

Show & Tell



**A Quick Glance
@ Wendi
Witthaus**

**Years served
as assistant
principal: 10**
Hopper Middle
School, Cypress,
Texas

Education
B.S., Education,
Texas A&M
University
M.Ed., Educational
Administration,
Prairie View A&M
University

Business
Certificate,
Executive
Education
Academy, Rice
University

National
Principal Mentor
Certification,
NAESP

Personal credo

"Our school's slogan is 'It's all about the TEAM.' I love this slogan, because the principalship is often a lonely job. To be successful, it's important to find colleagues to brainstorm together and support one another. I've been blessed to have many colleagues who have been there for me."



Team Captain

Texas principal Wendi Witthaus focuses on partnerships to lead effectively

Wendi Witthaus has spent nearly all of her 32 years in education teaching and supervising middle schoolers—many of them at-risk. "Middle school students are very entertaining," she says. "You never know what they are going to say or do. Every day is a new day."

Having directed the district's Alternative Learning Center (ALC), Witthaus became principal of Hopper Middle School in 2012. There, she stresses partnerships—celebrating staff achievements with weekly shout-outs, helping students support the community with food drives, and more.

How did your tenure at the ALC inform your approach to the principalship?

Students at ALC were there for behavioral reasons and stayed for a short period of time. The unique environment—a small setting with specific procedures and protocols in place—allowed us to focus on building positive relationships with students. I believe you must have a strong focus on relationships not only with students but staff as well.

What is the best “leadership moment” you’ve had since becoming Hopper’s principal?

My success comes from my students’ success. My best moment is when Hopper went from a 79 to an 82 on the state accountability system. We developed specific goals and an action plan as a campus. Throughout the year, we tracked our progress. Our students’ performance and success finally matched what I believed they were capable of achieving.

How did you use your familiarity with ed tech to help your school cope with the pandemic?

I have always been comfortable with technology and had already empowered teachers to take risks with technology to enhance student learning. When the pandemic hit, Zoom was new to our teachers, but the integration of technology was not.

“My success comes from my students’ success.”

How have you maintained staffing during the pandemic?

Retaining staff begins with creating a culture where staff feel supported and rewarded. Teachers support each other inside and outside the classroom. Every week, we do Friday Shout-Outs to recognize each other for the great things [we’ve accomplished] throughout the week.

What was the best book you read this year?

One of my favorite professional books is Todd Whitaker’s *Shifting the Monkey*. There are two parts that really speak to me: First, make decisions based on your best people. Second, shift how you ask [questions of] staff—framing your questions on the assumption that the person has done what they were supposed to do, rather than being accusatory. ●