Safe and Orderly Environment

Abstract

Formal Definition:

Establishing a safe and orderly environment where students will learn and behave appropriately require a high level of support to help students realize high academic and behavioral standards. A school wide foundation provides all students with the supports and skills they need to become effective learners and problem solvers. In addition, the foundation of a safe and orderly environment provides students and staff with the supports and skills needed to develop and foster appropriate behaviors and healthy emotional adjustment.

Building a school community is essential to creating a safe and orderly environment in which students and community members can interact positively among each other. Support and active involvement establishes good relationships, pride, and ownership between the community and the school campus. On campus and community programs dealing with drug, alcohol, and violence intervention aid in countering the effects they have against students’ ability to learn in a safe environment.

Character building and proactive behavioral strategies can be used to deter delinquent and disruptive behavior in the classroom. Teaching coping skills to students as a preventative measure encourages students to take responsibility for their actions. Likewise, positive disciplinary measures help students by explaining violations and
allowing for corrective behavior. All school staff should be trained in proactive behavioral approaches, such as intervening before a verbal dispute escalates into a physical fight. Including the enforcement of positive support systems of teaching expected behaviors, which can be more effective than reactive approaches that emphasize punishment.

Strategic planning is the effective component in establishing school wide expectations that are reinforced and modeled by the adults in the school. They are stated simply and positively, like “Walk” instead of “Do not run.” Their purpose is to establish clear guidelines for student behavior. These methods enable students to understand what behaviors adhere to or violate the school’s expectations in establishing a safe and orderly environment.
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Facts

- **Positive community environment** – advocates for successful and safe school environments include representatives of the entire community: parents, educators, administrators, community members, area businesses, and students.
- **Approaches to preventing drug, alcohol, and tobacco use, and violence in schools** – school-wide programs greatly enhance the safety of the school environment through education.
- **Proactive behavioral management** – teaches responsibility and self-discipline and promotes a safer and more civil learning climate.
- **School Safety Plan** – establishes a clear definition and understanding of expectations and guidelines for maintaining a safe and orderly environment.

Interpretation

Creating and maintaining a safe and orderly environment is possible with the support and active involvement of the community: students, parents, teachers, administrators, et al. Caring schools support relationships between students and staff, and help establish a sense of belonging, pride, and attachment to the school. Creating a nurturing environment helps to develop shared responsibilities for the well being of the school and the safety concerns of the students and staff. Research by Christie (4) and Marquez (13) identify how positive attitudes toward building community relationships help students feel accepted and respected, hence assisting in personal and academic success.

Buchholz (3), Dufour (6), Gardner (7), and Schaps (21) each found that the building blocks for a successful school environment involve the cooperation of the school’s community, and a shared system of values and goals. Likewise, Lantieri (11)
believes that in order to provide a positive school climate, school community and school mission be in accordance. Children of parents, who set firm limits in the context of a temperate, supportive relationship, demonstrate greater prosocial behavior. Christie (4), Donnellan (5), Dufour (6), Marquez (13), and Kadel (10) also stress that modeling those qualities and characteristics that promote a safe and nurturing environment, become the standard and not the exception.

In a report on the National Study of Local Education Agency Activities Under the Safe and Drug Free Schools and Communities Act, the U.S. Department of Education (26) researched prevention activities designed to increase student knowledge, attitude, and behaviors toward the prevention of drug, alcohol, and tobacco use in schools. Of particular interest is the argument that preventing drug use is an important part of preventing violence, Prothrow-Stith (20). The recent school shootings has prompted the initiation of violence prevention activities. Christle (4), Harris (8), Holloway (9), Prothrow-Stith (20), and the Texas Legislative Council (24) point out that confronting serious crimes in schools may involve a variety of very strict and controlled policies. Although these policies aid in reducing serious crimes in schools, alternate methods of character building are necessary to promote student moral, character, and responsibility. Remediation, delivered by the school counselors or administrators, is another method of preferred communication, which involves addressing discipline problems to the effect
that the individual(s) is redirected with positive reinforcement, Barr (1), Murphy (13), and Schain (17), and the National Association of School Psychologists (17).

Proactive behavioral management, according to Barr (1), Donnellan (3), Lantieri (11), Lewis (12), and McIntyre (15), increases good behavior just as negative attention can increase negative behavior. Research by Stage (22), has shown that antisocial behavior dramatically increases when disruptive behavioral patterns remain untreated. Substituting problematic behaviors through alternate behaviors can be taught and consistently reinforced with specific positive strategies: social skills, methods of communication, anger control and relaxation training.

Studies by Donnellan (5), McIntyre (15), Lewis (12), Murphy (16), and the National Association of School Psychologists (17), involve approaches using token rewards and incentives for good behavior, which have also proven effective for deterring disruptive behavior.

Researchers Dufour (6) & Lewis (12) agree that strategic planning, team building, and management strategies are characterized by well-established routines, constructive time-on-task, behavioral feedback, and successful intervention procedures. In addition, school designs that create a safe physical environment decrease opportunities for inappropriate behaviors, and are maximized by well-supervised, cadre-monitored areas, Kadel (10). This physical environment also includes the manner in which the campus and the school’s routines are managed to prevent problems. Environment includes the norms,
rules and their enforcement, and any support necessary to enable students to function responsibly. Effective school safety plans must be simple, school-wide, proactive, and positive. Buchholz (3), Harris (8), Kadel (10), and the National Association of School Psychologists Expectations (17) believe that behavioral supports must be consistent and simplistic so that all members of the school understand the rules and their consequences. By the same token, different levels of discipline need to be associated with different levels or multiple occurrences of rules violations. Therefore, clear guidelines must be agreed upon in the beginning of the school year.

Application

The fundamental task to schools is to provide all children with an academically sound education in a safe and orderly environment. School community influences can provide for a supportive baseline toward positive attitudes and academic success by involving families in meaningful ways in which all members feel connected, safe, and supported. Schools can create an environment of positive relationships by forming small learning communities within the school, offering extended day programs for children, and/or support students in making the transition to adult life and the workplace.

A significant part of maintaining a safe and orderly environment involves identifying problems within the community and promoting programs to combat their effects. In looking at the effect that smoking prevention programs were successful in developing “smoking refusal skills,” Beltramini (2) credits the Tobacco Awareness
Program (TAP) and the Tobacco Education Group (TEG) interventions for significantly decreasing tobacco usage among students. Similarly, a Drug-Free School Recognition Program, U.S. Department of Education (25), integrated the Goal Six challenge of providing “a safe, disciplined environment conducive to learning.” The program recognizes and assesses a problem, and then it monitors the situation by enforcing school policy, with education, parental involvement and assistance programs.

Different situations call for greater enforcement of rules and modifications. Schools faced with higher risk factors of violence and drugs may need to incorporate preventative procedures that may include metal detectors, police-monitored hallways, student and locker searches, drug testing, and zero tolerance policies.

Discipline is a major issue facing education. Educators are challenged by a system filled with students who lack basic character habits and respectful behavior. Difficulties may stem from poor socioeconomic environments, peer influences, or personal motivation. Approaches toward proactive behavior management have been successful in reducing the incidence of disruptive behavior using stickers, checkmarks, chips, points, etc., as token rewards for desired behavior, McIntyre (). Promoting alternate thinking strategies also helped students to understand, regulate, and express emotions constructively, just as positive disciplinary measures explain the infraction and the rules governing them, and offering the opportunity to correct the mistake.
The typical campus will encounter a variety of problems; consequently, violations of the rules are inevitable. Plank (19) found in his study that students might violate expectations and guidelines especially when “they perceive that their rights are being violated, that due respect is not being offered, or that they can break rules without consequences.” Therefore, strategic planning, team building, and management strategies are critical to establishing safe and orderly schools. A compelling responsibility of the school system is to model a “style of managing conflict that is conducive to promoting democratic practices and a culture of nonviolence in their schools,” Lantieir (11).
Bibliography


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