

An Inviting, Supportive, and Safe Environment

This We Believe: Successful Schools for Young Adolescents



A successful school for young adolescents is an inviting, supportive, and safe place, a joyful community that promotes in-depth learning and enhances students' physical and emotional well-being. In a healthy school environment, human relationships are paramount.

Visitors see staff members who are cordial to each other, teachers and administrators who speak to students by name, and students who interact comfortably and respectfully with adults and each other. Statements of encouragement and positive feedback substantially outnumber disciplinary or correctional comments. Interactions among staff members and between students reflect democracy, fairness, and mutual respect. Teachers, staff, and students learn and put into practice the skills of direct feedback, mediation, healthy and appropriate confrontation, positive risk taking, and personal and collaborative goal setting. Students and adults have a shared language to discuss issues of diversity and equity. The essence of a happy, healthy school lies in the talk one hears.

Everyone in an inviting school works proactively to eliminate harassment, verbal abuse, bullying, and name-calling. Students and teachers understand that they are part of a community where differences are respected and celebrated. When this egalitarian concept becomes embedded in daily school life, less time is devoted to settling disputes and managing classroom discipline. In schools that promote a safe and supportive environment, students are encouraged to take intellectual risks, to be bold with their expectations, and to explore new challenges. Every student—no matter what creed, color, or uniqueness—serves as a genuine part of the community and contributes based on individual strengths.

The school ensures that every student has at least one adult advocate who knows that student well, and all students are comfortable talking to any staff member. Schools develop structures so that students will be known as individuals and feel cared for and valued. Teams comprised of two or more teachers with the students they teach in common are essential to the process of creating learning communities. The team is a home away from home, the place where students work and learn together with teachers and classmates with whom they identify.

The school buildings and campus make an immediately visible statement about caring. An attractive, inviting, and clean physical plant is an expression of a supportive and safe environment. Student work is prominently displayed, an indication that learning is a school priority. Like the young adolescents themselves, the climate of developmentally responsive middle level schools requires constant nurturing.

Middle level educators, students, and their families plan and implement effective transition procedures for incoming students. These activities ensure that students become successfully integrated into the middle level school and maintain their continuous academic and social progress. Transition activities for students moving to the next level must be planned collaboratively with high school educators who recognize, understand, and build on the strong preparation students have received.

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