

Listening to the Voices of Young Adolescents

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Over 3200 middle school students from diverse schools (urban, suburban, rural) across North America were asked the question, "What do you think every middle school teacher should know about middle school students?"

Below are ***some sample unedited*** responses from students.

1. "I think every middle school teacher should know, or try to understand, the social whirlwind of statuses that forms and so quickly hardens with every student in their place. What may seem, to a teacher, a classroom full of students peacefully working, may be exactly the opposite to a student. It becomes a room full of pitfalls, danger signs, and safe havens situated carefully in familiar territory. Every student, throughout the day, moves cautiously on "safe" paths from room to room. They will not read in another level's territory. They will not mix; everyone knows their place. Only a teacher or a student from a higher level will cause them to mix.
2. "Middle school teachers should know that there are many groups of kids in a grade. There are popular kids and the kids who get picked on. Most teachers can't see this, so they don't try to make it better."
3. "Teachers should know that boys have territory separate from girls, and their own divisions in that. Boys and girls will absolutely not mix, except in the rare group of girls and boys that are friends; these groups are either absolute high status, or the very bottom. Every student, boy or girl has their place, their territory, their paths, the people they can stay with on their level. I think middle school teachers should know of and try to understand this code of the students. This network of statuses and levels is ever present in middle schools. While some students may not be directly aware of it, they always have a subconscious understanding of where they fit. This is very important for middle school teachers to know."

4. "Middle school students are little kids in big bodies. They need patience, they need understanding, and they need somebody who will push them, but not to the point where they feel so overwhelmed. Above all, they need to feel that someone cares whether they fail or succeed, or they won't. work hard".
5. "Every middle school teacher should know that all middle school students are different. They react different, their skill level and how they behave are very different from others. The teacher should also take the time to learn about them. They should learn their history to see if they got in trouble a lot. The teachers should know that we like to talk and do things so work with that talking to make it useful. Also kids like us are not perfect every day so if we mess up once or twice in a year they should give us a break."
6. " Don't be mad but, I don't think the teachers and staff respect our opinions enough. When I say this, many of the school's rules come to mind. They don't make sense to us, and the adults often get angry when we attempt to question them. Teachers try to tell us what to do, and don't explain themselves, even when we ask. To us, they are sending a message that they think we're not intelligent enough to understand their reasons. The rule may be perfectly fine, but seeing the staff patronize us and not even knowing why we should follow the rule in the first place will cause us to rebel, and misbehave. At my old school, we had one principal that would stand out by the front door every day and cheerily greet everyone by their first name. Since my school is much larger school, knowing everyone's name would be next to impossible, but it would be nice if the staff—especially the principal—tried to take more time to really get to know us. That would make it at least seem like they genuinely care about us, and the staff would probably learn from us, also. And if we liked the staff we would behave much more."
7. "Kids are changing every day and teachers need to be aware of that. I think that the middle school teachers should know what the students are interested in. They should know what books, movies and music they are into. Also I think that they should always listen to the kids when they are trying to explain something or open up to them. The more they punish the kids the more they act up. They should also know that kids spread rumors."
8. "The first important point about kids in our age group is we hate being singled out. Being treated differently is a curse so a way to help us learn is to treat us equally and not focus attention on one student. The second point is that students of all ages hate to be babied. You will be surprised at what we can handle if we put our minds to it. We don't have to be kept away from the truth."

9. "Every 7th grade teacher should know about their 7th grade students is that they are their own people and that they aren't just like everyone else and that when speaking to the class about someone, something, you aren't only speaking to a class. . . you are speaking to everyone individually but in a way where everyone gets the same ideas. Try to respect the fact that certain people will get the idea quickly and others you will need to explain to more than once because some are slower than others. Everyone's minds aren't the same."
10. "Teachers, teachers, teachers, when will they learn. I have the attention span of a raisin. I need to be kept busy with things that are fun. Teachers need to find out what interests kids and what stuff they like to do. So for a less whiny, annoyed and temperamental class, make it fun."
11. "8th graders need a special form of teaching. We could never learn about a subject by reading a textbook. We need it explained and compared to life. It would help if the learning was fun. We want to experience it. And, We'd like to have a say in what we do."
12. "I think that all the middle school teachers should know how each individual student learns. They should know how they learn and change the way they teach around all different methods. Sometimes they need to see it drawn out, sometimes they need scrap paper to write out the numbers and sometimes they can do it in their head in 10 seconds. We all learn different and we need different teaching."
13. "I think every middle school teacher should know what their students like for example they should know if they like learning with music, by games, by spelling, they should know what's their style of learning. My style of learning is with games. Another thing they should know is how their students feel. They shouldn't yell at us and start jumping to conclusions like most teachers. They should hear our side of the story before they start sending kids to the bench and giving out detentions. Teachers should know how their students feel. They need to know that by yelling at us and sending us to the principal won't doing anything but make us worse than we already are."
14. "I can imagine that teaching eighth graders must be pretty tough. Half of us don't even know who we are, so how could teachers understand us? It's hard, but I can think of some ways. First of all, it must be understood that we are all trying to fit in. Eighth grade is a hard year and everyone has insecurities. I'm not saying to walk on eggshells around us, but be aware that our emotions can change like the wind. Be firm, but understanding and

- strict but gentle. Also, we need to get breaks from class work and homework. We have a life outside of school. Parts of us wish we were older, but other parts wish we were still in kindergarten, playing in the sandbox. If it's nice weather, don't give a lot of homework. You could even have us read aloud outside or something. We need time to breathe and enjoy life while we're still kids."
15. "Middle school teachers need to know a lot about middle school; students. We can be pretty tricky and somewhat aggravating. We need to know and feel that our teachers are open to us. Open to our small mistakes and open to answer all of our questions."
16. "Middle school students learn a whole lot better when they are not being lectured to, being directed, forced, or ordered, but when choice is given and learning is interactive. Traditional classrooms in our society today define teacher and the classroom in general as a straight-answer, fact-feeding, dictatorship that cares little for the opinions and interests of the pupils, and that teaches little about the reasons behind the facts. Schools are meant to prepare kids for life and make them more apt to be successful in their life. One would suppose that the government having authority over public schooling would want the generations of the future to be more successful in life, thus feeding the needs of the economy and the requirements of democracy, the spread of freedom, the reduction of discrimination in all forms, and exercising the rights and morality of citizens. One would assume that the government—wanting such a society—would encourage the development of these attributes through schooling. However as we look at the teaching of present schools, we see suspension of constitutional rights, undemocratic classrooms, and the implementation of the fact-feeding teaching methods and passive roles for students. Now maybe it's just me, but I would have to think that we should be promoting the opposite of these things: am I wrong?"
17. "I think we should get the same respect as an adult, because what the kids of today say holds the future of tomorrow. If you as a teacher think you are better than us kids because you're an adult, that's not right."
18. "I think every middle school teacher should know what students like for example... they should know if they like learning with music, by games, by spelling, they should know what's their style of learning. My style of learning is with games. Another thing they should know is how their students feel. They shouldn't yell at us and start jumping to conclusions like most teachers. They should hear our side of the story before they start sending kids to the bench and giving out detentions. Teachers should know how their students feel. They need to know that by yelling at us and sending

- us to the principal isn't doing a thing but making us worse than we already are. That's all I think middle school teachers should know about their students if they want to be considered the best teachers."
19. "Any student would rather experience things instead of writing about it."
 20. "What middle school teachers should know about middle school students is that we are still teenagers, we could have hard events going on at home, that we are not always perfect, and when we are sick we don't want to do work. Students in all middle schools make mistakes! Sometimes we might forget to bring something home from our locker and be yelled at the next day for not having your homework. I get that you would take points of the homework grade but there is no need to make a scene. Sometimes we forget. WE ARE NOT PERFECT!"
 21. "I think that every teacher should know that every 7th grade student is smart in one subject or another. You may not be great at spelling or science but I bet you're pretty smart in another area. I've learned that no one is dull or unintelligent. We all flourish in one way or another."
 22. "8th graders need a special form of teaching. We could never learn about a subject by reading a textbook. We need it explained and compared to life. It would help if the learning was fun."
 23. "I think one of the most important things they should understand is that every single student has their own hopes and dreams. For some it may be to be on the honor roll all through high school, go to Harvard, and grow up to be a very "successful" person. For others, it may just be not to flunk out of high school. You need to embrace everyone's wants. That doesn't mean that you should give more attention to those with higher hopes - just work with each one and encourage them to do their best. The key to being a good teacher is knowing the kids. You have to know every single one and have a relationship with every single one. I think that one thing that really allows me to work hard is knowing that my teacher knows where I am in life at that moment. If they don't know me, I will tend not to work as hard for them."