

Middle school

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"... Middle schoolers are crazy. They are just a great big ball of raging hormones, and they don't know what to do with it. You have to help teach them that some of the things they think are the biggest drama in their entire life are not that big. That's hard to teach."

Book offers guidance

In her new novel, "Lucy and CeCee's How to Survive (and Thrive) in Middle School," local teacher Kimberly Dana attempts to impart a few of those lessons with a book for pre-teens that she said is "funny and also authentic and useful."

Dana, an English teacher at Nashville's McMurray Middle School, reveals what happens in the hallowed halls of junior high through the eyes of two radically different characters: CeCee, the shy and studious girl, and Lucy, her impulsive and boy-crazy BFF.

The girls chatter through notes they pass in school, personal diary entries and lists they make — lots and lots of lists about everything from how to handle gossip to homework excuses. Sprinkled throughout is tween-esque lingo like "unhinged" and "mega-ancient."

Dana — who said eighth grade algebra was the "bane of my existence" and, for better or worse, her social life was No. 1 — supplements the book with her own observations, as well as real stories students have told her over her 18-year teaching career. The result is a light-



Kimberly Dana, an English teacher at McMurray Middle School in Nashville, used personal observations and stories told to her during an 18-year teaching career to help write "Lucy and CeCee's How to Survive (and Thrive) in Middle School." The book is a lighthearted novel that follows two tween girls through the transition to junior high. PHOTOS BY JAE S. LEE / THE TENNESSEAN

hearted novel that also tackles serious issues, such as cyber bullying, boyfriends, eating disorders and self-esteem.

"These kids are evolving," Dana said. "They are neither child nor adult — they are in the middle. They are growing up socially, academically and mentally, and it's a very confusing time."

"This book is a 'big hug.' It says, 'It's going to be tough, but

you can do it.'"

Sweet freedom

Eleven-year-old Logan Eggleston does have a few worries about entering Brentwood Middle School — "more classwork, more homework and more tests," for example. She also is not looking forward to going from being the oldest in the school as a fifth-grader to the bottom of the ranks again in

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Author

TIPS ON THE TRANSITION

» **Practice:** One of the biggest challenges, said Bellevue mom Vicki Thompson, is that new middle-schoolers don't know how to work a combination lock. Thompson advises getting a practice lock, and "make sure they know how to use it."

» **Be informed:** Becoming familiar with new surroundings is important, said Franklin dad Naga Rajan, who has a rising high school sophomore in addition to 11-year-old twins. "Get to know the school," Rajan said. "Go to the website and attend parent orientation sessions. Take the kids to the student orientation session and talk to counselors to find out what you can expect."

» **Get organized:** Talk with kids about organization and responsibility, said Lori Eggleston, a guidance counselor at Brentwood High School. Encourage them to write assignments in a day planner immediately. Some schools, like those