

# The Smith School Shadow Knows!

Here's the perfect way to see school through the eyes of today's student.

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**HAD A STOMACH** ache; I was nervous; I didn't get a good night's sleep; and according to my daughters, I was clearly on edge. I finally admitted, "I don't want to go to school!" But as my wife likes to remind me, "You know you are the superintendent!"

But this time was different. I was going to school not as the superintendent, but as an 8th-grade student who didn't have his lunch packed and didn't know if he had to change for physical education. At least my homework was 100% complete! The last time I was an 8th-grade student, I barely weighed 90 pounds, I had braces, and what was with my hair? (See above photo.) But none of this mattered—I had to go!

Last month, I spent a day at Smith Middle School as an 8th-grader as part of the *Shadow a Student Challenge*, which is a journey that starts with "seeing school through your student's eyes." And that I did.

I was lucky enough to spend the day with a beautiful, kind, smart and engaging student named Allie. We started in homeroom, which also happens to be our brand new science room. It's magnificent!

During homeroom, we listened to announcements and reviewed the schedule for the day. I was anxious about two subjects—French and algebra, as both were

not positive experiences for me in middle school. Allie did her best to assure me that I would be OK in French, but she wasn't that sure about algebra. It turns out that she knows how to size up an adult rather quickly!

We started in robotics where the teacher had a cool playlist going. We participated in a world cultures fishbowl activity, and then went to French class where I learned a few new words. In algebra, we tackled algorithms, although I have to admit I struggled. Right before lunch we engaged in a spirited conversation about an article on the West Memphis Three, and the role that perspective plays in literature.

During lunch, I successfully navigated the line to purchase a bottle of water, and then I ate my lunch. At the lunch table, I sat with five wonderful 8th grade girls. They were kind enough to tell me what they liked about Smith School, what they would change, and what type of music they were following.

So, what did I take away from the day? I learned...

- Today's learning is active and *not* passive; there was very little "receiving of information." I was asked to think from the minute I got into the classroom.
- Smith students use technology to enhance and manage their learning. There was very little if any improper use of technology going on in the classroom.
- There was a clear emphasis on thinking. In other words, it's now not just what we know, but what we do with what we know.
- Students in the 8th grade are smart, engaging, funny and kind. (Even to their superintendent!)

Thank you to all the staff and students for making my visit a special one. My experience this time around was a lot better than it was when I was sitting in Ms. Faherty's class with Patty McCarthy and Christina O'Connor, and I can't wait to do this again next year. By the way, to which school should I go next? ☺