

1990

Discipline policy considerations for the administrator

Daniel Stehn
University of Northern Iowa

Let us know how access to this document benefits you

Copyright ©1990 Daniel Stehn

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.uni.edu/grp>



Part of the [Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Stehn, Daniel, "Discipline policy considerations for the administrator" (1990). *Graduate Research Papers*. 3323.

<https://scholarworks.uni.edu/grp/3323>

This Open Access Graduate Research Paper is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Work at UNI ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Research Papers by an authorized administrator of UNI ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@uni.edu.

Offensive Materials Statement: Materials located in UNI ScholarWorks come from a broad range of sources and time periods. Some of these materials may contain offensive stereotypes, ideas, visuals, or language.

Discipline policy considerations for the administrator

Abstract

According to a 1989 Gallup/Phi Delta Kappa poll, the most frequently mentioned problem confronting teachers is the lack of interest and support on the part of parents (Elam, 1989). Elam also found that other problems of major concern were the students' lack of interest and lack of discipline. It has always been convenient to blame the student and his immediate environment for his inability to perform academically. The question I wish to ask is "what is the school's responsibility in creating a positive learning environment?" If it is the school's goal to make "oranges" into "apples," how do we do it?

**DISCIPLINE POLICY CONSIDERATIONS
FOR THE ADMINISTRATOR**

**A Research Paper
Presented to
The Department of Educational Administration
and Counseling
University of Northern Iowa**

**In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in Education**

**by
Daniel Stehn
May 1990**

This Research Paper by: Daniel Stehn

**Entitled: Discipline Policy Considerations for the
Administrator**

**has been approved as meeting the research paper requirement
for the Degree of Master of Arts in Education.**

Robert H. Decker

March 26, 1990
Date Approved

Adviser/Director of Research Paper

James E. Albrecht

3-26-90
Date Approved

Second Reader of Research Paper

Dale R. Jackson

March 23, 1990
Date Received

Head, Department of Educational
Administration and Counseling

According to a 1989 Gallup/Phi Delta Kappa poll, the most frequently mentioned problem confronting teachers is the lack of interest and support on the part of parents (Elam, 1989). Elam also found that other problems of major concern were the students' lack of interest and lack of discipline. It has always been convenient to blame the student and his immediate environment for his inability to perform academically. The question I wish to ask is "what is the school's responsibility in creating a positive learning environment?" If it is the school's goal to make "oranges" into "apples," how do we do it?

Educators have been bombarded with "proven" methods in the handling of discipline problems. What must be remembered, however, is that in a heterogeneous society, one discipline policy will not succeed equally well everywhere. There are some educators who simply want students to conform in all ways to the standards of the school and believe schools would be better off without those who choose not to conform.

"Keeping juvenile delinquents in school does not prevent crime. It brings crime into the schools ...if all reluctant learners were required to remain in school, the schools would become

custodial rather than educational institutions" (Woodring, 1989).

Dealing with discipline problems not only causes anxiety for both the teacher and the student, but also takes away valuable time from the mission of the school; educating those who want to be educated. If we simply eliminate from our schools those who are not apples, schools would run more smoothly.

Educators have always understood the importance of setting high levels of academic expectation for students. "What must be remembered is that the same is true of behavior" (Petty, 1987). If educators do not demand high levels of behavioral performance from students, why should they expect to achieve them?

Many of the "seeds" of discipline problems may, ironically, be "planted" by the school itself. Burns (1985) identified several characteristics that are often present in schools with discipline problems. They include:

1. teachers who either do not provide supervision or provide "turn-your-back" supervision
2. an administrative staff that is expected to discipline and has accepted that responsibility

3. no agreement about the enforcement of even the simplest of rules
4. enforcement that is lacking in consistency
5. neither teachers nor administrators discuss behavioral expectations with the students
6. teachers that do not feel they will have the support of the principal
7. hard-core discipline problems are not expelled and repeated misbehavior is not dealt with

"The right of one student to an education cannot be allowed to supercede the rights of other students to an education or the general welfare of the school"

(Burns, 1985).

Petty (1987) sees one of the problems with discipline policies is that they sometimes "brand" the student who has committed a deviant act with a mark he must carry for life. He calls it a form of "capital punishment." "When a student makes a mistake, we must allow him to learn from that mistake through appropriate punishment. The student must then return to the mainstream of life and move forward" (Petty, 1987).

One of the problems with labeling the student who has committed a deviant act is that the student may accept that label. If perception is the basis for

reality, that student may see "deviant" reflected back at himself from the "system" and accept it.

Goodlad (1984) pointed out that a school's ambience plays a very important role in the success or failure of the school.

"Alike as schools may be in many ways, each school has an ambience (or culture) of its own, further, that its ambience may suggest to the careful observer useful approaches to making it a better school" (p. 81).

"If students feel as though the school has something to offer them, they will take ownership in the school" (Phelan, 1987).

Students need teachers who can create classroom environments in which teaching and learning can take place (Canter, 1989). But how do we do this? We must ask the following questions: (a) Why are students "turned off" by school? (b) Why do students become truant? There are many plausible explanations. Perhaps it is because the schools have to compete with the entertainment industry; perhaps it is the perceived lack of relevance to the student; perhaps it is the need for immediate gratification on the part of today's

youth; and perhaps education is not seen as a "ticket out" anymore, but instead to some, a "ticket" that delivers little.

When asked what steps might be taken to reduce truancy, the truants emphasized making school more interesting and fun (Sommer, 1985). How to make it more "fun" will require much study. We must remember also that all things needed or desired do not come without effort and sacrifice. Success may be more appreciated when earned.

Just as Burns' (1985) assertion that the school may itself be in part the cause of discipline problems, Rood (1989) asserts that the school itself may be the cause for absenteeism. Rood says there are four basic reasons why a student may not be in school: (a) weather and transportation, (b) health, (c) family choice, and (d) personal choice

Home dynamics that can generate poor attitudes toward attendance include the following:

1. the lack of family stability, separation or conflict between parents
2. the lack of parental concern or control over student action

3. the lack of personal involvement in school functions or understanding of school procedures
4. the inability of students to do the required homework for any number of reasons
5. a change in or consistently low socioeconomic status

School constraints may include:

1. the inability of the student to generate and maintain interpersonal relationships with other students
2. a "good riddance" attitude by the staff toward students
3. the inability to feel part of the school (lack ownership)
4. difficulty and frustration with classwork
5. lack of electives
6. the perception that school expectations are too difficult
7. an inconsistent disciplinary procedure
8. a permissive attendance policy without consequences for truancy (p.22).

The most important action that must be taken with truant students is to do whatever it takes to make the

students feel the importance of attendance (Eastwold, 1989). There are many ways to improve attendance (Miller, 1986). Miller suggests that we:

1. create an attendance philosophy for the school and publicize it
2. hold students accountable for unexcused absences by ensuring that they make up time missed through detention, in-school suspension, or Saturday school
3. create a make-up work policy
4. call truants personally (they may feel that someone does care about them)
5. involve truants personally in cocurricular activities-it may lead to an increase in attendance
6. call parents and hold them responsible if child is absent
7. schedule parent conferences
8. involve truants in group counseling
9. test chronic truants-are they bored with school, are they able to succeed or do they encounter continual failure?
10. give impromptu quizzes
11. design difficult make-up tests

Rood (1989) points out there are three basic types of discipline policies; policies that attempt to provide incentives for good attendance; policies that dispense punitive consequences; and restrictive policies that penalize students academically by withholding credit or lowering grades when a predetermined number of absences is reached.

According to Rood, incentive policies have had limited success. Gifts do not generally motivate chronic truants. Detentions and suspensions have not proven to be effective in controlling absenteeism; they may even compound the problem as suspension is only another vacation from school. There are some who openly endorse detention and suspension for truancy, however. Detention centers are an effective tool for dealing with discipline problems (Chizak, 1984). Chizak argues that schools are punishing the behavior while keeping the students where they belong, in school. Suspension for truancy is endorsed by some administrators as well but a suspension for truancy seems to make no sense at all. Parents may say that the student is being "punished" by giving him what he wants, a three-day vacation. According to Stine (1989), a suspension for truancy is reverse psychology at its best. It is like saying to

the student, you can't attend (even if you want to, you can't). Stine gives other arguments in favor of suspension:

1. A suspension is not designed to punish the student, but rather to call an enforced "parent conference." If a parent's presence is required for readmission, suspension is usually more effective than issuing a "bench warrant."
2. A suspension for truancy is not designed to punish the student but rather to punish the parent (who in turn will punish the student). The parent must endure the embarrassment of a call from the administrator, take time off work, arrange for a babysitter and so on.
3. Suspension for truancy might be considered part of a "Career Education" program. In the real world people get suspended (with and without pay), reprimanded, and fired for this type of behavior. "We do a great disservice to our students when we teach them false lessons such as there are no significant consequences for such behavior." "Better they should learn it in the tenth grade than

on the job" (Stine, 1989).

With few exceptions, many would argue that out-of-school suspension is counter-productive and should not be used except in extreme cases. Rather than suspending pupils for minor disciplinary offenses, students should be isolated with a paraprofessional (Vallejo, 1987). Students should not be allowed to eat or mingle with other students during the exclusion period. Vallejo suggests this type of program is more effective than out-of-school suspension because students on suspension do not receive credit for make-up work and are more apt to drop out.

Out-of-school suspension does temporarily free the teacher to better attend to the needs of seemingly more deserving students (Patterson, 1985) but is likely to increase discipline problems because of the frustrating effect of the returning student finding himself even further behind than when he was suspended. Although it is difficult to gauge the psychological damage done by suspending children, it is clear that suspension inhibits children's development (Miller, 1986). Miller says that schools should be helping these students through guidance and therapy rather than turning them away.

The Department of Education in 1987 set the national dropout rate at almost 30%. In some cities, more than 50% of all high school students drop out before graduating. One of the "solutions" to hold onto at-risk students is the in-school suspension program. To work effectively, the in-school suspension program must assume that student misbehavior is a symptom of an underlying problem which must be identified and worked on (Neill, 1976). Neill also says that students in in-school suspension should receive instruction comparable to or superior to what they would receive in regular classrooms.

"A basic provision of an in-school suspension program must be that students will not be academically penalized for being there, nor will they be permitted to do nothing (Neill, 1976)."

A vital element of in-school suspension is the insistence that all assignments be completed before a student is released (Patterson, 1985). Although in-school suspension is preferred over out-of-school suspension, in itself, it is not enough to modify the behavior of at-risk students. Counseling is a much-needed factor in the program (Hochman, Worner, 1987). Hockman and Worner assert that traditional in-school

suspension contributes little to students' educational progress. Counselors, they say, should become actively involved. Punishment alone helps very little.

While in-school suspension literature says that in-school suspension can be punitive, academic, and/or therapeutic, nine out of ten schools studied by Noblit and Short (1985) were punitive in nature with a minimal academic component. The ten schools selected for their study were the "success stories" of in-school suspension. The in-school suspension programs were conducted in restrictive, coercive environments that used academic seatwork to fill the day. The only successful in-school suspension program used behavioral modification principles and varied types of counseling to fit the needs of the students. Referral to in-school suspension as well as counseling was based on some diagnosis of the student's problem. Noblit and Short suggest that key questions that school administrators should ask before instituting an in-school suspension program include:

1. Does the school have a total discipline program? If not, in-school suspension may function only to segregate offenders.
2. Is the school attempting to identify the

reasons for rules infractions and misbehaviors?

3. Where are the positive reinforcers in the discipline program? Has the school defined discipline only in terms of punishment?
4. What are the offenses and causes of the offenses?
5. Will in-school suspension contribute anything significant to changing the student' behavior?
6. What is expected from in-school suspension? Does it simply replace out-of-school suspension as a punishment?

In-school suspension does not serve as a positive disciplinary alternative if the focus of the program is not rehabilitative.

"The fundamental purpose of discipline is to provide remedial treatment that identifies the underlying problem and eventually improves or corrects the misbehavior and not simply to inflict a penalty that temporarily extinguishes the undesirable behavior" (Sullivan, 1989).

Agreeing with Neill (1976), Sullivan says that to be considered a positive alternative to out-of-school suspension, in-school suspension must compensate for the

loss of regular classroom time with tutorial assistance. Sullivan also agrees that extensive individual counseling is important by a trained staff.

To suggest that determining an appropriate school discipline policy is an easy chore would be foolish. There are no easy solutions to problems involving discipline. There are too many variables that can complicate a smooth operation. In-school suspension does have merit but the problem is that many schools see it only as an alternative to out-of-school suspension. If we do not address the causes of the problems, we cannot expect the outcomes to change. Simply expelling or suspending may be the best solution in some cases and we should not apologize for it when necessary. Educators must acknowledge their inadequacies when confronting discipline problems but do what seems the right thing to do at the time based on the facts. If the discipline policy is firm, fair, and consistent in its dealings with students and parents, it should succeed.

REFERENCES

- Burns, James A. (1985). Discipline: Why Does It Continue To Be A Problem? Solution Is In Changing School Culture. NASSP BULLETIN, 69, 1-5.
- Canter, Lee. (1989). Assertive Discipline-More Than Names on the Board and Marbles in a Jar. PHI DELTA KAPPAN, 71, 57-60.
- Chizak, Lawrence. (1984). We Use a Detention Room to Keep Kids' Behavior Problems in Check. The American School Board Journal, 171, 29-30.
- Eastwold, Paul. (1989). Attendance Is Important: Combatting Truancy in the Secondary School. NASSP BULLETIN, 73, 28-31.
- Elam, Stanley M. (1989). The Second Gallup/Phi Delta Kappa Poll of Teachers' Attitudes Toward Public Schools. PHI DELTA KAPPAN, 70, 785-798.
- Goodlad, John. (1984). A place called school. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Hochman, Stephen & Worner, Wayne. (1987). In-School Suspension and Group Counseling: Helping the At-Risk Student. NASSP BULLETIN, 71, 93-96.
- Huff, Joseph A. (1988). Personalized Behavior Modification: An In-School Suspension Program That Teaches Students How to Change. The School Counselor, 35, 210-214.

- Miller, Dan. (1986). Effect of a Program of Therapeutic Discipline on the Attitude, Attendance and Insight of Truant Adolescents. The Journal of Experimental Education, 55, 49-53.
- Miller, Dan. (1986). Fifty Ways to Improve Attendance. NASSP BULLETIN, 70, 74-79.
- Neill, Shirley Boes (ed.). (1976). Suspensions and Expulsions. Arlington: National School Public Relations Association
- Noblit, George W. & Short, Paula M. (1985). Missing the Mark in In-School Suspension: An Explanation and Proposal. NASSP BULLETIN, 69, 112-115.
- Patterson, Francene. (1985). In-School Suspension Rehabilitates Offenders. NASSP BULLETIN, 69, 97-99.
- Petty, Ray. (1987). A Common-Sense Approach to Behavior Problems. Principal, 67, 29-31.
- Phelan, William T. (1987). Obstacles to High School Graduation: The Real Dropout Problem. The Journal of Educational Equity and Leadership, 7, 223-233.
- Rood, Robert E. (1989). Advice for Administrators: Writing the Attendance Policy. NASSP BULLETIN, 73, 21-25.
- Sommer, Barbara. (1985). What's Different About Truants? A Comparison Study of Eighth-Graders. Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 14, 411-421.

- Stine, Marc D. (1989). Why Suspend Students for Truancy?
A Principal Responds. NASSP BULLETIN, 73, 45-47.
- Sullivan, Judy S. (1989). Elements of a Successful In-
School Suspension Program. NASSP BULLETIN, 73, 32-38.
- Vallejo, M. Edmund. (1987). How to Curb the Dropout Rate.
The School Administrator, 44, 21-23.
- Woodring, Paul. (1989). A New Approach to the Dropout
Problem. PHI DELTA KAPPAN, 70, 468-469.