



DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE EDUCATION ACTIVITY

---

- [Home](#)

## Entity Print

### Block - menu block sidebar section root

### Relationships key to student success

**[Announced in June 2019](#), Antoine Sharpe is DoDEA's 2020 Teacher of the Year. Through a series of questions and answers, Sharpe shares his undeniable passion, enthusiasm, and commitment to teaching and making a positive and lasting difference in young lives.**

Sharpe was a military-connected child and former DoDEA student, moving eight times during his childhood. He has been teaching for 13 years, four of which have been with DoDEA. Sharpe is currently a math teacher at Humphreys Middle School.



### **Why did you get into teaching?**

There are many reasons why I teach. Honestly, I still feel as if I'm a kid stuck in a grown man's body. I loved everything about school: the routines, grading papers, playing kickball, and especially pizza day!

During graduation, everyone was excited they were done with school, and I was almost in tears because I had to leave and become an "adult." When I realized that if I became a teacher, I could stay in school, hang out with some of the coolest people on earth, and eat pizza every pizza day, I signed up as soon as possible.

Fast forward to today, I still feel like a kid. I play with the students as much as I can, bring math alive each day, and enjoy pizza day. I got the best of all worlds.

On a more serious note, I teach because I want my students to understand they will always have someone in their corner.

Being a military-connected child, I lost track of teachers and friends. Even today, students come in and out of our classroom within a year. We build these amazing relationships that may dissolve due to the student promoting to another grade, moving, or what may. It's hard to say goodbye, even when the reason is something to celebrate.

I try to stay connected to my students even after they leave my classroom. I want my students to know that I will always be there for them even after the last day of school. I have made an effort to stop by different schools around the world and have lunch with former students, attend graduations and ceremonies, as well as celebrate birthdays. I stay in contact with students to see how everything is going or to Skype and help with their calculus homework.

I do this because I still have a hard time with saying goodbye and I remember that feeling of never reconnecting.

As military-connected children move, sometimes there is that fear of being forgotten. Some struggle with finding their place in a new school and all they can think about is how great yesterday was. When students move on to a different chapter, it's great to be able to go back and connect with the previous pages.

I want my students to know, even though the chapter with me may have ended, I am always there as they continue on. I teach because I want to ensure my 'Sharpies' know they matter and they mean something to someone.

### **Can you share a fond teaching memory?**

I have had some amazing years as an educator. I have seen students come into my classroom hating math and leaving wanting to be



accountants. I have had students who begin to take risks and step out of their comfort zones. I have amazing students who I am honored to be able to say I know them.

Early in my career, I taught a student when he was in the third grade. During an open house, his former teacher and mother came to me and explained all of the struggles this little guy was going through. It broke my heart hearing all of the weight this eight-year-old was carrying around with him.

As the year progressed, I started to see how his struggles were affecting him as he began to act out. No one knew what to do with him. Removing him from the classroom caused his episodes to get worse. I was at a loss on how to reach him. Being a new teacher, how to handle this was not a course I took in college.

I remember watching him during recess one day and noticed he wasn't playing with anyone. At lunch, he wasn't sitting or talking to anyone. This little guy had pushed everyone away. At that moment, I realized he needed a friend. So I aimed to do just that. I sat with him at lunch, played with him on the playground, walked him to his bus, and just talked to him. I found out his interests and made them my own.

Through all of this, I learned everyone in this kid's past had either given up on him or left him. He wasn't acting out because he hated me, he was pushing me away so he wouldn't get hurt. He had learned how to build a barrier through his behavior to protect himself from others. So I worked for many years to help bring down those barriers.

Our friendship is still going strong today. It is amazing to have seen him grow up and become this phenomenal young man who is bright, intelligent, and funny. It's sad to think about all of the people who couldn't see past

that shell, who gave up on him, or would have given up on him if our paths didn't cross.

But more than anything, I am thankful he came into my life. I learned we all have a past and we are all dealing with things no matter how old we are. Some are able to mask it underneath a smile and some act out.

(Some may disagree with me) but I aim to be a friend first. I am there for each of my students. I get to know them and what is going on in their lives. I work on building trust so my students know that I am there for them and will help them through any problem they may have.

Without this little guy, who knows if I would have ever learned that lesson. So thank you J.

**What is your favorite way to engage students?**



I believe student engagement always begins with developing a relationship. One of my teacher mentors told me, "Kids don't learn from people they don't like. Our number one priority as a teacher should be, and always be, building those relationships."

When you build a relationship with your students, you get to know how they like to learn and be engaged. You learn what engagement looks like for them and how to tailor your teaching style to meet their individual learning style.

Relationships also help with student discipline. Dr. Jody Carrington, bestselling author of Kids These Days stated, "Every time you think of calling a kid 'attention-seeking' this year, consider changing it to 'connection-seeking' and see how your perspective changes."

To forestall behavior problems in the classroom, we need to ensure we are building positive relationships with our students. I believe it is very important as we are building these positive relationships, that we consider a student's cultural background as well as identifying and addressing our implicit biases. We need to also make sure we are not triggering students' behavior because of our own personal actions.

Everyone must find their personal way of connecting with their students. I personally enjoy having lunch with my kiddos or joining them during recess. I suggest all teachers greet every student as they enter the room. This

allows you to gauge their emotional state and then address it accordingly. I also take interest in what is happening in their lives. If they are obsessed with a certain television show, I make sure to watch a few episodes. If they participate in an afterschool activity, I make sure to stop by and cheer them on. I also get to know their parents and siblings.

Teaching is not a 8-3 job -- it's a lifestyle. We have to remember we have the most precious thing in this world in our classrooms. So as a teacher, we must create strong connections with our students to create a learning environment where risk taking and collaborative learning can take place. We must ensure we are promoting positivity, encouragement, and acceptance that will build students for future success.

### **What are your thoughts on representation and inclusion?**

I have noticed a need for minority representation within all communities. Many of our students have limited, if any, interactions with males of color. With this, I try to reach out and develop relationships with as many people -- students, teachers, and community members -- as possible.

During this process, I began to develop my voice to advocate for those whose voices are too quiet to hear. My passion for advocating for others has thus grown to include all students no matter what labels others have placed on them.

I teach to include acceptance of all whether we understand or not. This involves empowering our students with the skills needed to address situations that may make us uncomfortable. I believe in giving the students the needed tools to be able to have courageous conversations.

### **What is your favorite subject as a teacher?**

I absolutely love being a math teacher! I also believe it to be one of the hardest jobs. Many students come into my classroom with low math confidence or this notion that they are horrible at anything math-related. This self-deprecating idea is backed by parents being complacent with the idea their child is struggling with math because they struggled as a student.

I think this is why I love being a math teacher. I, too, was one of those students. Yet, I had amazing parents and teachers who never let me settle for mediocrity. If you struggle with something, you practice until you are better, and you keep practicing until your better is your best.



### **What was your favorite subject as a student?**

I never really had one favorite subject growing up. I remember particular classes I enjoyed like PE in the fourth grade because Mr. Grey was just as excited to play the games as we were. I enjoyed Mrs. Mitchell's seventh grade math class because that was the first time I understood math wasn't just about getting the right answer, but about the process.

As a student, I loved the subject or class, where I had a relationship with the teacher. Those teachers whose passion for their job was evident to everyone and who made me feel like Antoine and not just another body sitting in a chair.

As a military-connected child, I believe it is easy to feel unseen or just like you're moving through time. I constantly moved and sometimes would feel as if this was another school with another teacher and another group of students. I would give it a year or two, and it'll be on to the next bunch.

This feeling disappeared in the classes where the teachers made an effort to get to know me for who I was and connected the learning content to my personal life. Those classes became my favorite subjects. Each year I strive to do this for each of my students.

### **What is your favorite book?**

Encyclopedia Brown: Everyone's Favorite Boy Detective is my all-time favorite book. Mrs. Murphey, my fourth grade teacher at Naples American Elementary School, would read a chapter at the end of each day. Mrs. Murphey probably will never know, but she is the one who inspired the love of reading for me through her read-alouds.

### **What is one thing you can't live without?**

Something I appreciate more and more each day is my family. Family is something, I think, many take for granted. They are my driving force! I am really lucky to have these people in my life.

In Sharpe's year of recognition as the 2020 DoDEA Teacher of the Year, he will participate in various professional learning opportunities and develop an action plan that will influence leadership practices within

