

Student journalists from the Canine Courier at El Dorado Springs (Missouri) High School shared their thoughts and suggestions about what teachers need to know so that all students feel safe, welcome, and successful. Journalism teacher Amber Francis and assistant superintendent Theresa Christian facilitated their contributions.

# WHAT I WISH MY TEACHER KNEW



"I hope teachers understand that our experience in their classes affects us for our whole lives," says 9th grader Kaleigh Biby, 15.

## REACH OUT TO STRUGGLING STUDENTS

BY KALEIGH BIBY

**H**ave you ever noticed how easily some students grasp information regardless of how they are taught? But what about the rest of us? Every student learns differently, and the same teaching strategies don't always work for everyone. If a student does not grasp the information the first time they're taught, it makes the student feel frustrated. He or she may start

to dread the class and eventually the subject in general.

I wish teachers knew how much students struggle, often silently, when teaching strategies are ineffective, dusty, overused, or boring. I know your job is not to entertain me, but if you could use multiple teaching strategies, you'll catch more attention. If teachers also took time to build relationships with their students and recognize how each student learns, the

learning environment would be better.

I remember one class that relied almost exclusively on our comprehension of the textbook. After reading each chapter, we were given a study guide to complete and memorize, and the expectation was that you regurgitate the information back on the test. I struggled severely, always rushing the night before to

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# SPEAK UP TO SHUT DOWN BULLYING

BY TARYN DIPMAN

**“Y**eah, like people with Tourette’s!” the boy in my first-hour class retorts to a crude joke from his friend. The class erupts in laughter as he mimics repetitive arm flailing. As what feels like the entire class laughs and mocks, I stay in the back of the class, quiet. I’m not sure if these kids know that I have Tourette’s. They aren’t intentionally hurting me, but their words still scrape against the insecurities that accompany my disease. I’m sitting there, hoping that the teacher will say something to them. “Shut them down! Make them stop!” I poke at the teacher telepathically. She’s just like me, though: She stays quiet.

Now I’m sitting in my third-hour class, and two boys are whispering during quiet working time. I’m trying to focus on my work, but I can hear them making fun of LGBTQ people. Once again, I’m silently pleading for a teacher to step in. My spirits rise as the teacher notices the conversation. He looks at the boys and says, “We’re not talking about things like that. Let’s keep the conversation school appropriate. You two can talk about it after school.”

Situations just like these are taking place dozens of times, every single day, in every single school. When kids make jokes like this in the classroom, they often don’t realize that there could be someone in the room it hurts. Bullying is often unintentional, taking the form of racist, sexist, homophobic, and ableist jokes and comments. Adults often push for students to stop bullying by speaking up, but students stay silent for many reasons, sometimes to avoid



“Teachers, you have a powerful voice,” says 11th grader Taryn Dipman, 17.

conflict or cover their identification with a group. And many times, attempting to reprimand peers does us more damage than good.

As a student, I wish that teachers knew how impactful their voice and influence are in the fight against bullying in our school system. Many teachers are staying silent, or they make weak attempts, like when they shush the kids and say things like, “Let’s not say that,” then go back to their work. When this happens, bullies continue to make rude statements targeting certain groups because they realize that they have little punishment coming to them.

If teachers would stand up and have a conversation about marginalized students in their classroom, situations like the ones I described would begin

to diminish. All it takes is a few teachers saying, “Those comments are hurtful and unacceptable, and here’s why...” This can be a place of conflict and discomfort, of course, but it’s so important for us students to feel safe.

Teachers, you have a powerful voice. You’ve been chosen to fulfill a career where you shape the lives of today’s youth and the future of our world. If you choose to speak up on behalf of marginalized people and have a conversation with students about bullying, you’re choosing to plant tolerance in this world. If you choose to allow hate in your classroom, you’re allowing hate to take root in the world. Please choose to stand up and stop the seeds of discrimination. ■

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memorize the study guide. It brought loads of stress on me. I can assure you — I learned, remembered, and stored zero knowledge from that course. I can

also assure you that walking into that classroom was a source of major dread for me.

I hope teachers understand that our experience in their classes affects us for

our whole lives because we associate the subject matter with the class. When a student is struggling in your class, get closer with the student, show that you care, and try to fix the problem. ■

## LESSONS GO BEYOND THE SUBJECT MATTER

BY KAYLYNNE McCULLICK

**T**eachers have a lot of impact on our lives, and they don't always know it. They teach us a lot, and not just the subject they're getting paid to teach.

Teachers teach us things we will use in life, not just in school. My math teacher has taught me that there are more important things to worry about than what every single person thinks of me. She taught me that everyone has a different opinion and that not everyone is going to like mine. She taught me that when I am trying to accomplish something, I need to be focusing on that, not on what everyone thinks.

Teachers teach us things that will impact us as people. My English teacher taught me more than just how to write an essay. She taught me that everyone

is unique. She showed me that not everyone I talk to will understand me, and sometimes I won't understand them.

Teachers teach us how to move on from our past. My homeroom teacher has taught me that I'm going to disagree with people, but that opinions can change over time, and that enemies can become friends. He has taught me that people can truly change and become better people.

Teachers teach us things that matter. My journalism teacher has taught me so much more than the curriculum that she was handed. She taught me that I can really make a difference, even through my mistakes. She's taught me that hard work and effort are what separate a good person from a great one.

In the past year, I've learned a lot

more than that the election of 1867 was ended in a compromise. I've learned that I have to work with people I don't always like. I've learned that sometimes I'm wrong, and sometimes the teacher is. One teacher taught me that I'm not always going to like what I'm learning about, so I'll just have to be more attentive in those subjects. Another taught me that I can't be the best at everything and that I have to work harder at some things than others. And all of them have taught me that I am going to change, I'm going to mature and grow as a person. I've learned that no matter what happens, there will always be someone out there cheering me on, hoping for the best for me.

I hope that teachers recognize these lessons are as important as any fact or subject. ■



"Teachers teach us things we will use in life, not just in school," says 9th grader KayLynne McCullick, 15.



9th grader Michelle Nelson, 15, says of 8th-grade math teacher Tonya Hooper: “She has a way of joking around with students and making her students feel like they’re important.”

## RELATIONSHIPS WITH STUDENTS MAKE A DIFFERENCE

BY MICHELLE NELSON

**W**hen I started the 8th grade, I was terrified. I had always struggled with math, and everyone says that 8th-grade math is so hard! But when class started, it was different from any math class I had ever taken. We took notes almost every day, and almost anytime I was confused, Mrs. Hooper was there to help. As I started to learn and realize that I was good at math, I started loving it. I was finally looking forward to math every day, and it was usually the best hour of my day.

I wish more teachers knew what Mrs. Hooper knows, that they understood the impact of her organized classroom, her welcoming hugs or high fives each day, the way her classroom smelled like Fruity Pebbles, the way she made us take notes every day, and the way she held us accountable for our learning.

One day I decided to thank Mrs. Hooper for all of it, but she brushed off my thank you with the words, “Michelle, I’m just doing my job.” And it hit me, all this time I thought she was going over and above, but she just thought that it was expected. Her comment stuck with me, and I started to wonder, what, exactly, is a teacher’s job? And what makes Mrs. Hooper so great? Does her teaching style make her a better teacher? Am I more open to learning from her because I like her? What if I don’t like a teacher — does that affect my learning? Should it?

I’m not sure I know any of these answers, but I do think I know how Mrs. Hooper built relationships with all of us 8th graders. She has a way of joking around with students and making her students feel like they’re important. She knows our names, our handwriting, and pretty quickly within the year, she knew which lessons might

cause us to struggle. She makes sure that all of her students understand the content and was willing to revisit information that wasn’t quite learned yet.

And still, she held us accountable for our own learning. She instructed us to look at our notes when we had questions, she helped us through problems without giving the answer, and she let us know that she understands we have lives and other things going on outside of her classroom.

I learned more in that 8th-grade math class than I have in any of my other classes. It doesn’t surprise me when Mrs. Hooper’s former students, now in high school, come back to visit. Neither those students nor I will remember everything that she taught us, but we will remember the connection. ■