



Stephanie Worthey

Principal

Greenbrier Springhill Elementary School

Greenbrier, Arkansas

The Stats:

- Years as principal: 7
- 2018 NAESP National Distinguished Principal®

Education:

- B.S., Education, University of Central Arkansas
- M.Ed., Arkansas Technical University
- Specialist in Education degree, Arkansas State University

School details:

- Grade span: K–5
- Number of students: 450
- 42 percent receive free or reduced-price lunch
- Built on the site of a former family farm
- Literary Association's Exemplary Reading Program 2015–2016

Nothing but Net

A former college basketball player at the University of Arkansas, Stephanie Worthey has brought her “A” game to the elementary level as principal. In opening Greenbrier Springhill Elementary in Greenbrier, Arkansas, she helped foster a connected school climate with teachers funneled from several different schools. Worthey’s successes extend beyond the school culture, as well. She spearheaded Springhill’s award-winning literacy program and won recognition as a 2018 NAESP National Distinguished Principal. She has gained plenty of wisdom during her career and has plenty to share.

On opening a new school

My focus during the building of the foundation for Springhill Elementary was directed toward relationships. One of the first activities we did involved my grouping the staff in their new grade-level teams or specialty areas and having them stand outside a hula hoop. I had them introduce themselves and gave them several sentence-stem starters to begin the process of getting to know each other. Then I asked them to all step inside the hula hoop with their new team. I could immediately see the panic on their faces and how uncomfortable they looked.

I had them step back outside the hula hoop and asked them how they felt when they were standing that close to each other. They were honest—they said it was uncomfortable because they didn’t know each other well. At the end of the year, we did the activity again, and when I asked them to step inside the hula hoop, they all began hugging each other, laughing and smiling. It was a great reflection on how far we had come.

On being engaged physically

I have always believed that students need to be taught how to live a healthy life, and being physically active should be a part of their educational experience. When students are healthy, not only do their bodies work more efficiently, but their brains also benefit. When designing systems for our students, I try to incorporate physical activity whenever possible to show them that being physically fit can be fun.

On what she’s learned from improving her school’s programs

I always tell other administrators to take ideas from other people and make them work for their students, since each school has different needs. Make the schedule fit the students; don’t fit the students into the schedule. Simple steps that could be considered for elementary students are:

- Start with special education minutes first;
- Limit out-of-general-education pullouts;
- Schedule tiered interventions in the morning, when students aren’t tired;
- Offer enrichment (gifted and talented) opportunities through project-based learning, but limit out-of-classroom time; and
- Schedule opportunities for struggling students to connect to the school through means other than academics.

On what she does outside of school for fun

My husband, Dustin, and I are usually tag-teaming practices and games for our four kids. I love working out. My health has to be a priority if I am going to perform at my best, and CrossFit is a huge part of that balance. I also love to read books! During the school year, I read only educational books, but during the summer, I sneak in some reading for pure enjoyment. 📖