



Middle School Student Sound Off

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Middle school is amazing, exhilarating, difficult, and easy all at the same time. For some people, middle school is the best years of their lives, but for others, they could be the worst years. There are bullies and late work and stress, but there is also growth, the opportunity to make new friends, and the opportunity to discover yourself more. My experience as a middle school student has had all of these challenges already, and I am not even through my eighth grade year. There are times at school where I feel nothing but joy, and there are also parts where all I feel is sad and empty. All students should have a voice in school, but sadly, a lot of them do not have voices or feel like they cannot use their voice. We need to help those students stand up for themselves. We need to make a change.

As a middle schooler, I have a few hobbies that make all of the bad stuff worth it. One of my favorite things about middle school is that I have all of my wonderful friends and the hobbies that I love in one place. There are people in my life who say to me that school is not about friends, and that it should be to focus on your studies. But to me, my friends are everything when it comes to school. The reason that I want to get up in the morning and go to school is to see my friends. School would be even harder than it already is if I didn't have even just one of them. My favorite part about school other than my friends is my favorite classes, orchestra and art. When I get up in the morning, I am already thinking about orchestra. In fact, while writing this, my orchestra music is playing in my head on repeat. The first thing that I think about is how I can improve on parts of the music and where I can fit more practice time into my day. Art is the same. I think about how I am going to add more details to my painting and the basic colors I need to lay down. For me, these classes are almost like an escape from the rest of middle school. I am so thankful that they have these classes as an option. All in all, my favorite things about school are my art projects, and playing music in orchestra.

To be completely honest, middle school is a killjoy to not only me, but a lot of people. On the other hand though, there are the few things in middle school that make me so full of joy it is crazy. One of these things is, again, my friends. They are the people that make the whole school day worth it. One thing

that we do is in the morning, we all go and meet up in one of the bathrooms or the locker rooms and we just have fun. We dance, play music, and sometimes get kicked out. It is difficult to find a spot to hang out that is not in the bathrooms or the locker rooms because in our lunch rooms, you are only allowed to sit four to a table at breakfast and eight to a table at lunch (even though there are eight seats), and we usually have eight of us. We also do not like to hang out in our designated team areas because we are not only on different teams, but the bullies usually gather there in the mornings. Another thing that they help to make it fun is lunch. Although we can't sit eight to a table, a few of us will usually sit at a table nearby so that we can still talk to each other. In the end, my friends are what make me the happiest at school, even though we have to compromise our hangouts sometimes.

Safety in school is a big priority today as school shootings and other crimes at school have gone up. There is also the matter of not feeling safe around certain people. Taking both of these into consideration, there are only a few places at school where I feel the safest. One of those places is in the counselor's office. This is because there is nobody around to judge or ridicule me, and it is a pretty isolated room. Another place I feel safest is in the art room. Usually, there are only nice people in there and not anybody who likes to make fun of people. It is also just a pretty calm room overall which makes the vibe feel almost more secure. I think that these two places are so comforting to me because in the rest of the school, yes, I feel safe from physical harm almost all the time, but there are not a lot of places where I feel safe from being targeted by bullies. Overall, there are two spots at my school that I feel most safe and comfortable in.

The quote, "You just don't understand," is one that I use a lot. I think that I use this quote because I sometimes feel as if the adults in my life really do not understand. They say that they were a teenager once too and that they know how it is to feel a certain way, but the truth is they don't really know. Schools have changed quite a bit since my parents have been in it, and they do not understand how the public school system is today. At my school, we have our own groups. Nobody really talks to anybody outside of their groups. There are usually a few of the "popular" kid groups and then a few other groups that just separate and go on their own. They say that if you don't have anybody to hang out with, make new friends. But the thing is that you can't make new friends because you have known all these people your whole life and they spread rumors and make things up about you. I do genuinely wish that the adults understood more why we have changes in behavior or why we say we do not have anybody to hang out with when we haven't talked to anybody new, but I also think that the teenagers need to help them understand these things. In conclusion, I think that some parents and teachers do not understand school completely, and that the teenagers in the adult's lives need to help them understand better.

In my opinion, overall, teens are viewed as “lazy” or “not caring about anything”, but what I see is people who have their priorities set on one thing because the other is not as important. This might seem confusing to adults or even other teenagers, but let me explain. As an example, let’s say a cluttered room and practicing an instrument. The only thing that a lot of adult’s brains think when they walk in is how dirty the room is and how it needs to be cleaned up right that second. But personally for me, my priority is set on other stuff because having a messy room does not matter as much to me. What is running through my brain is a mental list of things. I need to do and what order they go in. First talking to my friends (because it is the weekend and we cannot just talk whenever we want at school), and then practicing piano. After that, practicing for any upcoming speeches or events. Next after that is getting ready. I usually will call my friends and chat for a while after this. The next priority is showering. Then, the final thing that I worry about is sleeping. Cleaning my room is not in my top priorities. I know that it might bother parents and guardians to see a messy room, but a lot of teens including myself have a mental schedule, even if they do not realize they do. I think that this is one of the most important aspects that parents need to know. When they walk in our rooms and see some clothes and trash on the floor and us sitting in our rooms, they immediately jump to the conclusion that we have been sitting there all day and that we have not been productive. Some days, in the teenager world, being on your phone is you being productive. Sometimes just having a day where you just talk to your friends is what you need. Teenagers are proven to have a decline in their mental health during these years because their brains are still developing. So, just a word of advice, if your teenager is sitting in their room and apparently doing nothing, do not immediately jump to conclusions. One solution is talking to them and asking why they are sitting in their room and seeing if they are upset. In my opinion, this small act could improve people’s mental and physical health substantially.

Being a middle schooler is tough. You never know what is going to happen next. It could be something that you think will make your life ruined, or it could be an eye opener. A few of the biggest challenges in middle school are bullies, friends, and grades (speaking from my personal experiences of course). With bullies, it is complicated. People will tell you to just report them, or to just ignore them, but that gets hard. When you have people constantly belittling you with their only goal being to make you feel bad about yourself it is hard. Yes, you can try to ignore it, but it will always get to you eventually. There are not only bad things about middle school, though. There are new opportunities everywhere you look. For example, I just joined oral interpretation a couple of weeks ago. Even essay contests like these are a great opportunity to not only show my writing skills, but also share my thoughts and feelings. Therefore, middle school presents lots of challenges, one of the biggest ones being bullies, but it also presents more new opportunities.

Middle school is messy, exciting, and stressful all at the same time. All of these aspects combined help me to be the confident and optimistic middle schooler I am. Some things that also make everything worth it are my friends, orchestra, and art classes. These hobbies make school the best that it can be. One of the things at school that makes me feel the most joy is again, my friends. When I hang out with them everything else seems to just go away. There are also very few places in the school where I feel completely safe. The places where I do feel the most safe are the art room and the counselor's office. Middle school is also a point in time where adults tend to perceive teenagers differently than how we actually are. Adults do not always understand us or our actions, but I think that in order for them to understand us we have to teach them. Middle school also presents incredible opportunities that are a once in a lifetime experience. All in all, middle school has so many good parts, but also a few bad parts. As we get older, we will learn this. Life is always going to have good times and bad times, you just have to look at the good times rather than the bad times.