

The Turnaround School Principal

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Discipline Matters

Turning Around a School – Effective and peaceable schools are worth the fight.

Research supports my experience that the foundation for establishing an effective school is to implement a firm, consistent, loving school-wide discipline plan.

Many schools are in need of revamping their student management plans. Yet what is often the case is the plan currently in place is not being enforced. Frankly, what is often the problem is that school administration wimps out by not enforcing the rules they already have. They complain that their students will not adhere to the rules and point to the need for additional rules. What they fail to understand is that a written rule does not necessarily bring about the desired behavior anymore than having a speed limit sign constrains everyone from speeding. Speeders have to be stopped. If speeding laws are never enforced, the laws will soon be ignored and the problem of speeding will worsen. Same with the school “laws” (rules). The signs may be posted. Most students are compliant and adhere to the rules. Then the 10- 20 % (non-compliant) will “test” the system. We must remember that the other students are watching – and learning!

Law enforcement uses tools to enforce their laws. School administrators have tools to use and yet many just ignore them or don’t “sharpen” the tools they have rendering them ineffective. They run ineffective detention halls and in-school suspension programs. They don’t enlist the help of parents and teachers. They allow students to be rude and disrespectful. They avoid holding students accountable or the accountability is inconsistent or appears to favor one student group over another. The adults are not acting like responsible, professional adults. The problem is not the students, the parents or the community. The problem is the people in charge.

For example, the dress code may specifically disallow some form of fashion/dress and yet student after student is allowed to disregard the code. Or, some students appear to be able to get away with some things that other students may not. It may be the athletes or cheerleaders or seniors or rich kids or the cool kids or the white kids or the honor roll kids who seem to have privileges that others may not. It appears as if there are “unwritten rules”. Everyone learns that “real” rules of conduct are not the ones written down. It is confusing and creates chaos and disrespect for authority

If a rule is worth posting, it is always worth enforcing 100% of the time with 100% of the people. This brings about order, stability, and peace.

Ineffective schools have ineffective administrators. Maybe the administrator has the talent and ability to lead the school well. It may be that he/she simply has not had sufficient training to know what to do. It may be that their efforts have been thwarted by others. Whatever the reason, the school can be changed. Actually, turning a school around is not a difficult task. A couple of things must be in place: (continued on page 2)

1. A mandate by someone in authority above the principal that big changes are necessary.
2. A principal who will take charge, take some risks, be courageous and stand firm.

The next step will be to get all the players on your side. Everyone is recruited to be on the team. Empower everyone you can: teachers, staff, PTA, student council. You will need help. Present a united front. Students must see that you say what you mean and mean what you say. Focus on the mission. Start the new plan the first minute of the first hour of the first day of school with no “wimping out” – and success will soon be forthcoming!