

Snapshot #6

Clear, Consistent Discipline Centennial High School

Jocelyn A. Butler

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Clear, firm discipline and attendance policies that are consistently enforced contribute to high student performance, according to findings from the effective schools research. As identified in *EFFECTIVE SCHOOLING PRACTICES: A RESEARCH SYNTHESIS* (Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 1984), those research findings include:

At the CLASSROOM level:

1.8 THERE ARE SMOOTH, EFFICIENT CLASSROOM ROUTINES.

- Administrative matters are handled with quick, efficient routines that keep class disruptions to a minimum.

1.10 STANDARDS FOR CLASSROOM BEHAVIOR ARE EXPLICIT.

- Teachers let students know that there are high standards for behavior in the classroom.
- Rules, discipline procedures and consequences are planned in advance. Standards are consistent with or identical to the building code of conduct.
- Consistent, equitable discipline is applied for all students. Procedures are carried out quickly and are clearly linked to students' inappropriate behavior.

At the SCHOOL level:

2.7 DISCIPLINE IS FIRM AND CONSISTENT.

- A written code of conduct specified acceptable student behavior, discipline procedures and consequences; students, parents and staff know the code; students and staff receive initial training and periodic reviews of key features.
- Discipline procedures are routine and quick to administer. Disciplinary action quickly follows infractions and is always consistent with the code; treatment is equitable for all

students. Follow-up and action for absenteeism and tardiness normally occurs within a day.

- Out-of-school suspension or expulsions are minimal; in-school suspension is used in most cases.

SITUATION

Centennial High School is located in a suburb of Portland, Oregon, and serves approximately 1500 students in grades 9-12. There are few minority students at the school, and student turnover is between 20 and 30 percent each year.

Since 1983, the school has focused on long-term, databased improvement using the ONWARD TO EXCELLENCE model developed by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory. Following a 1-step process, the school has used student performance data in a collegial effort to set and meet schoolwide improvement goals.

CONTEXT

During the first year of ONWARD TO EXCELLENCE in the school, Centennial set two major schoolwide improvement goals, one focusing on improving student academic performance and the other on attendance. The goal set in 1983 was to reduce student absences and tardies by 50 percent by June of 1985. At that time, 10 percent of the students were absent daily. In a school with Centennial High's characteristics, five percent absenteeism would be expected.

Attendance and discipline has been ongoing concerns in the school for over 14 years, with little agreement among staff about how best to handle these areas. The establishment of the priority schoolwide goal enabled the school staff to focus on and work together toward resolving this problem area.

A revised student code of conduct, clear discipline procedures and a more concise attendance policy were developed. During the second semester of the 1984-85 school year, about 20 teachers piloted the new approach; and in the fall of 1985 the code, procedures and policy were implemented schoolwide.

Since the institution of the new discipline/attendance policy at the school, absenteeism has dropped to eight percent, and there is a larger incidence of excused absences than on unexcused absences. In addition, student scores on the annual standardized achievement tests have increased, which may be tied to the changes in handling of attendance and discipline. For further information about the program, contact Dick Lund, Assistant Principal, Centennial High School, 3505 SE 182nd Avenue, Gresham, Oregon 97030, 503/661-7612.

PRACTICE: CLEAR, CONSISTENT DISCIPLINE

There is an explicit, clear and consistent discipline system at Centennial High School. Expectations for student behavior and repercussions for not meeting those expectations are clearly described in the booklet, "Rules for Student Behavior." Copies of the booklet are given to all parents of incoming students, and new students are familiarized with requirements as part of their orientation to the school.

Major expectations of students are that they understand and follow school rules, attend school regularly and on time and respect the rights, property and safety of others. Students who become involved in areas of problem behavior are subjected to specified disciplinary actions based on the seriousness of the behavior problem. All students are subject to the same disciplinary actions according to descriptions included in the booklet.

Disciplinary actions taken by school administrators are in increasing levels of seriousness:

- **Warning.** At this stage, a school administrator discusses with the student the student's behavior and tries to reach agreement regarding how the student should behave.
- **Conference.** A formal conference takes place between the student and one or more administrators during which the student must agree to change behavior. A written record is kept.
- **Parent Involvement.** A parent is notified by telephone, personal contact or letter. There may be a conference involving the student, a parent, school officials and others involved, again with a written record.
- **In-School Suspension.** A misbehaving student is reassigned to a separate supervised environment within the school and may be referred for counseling, may undergo a schedule change or may have a work assignment around the school. Written records are maintained.
- **Out-of-School Suspension.** Discussion takes place with the student of impending suspension to provide a hearing of the student's side of the situation; the student is excluded from school and school-related activities for a specified period of time (one to seven days) with possible advertisement of district or community alternatives. Written records are kept.
- **Expulsion.** The student is informed of immediate suspension and recommendation for expulsion, the removal of the student from school and all related school activities. The Board of Directors determines the length of time a student is expelled. Student and parents are informed of the impending expulsion and informed of the student's rights under due process. Again, alternatives are described and written records are kept.

All of these levels of action are clearly described in the booklet, "Rules for Student Behavior." In addition, these levels of disciplinary action are clearly tied to individual areas of problem behaviors with specific consequences listed for the first and repeated occurrences of the infractions.

There are 21 problem areas defined and tied to consequences in the booklet. They include tardiness, closed campus violation, defiance of authority, disorderly or disruptive conduct, automobile misuse, bus misconduct, forgery or lying, loitering, theft, tobacco, mischief, vandalism, alcohol or drugs, recklessly endangering, menacing or harassment, assault, fighting, weapons, extortion, explosive devices and arson. Levels of disciplinary action are carefully matched to the infractions and are explicitly described.

"Loitering," for example, is defined as the student's being in a restricted area of the building or campus without permission. The minimum action to be taken for the first occurrence is Warning; the minimum action to be taken for a repeated occurrence (second or subsequent infraction) is a Conference. The maximum action to be taken for loitering is Suspension.

In another instance, "Bus Misconduct" is defined as the student's acting in a manner which may distract the driver or result in unsafe conditions. The minimum action for first occurrence is Warning, and for repeated occurrences is Parent Involvement. Maximum action for first

occurrence is Suspension and for repeated occurrences is Expulsion.

In all cases, a degree of discretion is exercised by the administrator taking action in the problem areas, thus the assignment of a range of minimum and maximum actions for each problem area. If, for example, a student has demonstrated excellent behavior and then becomes involved in an infraction, the school administrators may consider the previous record in determining the action to be taken. If negative behavior is directly related to an identified handicap, that is considered; and if a student has continually been involved in problem areas, disciplinary action taken will probably be the maximum action listed. Severe violation of rules may result in disciplinary action that extends beyond the guidelines listed in the booklet.

Records of all discipline actions are kept based on a "Disciplinary Referral" form completed on every student referral. The first portion of the form, filled in by the referring teacher, identifies the student; the behavior area; the referring teacher; date, time and class in which infraction took place; and date(s) of parent and counselor contact. Teachers fill in these data, then mark the reason for referral by selecting one from the list of behavior areas (the same as those in the students' booklet) preprinted on the form. They also describe the problems necessitating the discipline referral. Both the student and the referring teacher then sign this portion, and the form is transmitted to the school office for action by one of the two assistant principals.

The second half of the form is then completed by the assistant principal and describes the action taken, again reflecting those possible actions listed in the students' booklet. Both administrator and student sign this portion of the form.

This "Disciplinary Referral" is printed on four-part, no-carbon paper. When both portions of the form have been completed, copies are distributed to the administrator assigning disciplinary action, to the student's parent as necessary, to the student's counselor and to the referring teacher. In this way, all concerned are kept apprised of the disciplinary action taken.

Designed through teamwork by teachers and administrators, this form is the backbone of a recordkeeping system supporting the relationship between behavior problem area and disciplinary action. Through this brief, easily understood one-page form, teachers, students, parents, counselors and administrators are all informed of action and how it is tied to the student code of conduct.

All student referrals are entered into a computerized schoolwide data system at regular intervals by office staff at the school. Entries are coded into the system according to student identification numbers. These data can then be extracted in a number of ways: by individual student, by infraction, by grade level, by location (classroom, lunchroom, etc.), by time period, etc. The information is available only to administrators, although teachers may ask for general information about students, and counselors keep separate records based on their own copies of referrals.

Approximately once per month or at other appropriate intervals (e.g., end of term), the assistant principals receive printouts of current data on discipline violations, usually listing individual students. This is the more useful form of data for them, as it helps in monitoring individual students' behaviors and in alerting administrators to the need for progressive discipline actions.

Examination of these data has been useful in identifying ways to adjust procedures in the school to reduce discipline infractions. Student tardies, for example, comprise over 50 percent of all infractions in the school. When the data were examined, it became evident that a large number

of tardies were taking place in the first period of the day and in the first period after lunch. Changes in staff supervision patterns so that teachers are in the parking lot before school and walking through the halls just after lunch have reduced tardies in those time periods.

In still another use of the data, discipline information is reviewed annually during the school's goal-setting process. In the 1987-88 school year, the school's goal is, in fact, to reduce the discipline infractions by 30 percent schoolwide.

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