

Recognizing Students' Positive Behavior

JAMES W. MORGAN

At New Fairfield Middle School in Connecticut, we have developed a positive method for improving student conduct and morale. The concept, recognition referral, is similar to disciplinary referral, but it emphasizes students' positive rather than negative contributions. It has five aims:

—to give students formal recognition from teachers and administrators for good behavior;

—to teach students they can receive attention and recognition for positive behavior, not just negative;

—to foster positive feelings in students when they see the school is interested in everyone, not just trouble-makers;

—to help administrators become acquainted with students for their positive contributions;

—to encourage teachers to look for students' positive characteristics instead of dwelling on the negative.

Students may be recognized for outstanding academic performance, for service to their teachers and classmates, or for their cooperative attitude and spirit. Figure 1 shows the Recognition Referral Form, which is filled out by teachers and administrators. It takes only a few moments for the classroom teacher to fill out the form. When we receive it in the office, we call in the student and congratulate him or her. We may also call or write to the student's parents. The reaction of students and parents has been tremendous. The referred student's initial shock and "I can't believe it!" expression are quickly replaced by pride and joy.

New Fairfield first used recognition referral about a year ago. So far, the results of the program are good. With a student population of nearly 480, disciplinary contacts have de-

NEW-FAIRFIELD MIDDLE SCHOOL New Fairfield, Connecticut	
RECOGNITION REFERRAL	
Student _____	Teacher _____
Homeroom _____	Date _____
Reason for recognition: _____ _____ _____	
ACTION BY TEACHER <input type="checkbox"/> Acknowledged with student. <input type="checkbox"/> Phone call to parents. <input type="checkbox"/> Written communication to parents. <input type="checkbox"/> Acknowledgement submitted for school bulletin. Other: _____ _____	ACTION BY ADMINISTRATOR Date _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Acknowledged in conference with student. <input type="checkbox"/> Phone call to parents. <input type="checkbox"/> Written communication to student. <input type="checkbox"/> Formal letter of recognition to parents. Other: _____ _____

Figure 1. Recognition Referral Form

creased to less than 1 percent, down from eight to ten on the average day to no more than four. Student suspensions have decreased by 33 percent and the number of days per suspension has decreased by 25 percent. Class cutting has been virtually eliminated.

Other variables, such as student population, staff changes, curriculum improvements, parental involvement, and expanded co-curricular programs, certainly contribute to the overall improvement in morale at the school. However, recognition referral appears to make a substantial impact on the attitudes, behavior, and self-concepts of the students. It can be a worthwhile investment of time for educators in other schools. ■

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