



52 NIGHT HERON - CHAPEL HILL, NC 27517 - P: 800-874-1100 - E: PHIL@LEARNINGFORLIVING.COM

Sounding Off On School Culture |

Five takeaways from this week's School Culture By Design Podcast

“Creating a vibrant culture in your classroom”

Guest: Matt Grigas, Theater Teacher, Neuqua Valley High School, Illinois

- 1) First weeks of school set the tone for the year!** We use activities that center on team-building. We looked at activities that Fortune 500 companies do for employee orientations and used some of those ideas to implement in our classroom. It helps our students to reflect on who they want to be as learners, how to make risks, etc. It helps us, as teachers, get to know our students better and really launches a dialogue of “what we want to accomplish as a class?” It gives me a good view of the vibe of the class.
- 2) Modeling is crucial. Teachers need to lead by example.** If I’m talking to a class of freshman, I open up about my first few weeks of school as a freshman and the anxieties I had, concerns about navigating a new school, etc. I share those stories with them and invite them to share those stories with me.
- 3) Every day, try to incorporate some small thing in your students’ learning teams that help them to learn something new about each other.** It might be a quick 30-second activity one day or a 5-minute activity another day. I’ll do something like have them in their teams figure out who is the oldest and have that person write their name on the board up front. So that gives all those students a couple seconds to ask each other about their birthdays – and it just helps build community. Someone might say their birthday is May 12th and someone else in their group could say, “Cool! I’m a May birthday too!”
- 4) I have an open-door policy at school.** I always keep my door open and hang out in the hallway and try to make dialogue with students across the school. Especially in the mornings before school officially starts, students might just have their headphones on and are zoning out, so I try to engage them... even if it’s just a 30 second conversation. It gives me a chance to meet students that I don’t have in my own class, and provides opportunities for me to remind them that they’re not just a face in the crowd but they have value.
- 5) I always boil things back to two things. 1) What’s best for my kids? And 2) Have high expectations but with high levels of support.** We can get so bogged down in the minutia with various programs and initiatives, but at the core of what we do, we have to put kids at the center. That can help de-mystify and de-clutter what we do. And in terms of having high expectations, remember that we’re not looking for perfection but we’re looking for everyone to put their best foot forward. We’re trying to teach the whole person - sometimes things go wrong to help grow us as people.



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