

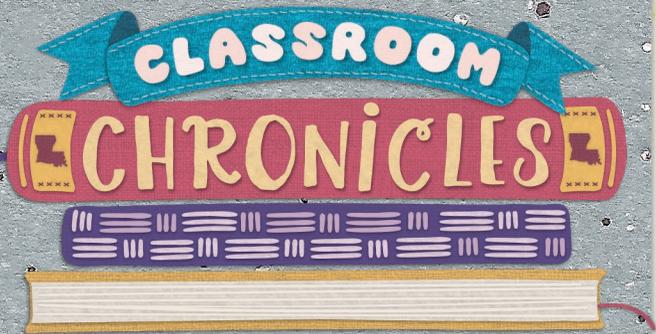
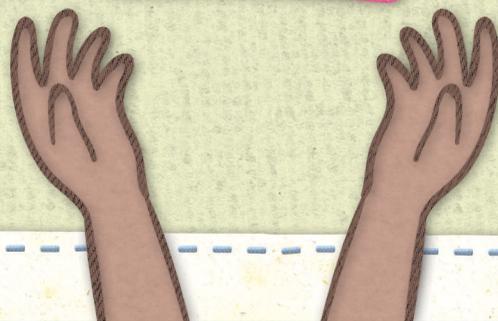


When a student quietly asked to switch seats for the day to keep a lonely classmate company, 2019 Louisiana Middle School Teacher of the Year Kathryn Ferguson agreed, and at the end of the class period, slipped the student a Kindness Spartan Check, a coveted bright pink coupon given to students who demonstrate acts of kindness on campus.

“For me, that other student had put on a happy face; I never would have known she was unhappy,” Ferguson recalled. “I felt her classmate’s request to do something as simple as switch seats, to look out for her friend, was a great example of kindness.”

It can be difficult to make middle school a place where students want to be. But Youree Drive Middle School in Caddo Parish is working to do just that through its “Kindness Spartan Check” initiative, which it implemented during the 2017-2018 school year. While the school previously had a system in place to reward “prompt, prepared and polite” students with special “checks” they could redeem for goodies, like school supplies or candy, at the on-site Spartan Store, Ferguson said the school community recognized the need to better emphasize acts of kindness.

“Compared to the regular checks, the Kindness Spartan Checks are larger, brightly colored, and worth five times more in value,” Ferguson explained. “When the teacher gives the check to a student, they should be specific about what act of kindness they observed.”



# CAUGHT BEING KIND

How a Caddo Parish Middle School Teacher Promotes Positive Behavior

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In addition to the checks, the school community has challenged itself to embrace kindness in other ways. “It can be something as simple as greeting kids at the door with a smile,” Ferguson said.

**So far the results have been promising. “It seems like a small thing to actively look for kindness and reward kindness,” she said, “but I believe we’re on the right track to making kindness the norm and not the exception. I feel the difference.”**

When asked what advice Ferguson would give to other educators wanting to better promote kindness at their schools, she said:

**Create buy-in with your faculty.** As with any new program you want to bring to your school, you must avoid making it seem “one more thing” to add to the to-do list. When she introduced the idea to her faculty, she gave them simple examples of how the program could be integrated into the activities they were already doing each day and presented it as an exciting addition, not a chore.

**Engage your students.** Creating fun incentives, like checks that can be exchanged for candy, is an effective way to capture students’ interest. It’s just as important to keep that momentum going by having conversations with students about kindness and demonstrating kindness through your own actions. Ferguson believes that students enjoy being a part of a process that can positively influence their learning community.

**Integrate kindness into everyday activities.** You don’t need to roll out a long list of new activities or programming to promote kindness on campus. Simply weave it into what you already do each day. For example, Ferguson said her administration added a kindness quote and challenge (i.e., write a nice note to a friend or teacher) to the morning announcements.

**Listen.** Implement progress check-ins with both teachers and students over time to understand how others feel about their school climate. For example, Ferguson said her school surveys students each year to see if they feel like their school is a kind place and to solicit feedback for improvements.

“Everyone benefits when the world around them is a place of kindness. If we can bring kindness into our schools every day, with all of our students, it will make school a place where students want to be and make us, as teachers, more effective.”



*Kathryn Ferguson*  
*2019 Louisiana Middle School Teacher of the Year*