Middle School Kindness Challenge
Fostering Kindness in America’s Middle Schools

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The Challenge: Meanness Is On The Rise

These are disturbing times.

Everyday, America’s students are increasingly exposed to powerful forces in and out of school – including via social media – that promote meanness, intolerance, division, violence, and even hate.

The trend is deeply troubling. A shortage of kindness in schools undermines students’ learning, wellness, and, ultimately, their and our nation’s future potential.
The Opportunity: Foster More Kindness

Research and experience demonstrate schools that intentionally and systematically teach and foster kindness enhance students’ sense of safety, support, and acceptance and, in so doing, help more students succeed in school and in life.

Too often overlooked, fostering kindness is a powerful, common sense solution to some of schools’ and society’s biggest challenges.

In an era when meanness and even cruelty are increasingly “normal,” there’s an urgent need to make kindness the norm for every student in every school in America.
## What Research Says: Kindness Works

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<th>Kindness is an important human strength that influences subjective well-being... We suggest that kindness can cause happiness... Happy people scored higher on their motivation to perform, and their recognition and enactment of kind behaviors.</th>
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<td>Otake, Shimai, et al, 2006</td>
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<th>Students who performed kind acts experienced significantly bigger increases in peer acceptance, [which] is related to a variety of important academic and social outcomes, including reduced likelihood of being bullied.</th>
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<th>Students learn best when they are in environments in which they feel safe, supported, challenged, and accepted... [They] are more likely to engage in the curriculum, achieve academically, and develop positive relationships; students are less likely to exhibit problem behaviors; and teacher turnover is lower and teacher satisfaction is higher.</th>
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<th>SEL (social-emotional learning) programs yielded significant positive effects on... students' behavioral adjustment in the form of increased prosocial behaviors and reduced conduct and internalizing problems, and improved academic performance on achievement tests and grades.</th>
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To move toward our vision of middle schools where kindness is commonplace, the Kind Schools Project is launching a Middle School Kindness Challenge in August 2017 that supports deeply meaningful campaigns for kindness in middle schools across the country.

Through the Challenge, we will provide every school with any combination of grades 5-8 with readily doable ways to teach, foster, and celebrate kindness. We will also recognize, connect, reward, and support all middle schools participating in this timely effort.
Why Middle School?

Middle school is a pivotal time in a young person’s life, when brain and physical development drive significant changes, including establishing a sense of identity and lifelong behavior patterns:

During early adolescence, many of the attitudes, beliefs, and values that young adolescents develop remain with them for life (Brighton, 2007). They move away from blanket acceptance of adult moral judgment to the development of their own personal values.*

By intentionally modeling and teaching the values of kindness at this critical age, school can ensure that students leave middle school with a positive mindset and the skills to guide their interactions in school and in the world.

*AMLE: Developmental Characteristics of Young Adolescents Research Summary, Micki Caskey, Vincent A. Anfara, Jr. October 2014

We spend so much time when they are little teaching sandbox rules, worrying about these little moral codes. But by the time they get into middle school, we forget to remind them. They need it then more than ever.

We spend more time on “Did you do your homework?” So it occurred to me that these kids need us to inspire them to be kind to one another”.

R.J. Palacio – author of Wonder
How the Middle School Kindness Challenge works?
How the Middle School Kindness Challenge Works

Through a **four week series of readily doable events and activities**, the Challenge will enable teachers and staff at participating schools to foster a higher level of kindness. Schools will receive rewards and recognition upon completion of the Challenge.

The **three Challenge phases** are:

**PHASE 1**
Stepping Up to the Plate
(Week 1-2)
Accepting the Challenge and Teacher & Staff Orientation

**PHASE 2**
Loading the Bases with Kindness
(Week 2-4)
Engage Students through Themed Pathways

**PHASE 3**
Bringing it Home
(End of Week 4)
Final Schoolwide Challenge to Celebrate Kindness
Phase 1: Stepping Up to the Plate (Week 1)

In phase 1 the principal, assistant principal, and/or other committed, well-respected colleagues volunteers to be the Kindness Challenge Captain or Co-Captains (up to 3 allowed) to lead all participating school staff through the following Phase 1 action steps:

- Register the school and all participating staff- at least 50% of staff must participate.

- Participating staff take a Reflection Exercise, an adaptation of a longer version that, in a randomized controlled trial experiment resulted in a 53% reduction in suspension rates.

- Convene a team huddle where participating staff select a Kindness Challenge Start Date and a schoolwide Essential Question to guide the school’s focus during the Kindness Challenge.

- Selecting one of three Middle School Kindness Challenge Pathways drawn from leading organizations participating in this first of its kind partnership: Making Caring Common, Facing History and Ourselves, InspiRED, Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence, and Greater Good Science Center.
Phase 1: Pathway and Activity Selection

Participating school staff will select one **Middle School Kindness Challenge Pathways** and **commit to teach at least four activities** that have been carefully curated from leading education organizations participating in this first of its kind partnership.

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<th>Pathway</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<td>Strengthening Peer Relationships</td>
<td>This pathway focuses on building constructive interactions among students for a positive classrooms and school culture. It includes activities that help students develop empathy for their classmates, listen actively, and resolve conflicts with each other.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Developing Positive Mindsets</td>
<td>This pathway focuses on self-management and self-care strategies that equip students with ways to monitor their own feelings, setting them up to be kind to others. Activities include practicing gratitude, goal setting and positive framing of situations.</td>
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<td>Fostering Empathy</td>
<td>This pathway goes beyond individual student relationships to tackle larger issues and trends, such as stereotypes and bullying, based on identity. It includes activities such as shared identity and fostering civic discourse.</td>
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TEACHER SCHOOL STAFF MY CHALLENGE DASHBOARD

PHASE 1

TODO:
- Orientation
- Reflection Exercise
- Select Pathway
Phase 1: Kindness Captain/Co-Captains

At each participating school, the **Kindness Captain**, or **Co-Captains**, is the force behind making the Kindness Challenge a success at his or her school. The Kindness Captain should be someone with credibility across the school to manage Kindness Challenge completion. Additionally, the Kindness Captain is responsible for:

- ✔ Registering the school and participating staff to accept and take the Challenge
- ✔ Articulating the reason for school’s Challenge acceptance
- ✔ Explaining to participating staff how activities fit together
- ✔ Maintaining momentum and a positive tone throughout the Challenge
- ✔ Arranging the logistics of the Challenge
- ✔ Supporting participating staff in completing the Challenge
KINDNESS CAPTAIN DASHBOARD

PHASE 1

TODO:
- Recruit Staff
- Orientation
- Set Start Date
- Essential Question
- Plan Kickoff
Phase 2: Loading the Bases with Kindness (Weeks 2-4)

During phase 2, teachers and other participating school staff carry out and share feedback on the activities from the pathways they’ve chosen.

Once activities have been taught, teachers and staff will be asked to rate the activities on their effectiveness and usefulness on their personalized Kindness Challenge dashboard.

Teachers have 4 weeks from the Challenge START DATE chosen by the Kindness Captain to complete their chosen activities.
TEACHER SCHOOL STAFF MY CHALLENGE DASHBOARD

PHASE 2
Teach & Rate Pathway Activities
SCHOOL CHALLENGE DASHBOARD

ALL PHASES: VIEWABLE BY ALL STAFF UP TO DATE ON PROGRESS

CHALLENGE PROGRESS STAFF PROGRESS
Phase 3: Bringing It Home

The Challenge culminates in Phase 3 as teachers, staff, and students apply their deepening conceptual and practical understanding of the power of kindness by designing and implementing a final schoolwide event that celebrates the importance of kindness and spotlights how the school will make kindness an ongoing aspect of the learning environment. Final Kindness Challenge event options could include:

- A Kindness “Teach In”
- A Kindness Public Service Video
- A Kindness Project Expo
- A Presentation on the Power of Kindness, to parents, the school board, etc.
- A New Kindness Webpage on the School’s website
- A Kindness Podcast produced by students and staff
### Phase 3: Earning Kindness Rewards

Beyond the most important outcome of the Challenge in every participating school—*intentional teaching, fostering, and celebrating of kindness*—rewards for schools and school staff will include:

| $500 DonorsChoose.org credit for the first 500 schools that complete the Challenge* and eligibility to enter a drawing for a $5,000 DonorsChoose.org credit. | A special badge on GreatSchools.org, the nation’s premiere school ratings site, for all schools that complete the Kindness Challenge. |
| Reduced price services from leading education support organizations Facing History and Ourselves, Making Caring Common, AVID, and the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence. | Individual recognition for all participating school staff, including special kindness-related microcredentials that staff can display in professional portfolios and on social media (available in 2018). |

*The Challenge is completed when the majority of participating teachers and staff complete their chosen activities and the school completes its schoolwide event.*
How to Use DonorsChoose.org Credit

How it works

1. Go to www.donorschoose.org and setup an account. There is a step by step process with tutorial video.
2. Create a school project and write the proposal for your project (1 hour or less). This can be any project for your school, it does not need to be a kindness related project.
3. DonorsChoose.org sends you to their preselected vendors to shop for the items you need for your project.
4. The Kindness Challenge will fund $500 to your project.
5. If your project costs more than $500, the project will be listed on DonorsChoose.org crowdsourcing project for other to fund/donate.
6. DonorsChoose.org purchases all the items for your project and ships them directly to your school.
7. You DO NOT receive cash.
8. School/you are expected to write a reflection when your project is completed/funded.
9. You (School and Teachers) can use your account for future projects.

Additional Resources

Forum: How DonorsChoose.org work for Teachers/School
http://www.proteacher.net/discussions/showthread.php?t=154629

DonorsChoose.org You Tube Channel
https://www.youtube.com/user/DonorsChoosedotorg/videos

Tips for your DonorsChoose.org Project
Current Collaborations

We are now inviting an array of education organizations, school districts, and charter management organizations to partner in this timely and important effort. Join us!
Kindness Challenge Timeline

**FALL COHORT: 2017-2018 SCHOOL YEAR**

- **2017**
  - **Jun**: Fall cohort open
  - **Jul**: Outreach
    - Orientation: 7/12/17
  - **Aug**: Accept Challenge: Pre-register
  - **Sep**: Fall cohort opens
    - Last registration: 10/10/17
  - **Oct**: Last start: 10/24/17
  - **Nov**: Rewards
    - $500 DonorsChoose Credit
    - Kindness Badge on GreatSchools! website
    - Discounts from Leading Education Support Providers
    - $10,000 DonorsChoose Credit for One School via Drawing
  - **Dec**: Closes: 11/21/17

- **2018**
  - **Jan**: Spring cohort opens
    - Last registration: 3/12/18
  - **Mar**: Last start: 3/26/18
  - **Apr**: Rewards
    - $500 DonorsChoose Credit
    - Kindness Badge on GreatSchools! website
    - Discounts from Leading Education Support Providers
    - $10,000 DonorsChoose Credit for One School via Drawing
  - **Jul**: Closes: 4/23/18
The Kindness Challenge: How It Works

PHASE 1: Registration – Week 1-2
Stepping Up to the Plate: Accept the Challenge

- **Kindness Captains** (up to 3 per school)
  - KCs Register Self & School
  - Watch Orientation Video
  - KCs Recruit Teachers
  - KCs Set Start Date
  - Essential Question
  - Plan Kickoff

- KCs Monitor Progress
- Encourage Teachers

- KCs Plan Final Activity

Challenge Opens 9/5/17
www.Kindnesschallenge.com

PHASE 2: Week 2-4
Loading the Bases with Kindness

- Teachers Register via Invitation or www.kindnesschallenge.com
- Watch Orientation Video
- Teachers Take Reflection Exercise
- Teachers Select Pathways & Activities
- Teachers Teach Kindness
- Rate Activities

PHASE 3: End of Week 4
Bringing it Home

- KCs Upload/Send Final Activity

Final Challenge Activity

Final Challenge

Celebrate

MET Challenge

Teachers & Staff: My Challenge

Middle School
Recap of Kindness Challenge Rules

REGISTRATION RULES:
▪ School must be in the GreatSchools! Database to register for the Challenge. (Exception, contact us from website)
▪ The person who first registers the school is the designated Kindness Captain for the school. A school can have up to 3 co-Kindness Captains
▪ School/Kindness captains recruit at least 50% of school staff by “KICKOFF DATE” before Challenge can begin
▪ School staff = Teacher and specialized instructional support personnel (SISP)

COMPLETION RULES:
▪ SCHOOL: A majority (50%) of school staff must complete the challenge (allow 10% grace)
▪ STAFF: Delivered and rated 4+ activities
▪ SCHOOL: Completed final activity and uploaded onto Kindness Challenge Website

REWARD RULES:
▪ $500 DonorsChoose.org Credit for the first 500 schools that complete the challenge
▪ Kindness Badge on GreatSchools! website
▪ Discounts from Leading Education Support Providers
▪ $5,000 DonorsChoose.org Credit for One School via Drawing per cohort
Next Steps: Accept The Challenge

www.kindnesschallenge.com
Thank You

For additional information, please visit our website
www.kindnesschallenge.com

or contact us at
@fosterkindness
program@kindnesschallenge.com