



# Champion a Student

## DIRECTIONS FOR THE FACILITATOR

Evidence shows that students do better in all areas of school if they have at least one adult in the building that they trust. Some schools have a beginning-of-the-year survey where students give their feedback regarding such things as clubs they may be interested in, field trips they would like to experience, or hobbies they have outside of school. Such a survey would be an ideal opportunity to also find out if students can identify someone in the building (teacher, administrator, counselor, social worker, etc) who they feel comfortable talking to should they need the help of a trusted adult. Being an educator who champions students requires a combination of empathy, understanding, and actions that prioritize student success and well-being. This workshop is intended to cultivate empathy in instructional leaders and/or teachers. Participants will learn practical strategies to enhance their empathic skills.

### Agenda:

- What does it take to champion a student
- Championing a student strategy
- Collective Reflection and Action steps

### Introduction:

Facilitator starts with reflecting on the work done so far in understanding how to have more empathic interactions with students, in particular those who are not flourishing in our mathematics classrooms. Remind participants of the activities they have engaged in so far and what we have learned (What happened to you Book Club, Portrait of a Student: Creation, Portrait of Students: Analysis, Empathy Video Analyses, Empathy Play Analyses, E.M.P.A.T.H.Y™ Observation Protocol).

In this session, we will work on a specific empathy strategy that we can enact right now. We begin by committing to Champion ONE student who is not flourishing mathematically. We then brainstorm empathic responses to comments that your student might say during your mentoring relationship. We then reflect with peers on the lessons we learned during the mentoring relationship, any common patterns across mentoring experiences, and future strategies you can implement to create environments in which all students' mathematical identities are supported in positive ways.

## Part 1: Prepare yourself to Champion a Student

As you begin your journey towards championing a student, you may face scenarios similar to those listed in the following section. This activity will have participants brainstorm what their real-time responses might be if a student displays this behavior and/or makes these comments. **Do not speak hypothetically** (e.g., "I would say something like this...") **instead choose someone in the room to play the role of the student and respond as you would to the situation.** Each of these scenarios has been provided on individual slides and displayed one at a time, or you may wish to print them on cards for individual contemplation and reflection, followed by whole group sharing and discussion.

1. During a small group activity, the student avoids participating, convinced that they lack the innate ability to excel in the subject. They express, *"I'm just not a math person, it's not for me."*
2. When a student who has a low grade in math class says to you *"I always get bad grades in math, no matter how much I study. I am just no good at math!"*
3. The student asks you for help with math after school. The assignment is long and procedure heavy. Frustration mounts and they exclaim, *"I'll never understand this stuff, it's too hard."*
4. During one of your one-on-one meetings, the student tells you they got in a verbal altercation with their math teacher today. The teacher heard the student say, *"I'm never going to use calculus in real life."* and said to your student, *"With that attitude, you're right. You might not pass it in college either."*
5. As you walk with your student to math class, the student expresses dread and reluctance, wishing they could skip the class entirely. *"Math class is the worst part of my day."*
6. During group work, you approach your student's small group. As soon as they see you they say, *"I'm in the dumb kids' group. That's why the teacher put us all in the same group."*
7. Your student says, *"I don't get why my math teacher doesn't like me. All my other teachers do."*
8. Your female student says, *"Everybody knows, girls can't do math."*
9. Your student says, *"My teacher always calls on the smart kids, even though I have my hand raised. And when she calls on me and I'm wrong, she says 'Good try. Who can help Emily get it right?'"*
10. Your student calls you over to help them with a math question on a test, saying *"This question doesn't even make sense..."* but it's less than 1 minute since the

start of the test, and it is evident to you that they have not yet put effort into attempting to answer the question.

11. A student who is generally less confident gives an enthusiastic but incorrect answer out loud, and other students laugh.
  12. You notice that a young girl of color is in your regular math class. She is quiet and does not participate much, but her grasp of math concepts appears strong when you look at her work. You encourage her to share her thinking with the class, but she shyly refuses.
- Present these scenarios to the participants and have them discuss as a group, how would you react to a teacher/parent/guardian/administrator/coaches when they make these statements in a way that shows Empathy? **Do not speak hypothetically** (e.g., "I would say something like this...") **instead choose someone in the room to play the role in the scenario and respond as you would to the situation.**
    1. The parent/guardian reviews their child's recent math assignments and notices numerous errors. Feeling exasperated, they confront their child, saying, *"You need to pay more attention and stop making careless mistakes. Math is a skill you can't afford to be careless with."*
    2. During a homework session involving complex formulas, the parent/guardian notices their child's frustration. With impatience, they say, *"You need to stop complaining and start working through the problems. Math won't get any easier if you give up."*
    3. A teacher returns graded math tests to the class. Disappointed, they scold a student with a below-average score, saying, *"You need to start taking your studies more seriously. These grades aren't acceptable."*
    4. A teacher notices a student sitting alone during group activities and approaching math problems hesitantly. With a tone of frustration, the teacher says, *"You need to start participating more actively in group work. You can't expect others to carry you through."*
    5. A math coach observes a disengaged student during a math lesson and attributes their lack of participation to laziness. Frustrated, the coach remarks, *"You need to start showing more effort in class. Math is important, whether you like it or not."*
    6. A math coach observes their child's lack of enthusiasm towards math. With a sigh, they remark, *"You need to stop making excuses and start taking responsibility for your grades. You're capable of doing better if you put in the effort."*
    7. An administrator notices a student's reluctance to show their work on math assignments during a classroom observation. Irritated, they say, *"You need to*

*stop being so stubborn. Showing your work is crucial and you would need to do that in your future workplace"*

8. An administrator overhears a student expressing doubts about the relevance of algebra. With annoyance, they respond, *"You need to stop questioning everything and just do the work. Algebra is a fundamental skill that you'll need whether you realize it now or not."*
9. *During a parent conference, the parent exclaims that "I was never a math student, so I totally understand my son's low grades in math. He got it from me."*
10. *During a parent conference, the parent laments their students' low grade in math, to which the assistant principal responds "hey - math isn't for everyone."*
11. *You overhear a group of parents talking - "half the stuff they taught me in math class I have never even used! Like the pythagorean theorem and the slope formula - it was torture! Who uses that stuff anyway?"*
12. *A teacher is concerned with a student joining his class half-way through the second semester, and laments "these migrant kids never know anything. Why should I try to teach them if their scores don't count?"*

## **Part 2: Championing ONE Student**

Now that you are prepared, let's start with one student. The goal of this activity is to build your empathic capacity, the ability to perceive, process, and respond to a student when they are experiencing an adverse event. If you are a classroom teacher, pick one student who is not yet flourishing mathematically in your classroom and who you would like to know more about. If you are an instructional coach, pick a student who is not yet flourishing mathematically and inform their classroom teacher that you will serve as their Champion for the remainder of the school year or as long as you designate.

### **The Mentor Role:**

Spend time developing a relationship with the student.

1. Start each conversation with a positive affirmation (e.g., "I noticed this week in math class that you had your hand up several times"). Champion and student each take a turn talking about something positive that has happened since you've last spoken, or something you are looking forward to. It can be related to school, but it's better if it's not school-related.
2. Ask them about their life outside of school. Discuss personal interests, goals, hobbies...etc.
3. Attend events they participate in (sports, arts, clubs, church, community events,...etc.) if possible.

4. Let them know that they too, can come to you with any concerns, or to share anything positive going on in their life.
5. Staff members may come to you with concerns or complaints about your student's behavior or effort in class. Do not feel that you need to provide disciplinary action or explanation for the behavior. Ask them what they have done to support the student when they engage in disruptive behavior or what they have done to support them academically. Trust is key to developing relationships with students, so protect the confidentiality of the student.
6. You may be the only one to actually listen to the student and their side of how things are going. You do not play an administrative role. You are not a disciplinarian. You are the advocate for the students. Listen empathically and check that your assertions are accurate by asking the student (empathic accuracy).
7. You are not the social worker or counselor. If there is an inkling of harm to self or harm to someone else, engage a social worker or counselor.

#### **Teacher Mentor Protocol:**

1. Meet with the student's other teachers to get a more full picture of the student outside of your mathematics class. Remember to listen for deficit language and teacher bias. Call the student's parent(s)/guardian(s), ask them about the things that your student likes to do for fun, how they feel about math class, and other non-invasive topics. If the student is multilingual and you do not speak their parent's/guardian's home language, write a short letter requesting this information (have the ESL teacher translate if possible).
2. Meet with the student weekly. This can be before classes begin (during Homeroom), at the beginning/end of an elective block, after school while waiting for dismissal, etc.
3. Document each session by completing the [Champion Mentoring Form](#).
4. Check in with instructional leaders, guidance counselors, teachers, administration, and social workers as needed. Let this be an opportunity to receive feedback about both your student and your classroom.
5. Do not become frustrated if the flourishing process takes longer than you anticipated.

#### **Instructional Leader Mentor Protocol:**

1. Meet with the student's teacher to find out, from their perspective, why the student is not flourishing mathematically. Remember to listen for deficit language and teacher bias. Meet with other teachers to get a more full picture of the student outside of mathematics class. Call the student's parent(s)/guardian(s), ask them about the things that your student likes to do for fun, how they feel about math class, and other non-invasive topics. If the student is multilingual and you do not speak their

parent's/guardian's home language, write a short letter requesting this information (you could ask the ESL teacher to support you in having the letter translated if possible).

2. Meet with each student weekly. This can be before classes begin (during Homeroom), at the beginning/end of an elective block, after school while waiting for dismissal...etc.
3. Visit the student during their classroom instructional time, in particular mathematics. Make observations about the students' participation as well as teacher-student interactions (you might want to use the E.M.P.A.T.H.Y.™ observation protocol).
4. Document each session by completing the [Champion Mentoring Form](#).
5. Check in with guidance counselors, teachers, administration, and social workers as needed.
6. Do not become frustrated if the flourishing process takes longer than you anticipated.

**Overall Reflection Questions:**

1. Based on your championing experience, what aspects of the student's life inside and outside of the classroom might be influencing their ability to mathematically flourish?
2. What positive changes have you observed in the student's attitude or behavior toward math since you started championing them?
3. Are there any patterns or common themes emerging from the feedback provided by teachers, parents, and other stakeholders about the student's experiences in mathematics class?
4. How can we effectively communicate with other staff members to address concerns about the student's behavior or effort in class while maintaining a focus on advocacy and support?