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Best Practices

1) Building relationships with students. I think it is very important to build a positive relationship with students. I love middle school students! They are amazing, awkward, and fun, especially when many of their actions are emotionally and socially driven. I often say with middle school students “the drama is real.” It is their whole world. Taking the time to get to know them can really help them navigate their feelings during these dramatic years. Personally, I try to learn every student’s name, so when I see them in the morning I can greet them with a “Good Morning” and their name. This works especially well in the beginning of the year with sixth graders new to middle school. I often spend recess and lunch time out with the students, talking story, getting to know them. I’ve also done surveys during these times, even one about what costumes our principal and myself should use for Halloween. Students were then looking forward to Halloween to see The Hulk and the sea witch Ursula!

I truly believe that a positive teacher-student relationship is one of the most effective strategies for student achievement. Once students know that you care and are invest in them, they give you their best. As vice principal, I have ensured that we continue to have an advisory period in our bell schedule where teachers can foster student relationships. Students stay with their advisor from sixth through eighth grade. Activities are also scheduled during this time so teacher and students get to know each other not just through academics, but through fun events and games. Our middle school team meets weekly to talk about student concerns and successes. Often if there are concerns in the classroom, we will also discuss the relationship a student has with that teacher. We’ve found teachers who foster positive relationships with their students have less student behavior problems in their classroom.

I value my relationships with students. Even when students are sent to my office for a disciplinary issue, I cultivate a relationship that is built on listening to understand and work on choosing the best actions

moving forward. We always talk through their problems, come up with possible solutions (often what they could have done in hindsight), and a plan with moving forward.

This year I received a text from a former middle school student that said “Happy New Year! Thank you so much for everything you have done for me. You have helped me grow so much as a person. Thank you again. I will also be here if you ever need anything.” It warmed my heart and reminded me that taking the time to build a positive relationship with a student is 1000% worth it!

2) Collaboration. I believe collaboration is what keeps a team together. It is what keeps a school together. As vice principal, I value collaboration with our teachers, among our teachers, and especially with our students. Collaboration gives voice and ownership to all involved. Great ideas also come from collaborations!

Whenever I can, I make decisions through collaboration with my teachers and, when appropriate, with our students. For example, when I was able to secure funds for our 1:1 program (1 Chromebook for every student), I created collaboration time for our teachers to figure out what implementation would look like. Together we figured out where Chromebooks would be stored, how students would retrieve and return them, and how teachers could use this new tool in every classroom. I really started pushing for a 1:1 program the year before, after talking with students about the lack of student access to computers throughout the day. Students wanted devices they could use all day in every class. In collaboration with our complex area support team, I was able to secure the funding for our Chromebooks. Our 1:1 program is now in its second year.

I believe collaboration is the key to being a successful school I often talk in “we” or “our” as I truly believe “I” alone would not be able to provide the best learning environment for our students. I also believe we need to model and provide time for students to collaborate. We are in our second year of Houses – a built-in collaboration time for students. We have three Houses that each have a mixture of sixth, seventh, and eighth graders. Houses meet together, do activities together, compete against each other during Spirit Week, and this year are each planning a community day event. Each House has three House Representatives. All House Reps meet with me every other Wednesday where we discuss student concerns and upcoming activities. Giving time for students to collaborate their solutions and activities had led to a positive school experience for all.