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Abstract

Discipline has long been identified as one of the foremost problems In the American educational system (Gallup, 1987). Feitler and Tokar (1982) found that 58% of their sample of teachers classified Individual students who continually misbehave as the primary cause of Job-related stress. Parents and teachers al Ike have criticized schools for lacking effective discipline plans. This must be a major concern of the school administrator because a quality educational environment relies upon good discipline (Ban, 1985).

FORMULATING A SCHOOL DISCIPLINE PLAN

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Neil Robert Mullen

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Discipline has long been identified as one of the foremost problems in the American educational system (Gallup, 1987). Feitler and Tokar (1982) found that 58% of their sample of teachers classifed individual students who continually misbehave as the primary cause of Job-related stress. Parents and teachers alike have criticized schools for lacking effective discipline plans. This must be a major concern of the school administrator because a quality educational environment relies upon good discipline (Ban, 1985).

This paper will examine the process of formulating a plan for school discipline. It will elucidate the features of a complete and orderly plan and discuss related information pertinent to the school administrator.

Many schools have developed discipline codes as a response to concerns about discipline problems. Out of every four schools it is estimated that three will have discipline plans. Some teachers' unions are negotiating a statement in their contract that specifies that each school develop a discipline policy (Jones, 1984).

The purposes of the discipline plan are varied. It should help make the school a safe and orderly place to teach and learn. Ban (1985) indicated that models of socially acceptable behavior should be shown through the plan. The connection between behavior and consequences should be understood through

consistent enforcement of the plan. It should also help students understand that they are responsible for their own behavior.

Jones (1984) indicated that a poorly conceived plan may be detrimental to student behavior. It may also effect teacher moral and be a cause for critisism from the community.

The relationship between good discipline and academic performance has been proven (Rich, 1984). Students who habitually misbehave consistently earn lower grades. Studies have shown that poor students who transferred from schools with discipline problems to schools with good discipline became better students (Baker, 1985).

As a prerequisite to development of the discipline plan, school authorities should review legal questions which may influence the composition of the discipline code. Zerkel and Gluckman (1985) reviewed recent court cases and developed the following guidelines that will help lessen school legal challenges by:

1. Striving for specificity and clarity in such rules, using terms like "prescription medicines" or vitamins rather than "medicines."

2. Explaining these rules to pupils and parents in handbooks and newsletters, and at assemblies.

3. Being particularly careful about rules with mandatory penalties, such as those calling for automatic expulsion for specified offenses.

4. Developing some alternatives to exclusion from school,
    such as in-school suspension (p. 46).

Wagner (1987) indicated that in-school suspension provided a
setting in which students were isolated from the rest of the
student population. Students would complete academic work and
discuss their problems with the principal or coordinator. Not
seeing their peers has proven to be an effective form of
punishment.

A discipline plan should meet several requirements if it is
to be effective. It should help solve the schools discipline
problems while meeting the legal requirements of due process.
The policy should foster prompt feedback to students and staff.
Also, it must not be time-consuming (Bowin and Hammond, 1988).

Short & Short (1987) suggested that the discipline policy
should be consistent with school goals. Administrators who set
school goals have a substancial impact on the discipline
structure of the school.

In addition to the school goals, it is important to state the
goals of the discipline plan itself. Four behavior management
goals were noted by Harris and Short (1988):

1. To effect and maintain positive relations between
    principals, teachers, and students.
2. To have all student misbehavior corrected in such a way
    that the student accepts responsibility for the
    misbehavior by seeing that it does not recur.

3.   To provide every student with an equal learning climate.

4.   To provide every teacher with an adequate teaching
      environment (p. 29).

According to Maynard (1985), "the best, most effective
discipline programs are preventive, simple, and flexible enough
to accommodate differences in specific situations" (p. 10).

Many discipline plans fail to include one very important
component, a prevention program. The prevention program attempts
to increase community awareness of discipline problems. It
should encourage good behavior in students before and when they
enter school. Also students with potential for behavior problems
should be targeted before their behaviors are established (Knoff,
1984).

Graff (1984) noted several ways of preventing misbehavior:

1.   Thorough planning for instruction.

2.   Appropriate instruction which meets students educational
      needs.

3.   Positive reinforcement to motivate students toward
      useful goals.

4.   Setting procedures to streamline daily organizational
      activities (attendance procedures, passing periods,
      etc.)

5.   Contingency planning for rainy days, assemblies,
      schedule changes, etc.

6.   Effective supervision in the classroom, halls, and other
     areas.

7.   Consistent rules in all classrooms, in accordance with
     the school plan (p. 56).

For the discipline plan to be useful it must be kept as
simple and short as possible. "The average high school student
should be able to read and understand its major points without
substancial effort (Lescault, 1988 p. 49). Rich (1984) stated
that schools should have few rules and totally eliminate those
which do not contribute to educational objectives. Also, the
fewer rules, the more likely that it will be followed and
enforced.

The plan should be flexible enough to allow administrators
and teachers to meet the needs of individual students.
Flexibility also reduces the probability that policies will
conflict (Huge, 1985).

The plan must be based on fairness and consistency. Students
will usually accept a system that apply equally to all
individuals. This will also increase the chances that the
teachers will take an active role in working with students who
misbehave.

Black & Welch (1985) indicated a rewards systems was also an
important component of the discipline plan. The purpose of
rewards was to reinforce appropriate behavior. It should be
clear that proper behavior leads to pleasant consequences.

Cooley and Thompson (1988) noted that positive reinforcement should not be overlooked. Especially since many troubled students do not have proper support at home.

Staff input was essential to the success of any plan. Teachers should make recommendations concerning the plan which they will later be asked to enforce. All staff members should be involved in the early stages of development to ensure that the schools problems were accurately stated (Jones, 1984).

Wagner (1987) suggested that teachers be involved in setting some basic classroom rules that will be consistent throughout the school. They should also decide the consequences for breaking those rules. Modification should be allowed to meet individual classroom needs.

The students' view of the plan was also important. If students have a voice in the development of the plan, they will be more committed to it (Lescault, 1988). Specifically, students who were most often in trouble should be included (Maynard, 1983).

According to Rich (1984), students may violate a rule because they believe the rule is needless. This is why it is important for the students to understand the need for a rule and why it is necessary to comply with it.

Parents should be invited to participate in the development of the plan. If parents are not allowed to air their points of

view, the plan may prove ineffective (Lescault, 1988). Cornell (1986) found that the success of the plan depends heavily on the attitudes of the parents. If parents seem disinterested in the plan, it is likely to breakdown. Parental involvement in the formulation process was often enough to win them over as supporters.

Lescault (1988) recommended that a committee made up of board members, administrators, faculty, parents, and students be formed to work on the plan. Their first step would be to examine the current discipline policy. If there was none, they should write down all the things that deal with discipline.

Lescault (1988) also found that committees that started by writing goals and objectives often became bogged down and their work proceded very slowly. Reviewing recent discipline records allows the committee to see what has been happening in the school. This should provide insight and help the committee develop a discipline plan that reflects the needs of the school. Every regulation drafted should be examined in light of this question: "Why does this policy or regulation exist?" (p. 48). If there is no satisfactory answer, the regulation should not be included in the discipline plan.

On closer examination, many disciplinary rules and actions are found to be ineffective because they are not appropriate. For example, a school that suspends students for tardiness and

skipping classes gives students something that they may view as more of a reward than punishment (Baker, 1985).

Examination of teaching methodology, curriculum, and human relationships within the classroom should be made. If it was determined that change was necessary, a list of recommendations for altering the curriculum and improving the school climate should be made. Also, a course in which teachers become familiar with current research on human development, classroom management, and teacher effectiveness can be offered (Jones, 1984).

School districts should gather accurate data on student behavior in their schools before setting policy. Only after the data has been examined can the discipline problems be defined (Jones, 1984).

Short & Short (1987) indicated that schools that introduce discipline plans without the study of their own problems actually may increase serious discipline problems. Plans that are borrowed from other schools tend to focus on punishment and rigid rule enforcement rather than problem prevention.

Once the school's problem areas have been defined, the next step would be to draft a discipline plan to meet the school's needs. Every policy and regulation should be examined to see the correlation between the plan and a safe and orderly environment (Lescault, 1988).

When the finalized plan has been accepted, staff members

should be trained to become familiar with it so proper implementation may take effect. Their help with the consistent enforcement of the plan is critical to its success. Students must believe they will be treated fairly if they are to cooperate with the plan (Black and Welsh, 1985).

Communications is essential if the community is to support the plan. The school has an obligation to inform the public about discipline policies and procedures. Asking for the parents' signature indicating they have received and read the plan is one alternative. Comments should be welcomed to foster open lines of communication (Wagner, 1987; Ban, 1985).

It is also important that the rules be clearly communicated to the students. Assemblies may be used to allow discussion of the rules so that all those involved understand them. Each student should also receive a handbook which contains the discipline plan (Jones, 1984).

Keeping track of the discipline problems of a school must be a continuous process. According to Wagner (1987): "this maintains accountability for administrative actions, gives teachers instant access to a student's record, and provides feedback to parents during phone calls and conferences" (p. 50). These records are also necessary in complying with legal directives and for providing a basis for evaluation of student discipline plans (Ban, 1985).

Ban (1985) stated that records should be kept at district, building and classroom levels. Records regarding expulsion, suspension, vandalism, violence, student hearings, and referrals should be kept at both district and building levels. Teachers should keep record of less serious infractions in their classrooms. A checklist may be used for this procedure, recording the offense, the time and the teachers response.

A periodical review of the plan was deemed as necessary to determine if it was operating effectively. The purpose of the evaluation was to determine if the plan was working. A survey of staff members would indicate whether they thought modification was necessary (Black and Welsch, 1985).

A discipline review committee may be formed to review the discipline plan. Parents, students, teachers, and adminstrators could be involved to gain feedback from all participants (Ban, 1985).

Through the entire process of building a discipline plan the principal must be the central figure. The principal must actively support the policy and treat each student impartially and in accordance with the policy (Black and Welsh, 1985). Research suggests that well-disciplined schools were the result of the principal being able to create a system of structure and order (Calabrese, 1985).

Schools that have effective discipline plans have principals that require teachers to handle routine discipline problems.

When principals become involved in the routine behavior problems
it results in a higher incidence of suspension (Short, 1988).

Principals in schools with good discipline are highly
visible. They were often seen at school activities and take a
sincere interest in all that was happening in the school. If the
principal was directly involved with the students, discipline
problems were significantly reduced. Also students were likely
to show improvement in their grade point average (Calabrese,
1985).

Black and Welsh (1985) indicated it was clear that the
principal and teachers must be willing to work as a team to have
an effective discipline program and to ensure an orderly learning
environment.

In conclusion, few subjects in education are as problematic
as student misbehavior. As Baker (1985) stated, "the most
important victim of student misbehavior is learning" (p. 486).
Schools can respond by developing a plan for school discipline.

The plan must be based on data collection and communications
that includes all involved parties. It is important that the
plan be flexible and simple enough for the students to easily
understand. It should be preventive in nature and focus on
rewards instead of punishment.

The principal plays the key role by promoting high
expectations for student behavior and by facilitating all

variables that encourage a good learning environment. Without strong leadership from the building principal the process may culminate in the formulation of a worthless document, rather than one that will help students become responsible citizens.

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