

FINGERPRINTS OF KINDNESS

HOW TO SPOT COMMUNITIES THAT FOCUS ON CHARACTER

Presented by: Houston Kraft

1. The front desk staff isn't surprised by a visitor on campus. They are positive and helpful with each person that comes through the door knowing that it might be that person's first impression of the school. To take it a step further, they know about special events and special guests (For example, a bad sign of things to come as a speaker is, "Oh, we have an assembly today?") They are excited about the day's event because a culture of excitement has been cultivated. When the secretarial staff is just as excited as your seventh graders, you are building a community that gets excited for each other.
2. As a guest in the building, it is built into the school's DNA for students and staff to ask if they need any help finding anything because they see that they are new or have a visitor's badge.
3. When showing up at school, there are students greeting you at the doors (even if there are multiple doors) with a positive and intentional welcome. Sometimes this includes music being played to create an even more positive vibe entering the school.
4. When you walk in the doors of the school, what they value most is on display, which hopefully is pictures of students graduating, smiling, and connecting, along with other creative and positive imagery. Not just trophies of athletic victories.
5. The admin staff sets the example with guests, parents, and community members in the building. They take time to say hello or share with special guests why they are excited about their visit and how it aligns with their vision or their purpose for building a better community. When those at the helm are passionate about their purpose, it is contagious.
6. The school's administration is active in making connections with students during the school day. They are out in the hallways when possible connecting and not just catching wrong behavior. They set the example for what it looks like to create a positive culture in the school.
7. When the bell rings, staff are in the hallways leading the charge. They are at their doors. They are using names. They are smiling. They know that real connection happens in the hallways, not during their powerpoints.
8. The school has found ways to celebrate all students simply for being a member of their school. Things like stars or a school symbol with every student and staff members name on the walls around campus.
9. Student work is showcased and celebrated. Learning is hanging on the walls. Culture is reflected in student artwork in the halls. Every student should be able to walk through the halls and see something that inspires them and/or something that they created. They are part of the fabric of the place.
10. Greatness is expected. When a staff member introduces a guest presenter and says, "We are the best school in America and the speaker today will brag to his friends about how attentive and kind you are," then we are off to a good start. Saying, "please be quiet. Please don't disappoint us," isn't as effective. Saying nothing at all and letting your students talk over you is even worse. Great schools expect their students to be great.

11. A number of the school's biggest activities are focused on serving their community. Examples: Food Drive, Community Dinner, Benefit Night Talent Show, Community Care Week, Fall Leaf Raking for Local Residents, Holiday Caroling, etc. that give students the opportunity to experience real service opportunities.

12. Your students who are in leadership positions (Student Government, Athletes, Club Presidents, Etc.) have an intentional process where they are challenged to stay focused on connecting with their peers and school staff in intentional ways that build relationships and creates a culture of caring.

13. Intentional activities are planned to support those with the least amount of power in your school. This could include a Homecoming/Prom Project or Pack the Gym for Special Olympics. Clubs are offered to include activities that meet the diverse interests of all students and recognition projects highlight non-traditional gifts and skills.

14. The school invests in a process in welcoming their new students by dedicating time before school starts to connect with them. Part of, if not the entire first day of school, should go to make sure that the newest members of your school feel important and comfortable. This process should include older students as mentors and/or role models during this process. You only get one chance to make a first impression.

15. The school has an intentional way of honoring staff and students at the end of the year with the biggest and most important awards being given for the character traits most desired in the school to show how important that is to everyone else.

16. The school finds intentional ways to connect the community to what they are doing. Examples might be honoring community members at sporting events, assemblies, and other special events during the year. It also could include inviting community members from the retirement home to come and greet with students in the morning or at the end of the day. Finally, it could include paying for a free BBQ at Homecoming or the beginning of the year, for anyone in the community to attend.

17. The school's student leadership program is an open program, which means that you don't have to be elected to get into the group that puts on school activities and service projects.

18. Before the school year officially starts for students, the student leaders of the school find a way to intentionally welcome the staff back on their first day. This could include a big thank you note next to each staff member's main work location, greeting them at the door when they come into school for their first day of training and prep, or sharing a positive message with them at their first staff meeting to remind them of the difference that they make.

19. A school closes the activities gap by purchasing a spirit shirt for every student in the school so that on spirit days everyone has something to wear. If funding is an issue, then gain business sponsorships to make it happen.

20. The school has an intentional approach of promoting positive relationships and proactive classroom management strategies for staff. This could include such research-validated techniques as greeting students at the door, providing wise feedback, the 5:1 Golden Ratio of positive to constructive comments, emotional hooks, Establish - Maintain - Restore (EMR) relationship techniques, multiple opportunities to respond, pre-correction, and a consistent response to problem behavior that focuses on maintaining and or restoring the relationship afterwards.