



Navigating the Ship from Middle School to High School

Guiding Adolescents Through Transition with
Purpose, Pride, and Support

Dr. Lynn Fought & Stephanie Anderson
Grounded in 10 to 25 by Dr. David Yeager

Who We Are



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Overarching theme:

To transform school culture, educators must master self-regulation to create safe environments (Conscious Discipline) while holding high academic standards paired with authentic respect (David Yeager: 10-25)—empowering students of all ages to manage their emotions and engage deeply in their learning.

Purpose in Schools & for Students

- **Conscious Discipline** sets the foundation by teaching **educators** to regulate their own emotions first, creating a safe, connected school climate where **students** learn the social-emotional skills needed to stay calm and focus on learning.
- **10 to 25** builds on that foundation by guiding **educators** to adopt a mentor mindset—pairing high expectations with genuine respect—so **adolescent students** feel valued, motivated, and willing to take on hard challenges without fear of public embarrassment.



Who's in the Room?



The "Two-Sided Business Card"

- Everyone will share:
 1. **Side A (The Official Title):** What your email signature says you do.
 2. **Side B (The Real Title):** What you *actually* do in plain English or a fun 3-word summary (e.g., "*Chief Fire Extinguisher*" or "*Adolescent Translator*").

We are going to give you a bit to think of your “**Real Title.**” When we tell you, you will share with your shoulder partner. The person with the birthday the closest to today will go first.

1-2-4 Brainstorming Strategy

The Single Highest-Risk Academic Leap.

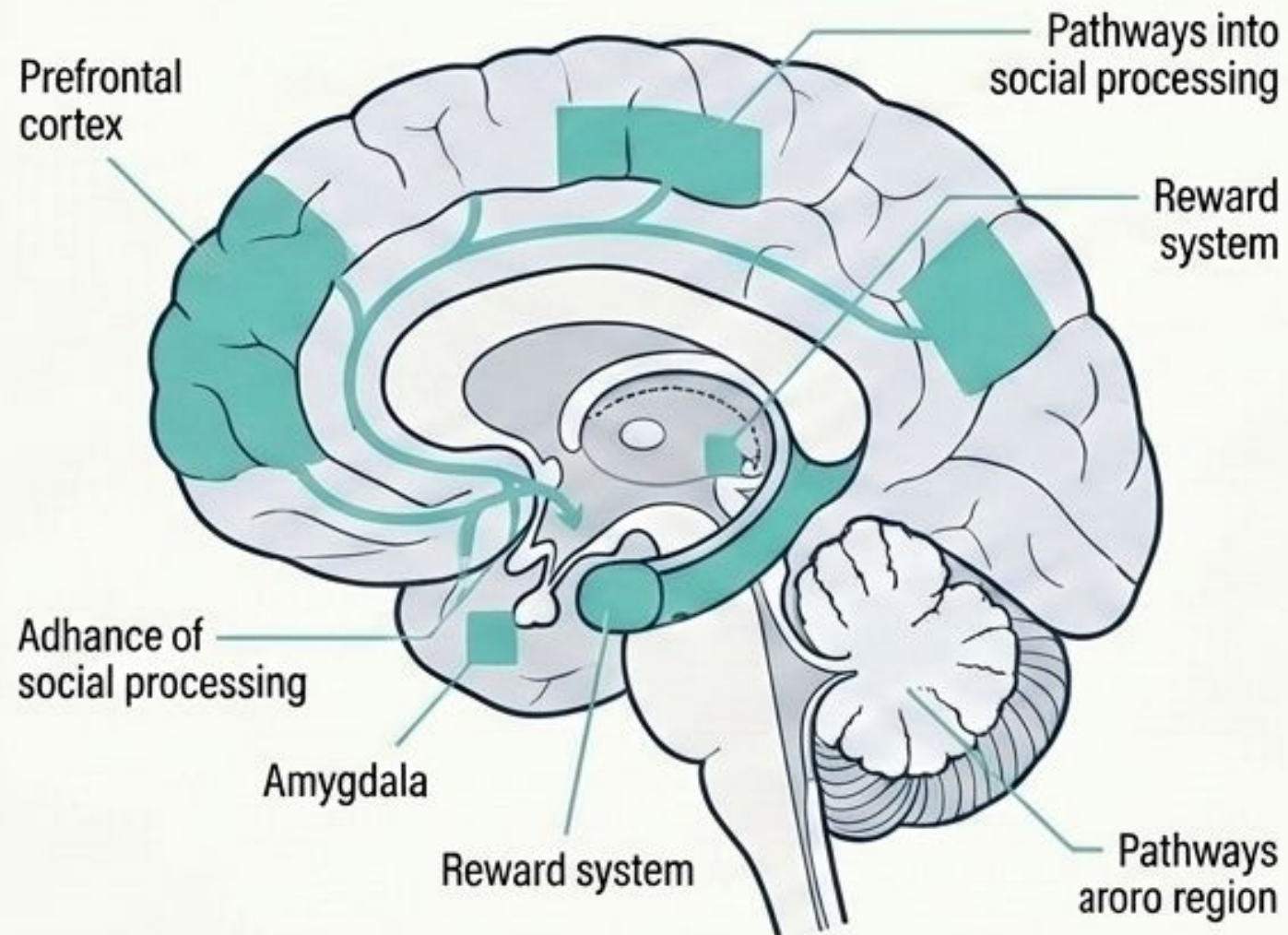
The Predictor

9th-grade GPA and course completion are the #1 predictors of high school graduation.

The Preparation

Middle school is where we build the hull to survive that wave. Waiting until high school is too late.

The biological drive for status and respect



Rapid Neural Remodeling (Ages 10–15)

Brains in this age bracket are biologically hardwired to crave social status, respect, and autonomy.

The Root of Defiance

Misbehavior in middle school is rarely random. It is almost always a direct neurobiological reaction to feeling patronized, disrespected, or treated like a child.

The Neurobiological Incompetence Model

The Myth:

~~Teens have a biological flaw or a malfunction in their prefrontal cortex that makes them inherently defiant, irrational, and difficult to manage.~~

The Science: Rapid Neural Remodeling (Ages 10-25)

The brain is not malfunctioning; it is heavily optimizing. Adolescents possess a profound, hardwired neurobiological drive for:

- **Social Status**
- **Authentic Respect**
- **Autonomy**

What Type of Mindset Do You Have with Your Students?



- 1. The Enforcer**
- 2. The Mentor**
- 3. The Protector**



Choose your default leadership mindset



The Enforcer
(High Standards, Low Support)

Result: Mutiny

Active resistance, compliance without growth, underground rebellion.

The Mentor
(High Standards, High Support)

Result: Navigation

Ownership, resilience, self-efficacy, high achievement.

The Protector
(Low Standards, High Support)

Result: Drifting

Fragility, anxiety when facing high school expectations.



ACTIVITY / DISCUSSION



**Think for a minute about your time as a teacher
and as an administrator.**

**Which of these sounds like how you would
describe your default mindset?**

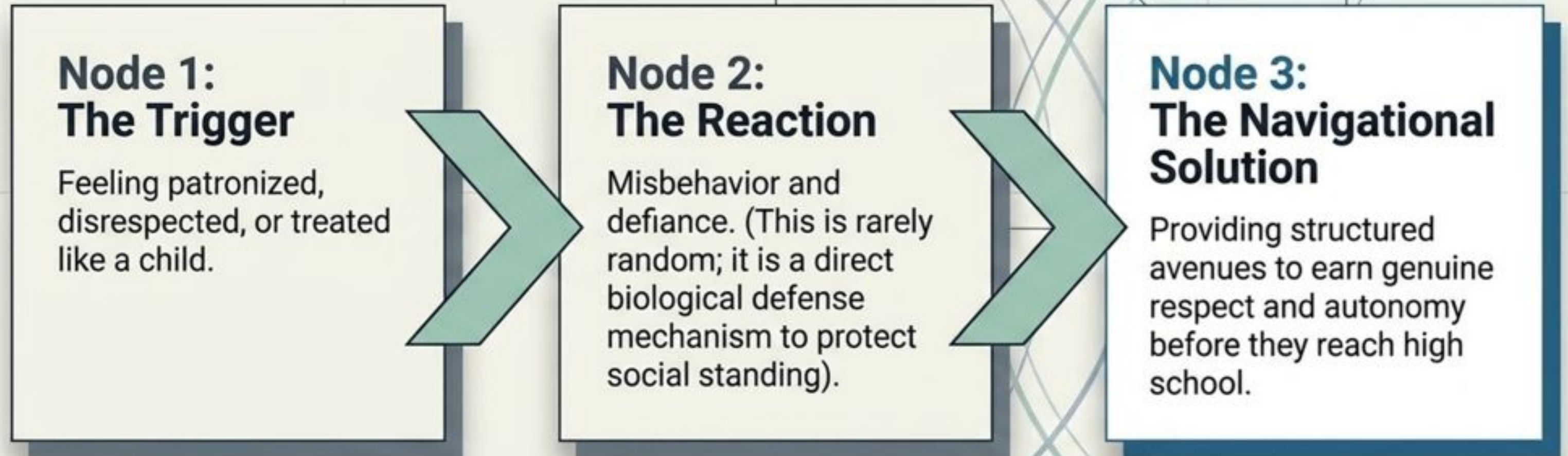
Why do you think that?

**When the timer begins share with your shoulder
partner.**

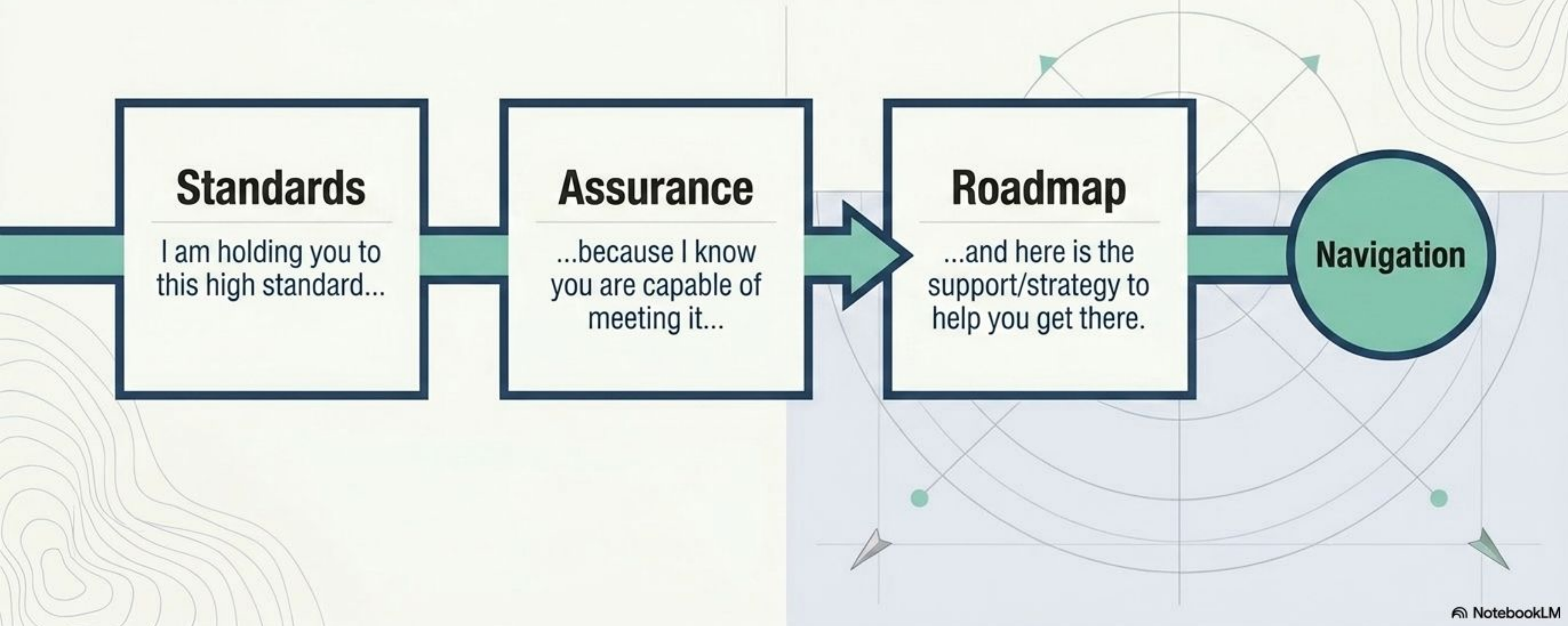
Think/Pair/Share Activity

****The person with the longest hair will go first.***

The Root of Resistance



The exact sequence to trigger partnership instead of defiance



How the Mentor mindset shifts the language of correction

Traditional Approach

Enforcer:

Redo this assignment by tomorrow or you get a zero.

(Triggers threat response)

Protector:

It's okay, middle school writing is tough for everyone.

(Lowering the bar secretly signals to the student that you don't believe they are capable).

Wise Mentor Feedback

Wise Mentor:

This draft doesn't meet 8th-grade standards yet, but I'm returning it because I know you can produce high-school-ready work. Here are two specific revisions to start with.

Build structural safety nets to ensure adolescent autonomy



1. Autonomy with Boundaries

Replace passive study halls with student-led goal setting and campus roles. Give middle school students real voice in school culture.



2. Growth-Mindset Discipline

Treat disciplinary incidents as navigational course corrections. Implement restorative conferences to preserve student status and dignity.



3. Peer Helmsmen

Pair middle school students with high school mentors. Near-peer guidance is 3x more effective than adult lectures on high school readiness.

Evaluate your school's current transition alignment



Culture & Language Check: Do teachers use high school as a threat (“Wait until you get to high school...”) or an exciting voyage?



Discipline Review: Are office referrals handled restoratively, offering a clear path back to respect and community standing?



Cross-Building Bridge: Do middle and high school department heads meet quarterly to align standards and handoffs?

Action Item: Identify ONE item above to target for your next administrative PLC meeting. (5-Minute Table Discussion)

Transition is a continuous year-long bridge

Phase 1: Fall (Setting Course)



Focus: Staff Mindsets

Actions: Train faculty on Wise Feedback.
Establish student-led goal-setting.

Phase 2: Winter (Mid-Voyage)



Focus: Early Warning

Actions: Identify “at-risk for transition” students.
Implement high-support academic clinics.

Phase 3: Spring (Approaching Harbor)



Focus: High School/Junior High Handoff

Actions: Host student-to-student transition summits.
campus visits focused on belonging, not intimidation.

The Formula for Wise Feedback



To deliver feedback that young people actually trust and act on, use this explicit transparency framework:

1. **State the High Standard:** Make it clear what excellence looks like and that you aren't lowering the bar.
2. **Convey Personal Belief and Support:** Explicitly state *why* you are giving the critique: *"I'm giving you this feedback because I know you are capable of reaching this high standard, and I'm committed to helping you get there."*
3. **Provide Actionable Next Steps:** Give concrete guidance on what to fix, keeping the focus entirely on growth and mastery rather than fixed traits or smarts.

Students take the helm when they feel authentic respect

When we treat middle schoolers with authentic respect and hold them to high standards, they don't just survive the transition to high school—they take the helm of their own future.

1: What is ONE shift your leadership team can make this month from 'Enforcer' to 'Mentor'?

2. What supports do your teachers need to practice and provide “wise feedback” to their students?



Practical Strategies for Educators and Parents

- **Ditch the "Praise Sandwich":** Traditional methods (praise, criticism, praise) often feel manipulative to youth ages 10 to 25. Instead, lead with your high expectations and your absolute belief in their potential to meet them.
- **Reframe Struggle as Part of Mastery:** Explicitly tell students or children that encountering difficulty on a hard task is normal. Frame the struggle not as evidence that they lack capability, but as proof that they are engaging in real, high-level learning.
- **Ask Authentic Questions First:** Before handing down evaluations, prompt them to evaluate their own work first. Ask: *"What part of this draft feels strongest to you, and where do you think it still needs a push?"* This honors their status, autonomy, and perspective.
- **Normalize Final-Stretch Reassurance:** Young people experience intense self-doubt during high-stakes moments (like final exams, big projects, or performance milestones). Use repeated transparency statements right before these hurdles to remind them that your high standards are backed by total support.



YEAGER OUTLINES

5 CORE INSTRUCTIONAL & BEHAVIORAL PILLARS

1. TRANSPARENCY
 2. QUESTIONING OVER LECTURING
 3. REFRAMING STRESS
 4. TAPPING INTO PURPOSE
 5. PROTECTING STATUS AND BELONGING
- 

1. **TRANSPARENCY:** EXPLAIN THE RATIONALE BEHIND SCHOOL RULES, ASSIGNMENTS AND POLICIES RATHER THAN RELYING ON “BECAUSE I SAID SO.” YOUNG PEOPLE RESPECT AUTHORITY WHEN THEY UNDERSTAND ITS PURPOSE.
2. **QUESTIONING OVER LECTURING:** USE BACK AND FORTH DIALOGUE TO GUIDE STUDENTS TOWARD SOLVING PROBLEMS THEMSELVES. ASKING THOUGHTFUL QUESTIONS HONORS THEIR AUTONOMY AND BUILDS DECISION-MAKING-SKILLS.



3. REFRAMING STRESS: TEACH STUDENTS THAT PHYSIOLOGICAL STRESS (SWEATY PALMS, RACING HEART) IS NORMAL MOBILIZATION OF ENERGY TO HELP THEM FACE A CHALLENGE, NOT A SIGN THEY ARE FAILING, OR INCAPABLE.

4. TAPPING INTO PURPOSE: MOTIVATE STUDENTS BY CONNECTING LEARNING AND BEHAVIOR TO PROSOCIAL GOALS - SKILLS THAT ALLOW THEM TO CONTRIBUTE TO COMMUNITIES OR MAKE AND IMPACT.

(FIELD TRIPS, SCHOOL VISITORS, COMMUNITY SERVICE)

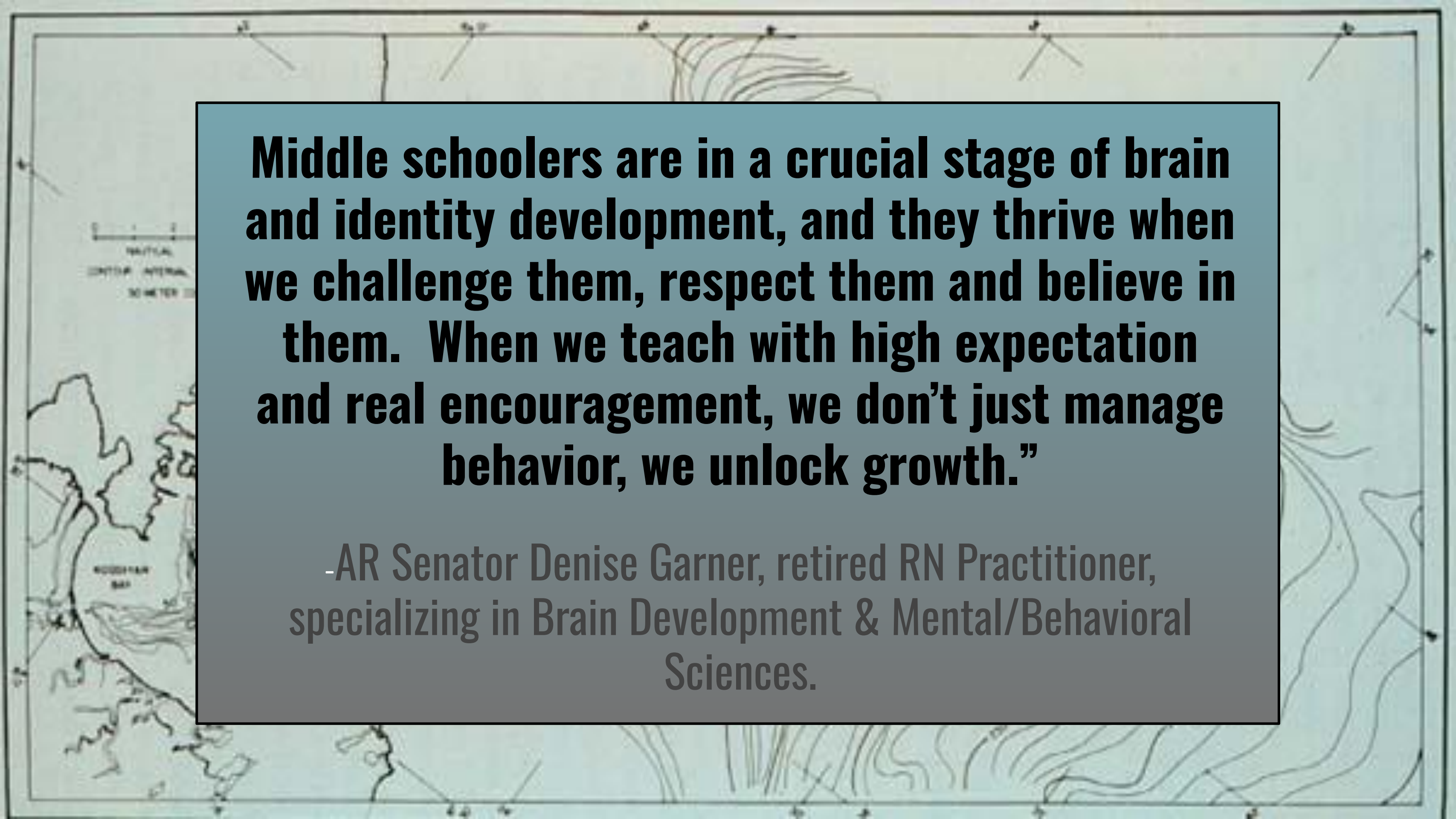


5. PROTECTING STATUS AND BELONGING: AVOID PUBLIC REPRIMAND OR PUNITIVE TACTICS THAT TRIGGER SHAME. CREATE A CULTURE WHERE EVERY STUDENT FEELS VALUED PREVENTS DROPOUT, BEHAVIORAL ESCALATION, AND DISENGAGEMENT.

QUESTION:

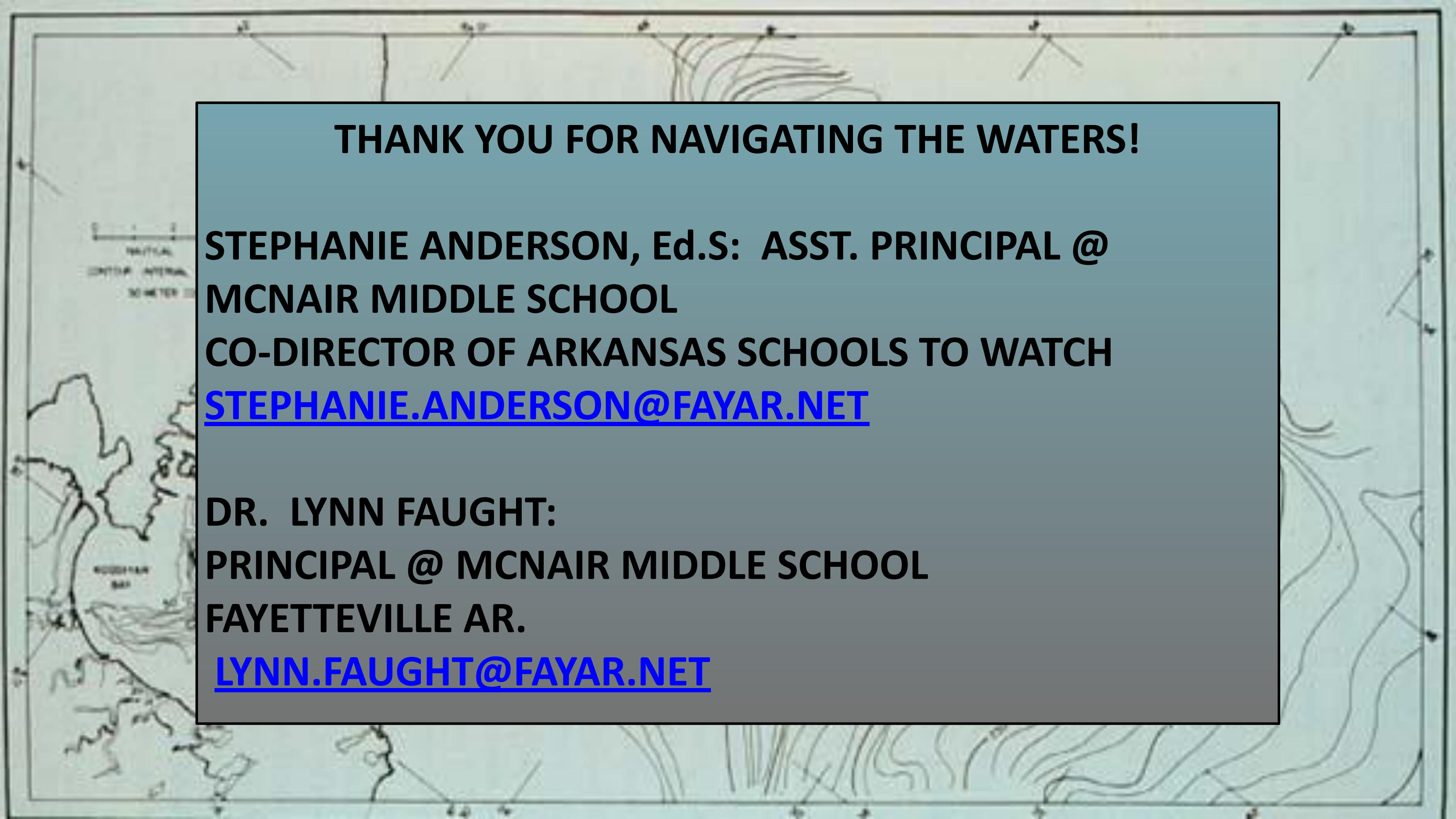
**HOW DOES THIS LOOK IN THE CLASSROOM?
WITH PARENTS?
IN YOUR OFFICE MEETING WITH STUDENTS?**



A topographic map with contour lines and a scale bar. The scale bar is labeled "NAUTICAL MILES" and "KILOMETERS". The map shows a coastline on the left and a body of water labeled "HUDSON BAY".

Middle schoolers are in a crucial stage of brain and identity development, and they thrive when we challenge them, respect them and believe in them. When we teach with high expectation and real encouragement, we don't just manage behavior, we unlock growth."

-AR Senator Denise Garner, retired RN Practitioner, specializing in Brain Development & Mental/Behavioral Sciences.



THANK YOU FOR NAVIGATING THE WATERS!

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