



## WHAT iGNITES US

### Mastery and Growth Orients Student Success

Springton Lake Middle School: Media, PA

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Students begin their journey at Springton Lake Middle School in Media, Pennsylvania with an admirable, unique outlook as young adolescents. RJ Palacio's summer reading book, *Wonder*, sets the emotional and social stage for the incoming student body, encouraging students to adopt a caring, empathetic, and embracing attitude towards others. And they do. Additionally, Palacio impresses upon readers, *It's not enough to be friendly. You have to be a friend*. Through the halls and classrooms of Springton Lake Middle School, friends are an unlimited entity, creating a warm and inviting environment.

With students who value themselves and those around them, it comes as no surprise that they also value the depth of learning. The staff at Springton Lake has embarked upon a mastery oriented adventure where learning is a result of intrinsic motivation with an emphasis on depth and growth. Cathy Vatterott's text, *Rethinking Grading*, provides a schoolwide platform for ongoing professional development in grading reform whereby the focus is on the learning; grades are a communication vehicle, not a motivator. She emphasizes, *In our relentless pursuit of the almighty A and the perfect GPA, something got lost – learning* (Vatterott, 2015). In support, the 2017-2018 Springton Lake Middle School Statement of Beliefs recognizes that *effective and ongoing assessment is an essential element of the teaching and learning process*. Principal, Dr. Bob Salladino, prioritizes the success of all students with a concentration on timing of comprehension. Synchronizing the content with the moment of comprehension is key to learning; reshaping a grade centric culture into a mastery environment is key to motivation.

To accomplish in depth, genuine learning and intrinsic motivation, parents can expect a consistent, strong commitment from the staff at Springton Lake MS. Grade calculations are a reflection of learning objectives, not of work habits, thereby eliminating participation and effort as contributors to overall grades. The final outcome or product of the learning is valued greater than the steps taken to achievement, diminishing the pressure of homework influencing grade calculations. Teachers provide multiple opportunities for mastery in an effort to prevent student elected *opt-outs*. Cohesively, grading practices are unified across the building. Students can expect a middle school experience that generates intrinsic motivational values such as interest, curiosity, pride, autonomy and personal success. Learning is an outcome resulting from students' intrinsic desires to accomplish mastery and improve self-esteem. The Springton Lake staff knows

and believes that the success of young adolescents is established through a love of learning, not simply a love for letter grades.

W.B. Yeats, Irish author of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, reminds us, *Education is not the filling of a bucket, but the lighting of a fire.* Springton Lake Middle School is a place where students are ignited to learn, where they appreciate that mastering new material is not solely to fill their bucket. The mastery serves as a catalyst for greater, deeper learning, illuminating a life-long path of achievement.