Characteristics of Schools with Good Discipline

Good discipline is a melting pot of positive factors including, among other things, high rates of student success and strong principal leadership.

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growth of students. High rates of success are important for student academic and social growth. Success contributes to positive student self-esteem, which in turn translates into positive student behavior. Schools that provide opportunities for students to learn concepts, practice skills, and experience some degree of academic success tend to have fewer discipline problems.

Building on basic skills developed in the elementary grades and anticipating the differentiated curriculum of the higher grades, our program focuses on developing each student as a competent, self-disciplined learner. Students are constantly reminded that we expect excellence in all things.

Solving problems is not fostered by excluding others from solving problems. A positive school atmosphere is fostered by including some students in solving problems, which can lead to academic success. An example of this is the Beginning Teacher Evaluation Study (BTES), which was developed by a committee consisting of parents, teachers, students, and administrators. After the code was created, workshops were presented to parents during an evening spent teaching the code to the students.

Groups of 25 students, answering questions and explaining rules and regulations in the code, worked on a new Discipline Code, which was developed by a committee made up of parents, teachers, students, and administrators. After the code was created, workshops were presented to parents during an evening spent teaching the code to the students. Members of the committee worked with groups of 25 students, answering questions and explaining rules and regulations in the code. A workshop was also provided for the teaching staff and school monitors. We now have a Review Committee of teachers, students, administrators, and parents who updated the code to make sure it is being properly implemented.

When problems arise in exemplary schools, teachers and administrators think before they act; they search for solutions, not victims. One school included in the PDK study, for example, solved its graffiti problem by developing a program where students painted murals on the walls of the school halls. The program, coordinated by an art teacher, not only beautified the school, but also drastically reduced the graffiti and vandalism.

The expectation and opportunity for success are fundamental to school life: Teachers must give respect if they want to receive it; they must expect success to help students achieve it; and they must foster student leadership if they want students to learn decision-making skills.

During the 1979-80 school year, we held a student leadership conference day which was devoted to training students in the areas of communications skills, community development, decision making, interpersonal cooperation, and goal setting. During the day, students moved from one workshop to another listening to guest speakers and parents from the community who volunteered to help. Our goal was to develop student leaders who were capable of being involved in committees in the classrooms where student leadership was needed. Many of the students who participated in this workshop will be giving workshops next school year for other students.

Characteristics:

1. The school is viewed as a place to experience success. One of the most significant findings of the Beginning Teacher Evaluation Study (BTES) was the role success plays in the development of a positive school atmosphere. Success contributes to positive student self-esteem, which in turn translates into positive student behavior. Schools that provide opportunities for students to learn concepts, practice skills, and experience some degree of academic success tend to have fewer discipline problems.

2. The expectation and opportunity for success are fundamental to school life. Teachers must give respect if they want to receive it; they must expect success to help students achieve it; and they must foster student leadership if they want students to learn decision-making skills.

3. Problem solving focuses on causes rather than symptoms. Teachers and school administrators must develop an understanding of the factors that contribute to discipline problems. Treating symptoms without dealing with causes is analogous to giving a chronically sick person aspirin without attempting to identify the cause of the illness.

For example, one school made separate lists of causes and symptoms (see Figure 1). Problem behaviors (or symptoms) evidenced at the school are listed in the left-hand column; possible causes (or factors) listed by the staff, appear in the center column; and activities to ameliorate problems are in the right-hand column. Too often, misbehavior is treated as a student problem resulting from cultural factors, peer-group pressure, or genotypic tendencies. Treating symptoms rather than causes makes misbehavior more narrowly a student problem. Behavior is too complex to be dealt with so simplistically. Treating causes rather than symptoms successfully requires knowledge of the causes of discipline problems, faculty members at exemplary schools are constantly seeking an understanding of and information concerning student behavior.

Figure 1. Sample Lists of Causes and Symptoms of Discipline Problems.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Causes</th>
<th>Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of student involvement</td>
<td>Written rules and definite consequences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of rules on attendance, discipline</td>
<td>Staff cooperation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of rules on attendance, discipline</td>
<td>Consistent enforcement of rules and regulations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of rules on attendance, discipline</td>
<td>Better supervision in all areas; strict enforcement of hall passes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff not working together</td>
<td>Support of staff by administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extensive exceptions made</td>
<td>Communication and meetings with parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wishy-washy leadership</td>
<td>Student handbook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited activities in community</td>
<td>News articles on school policies and practices</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Staff cooperation |
Consistent enforcement of rules and regulations |
Better supervision in all areas; strict enforcement of hall passes |
Support of staff by administration |
Communication and meetings with parents |
Student handbook |
News articles on school policies and practices |
"High rates of success are important for student academic and social growth."

symptoms places ownership for discipline problems on the shoulders of all school participants. The efficacy of the holistic approach is obvious: teachers must assess their own behavior and classroom activities as well as the overt behavior of students.

Characteristic 4—Emphasis is on positive behaviors and preventive measures. The schools in the PDK study focus on rewarding rather than punishing behavior. Punishment is used by teachers and administrators as a last resort and only after rules and procedures have been clearly communicated to students. Faculty members in exemplary schools seem to understand what Nietzsche meant in Genealogy of Morals when he suggested that punishment tames man but does not make him better: they recognize the limitations of punishment. Teachers and administrators in exemplary schools constantly seek ways to help students feel better about themselves. Emphasis on rewarding positive behavior has surfaced in numerous other studies. According to Rohr kemper and Brophy,

Teachers with greater ability to handle difficult students used more total rewards, including more symbolic rewards and contracts; more total supportive behavior, including more comforting and reassuring of students; and more unique supportive methods. In addition, high ability teachers used punishment less than the other teachers. . . . Not only did less effective teachers invoke punishment more, they also failed to provide support and encouragement as often as teachers rated higher. Exemplary schools do not concentrate their efforts on formal rule enforcement or punishment programs. Instead, they engage in a wide range of activities to enhance the self-perceptions of students and to maintain the support and confidence of staff members. They use award or honor days, positive messages to parents, and special programs to recognize student accomplishments. Such reinforcement is supported by more subtle methods that teachers use in the

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Characteristic 5—The principal is a strong leader. Numerous studies have highlighted the relationship between strong leadership and student achievement.3 Similarly, the principal plays a prominent role with regard to discipline, and no person has as great an impact on the school atmosphere. Teachers look to the principal for support and leadership. They want someone who provides direction yet is tolerant of instructional autonomy.

The principals described in the PDK study possess a form of tender strength. They make their positions clear but they do so in non-Machiavellian ways. They influence the staff and students without dictating. They are, as the following example suggests, a source of constant positive strength.

Last year, before Mr. Martin came here, it was a disaster. In just a few months, he has turned the whole school around. Look how excited the staff is! He really has made a difference. Of course, desegregation helped a little, and he brought in his whole team, Stephanie and Bones (vice principals); they work together like clockwork.—HART JUNIOR HIGH, OHIO.

It is one thing to suggest that the principal should provide support, and quite another to accomplish it. Lightfoot, in her description of exemplary schools, not only reinforces the notion of the principal's importance but also sheds light on how such a posture of effectiveness is accomplished.

The first thing Benson did as principal was visit and talk with every member of the faculty, classified staff, and custodial staff. He asked each person what he or she thought needed changing, and refused to get involved in "old stories" and bitter battles from the past. Benson was eager to cast a wide net. . . . His leadership began subtly, listening for direction from the collective body, working behind the scenes to create alliances, and carefully, but willingly, delegating responsibility to others. . . . As one faculty member said, "He is the best listener. . . . I can just feel his support and confidence."4

Conclusion
These five characteristics only partially represent the findings of the PDK Commission. Numerous other factors and concepts emerged and are discussed in the Handbook for Developing Schools with Good Discipline.

Perhaps the most significant finding emerging from this study is that there is no single recipe for success. Exemplary schools are successful because teachers, administrators, and students put all of their energy into creating a positive atmosphere. Those who have been looking for simple solutions to the discipline problem will probably not find them in the PDK Commission study. On the other hand, those who are willing to re-examine their current practices and try new approaches may discover the Commission's findings a useful guide to action.
