



WHAT iGNITES US

Souderton Charter School Collaborative

Where *How Are You?* Is More Than A Rote Greeting

Souderton Charter School Collaborative: Souderton, PA

By: Joy Rosser

jrosser@kcsd.org

Joy Rosser is currently serving as secretary on the DVR-PASCD board, teaching sixth grade science at Kennett Middle School, serving on the Pennsylvania Don Eichhorn Schools: Schools to Watch State Evaluation Team and is president of the southeast regional PAMLE board. Joy is expanding her research and writing; discovering ways people are being ignited within educational institutions, among student interactions, and within families affiliated with education.

For a proven, innovative, nurturing learning environment paired with values and a mission committed to lifelong learning, Souderton Charter School Collaborative (SCSC) does not disappoint. The emotional, academic, and social wellness of students is a top priority; students thrive in an engaging environment that drives and motivates their minds and spirits.

SCSC recently joined 35 other Pennsylvania middle-grades schools previously recognized based on a schoolwide collaboratively written application and an evaluative visit from the STW state team. Collaborative and shared leadership, teachers striving to build relationships, and students committed to personal learning and responsibility were all evident in the application and STW visit. SCSC was recognized at the Pennsylvania Association for Middle Level Education State Conference in February and at the STW National Conference in Washington, D.C. in June, along with other schools from across the country.

Specifically, students at SCSC benefit from a challenging and invigorating learning environment, but more importantly, they benefit from a caring atmosphere driven by tenets and interactions that set their school apart from many others. Each day, students are asked *How are you?* Although this might seem like a commonplace greeting, SCSC takes it to greater heights with the hearts of students as the focal point. Each student responds daily via Google Classroom followed by personal responses from teachers – in the form of a conversation or even a personal sticky note on their desk. SCSC values the daily check-ins because they afford students an opportunity to share challenges, concerns, and celebrations. It's one of the many building blocks that puts student wellness at the forefront.

Students reflect regularly on the tenets of cooperation, assertiveness, responsibility, empathy and self-control (for more information, see Responsive Classroom:

<https://www.responsiveclassroom.org/about/principles-practices/>). Building independence and responsibility, students introspectively ask *Why Am I Learning?* and *What Am I Personally Working On?* In the current school year, students voted to focus on the areas of positive energy, integrity and sportsmanship in addition to the standard tenets. With students driving the vision of what is expected of themselves and their community, there is a unique investment coupled with a strong sense of self. The tentacles of good character are far reaching and mutually beneficial for all stakeholders.

In speaking with Lead Teachers, Jeannine Dunn and Julie Cook, it is evident there is an enthusiasm for supporting and encouraging the uniqueness of each child. Specifically, the I-search yearlong independent study allows all students to choose one topic or passion to investigate for a year-long study. Supported by staff, peers, and community members, students become experts in their selected realm and culminate their learning with a presentation to peers. Bagpiping, Bee Keeping, Geology, Sailing, Sewing, Metal Working, and Butterfly Gardening are just a few of the many topics explored by students. In effect, students take ownership of their topic as an endeavor for personal growth.

Student wellness and a true sense of belonging at SCSC start with the genuine age old question of *How Are You?* and span out to an array of interactions, relationships, activities, projects, and collaborations; all which feed and fuel great character and motivation in students. SCSC ties academics with boundless opportunities to create a thriving, caring environment for students.