



Educators and Parents Unite! The Power of Strong School-Family Collaborations (with Megan Olivia Hall) *(Transcript)*

*Educator Wellness Podcast
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[PODCAST INTRO] 0:00 | Dr. Kari Vogelgesang:

Hello everyone. I'm Kari Vogelgesang, your host of the Educator Wellness Podcast, here to share and promote my life's work and passion, all things wellness. But not just any wellness. We're here to discuss wellness specifically as it pertains to educators. I am a former elementary school teacher and I am passionate about helping educators see wellness in a very different way.

This podcast is dedicated to educators across the globe, creating a space for us to come together in an authentic and therapeutic way, sharing our stories, our hopes, our joys, our fears, our sorrows, and hopefully creating some space to share some laughter with one another as well in our journey to learn how to support one another, to prioritize wellness, and enhance our overall well-being.

Please join me as we talk with nationally recognized experts to guide us on a transformative journey of self-discovery, helping us to embrace and weave all dimensions of wellness into the fabric of both our personal and professional lives. Also, please note that the opinions and perspectives that are shared on this podcast do not necessarily represent those at the Scanlan Center for School Mental Health, or the University of Iowa.

Welcome to another inspiring episode of the Scanlan Center for School Mental Health, Educator Wellness Podcast. I'm your host, Dr. Kari Vogelgesang, and today we are coming together to discuss the collaborative force of parents, teachers, and students, when they can come together and build connection, a relationship with one another in our schools. And we're here to discuss this with the 2014 Minnesota Teacher of the Year, Dr. Megan Olivia Hall. Megan Olivia Hall is a STEM educator and instructional guide, avid site coordinator, and social emotional lead teacher at Open World Learning Community in St. Paul Public Schools.

She is a National Board certified teacher. She is the 2014 Minnesota Teacher of the Year, and a 2015 NEA Foundation Global Fellow. She is also an action research coach for St. Catherine, and Megan regularly presents at national teacher conferences and currently consults through SPARK Teaching Group, leading professional development for teachers in the areas of team building, supporting student mental health, and teaching with joy. Megan holds a PhD in Learning, Instruction, and Innovation from Walden University. Megan's writing has been featured in Education Week and the Science Teacher, and she has several books out.

Her books include Awesome Kitchen Science Experiments for Kids, which was an Amazon number one bestseller in Scientific Experiments & Projects, as well as Awesome Outdoor Science Experiments for Kids, and Big Chemistry Experiments for Little Kids, and she also wrote Adventure Girls! STEM Crafts. She is a leading educator ambassador for Equity Fellow with the Education Civil Rights Alliance. Megan is passionate about diversity, inclusion and access in STEM education, and Megan is proud to lead diverse Education Placement STEM classes and a gender inclusive FIRST Robotics team at OWL.

So welcome everyone to today's podcast. We're diving into the critically important topic of family-educator relationships and exploring how these connections can revolutionize not only a child's school experience, but also boost the professional joy and fulfillment of educators. So let's get inspired and discover the power of collaboration in our schools.

Welcome Dr. Hall to our podcast. We're so excited to have you today.

3:54 | Dr. Megan Olivia Hall:

Thanks for having me. I'm so excited to be here.

3:56 | Kari Vogelgesang:

Good. Okay, so I think we should just start off by just having a little bit of background information about Dr. Hall. How did you get into teaching? Why? Did you know from a really young age? Did it come to you later in life? I always think this is a really interesting question to give teachers because we all seem to find this profession, especially those of us who end up staying in it for a long time in really unique in different ways. So give us a little bit of information about how you got here.

4:26 | Dr. Megan Olivia Hall:

It definitely was not from a young age. I had no idea that I was going to be a teacher, and actually all the way through my undergrad, I was premed. And it was when I was interviewing at medical schools and actually after I had gotten into medical school, all that effort, all that time, that I realized that medicine was not the right career for me. I knew I wanted to make a difference, I wanted to work with people and help people, but it just wasn't a click with medicine. And so I withdrew my applications from the schools

I'd applied to, and I took a career aptitude test at my college and career center at my college. And the career coach said, "Education."

I did not enjoy high school, and my initial response was, "You can't make me go back there. There's no way I am going to be a teacher." But I had a friend, a college friend, who had graduated from this funky little school called the St. Paul Open School. It was one of the original open and free schools in the open school movement, opened in 1971 when all the wild ideas were percolating in education. And she said, "I think you would really like my science teacher, Julie Doble. You should go meet her and see. Maybe education doesn't have to be what you think."

So I met Julie and the year after college I worked at a flower shop and I volunteered once a week in Julie's classroom. And when I looked around and saw the way Julie taught, I said, "Okay, I can do this. This is fun. This is hands-on. Kids are honored for who they are in this really special school." I ended up student teaching with Julie, and when she retired in 2006, I applied for her job and became a full-time teacher.

So the process started in 2000 and it was six years later that I got the job, and that was a good fit for me. So it took a while. I had to teach in some different places. I subbed around and I didn't like every school that I worked in. I didn't like every job, but I eventually got to the place I wanted to be. And I've been here at what used to be the St. Paul Open School, now it's Open World Learning Community and St. Paul Public Schools, full-time since 2006. So not 20 years yet, but getting close.

6:33 | Kari Vogelgesang:

Wow. That's a long time though to be in one spot, especially in education through... You know what I think is funny? And I have no data to support this, so don't come at me, people who are listening to this. This is not evidence-based or data-driven. It's just my conversations over my 30 years in education. Some of the best teachers I have ever met and I've ever worked with are people who did not enjoy their school experience. Have you found this to be true as well?

7:04 | Dr. Megan Olivia Hall:

I think so. I think people who are really passionate about education, who have innovative ideas and really kind ways of interacting with students, are really bothered when it's not done well. And, I mean, no system is perfect. So we're all going to experience courses we don't like, teachers we don't like, and I think the people who are really sensitive to the highest quality in education are often the ones that are bothered the most when it's not there.

7:33 | Kari Vogelgesang:

Yeah. Yeah, I agree with that. I mean, I don't think it has to be your experience in K-12 education in order for you to be a good teacher, but I do think there's just this thread that I see in conversations that I have with teachers, who I have either worked with or my kids have had, and they're like, "Oh, yeah, I'm a high school dropout, and then I had to go back and do all of these things, find my own..." And it's like they bring this perspective to the profession that ends up just being so authentic and kind and considerate that I just really, really appreciate. Not that you dropped out of high school. I didn't mean it that way. I just meant [inaudible 00:08:15]-

8:15 | Dr. Megan Olivia Hall:

Actually I did really well, but that doesn't mean I was having a good time. And I think we need to understand that sometimes our overachievers are really suffering too. That just because you don't see the struggle doesn't mean the struggle's not happening.

8:30 | Kari Vogelgesang:

100%. Yeah, 100%. So today we're going to focus on drawing on your expertise in this profession for as long as you have been in the field, and your understanding, knowledge, experience, particularly with parent relationships. And we're going to weave students into this conversation here in a little bit, but let's just start with parents.

When you're thinking back to... And again, your experience in your school I understand is different than somebody else's experience as a teacher in another school down the road, for sure. So we're over-generalizing in this conversation, okay? But I do think, and I would probably imagine you agree with me, that there is this conversation right now, particularly since COVID, even before COVID, but definitely enhanced since COVID, that there's been kind of a breakdown in communication or trust, potentially, between parents and educators. And I'm wondering, A, have you experienced that or have you heard of this? And where do you think this might be coming from?

9:43 | Dr. Megan Olivia Hall:

I think that we do see more difficulty in every level and every layer of education since COVID. Everything's harder. For me, I've always taught in an inner city school and there's always been a certain percentage of our population that have experienced trauma. But after COVID, 100% of us have experienced trauma, every adult, every child, every caregiver, everybody. And I think that level of trauma kind of lifts some of the veils and shows us some of the problems that were there all along.

So when I think about dynamics with families, I mean, I want to get to the point where we're working together as a team, but there are a couple of different dynamics that happen as well. One of them is really families as victims of the school system, and unfortunately we have some problems in our school systems that have marginalized some particular populations. When we think about the school-to-prison pipeline, it's real. It exists. And there are certain demographics that... There are folks that just experience that in such a negative way and they have, generationally.

And then you can think about the boarding schools that native families have endured for so long, especially here in the Midwest. Those situations carry so much hurt and harm that a teacher really has to work hard to show that they're different from the past to get that family into a better relationship with the school. And then I think we also have some situations where families are like customers of the school and the relationship is more transactional. And that's not as serious of a situation. There's not as much harm there, but it's not the same as working together as a team.

11:27 | Kari Vogelgesang:

Right.

11:28 Dr. Megan Olivia Hall:

It's not collaboration. I often think that the conflict that often arises between families and teachers comes from this longing that parents feel when they're separated from their kids all day. I'm a mom, I have two kids, and it's hard to be at work away from my kids. One of my kids is actually a high school student in the school where I teach, but I rarely see him and I miss him all day. And then my daughter is eight, she's a second-grader, and I miss her every minute we're not together. And it can be hard not to focus that longing and some of that disconnect, or the need to make sure my kids are okay, into a more transactional or negative reaction, negative relationship with the people that are caring for my kids.

It's important not to do that, but it's so hard when we miss our kids all day long. During COVID many of us were with our kids 24/7. We didn't have to have that separation, but that separation I think can make it challenging to build a good relationship. So I think those are some of the troubles and difficulties that I see generally, but I don't think that they're impossible to overcome. I think there are lots of proactive things we can do in education to build a more positive, more collaborative relationship.

12:44 | Kari Vogelgesang:

Yeah. I think you brought up some phenomenal points, and I want to revisit them in just a minute, but I do think maybe we should take a step back. I should have leaded with this question too. In your experience, what are some of the benefits of having a really close connection and relationship with families? Because I'm sure you've experienced both.

So why are we even striving? I mean, I know that there are some people maybe who will listen to this conversation and say, "But it is transactional. It's a transactional relationship. You are there to teach my child math, fill in whatever content area you teach, and I don't want you teaching them anything else. And if you're not doing that well, you're not doing your job and I'm going to hold you accountable." So what is dangerous about that perspective, potentially?

13:36 | Dr. Megan Olivia Hall:

I mean, I would say that I have no problem with accountability. I'm a science teacher, I'm an agriculture teacher, and I make sure that I teach the standards and that kids have a chance to do well. And when they do great on their state assessments, I'm happy. So I just want to be clear that I have no problem with people checking in and making sure I'm doing my job or not. But I would also say that part of me doing my job well is having a good relationship with every kid in my classroom.

And that means being on good terms with their family. It means having a team approach. It means open communication. It means that when a family comes into the school, they feel welcome, they feel confident, they feel at ease. They can ask me questions. It means that my students are proud of their work and they want to show it off to their family, and their family want to ask questions about what we've been doing in class. It means that what happens at school isn't in a black box, it's not a mystery.

There's a window that I hold open for my families and for conversation between home and school. So I would say, I mean, yeah, it matters that I do my job. I'm not just going to sit around and drink coffee at my desk all day. That's not what I'm talking about. I'm saying that part of my job is the relationship, and that young people are going to learn way more when they know me and trust me than if I'm just a bot to them.

14:56 | Kari Vogelgesang:

Yeah, I agree with you. This education not being done in this black box, I think is what you said, I always say this as well. People don't learn in vacuums. There's the real world going on around us at all times, and we absolutely know that we're more willing and even able to learn when we are with people whom we trust and respect, and have a good connection with. We're able to take risks in ways that we would never do if we don't trust those people.

And in order to have a sense of trust, then you have to have a relationship with them. You have to know that you can trust them. They have to prove that to you. So I say the same thing, and I do think it's something that has gotten lost for some reason along the way, and we need to do a better job of communicating why we are trying so hard to build connection and relationship with families.

I think this also goes back to a point that you made right out of the gate, too, at the beginning of the podcast, which is, without having a relationship with parents and understanding their culture, their language, their identities, then it's really hard to create environments that honor and cherish all of those student and family assets in our environment so that we can do right by and we can do best for our families and students. And that's, you have to build a relationship to do that.

16:24 | Dr. Megan Olivia Hall:

Absolutely. And children are precious. I think that when we try to reduce the learning environment and the learning relationship to just business, it takes away some of the most meaningful and purposeful part of our lives as parents and as educators. That really seeing the kid and taking the time to honor them and to make sure that the adults in their lives get along and are on the same page, that's what makes it feel good to be a parent and to be an educator, to know that it's not just a worksheet. It's a mind, a young mind, that's growing and that's being nurtured and attended to.

17:03 | Kari Vogelgesang:

Yeah. Are there different things that your school or that you have done recently to try to strengthen this bond and relationship between the educator, parents and students? For example, I'm thinking of a school that I worked at years ago, and we used to have student-led conferences. And they were great. And I know that now... I've talked about this recently with people, and they're like, "What is that?" And so, I don't know. For me, that was one thing that I thought of when this topic was brought up to me recently at a conference, which made me develop this particular topic. So what about you? Are there other strategies and things that you do to try to really build and maintain and grow that relationship?

17:57 | Dr. Megan Olivia Hall:

Well, first I want to agree. Student-led conferences are where it's at. That 20 minutes where the family and the teacher and the student are all together... And I teach secondary. So most secondary conferences are a round-robin in a cafeteria and you've got two minutes with each teacher, but not here. We have conferences with our advisory groups, and our kids stay with the same advisor for seven years. So that family is meeting with the same teacher three times a year for seven years, 20 minutes each time. And the person who talks the most in that conference is the kid.

So it's a pretty light lift for the family. They're there as an audience, but what a difference it makes for a child to know, "When I showcase my grades, my highest quality projects, when I talk about the goals

that you help me set and whether or not I'm achieving them, my family is listening and my teacher's listening, and it matters to them how well I do in school." A really well-run student-led conference is like an all-state athletic event where the work a child has done is so important that everyone's there to watch.

I mean, it's the best time to have the kind of conversation that good relationships are built on. Yes, celebrating the kid, but, "Oh, I'm worried about this. Did you notice this? This was my observation. Have you seen this happening with my child?" Those little back-and-forths. And of course, also, "How are you? What's new with your family? I heard that you have a brand new baby niece," those little relationship-building conversations. So, yes, absolutely student-led conferences.

We also have this really big, beautiful event that happens in EL education schools all over the world called the Celebration of Learning, and the Celebration of Learning, it's actually this Friday, I'm pretty pumped.

19:38 | Kari Vogelgesang:

Wow.

19:39 | Dr. Megan Olivia Hall:

It's only once a year and the products that kids have made throughout the year are showcased. And there might be live performances, there might be galleries that students are hosting that parents and younger siblings and older siblings come and visit. So our Algebra 2 kids do a carnival game where there's all these separate games that kids have designed and built to exemplify the algebra principles they've been learning.

There are eighth graders who have published a book about justice and they're reading out loud from the book and explaining all the research they did for all the different pieces they wrote. We have a phenology calendar that our seventh graders make to show the impact of climate change on Minnesota species, and that's put up on a big gallery wall and kids host it and families can come see all the artwork. So the Celebration of Learning, again, when you talk about amping up academics and making them count as much as a major athletic event, that is a celebration of learning.

We also have a food truck come and there's a big dinner and it's a big basket raffle for the PTA to raise money for all the events. So having a big all-family, all-school event that celebrates academics, I love that too. But I mean, we have other evening nights, too, throughout the year, and some of my favorites are our family culture nights. Oftentimes our seniors organize those. We have Asian family culture night. We have Dia de los Muertos to celebrate Latin American family and culture. We have African American family culture night. And on these nights we have performances. We have a big meal together.

When you think about a relationship, any relationship, a friendship, a romantic relationship, any good relationship, you'd want us to have some fun together. You wouldn't want it to be just business. So when we have these special evening events, that's a time for families to build a relationship with the people who work in the school, but also just with the school. The feeling that this is a place I'm welcome to. I can come have fun here. My child is happy when they walk through the doors. My child is safe. My child's learning and growing. I love those night events because it's fun.

Sometimes we get to be all business and so serious, we forget the benefit of fun, the relaxing, the power that it has to build confidence and ease so that when we have something hard to do, we're not all

worried and clenched up as we start to work. We're relaxed, we're open, we can really apply ourselves and make some progress. There's a couple of other kind of radical things that our school does.

We have a very active PTO and the parents that spend their time for the school... When people can afford to spend time for the school, it always makes the school run better. Schools never have enough help, so volunteers are always needed. Our PTO members actually serve on interview committees for new staff. So that means, usually, that's just the principal in most schools, but we have interview committees that include students, parents and teachers as well as administrators, so that people have a chance to choose who's going to come into our community.

22:54 | Kari Vogelgesang:

I know that a couple of schools here, they do have students who sit in on some of our interviews, like in my home district here. But the PTO is a good idea.

23:07 | Dr. Megan Olivia Hall:

I love it. And I know I'm monologuing a lot, so I'll just share one more thing that I love. I really love field trips. Field trips are a big part of my teaching, and there's no way that I could have a safe field trip without a lot of chaperones. And again, I'm secondary, so I have high school field trips. I just had one for my landscape design class where we visited six different Minneapolis parks in one day. We had a bus take us to lots of different parks.

I had 10 parents on a trip with 60 kids. I couldn't have done it without them, but the way it worked was, I emailed all the families and I gave a really concrete ask with a start time and an end time. And the families know by now that I'm always going to pair them with their child. They're always going to be in the same group as their kids, so it's guaranteed quality time. And I also tell my students, "Be nice. If your parent's giving up a personal day to be with you, be with them. Sit down and eat lunch with your mom." Yeah.

So I think kind of bending some of our perceptions about what roles parents can have in schools and opening up some new jobs can empower parents and show that they do belong here. Sometimes teenagers aren't always very forthcoming about what's happening in their day. I mean, I think even elementary age kids have a lot of, "Oh, my day was fine," and they don't give us any details. So I think parents need to have their own relationship with the school so that they can get information maybe another way besides their stoic children. At least my kids are stoic. I'm Minnesotan though, so Minnesotans often keep a tight lid on it.

24:40 | Kari Vogelgesang:

Well, no. I have a 22-year-old and a 19-year-old, and they're both boys, and, yes, it was very hard to get information out of them. They're both now in college, but it's very difficult to get information out of them. It's actually better now that they're out of high school. They give me more. But I love this idea of creating unique ways.

Now, every school setting, I'm just going to highlight this because I know we're going to get this feedback. Every school setting is unique and different, and what works for one community, there are going to be different challenges in another community in doing that particular activity with that particular population of parents and students who live in that community. So the idea is that, you know,

Dr. Hall is sharing with us today, I think are phenomenal ideas and can definitely be adjusted in ways that would work for different communities and different school needs and wants and desires. So I want to highlight that.

I also just love this idea of coming up with, not just thinking about the parent-teacher conference, but thinking about celebrations across the calendar year, potentially even in the summer where we invite families in to just surely celebrate our community and the learning community that we're wanting to create and that we're creating collectively. I think that goes a long way in building relationships. And those are great big events, right? But can we talk a little bit now about some of the smaller, well, collectively though, when you build them over time, they're enormous and extremely powerful, but some of the things that we can do on a day-to-day basis with families and students to help build a stronger connection and bond.

26:33 | Dr. Megan Olivia Hall:

I mean, I know that there are some folks that say, "Call five families a day." They say, "Start out the school right. Call five families a day and say five positive things about five different students." And I love that idea if you're a talker. If you want to be on the phone, if it gives you energy to chat on the phone, go for it. I'm an introvert and after a full day of teaching, the idea of getting on the phone and making five calls when I have a stack of papers to grade, I mean, maybe a digital stack, but it's still a stack, and lessons to plan and materials to organize, it sounds exhausting to me.

But that's not the only way to communicate, right? And I've found that sending a weekly email, just a mass email to everybody in that particular class, oh, my goodness, it's so powerful. And even if the role for the parent is to know what's happening in school, that's a great role. If the parent's only job is to know what's been happening in class, when's the next test coming, what's their grade looking like, is their homework, is there not homework? If it's a friendly, short and sweet welcome-to-my-class email, then people are saying, "Oh, you know, Dr. Hall's got another email for us. What's been happening in science class?" That's it. That's a good ask. That's a good thing for...

And of course, not all families can read email every week, and so we might need to find another avenue if that's the situation. But most folks have email these days, and you'll get 90% of the families connected if you send just a mass email once a week. I think it's great if you're in a middle school team to have the whole team contribute to a single email. Just open a Google Doc and the social studies teacher has two sentences. The ELA teacher has two sentences, and then one person on the team sends the email. They just copy and paste and send it through whatever learning management system you have.

I started doing that maybe five years ago, and I found that the number of concerned parent messages I got dropped to almost zero, because folks knew what was happening. And they also... I would often say, "Please praise your child for their good work. Our class has been doing great." Or, "Please make sure your child remembers that the test is Tuesday." I mean, that is a role for a parent in school. It doesn't have to be taking a whole day off work or donating \$200 of school supplies. Almost nobody can do that.

But I would say 90 to 95% of families can say, "Hey, your science teacher said your class is really on fire this week." Or, "Oh, I heard you've got a big test coming up in math. Do you have some time set aside to study for that?" Even if the parent's not helping study, just bringing it up makes a difference for their kid.

29:17 | Kari Vogelgesang:

And it gives them a topic of conversation as well. I know that sometimes when we would be sitting down for dinner, or in the car going between activities or whatever when I was in high school, it's like we were just talking about, it can be hard to have conversations with a teenager and pulling information. So sometimes it's just helpful to get that information, not only so that we're on the same page, but also so that you can strike up a conversation with your adolescent, or even your elementary school child as well, so that you know what's going on, and that they know that you know what's going on as well, which I think is [inaudible 00:29:52]-

29:52 | Dr. Megan Olivia Hall:

You've got the inside information because the teacher slipped it to you, and slipping parents that inside information can be 10 minutes a week. It does not have to be five calls a day. And the tone of the email can be friendly. The tone of the email can be positive. That has the same impact as those five positive calls a day. You're already a household name for that family then. So, sure, if something difficult happens, they already know about you when you call.

You're not a random stranger. You're that person who's been sending, gosh, it's week 15, so they've already gotten 15 emails from you. They know who you are and they know that you want the best for their kid, and also you've been slipping the inside intel so they can have some kind of conversation besides just grunts. And I mean, I'm not trying to slam my children at home, but sometimes it really is just a grunt, and I do need something to get the conversation ball rolling.

30:41 | Kari Vogelgesang:

Yeah. Yeah. I like this what you said too, before we start to kind of wrap up here. You alluded to this thing of like, sometimes we have students where we have to start communicating with parents for less desirable reasons.

30:58 | Dr. Megan Olivia Hall:

Yeah.

30:59 | Kari Vogelgesang:

And that's tricky, especially if we haven't already established a relationship with them and there isn't open lines and transparent lines of communication. I've told this story on this podcast before, but I'll tell it again because it fits in here. And I have one of my best friends, her son was the same age as my youngest son, and they went to school together. He was a child in our elementary school. He was just a great kid, and he was hilarious and just a super dynamic kid, but didn't always get lots of positive feedback.

And then the parents never got positive feedback, until he was in one particular classroom one year when they were in third grade, and that teacher bent over backwards to everything that he did that was positive. Not everything, but she caught lots of things, and she either sent home a note or gave the family a call and said, "You know what? So-and-so did this today, and I'm really proud of him, and you should be proud of him, too."

And to this day... This child is now an adult, and they still talk about this teacher and they still talk about what a great year that was and how much learning took place that year. And I just can't tell our listeners enough how important that is. Because also then, when things weren't going quite right, they trusted that that teacher was telling them the actual truth and the facts and that they had his best interest at heart, and it just went so much better.

32:38 | Dr. Megan Olivia Hall:

I'm going to go to my desk. I'm going to make a noise and I apologize for that.

32:41 | Kari Vogelgesang:

No, no, you're fine.

32:43 | Dr. Megan Olivia Hall:

This is what I wanted to find. I mean, this is kind of a memo to principals, but we have these postcards printed for our school. You can see, you don't have to write very much. Getting one of these postcards makes a family my ally for life. If I say... And especially the kid that sometimes they don't do what they're supposed to do, if they get a piece of good news from any teacher, that teacher is like the person who turned their kid around. I mean, the kids turn themselves around.

The kid did something good on their own, right? But they saw my child, they honor my child. They see the good in my child, right? And so if it's a hard day, if something's got to change, exactly, I can trust them. They're a caring, passionate teacher who sees the good in my kid, and they're going to help them become a better person. And sometimes being a better person means finding a limit and reinforcing a limit. Absolutely.

But I will say, if you print these up for your staff, this is... I mean, teachers, tell your principals, make mass postcards because this is so fast and so easy. I fill it out, I give it to the school secretary, she stamps it, and then it's like magic sparkles emanating from the windows of the school and just illuminating the lives of my kids and their families. It's incredible how far a few good words can go.

34:09 | Kari Vogelgesang:

It does. Those of you who are just listening by the way, and they're not watching this on YouTube, then just know that she shared with us just... Most of you have postcards that your school sends out for various reasons. And it's just a blank postcard, but on the front of it said, "Good news, Owls," I think, because you must be the... "Good news from Owl!"

34:28 | Dr. Megan Olivia Hall:

Yep. Because Owl is our school name, so it could, you know, "Good news from Susan [inaudible 00:34:34] Middle School," or whatever. Yeah.

34:36 | Kari Vogelgesang:

Yeah. So that's great. Okay. As we're kind of winding things up here, I would like to play a little bit of a game with you. If you could go back in time and you could give your first year teacher self some advice, what would you tell yourself?

34:58 | Dr. Megan Olivia Hall:

Well, I was a very nervous first year teacher. I was worried all the time. So I think the first thing I would tell myself is, "It's going to be okay. Take a deep breath. It's going to be okay." I was so nervous. I remember, in those days everything was on paper. I remember looking down at my hand as I was passing out papers and it was shaking as I was giving kids the papers. I was so worried. So first thing I would say is, "Megan, it's okay. It's going to be okay."

And then the second thing I would tell myself is, "You aren't going to know ever, or maybe for several decades, about the seeds you plant because they're going to be little tiny plants for a long time." But I had taken my 14-year-old son out to grab a bite to eat in between sporting events. We were at a restaurant, and a man in his 30s stopped me and he said, "Hey, did you used to teach science at the Art School?" I said, "I did. It's nice to see you, Tom." I remembered him. And he said, "Do you remember me?" I said, "I remember you."

He said, "I'm sorry I was so hard on you. We really gave you such a hard time." And he said some more negative things about himself and his classmates, and he said, "I always wondered, was it worth it?" I said, "Tom, look at you. You're out to dinner with your friends. You're a professional. You're taking care of yourself. You're leading a healthy life. Of course it's worth it." But I wouldn't have known all those years, I mean 20 years ago, that just by showing up, staying positive, and doing the work, I would've helped him.

And back then I taught at a school for kids at risk of dropping out of high school. I helped him get his diploma. I helped him move on with his life. And whether you say that compliment that helps the kids see the good in themselves, whether you teach someone the right place to put apostrophes and where to not put apostrophes, whether or not you teach them division, it's something that's going to help make that person's life better and help them become the incredible person they were always meant to be.

So I would tell that new teacher, "You're not going to know right away, but you are making a difference. So number one, take a deep breath. It's going to be okay. And then secondly, you're making a difference. And you might just feel tired at the end of the day. You might not feel like someone who's changing the world, but you are. Teachers change the world, and it can be grueling work. It can be so hard, but it is worth it because you are making all of these people becoming themselves in a way that they couldn't without your help."

37:24 | Kari Vogelgesang:

Yeah. It truly is a magical profession. It really is. And it is grueling. It's exhausting, but you wrapped it up in a really, really nice way, so I won't mess it up by blabbing on anymore. But it's just so true. I mean, it is really, truly magical to be a part of the profession. Yeah. Well, I really appreciate your time and your expertise with us today, Dr. Hall, and I sure hope that we can stay in touch.

37:48 | Dr. Megan Olivia Hall:

It was an honor to be here, and thanks for your work supporting educators. It's so cool.

37:53 | Kari Vogelgesang:

I want to thank everyone for joining us on this enlightening journey into the vital role of building strong family educator relationships. Today we've discussed how these connections can create a more supportive and enriching environment for our children, and significantly enhance the professional fulfillment of our educators. By taking the time to get to know one another and fostering genuine connections, we create a community where everyone thrives.

So until next time, let's keep nurturing those bonds and making a positive impact together. Stay inspired and stay connected. I'm Dr. Kari Vogelgesang, forever cheering you on. Take care, everyone.