



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

Sounding Off On School Culture

“Keeping the pulse on your student’s lives.”

Guest: Bryan Slater, History Teacher, Sumner High School, Washington

- 1) **Create a daily check-in Google Chart for your students that always includes two simple questions: “How are you? (one scale of 1-5)” and “Why?”** I leave it open-ended. As students get to know me better throughout the year, their check-ins become more thorough. As a result, I’m able to keep my finger on the pulse of my students, not just academically, but personally. I can include questions that gauge their understanding of the content I might have taught yesterday, but I always include those personal questions. For the introverts in the classroom, it’s super beneficial because you can’t always read through their expressions what is going on in their lives. So this gives me a chance to really get to know them and let me more effectively do my job.
- 2) **Use those check-ins as a way to build trust with your students.** Since this Google form is updated in real-time, I’m seeing the answers slowly come in as students trickle in the classroom. If a student is having a hard day, I can quickly shoot them a quick email that says, “Thinking about you and hoping the rest of your day gets better!” It takes me 10-seconds to craft, but it makes a big impact on my students. Also, if my student writes something like “I didn’t eat breakfast today so I’m having a hard time focusing” or “My parents got in a big fight this morning so I’m distracted” – it helps me deal with the root of behavior issues. It helps me decrease my classroom management issues because I can understand why my student is doing what they’re doing because of these check-ins.
- 3) **Tips for setting up the Google Form:** Do not use your private Google account to collect student information – that could get you into a lot of trouble. Our situation is unique because we’re a Google District. This could be more complicated if you’re not part of one because I’m not sure if Microsoft has an equivalent tool. But if you are part of a Google District, you create your form and email a link to it out to your students. I have a mass email address for each class. Google forms now have built-in quizzes where you create a linear scale questions and blast them out to each class.
- 4) **Students need to see the humanity in their teachers.** One way I do that is on that same Google Form where I ask how they’re doing, I put in parentheses how I’m doing. I might share, “Had a baby wake up several times last night so I’m pretty exhausted, but I’m looking forward to getting some energy from being around you guys today.” Another way is I’ll write on my coffee cup - “I’m at a 2 today... ask me why!” and wait for one of my students to see it and ask me. I’ll also do something called “True Story Friday” – every Friday I’ll let the students choose the topic (school-appropriate) and I’ll tell them a true story relating to that topic. And it’s important that you’re not always the hero of the story – you need to be humble. They don’t need to see you as a perfect person, but a person who has made choices that impacts their life.

Currently reading:

James Hunter “The Servant”

J.D. Vance “Hillbilly Elegy”



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