? Follow up on any suspicions that you may have. It is better to be safe than sorry at this time of your child's life. Know where your child is at all times. Be clear and consistent with discipline.
9. **Make it clear that she must follow school rules and policies.** Teach her to respect people as well as property. Help her know right from wrong and what she must do when negative temptations come her way.
10. **Encourage him to get to know his counselor** and to maintain contact throughout his middle-school years, if possible. Not only will the counselor be invaluable in supporting his academic path, he's also one of many potential adult role models for your child.
11. **Attend parent meetings,** open houses, booster clubs, parent education groups, and other activities for parents. I mentioned this before, but it is very important for your child!



12. **Volunteer at school.** Both your child and the school will benefit from your involvement and help. Schools solicit volunteers to help in a variety of ways: tutoring, assisting in the media center, giving speeches, helping out at activities, chaperoning, etc.
13. **Consistently acknowledge and reward efforts at school.** Many parents expect the school to provide the incentives for their child's accomplishments. While schools do have a lot of motivation programs, parents need to recognize their child's successes too. When your child works hard, your acknowledgment motivates him to persist.

None of us are perfect and we sometimes make mistakes in raising our children. But your child needs your love and respect. A pre-teen needs to become independent, responsible, and self-sufficient to succeed in most of her endeavors in school and at home. The best way to help her in all aspects of development is to try to ensure that her emotional needs are consistently met. Your understanding, common sense, adult judgment, and good sense of humor can make these middle-school years a joy for both you and your child.

**STATEMENT OF NON-DISCRIMINATION** The Robertson County School System does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, disability, age, religion or marital status, in training, activities or employment practices in accordance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the Americans with Disabilities Acts of 1997 and 2004.