MVP SPACES
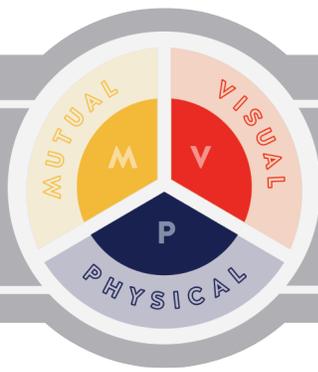
A Holistic Learning Environment

A guide for using Visual STAPLEs in the classroom.

Simple Techniques to Achieve a Positive Learning Environment

Anthony M. Chiles, Ed.S.

THE WHAT

MVP Spaces is a guide to support an educator's practice in Mutual, Visual, and Physical learning spaces. Eight practices support each space called STAPLEs (Simple Techniques to Achieve a Positive Learning Environment) and are grounded in four principles: Relevance, Empathy, Action, and Lifelong Learning. Insight into these spaces provides an educator with a personalized framework to create a holistic learning environment for their students. MVP Spaces provides the blueprint for educators to engage in high-quality teaching and learning techniques, centralized in one location and simplified to implement with consistency and fidelity.

THE WHY

Creating holistic learning environments is essential for students to thrive socially, academically, and emotionally. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the importance of such environments, particularly in disruptive and uncertain circumstances. However, many students and educators who rely on the consistency and structure of traditional face-to-face instruction need help to navigate the ever-changing landscape of blended and online learning. The research for creating positive learning environments includes many strategies to enhance an educator's toolkit. For example, one way to foster a positive learning environment is to establish clear and consistent expectations for behavior and learning, including structured and predictable routines and clear classroom participation guidelines. When students know these expectations, they are more likely to feel secure and confident executing them. Unfortunately, implementing effective strategies fails due to the need to implement them with consistency and fidelity. As a result, some educators have begun to review their core practices and are renewing their commitment and engagement in these techniques.

THE HOW

The Educator will first take the MVP Spaces Survey to analyze the perspective and use of the 24 STAPLEs in the Mutual, Visual, and Physical spaces. The survey questions are based on the REAL Education principles and help guide the implementation of each technique, focusing on consistency and fidelity. Each STAPLE includes (if applicable) a scripted activity and supporting documentation. Explore instructional videos, downloadable STAPLE handouts, and educator resources–plus connect with a growing teacher community–all at realeducators.org.
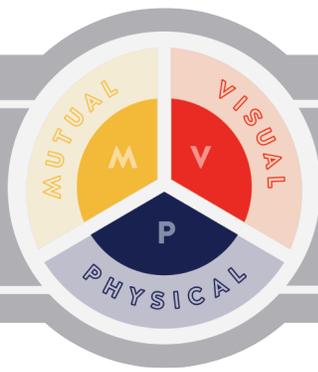
What is REAL Education?

Relevance in education focuses on a person's needs according to time and context. Relevant teaching engages students emotionally and connects prior knowledge to support the development of neural connections and long-term memory storage. [7] Students must feel that the information they are learning is useful, valuable, and essential for their future. Relevance is most impactful when learning is connected to everyday life applications and as information moves from theory to practice. [37] Background knowledge through scaffolding supports relevance by bridging the knowledge gap of new learning material. Relevant, real-world instruction can empower students to take ownership of their learning experiences.

Empathy in education is a teachable attribute innate in all people. We learn from a young age to "feel what others feel." When explicitly taught and modeled, empathy teaches us to understand another person's point of view while using the information to inform our actions based on the situation. [78] Compassionate action takes shape when empathy is enacted, whether a hug, a helping hand, or a shoulder to cry on. [64] The golden rule "treat others as you want to be treated" is evident in nearly all cultures and ethnicities. Empathy teaches us how to interact with each other without judgment. Empathy interactions allow us to build social connections with others, regulate our own emotions, and promote helping behaviors. [15] A culture of respect, trust, and teamwork is established when empathy is understood, modeled, and reinforced.

Action in education is a driving force for active engagement. Daily activity that includes mental and physical experiences is needed to support creative and critical thinking skills in learning. [47,73] Active learning allows students to be fully engaged in their education through hands-on learning, collaborative group work, and memorable experiences. [74] Experiences that are mentally and physically demanding to develop deeper learning connections. [7] We remember what we touch. Taking active brain breaks during instruction allows the brain to retain information and focus attention. While the instructional approach sets the stage for an active classroom, the way a learning space is physically set up is equally important to the overall success of the active system. [41,70] Being mentally and physically active benefits the body and mind by reducing stress and improving mood and overall mental health. [12]

Lifelong Learning is a process where one can learn, unlearn and relearn continuously. [20] History's greatest pioneers, inventors, and leaders have utilized continuous learning to create and improve significant human advancements in transportation, agriculture, and technology. Through trial and error, creating and destroying, defining and redefining, lifelong learning provides us with a wealth of knowledge on developing continually. Lifelong learning builds innovation and creativity in finding solutions for age-old problems still waiting to be solved. [39] Lifelong Learning does not occur in a single location, at a particular time, or in one attempt but is flexible, timeless, and omnipresent. Students in the 21st century can now learn from anyone, anywhere, and anytime. [39] Continuous improvement encourages an endless pursuit of understanding the world around us and how to make it better, including ourselves.

Combining Mutual, Visual, and Physical Spaces with the foundational principles of relevance, empathy, action, and lifelong learning creates a holistic learning environment. To truly educate students, we must return to the simple, integrated format that has produced some of the greatest minds in history. This means providing learning experiences that are experiential, meaningful, and connected to all aspects of life. The focus should be on providing a well-rounded education that extends beyond economic or political considerations and encompasses a Real, Experiential, Authentic, and Lifelong approach. This approach is vital for preparing students for the demands of the 21st century.

A note from the Author of **MVP SPACES**:

Thank you for being so committed to creating and sustaining holistic learning environments. By utilizing these techniques, MVP Spaces will help new and veteran teachers become REAL Educators. Our students depend on us to come alongside them and facilitate their learning in meaningful and engaging ways. We can do it. Let us work together and make it happen!

Sincerely,

Anthony M. Chiles
MVP Spaces, Creator
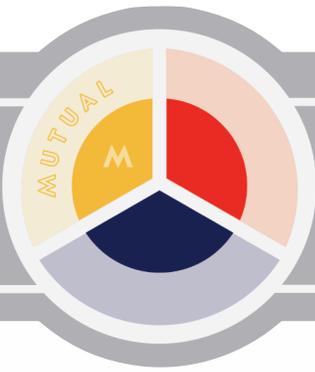
VISUAL SPACE
STAPLE & Definitions

Visual Space **|** Aspects of a space balanced with examples, exposures, and experiences to support learning.

V1 Model Expectations

V2 Post A Variety of Student Work

V3 Provide Low Light

V4 Display High Quality Exemplars

V5 Use Media to Enhance Learning

V6 Display Different Cultural Perspectives

V7 Use Natural Light

V8 Display Universal Vocabulary

R.E.A.L. Education 🔗 Connection

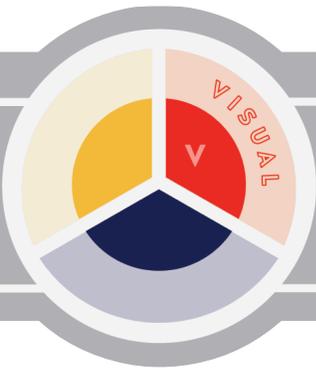**R** **Relevance** | having significant and demonstrable bearing on the matter at hand.

E **Empathy** | the ability to understand and share the feelings of another.

A **Action** | the manner or method of performing.

L **Lifelong-Learning** | knowledge acquired by systematic study in any field or scholarly application.
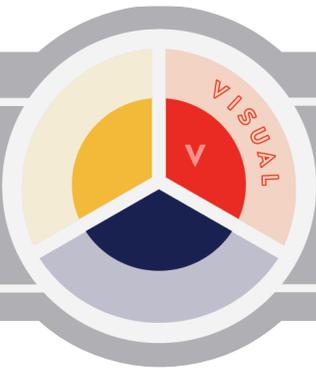
VISUAL
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Modeling expectations helps students understand and practice the behaviors and routines needed for success. When students see and hear clear examples, it reduces confusion and builds accountability. Effective modeling requires teachers to communicate, stay consistent, and ensure expectations are achievable and connected to student needs.

1. Clear Expectations – Students must know exactly what is expected before being held accountable.

2. Consistent Expectations – Consistency builds trust—expectations one day should be expected every day.

3. Obtainable Expectations – Expectations should be realistic and developmentally appropriate for all students.
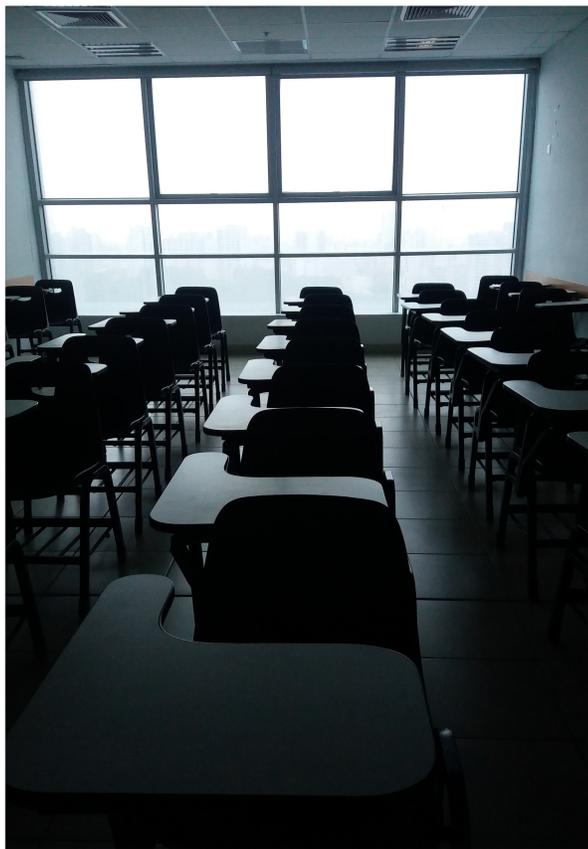
Research Resource [34,45]

R.E.A.L. Education 🔗 Connection

○ **Relevance** – Demonstrating real-world applications helps students see the importance and usefulness of their learning.

○ **Empathy** – Modeling respect and inclusivity helps students develop empathy and learn to interact with diverse people.

○ **Action** – Encouraging responsibility and positive contributions can inspire students to become active and engaged citizens.

○ **Lifelong Learning** – Teaching students to ask questions, analyze information, and reflect fosters intellectual curiosity and a love of learning.

STAPLE #2
Post A Variety of Student Work

When completing performance tasks or design projects, displaying work can showcase what students know and can do. Sharing the information and having students explain their work promotes critical thinking and communication skills while building confidence, ownership, and a deeper connection to the learning process.

1. Posting student work on a physical or digital wall.

2. Invite students to serve as docents during events.

3. Recognize student work through timely, effective feedback.

Research Resource [9,26,38]

R.E.A.L. Education 🔗 Connection

○ **Relevance**: It helps students see how classroom learning connects to their lives, cultures, and real-world experiences, making the content more meaningful and engaging.

○ **Empathy**: It reflects a variety of backgrounds and voices, inviting students to see the world through others' eyes, encouraging understanding, respect, and compassion.

○ **Action**: When students see their peers using skills and creativity to address real-world issues, they're inspired to participate and contribute to positive change in their communities.

○ **Lifelong Learning**: Showcasing a variety of student work inspires a love of lifelong learning by demonstrating the breadth of what students can accomplish with their skills and knowledge.

STAPLE #3
Provide Low Light

Modern lights flicker at rapid speeds, causing the eyes to adjust constantly. Technology in the classroom additionally increases lighting for active whiteboards and other screens. Blue lights from these screens may further irritate the eyes over time. Keeping the lights low helps to reduce eye fatigue and headaches. A calmer visual setting can also improve focus and minimize overstimulation for all learners.

1. Turn out some lights (if applicable) to reduce the amount of light exposure.

2. Soften the lighting by using light covers or filters.

3. Add full-spectrum/dynamic lamps in the room or change the fluorescent ones.

Research Resource [5,16,35,46]

R.E.A.L. Education 🔗 Connection

○ **Relevance**: Using natural or warm lighting can create a comfortable and inviting learning environment, increasing student engagement and motivation.

○ **Empathy**: Appropriate lighting can ensure that all students can see and participate equally, regardless of any visual impairments.

○ **Action**: Good lighting can enhance safety and security in the classroom, reducing the risk of accidents or injuries.

○ **Lifelong Learning**: Proper lighting can support students' health and well-being, which is essential for long-term learning and success.
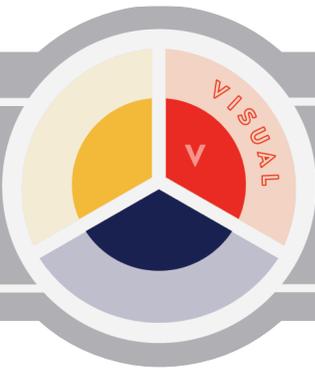
STAPLE #4
Display High Quality Exemplars
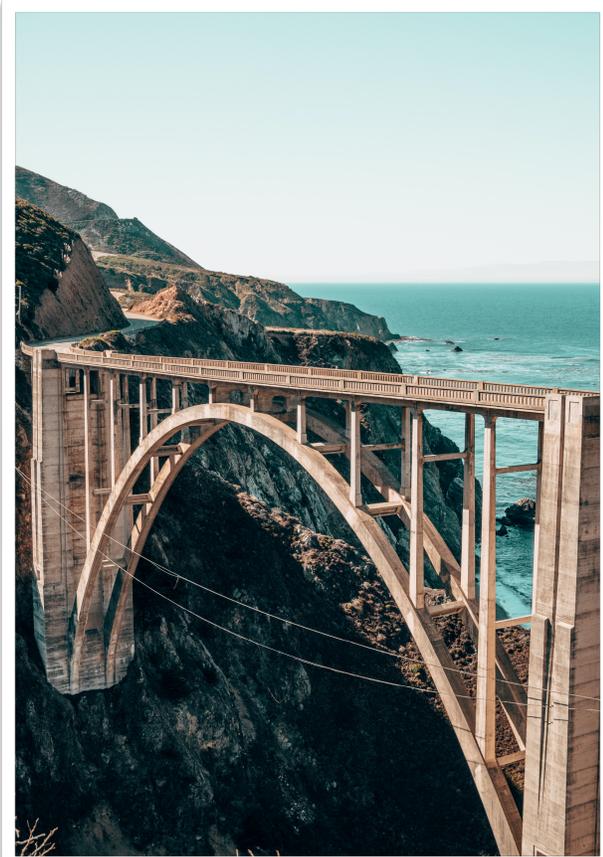
Using exemplars in learning helps students better understand key skills, content, and expectations. When background knowledge is limited, exemplars play a critical role in framing how students approach new concepts. They serve as reference points, not blueprints to copy, and help students recognize what success can look like.

1. Clarify that exemplars are for reference, not replication.
2. Build background knowledge in new concepts with exemplars.
3. Use a variety of student work samples.

Research Resource [55,82]

R.E.A.L. Education 🔗 Connection

- **Relevance**: Exemplars demonstrate how concepts apply to real-world situations, motivating students to learn and use them.
- **Empathy**: Displaying a range of exemplars from students with different needs or backgrounds shows that success can look different for everyone and fosters a more inclusive classroom.
- **Action**: Exemplars provide clear models that encourage students to apply feedback, improve their work, and take ownership of their learning.
- **Lifelong Learning**: Exemplars foster a love of lifelong learning by demonstrating excellence and the possibilities of what students can achieve with their skills and knowledge.

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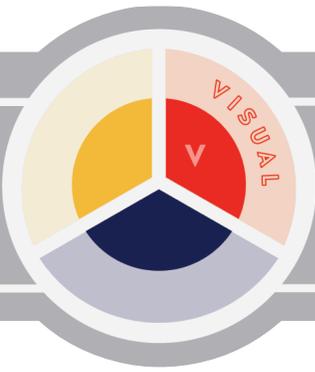
STAPLE #5
Use Media to Enhance Learning
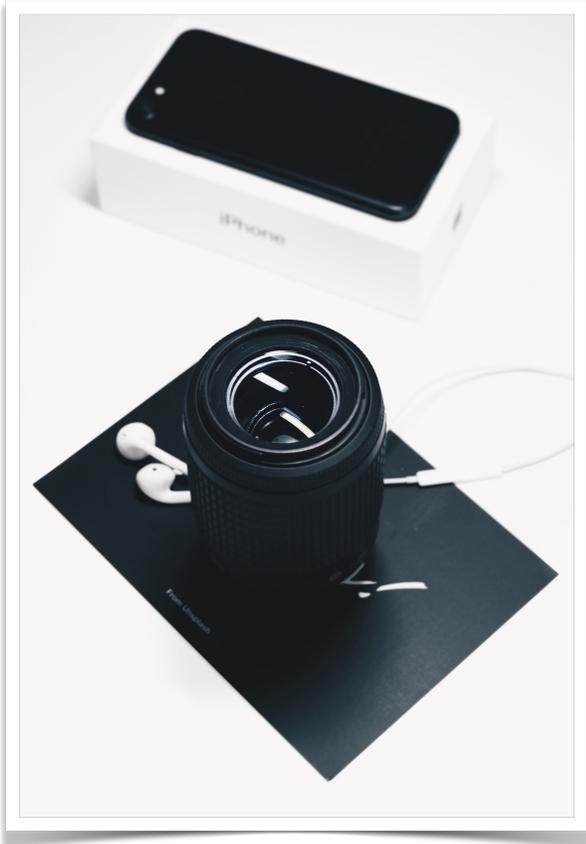
As digital natives continue to fill our classrooms, embracing media and technology as learning tools is no longer optional; it's essential. When used intentionally, media enhances engagement, supports differentiated instruction, and fosters creativity. The goal is not to replace quality instruction with technology but to enrich learning through interactive platforms, digital collaboration, and opportunities for student-driven design.

1. Use a variety of technology tools.
2. Teach responsible use of the devices.
3. Allow students to design/create using various media platforms.

Research Resource [8,61,88]

R.E.A.L. Education 🔗 Connection

○ **Relevance**: Using videos, simulations, and other forms of media can help students see how the concepts they are learning apply to real-world situations and make the learning experience more relevant and meaningful.

○ **Empathy**: Media can help students develop empathy by exposing them to different perspectives and experiences.

○ **Action**: Integrating media into learning gives students a platform to research, create, and share their ideas, turning passive consumption into active expression and real-world problem solving.

○ **Lifelong Learning**: Students can access media on their own time and at their own pace, allowing them to continue learning and exploring their interests outside the classroom.

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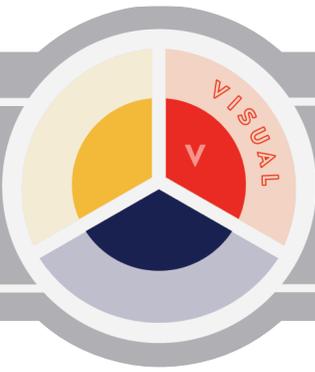
More than 195 countries represent a rich tapestry of cultures, histories, languages, and identities. In the classroom, displaying and honoring different cultural perspectives builds empathy, promotes inclusion, and helps students recognize the value of their culture and others. When students see themselves and others reflected in the curriculum and learning environment, it fosters belonging and mutual respect.

1. Cultural Dialogue – Create space for open and respectful conversations around culture.

2. Cultural Sensitivity – Be mindful and intentional about honoring cultural identities.

3. Diverse Planning – Integrate cultural representation into your lessons year-round.

Research Resource [11,27,92]

R.E.A.L. Education 🔗 Connection

- **Relevance**: Displaying different cultural perspectives helps students see themselves and others reflected in the learning space, making content feel more meaningful and personally connected.

- **Empathy**: Displaying diverse perspectives promotes understanding and appreciation of different experiences and backgrounds.

- **Action**: Displaying examples of positive impact from different cultures inspires students to take action and make a difference.

- **Lifelong Learning**: Displaying different cultural perspectives fosters curiosity and open-mindedness, supporting a love of lifelong learning.
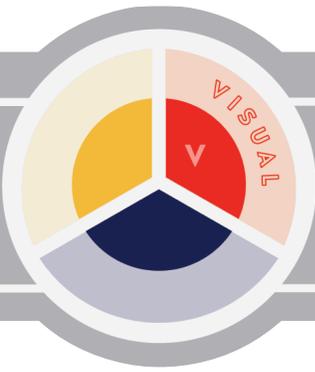
Natural light supports student focus, energy, and well-being. Exposure to sunlight reduces eye strain, enhances concentration, and boosts productivity by increasing vitamin D levels. It also promotes emotional balance by stimulating serotonin, a key hormone linked to mood and calmness. Even in classrooms with limited windows, educators can find ways to use nearby spaces or indirect sunlight.

1. Schedule times to go outdoors - Incorporate short outdoor breaks or lessons into the daily schedule.

2. Make the classroom mobile - Use flexible seating or mobile learning tools to teach in brighter spaces.

3. Open the blinds daily - Let sunlight in to brighten the space and boost mood naturally.

Research Resource [59,68,77]

R.E.A.L. Education 🔗 Connection

- **Relevance**: Natural light creates a positive atmosphere that supports concentration and learning.

- **Empathy**: Students may feel more relaxed and comfortable in a well-lit and airy space, which can help create a more positive and supportive learning environment.

- **Action**: Natural light can promote physical activity and movement, which are essential for overall health and well-being.

- **Lifelong Learning**: Students may feel more inspired and motivated to learn in a well-lit and inviting space, which can support a love of lifelong learning.
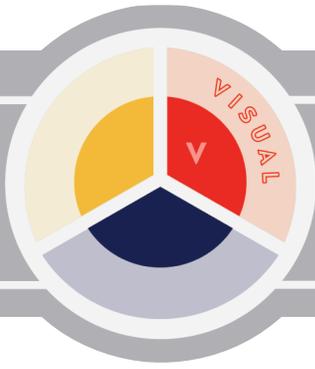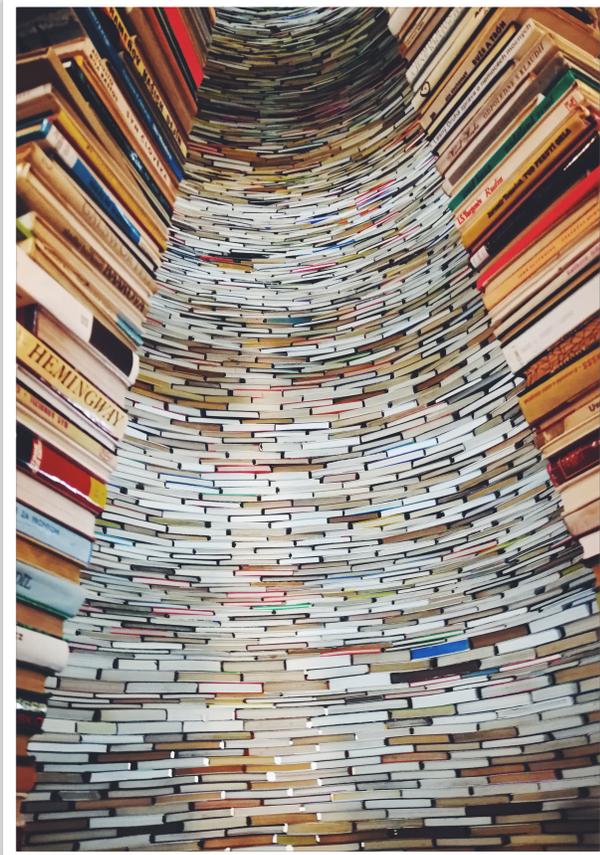
Exposing students to universal vocabulary is critical for developing literacy in today's information-rich world. Understanding words and their meanings provides the context needed for comprehension and learning. When vocabulary is displayed and reinforced, students encounter new terms more frequently, deepening their knowledge and language skills.

1. Students should read for thirty minutes per day.

2. Use vocabulary with cross-subject transferability.

3. Read out loud to build vocabulary.

Research Resource [6,42,72]

R.E.A.L. Education 🔗 Connection

○ **Relevance**: Students can understand the language and concepts specific to the topic they are studying, and be provided with the vocabulary tools they need to engage with the subject matter.

○ **Empathy**: Displaying vocabulary in multiple languages can promote empathy by acknowledging and respecting the linguistic and cultural diversity of others.

○ **Action**: When vocabulary is visible and connected to real-world contexts, students can use those words in their writing, discussions, and decision-making, deepening their understanding and encouraging purposeful communication.

○ **Lifelong Learning**: Displaying vocabulary can support a love of lifelong learning by encouraging students to expand their vocabulary and learn new words.

ANTHONY ⋀⋀ CHILES

Inspiring REAL Connections, in the Digital Age

Anthony M. Chiles is an engaging communicator and an expert in helping people build REAL connections with others and create positive learning environments in schools. With over 20 years of experience as an educator and administrator in Georgia, Anthony is deeply committed to servant leadership and applies a head, heart, and hands approach to teaching others.

Anthony holds a Bachelor of Music Education from Berry College, where he developed a strong foundation in music and the arts.
He then pursued further academic achievements, obtaining a Master's and Specialist in Educational Leadership from Georgia College and State University. Additionally, Anthony has earned a Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math (STEAM) Endorsement from Augusta University, equipping him with a multidisciplinary perspective that enhances his ability to address complex challenges in today's educational landscape.

Anthony cherishes his role as a husband to Sherrie and a father to their six beautiful children. Growing up as a military dependent, he has had the privilege of experiencing diverse cultures and backgrounds, instilling in him a deep appreciation for inclusivity and a genuine desire to support individuals from all walks of life. He is dedicated to creating transformative experiences and empowering others to thrive personally and professionally.

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