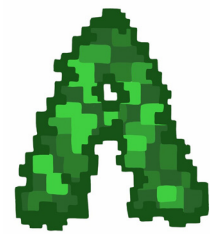


Instructor Constructor

Building the perfect teacher from the ground up



teacher can make or break a class. Whether it be English, calculus, or art, the teacher is always at the center of intellectual discovery in the classroom. However, when that center is muddled with monotony, a disinterested attitude, or a lack of understanding of the topic at hand, students tune out—they fail to learn.

In a classroom that transmits warmth, promotes curiosity, and fosters student creativity, however, the narrative flips: Students are more engaged, excited to learn, and mentally sound.

Here, we compile a wide assortment of student opinions on student teaching preferences. Interestingly enough, the same positive traits pop up over and over again, and so do the same negative traits.

Certain teachers' names also pop up again and again. The teachers we interviewed were all mentioned by name by students as exemplary educators at Montgomery Blair. Although we are not able to cover every praiseworthy educator, the traits detailed throughout the piece manifest themselves in teachers from every department and walk of life within Blair.

And with this, we construct the ideal instructor.

Mapping the classroom

When it comes to setting the tone for a course, classroom and lesson structures are a student's map to knowledge. When expectations are not clear, the map gets jumbled, and the final destination—a fruitful education—becomes further out of reach.

According to the students, the best course of navigation is found through straightforward communication between students and teachers. "I think the teacher really has to be able to tell the student what's

going on, what's going right, what's going wrong, and really be able to talk to the student about what they've got to do to get a good grade," freshman David Diouf says.

A teacher that is receptive of their students' engagement in the classroom is more likely to adapt to the needs of their class and provide the necessary support to bring the best out in their pupils.

One of the greatest indicators of a conducive learning environment is a setting in which the learning interests of students are taken into the highest consideration. "A good teacher is a teacher who focuses on what the students are doing and not what the teachers are doing," math teacher David Stein says.

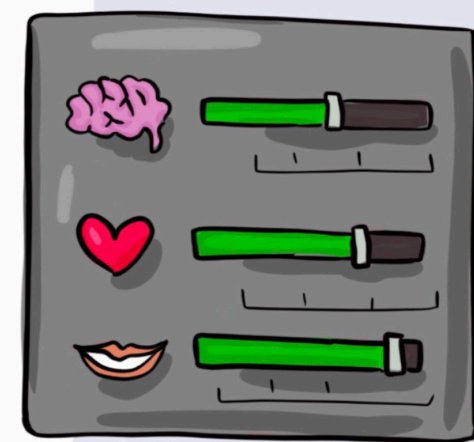
Teachers must not only direct their focus, but the focus of the entire classroom in order to facilitate learning. "If [the kids are] bored and not paying attention, then they're not learning anything.... You have to change things up and tell funny stories and things like that," Stein says.

Teaching techniques

While teachers have plenty of techniques for maintaining class structure, the most loathed are those which cut students from the equation. Teacher-centric lectures are oftentimes considered a necessary evil. However, students commonly share scorn for long, drawn out lectures that many say leave the classroom half asleep.

Junior Peter Zhang dislikes the monotony of an hour and a half of lectures. "A lot of teachers prefer to just give out content and expect kids to learn it," he says. "I just don't think that's a very productive model for kids to learn."

In a classroom where discussion guides all learning, students become more invested in the subject material. "Personally I really like... the more interactive stuff



PATIENT	FLEXIBLE
KNOWLEDGABLE	FRIENDLY
ORGANIZED	UNDERSTANDING
RESPONSIVE	FUNNY
ACTIVE	COMMUNICATIVE

just because it's not just this boring, the teacher talks for the entire time, [rather] it's where you can actually put in your own [ideas] and learn by yourself," freshman Anthony Alexander says.

History teacher Marc Grossman, described as an interactive, patient, and active teacher, guides his classes with teaching principles that have spoken to the needs of many students. "Ultimately, [a classroom] is a platonic place of learning," Grossman says.

Grossman pushes for contrarian ideas and criticism in order to guide higher learning in his classroom. "Our legal system is based on the Socratic method, and it's this notion that the truth will come out when a competition of ideas is allowed to exist.... [Contrasting ideas] help bring about truth and that is important in the classroom as well," Grossman says.

In classes where practice makes perfect, like many math and science courses, letting students run free and tackle problems on their own is also recognized as being extremely helpful. "A lot of the class time [in Ms. Hart's organic chemistry class] is devoted to just solving problems and working in group to learn the material, which I think is a lot more productive and also educational," Zhang says.

Knowledge level

To be a teacher, there must be a certain threshold of knowledge obtained before dispersing it to the masses. Of course, there are the state, county, and countrywide tests for certification, but there is more to a teacher's knowledge than a rubber-stamped seal of approval.

Many students are looking for an extensive and intricate understanding of the material at hand, looking for teachers who infuse their instruction with more than busy work and lazy presentations.

Junior Ifrah Hussain values lessons that provide real life applications and connect to her day-to-day life. "I feel like Ms. Earle [who teaches biology] and Mr. Zick [who teaches social studies], they were really good teachers and they involved real-world examples," said Hussain. "They really connected with their students and I feel like a lot

of teachers don't do that, and I feel like there are a few teachers out there that really want to get to know their students."

Asking questions is arguably the most pertinent topic among students when it comes to having a good teacher. "[When] you ask [a good teacher] an extra question that's not in the curriculum, they can answer it or at least can help you figure it out," junior Karen Yang says. "[A bad teacher would] say that it's not in the curriculum or copy answers off the internet for answer keys."

Many teachers will say that there is no such thing as a stupid question. However, some teachers turn around and dismantle that statement by discouraging questions or dismissing a question as too simplistic to warrant a response.

A teacher who handles questions poorly can kill a student's enthusiasm for a course. "I asked [a past math teacher] a question because I was very confused and we were going fast and she said to me that I should know [the answer]," freshman Momoreoluwa Del-Davidson says. "I obviously didn't know it, so I just went back to my desk and didn't know what I was doing, so that was horrible."

Beyond classroom knowledge, many students credit their favorite teachers with exposing them to life skills, such as information retention techniques and mindset shifts.

Del-Davidson attributes her newly effective study habits to her history teacher. "I was having trouble doing my history homework because I was always doing it in loud places," she said. "[Mr. Grossman] showed me that if you want to study and actually retain the information, you have to go somewhere quiet, and once I started doing that, I got much better grades."

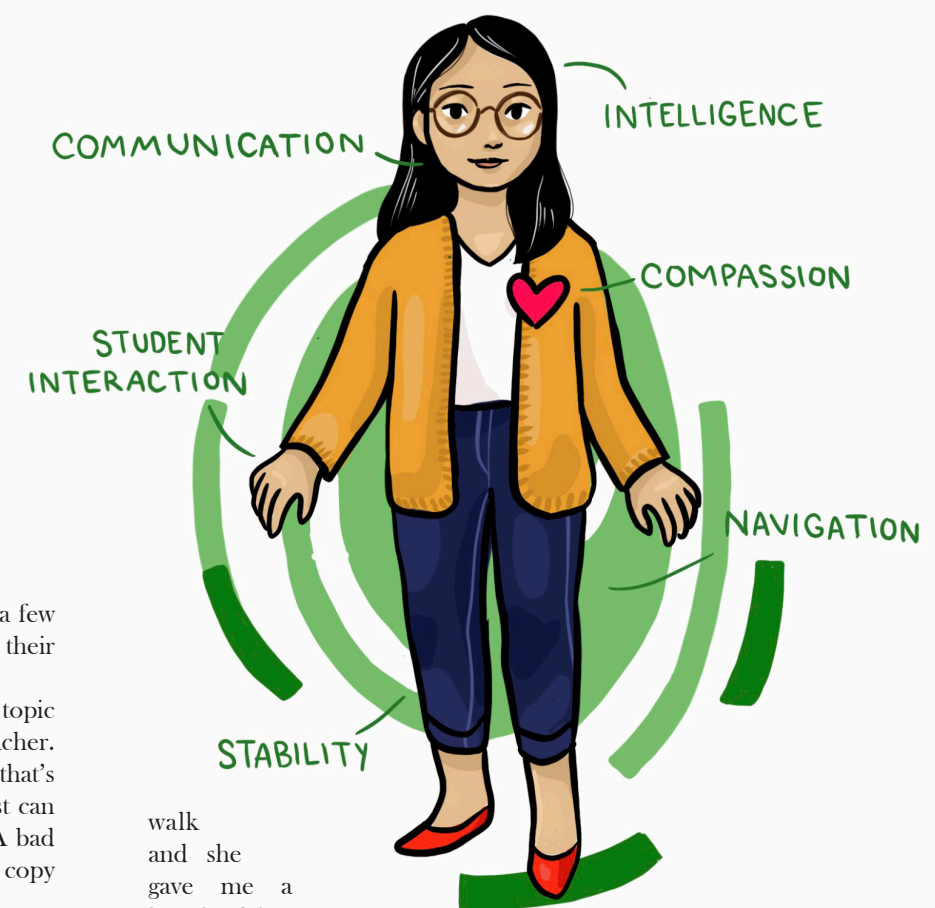
Personality traits

Compassion, empathy, and understanding constantly come up as traits excellent teachers possess. Whether that be in a student's moment of need emotionally or physically, outstanding teachers always exhibit kindness and understanding.

The saying goes that 'patience is a virtue', and these values transfer seamlessly into the classroom setting. "[Good teachers] work with different students and understand that not everybody learns at the same pace or learns the same way, and I think that having that patience is really helpful," freshman Declan Herlihy says.

Knowing that one's teacher cares about their students on both a professional and personal level provides a support system on which students can comfortably rely.

Freshman Medhanit Desta recalls a specific moment of compassion during a particularly stressful day. "I was crying one day and [my English teacher Dr. Simel] took me out and gave me a nice conversation, and we went on a nice



walk and she gave me a bunch of tissues.

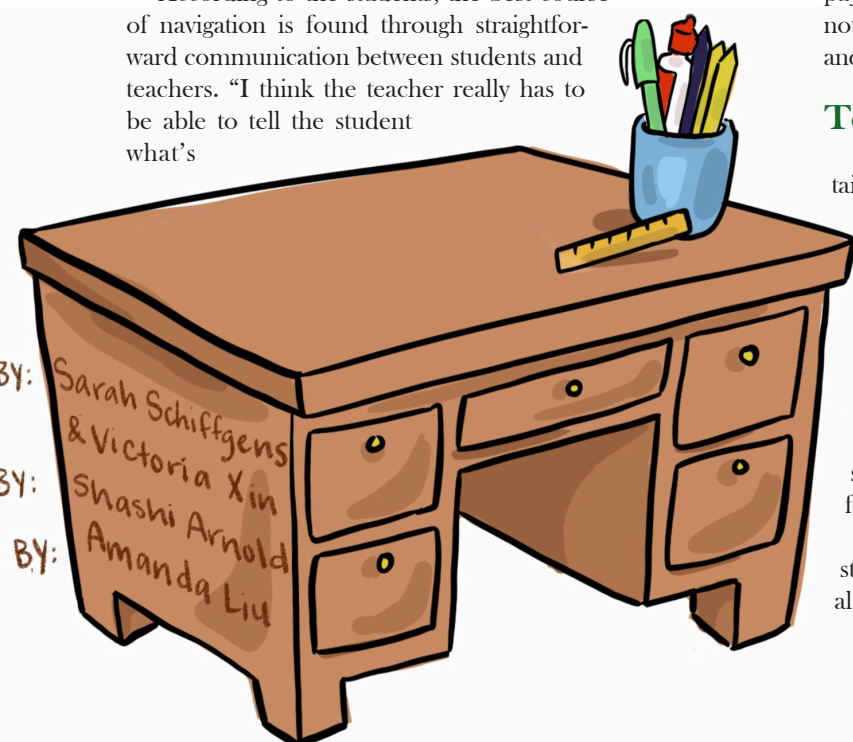
I was feeling a lot better [afterwards]."

Compassion is greater than showing kindness: It also extends to reassurance and support. When students begin to doubt themselves, good teachers are pillars that they can lean on during emotionally difficult times.

Junior Elizabeth Olsen witnessed a moment of true kindness after school during a help session for an AP course. "[Another student] was saying how he felt incredibly inadequate, and not smart enough to be in [his AP Chemistry] class, and he felt like all of his classmates were judging him, he felt like he was comparing himself all the time, and he was very emotional, he felt like he was about to cry," she says.

"[Magnet math teacher Edward] Kirk's response was one of the nicest things I've ever heard a teacher say, where in this very kind but slightly stern voice was like, 'You're smart, you're enough, you don't need to compare yourself, because you know what you're doing,'" Olsen says. "He really was able to communicate to that kid... the importance of valuing one's own intelligence."

With administrations breathing down teachers' necks, countless education theories dictating their every response, and a roomful of rowdy high schoolers to control, it does seem impossible for teachers to do everything right. Yet some teachers still manage to do it.



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