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Case Study

Being in middle school is probably the most difficult and awkward stage of growing up. Everybody is going through change mentally and physically but one of the most important things to middle school aged kids is fitting in with their classmates. To feel what it’s like to be a middle school, I chose to interview two students from Ms. Knips’s eighth grade technology class. I chose eighth graders to interview because they have had the most experience at Lesher, they are about to end middle school and I wanted to see what they are nervous and excited about when moving to a high school. For these interviews, I chose two outgoing students who seem popular and are involved with extracurricular activities.

I interviewed, “Jessica,” a smart girl who was always on task in class. I chose to interview Jessica because she seems very mature for her age and enthusiastic about school. I wanted to see if even positive students have something about middle school that they struggle with. I began by asking her if she liked school and why. She replied that she liked school because she gets to see her friends and some of the teachers are fun including her favorite teachers Mrs. Freemyer and Ms. Dixon. What she likes about Lesher is how easy it is to be involved in school, there are a lot of sports and clubs for everyone. She is involved with NJHS (National Juniors Honors Society) and sports. I interviewed Jessica when the dance was coming up so I asked if she was going and what a middle school dance is like. She replied that she was going and mentioned that in sixth grade the dances were more fun because more people came but the other dances were boring because not a lot of people showed up and there was nothing to do. After learning about the positive things about school, I asked Jessica what is her least favorite thing about Lesher. She answered that all of the homework because she is involved with five sports and it gets stressful, overwhelming and some teachers don’t understand that she has a lot of commitments outside of school. After learning about Lesher, I asked Jessica about high school, what she is excited and nervous about. She is excited that there is more freedom in high school but nervous about the large size of Fort Collins High School. She is also nervous that there will be a heavier load of homework.

Interviewing Jessica taught me about what it’s like being in middle school and transitioning to high school. I learned that the social aspects of school are just as important as the learning when Jessica described the dance and that her favorite part of school is seeing her friends. I also realized that teachers make a school experience enjoyable when she mentioned that her favorite teachers make learning fun. I also learned that teachers should be understanding and meet their students halfway, when Jessica was describing the stress of being involved with a lot of sports. The homework is her least favorite part of Lesher because teachers aren’t understanding and as teachers we should work with our students to help them succeed.

In addition to interviewing Jessica, I interviewed an eighth grade boy, “Jack.” I chose to interview Jack because he always seems happy. He shows that he cares about his work even when he gets off task sometimes. This student is creative and seems to have a lot of friends so I wanted to understand if he had any worries or things that he hides behind his bright personality. Just like Jessica, he likes school because he has a lot of friends and there are several sports that he is involved with including football, basketball and track. He is also a web leader who makes sure everyone gets involved and feels safe at Lesher. Learning is also important to Jack, and he mentioned that the teachers at Lesher make their teaching relate to the students so that they can get a better understanding. Although this student seems positive and happy all of the time, there are some things that brought his mood down in middle school. When I asked what his least favorite thing about Lesher is, he answered that some teachers pick favorites and don’t treat all of the students with equity. He described a specific time when he asked his gym teacher if they could play basketball and she replied by telling Jack and his friend that they wouldn’t be successful, Jack responded by telling the other teachers but nobody did anything. After hearing this it made me upset because Jack has such a bright future ahead and even though he seems happy, something that a teacher said brought him down. This taught me that teachers need to think about what they say to students because it could really have an impact since students look up to their educators. I also asked Jack what he was nervous about high school and he said that he was worried about peer pressure and getting involved with the wrong crowd, he doesn’t want to do anything that would hurt his future. This was interesting to me because he seems like a leader who would make the right decisions. When hearing Jack’s worries about high school I learned that being socially accepted is important because students want to seem cool and popular to their peers but also want to make decisions that are right for them

As a teacher it is important to get to know your students and interviews are a good way to build understanding and strong relationships. Individual interviews can help guide instruction in several ways. By knowing student interests, teachers can make learning more relatable, engaging and easier for students to understand. For example, as an art teacher, knowing student interests will help me choose artworks to show to the class and come up with differentiated projects where they can all express their passions. Individual interviews also help with understanding behaviors. If I know what my students are going through, it will help me be more patient and understanding to the needs of my students. This also shows the students that I care about them and their learning, I want them to grow and succeed and when I know them, I can individualize instruction to improve their skills in my art class. I would use individualized interviews to help improve my teaching in the future so that I can treat every student equally, get to know them and shape my curriculum around their interests and passions.