



Mark E. Warford

Bethlehem Central Middle School

Delmar, New York

markwarford28@gmail.com

Best Practices

1) When I think about all the aspects to an administrator's job that should be considered as best practices, one at the top of the list would be visibility. Students and parents want to see their administrators out interacting with the students and with the community.

Visibility starts at the beginning of each day; standing at the door welcoming students as they come into the building. In our school we are fortunate to have a TV studio that broadcasts our morning announcements to get the day started. This gives me the opportunity to be in front of all the students to review important information. Serious topics such as emergency drill procedures or testing information are discussed, but it more importantly gives me an opportunity to congratulate staff and students on major accomplishments, promote school events, or enlist the students to help with school initiatives or problems that we need to solve together. Parents are invited to stream our morning broadcast at home and may do. I typically go on the announcements a few times each week. This allows me to be visible and helps me form connections with the whole building. This seems evident by my salutation. At the end of each announcement I say, "Have a great day!" and then slap the desk. Students and parents of all grade levels tell me that the kids wait for the end of the announcement so they can slap the desk with me.

Visibility also means being present and/or participating in student activities. One of my favorite activities is our school music performances. I make it a point to attend every grade level performance; not only to be visible to our supportive parents, but mainly to give our students high fives and kudos as they exit the stage. They notice when we administrators are there!

This past spring I was asked to take on the role of Frankenstein for our school play. I think the fact that I am 6'4" helped, but I knew that the parents and students would be excited to see their assistant principal

out on the stage performing with the students. The group that seemed the most excited was the make-up crew. Putting make-up and costumes on me was a big hit. It also helped to form connections and make me more approachable. I vividly remember one student saying, “Mr. Warford, if I am going to get this right you need to sit still.” The kids still remind me of that.

Our school is a vibrant place with lots of after school clubs and activities; all of which help students to showcase their talents and interests. From our building art show to the Junior Chefs cooking classes with our FACS teachers, I pop in to see their projects and encourage them to continue their good work.

2) Another best practice is engaging with the community. Public education is truly a community alliance where the school is called on to partner with our families to help our kids grow. Creating programs and participating in community events are a great way to foster this relationship.

I am one of the founding members, and the only serving president, of the Delmar Farmer’s Market. Over the past eleven years I have worked with dedicated community members to help the DFM be recognized as one of the top 100 markets in the country according to the Daily Meal. As the creator of our school garden, it was a natural connection to have students sell the produce we grow at school. Three times a year students harvest, clean, and prepare the organic vegetables for sale at the market. Participation at the farmer’s market is a great opportunity to put the skills they learn at school on display. Math and language arts skills are needed when talking with the customers and transacting business. Organizational skills and visual arts are needed to create a visually appealing stall.

As part of the Garden Club I hold Community Gardening Night every Tuesday evening so adults can participate. We have a great bunch of dedicated community members that help with the work. We also partner with a local restaurant to offer BC Meals Night each Tuesday night in October. The restaurant prepares a three-course meal using produce grown in our school garden. The response from the community has been overwhelming with increased participation each year. It is a wonderful way to highlight the hard work of the community members and students.

Each year we also hold our annual Salads-for-Kids Day. Produce from our school garden is used to make fresh, organic salads that are served to all our staff and students free of charge. Community members from our Healthy Kids organization come in to school and prepare and serve the salads to the kids. This event reinforces how fresh, healthy vegetables actually taste good. It also models for our students the reality of locally grown and organically produced food. The best part is seeing the joy on the parents’ faces as their kids eat fresh vegetables and often ask for more. My work with the school garden has also connected me to local organizations like the Bethlehem Garden Club and the Bethlehem Food Pantry. Each year we donate over 1,000 pounds of produce to our community.

I also founded our building Halloween party where nearly 900 of our students attend and over 80 community members support the event. This yearly celebration is a community building highlight at our school. We also collaborate with the Town of Bethlehem Recycling Department to hold huge recycling events two times each year.