

School Improvement Project: Conscious Discipline

by:
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Statement of the Purpose of the Project

The campus was in great need of a school wide classroom management program because there were high behavior referrals in previous years with a high number of out of school suspensions. There was also a new administration team to the campus, and it was decided to moderately implement a new strategy called Conscious Discipline. “Conscious Discipline is a comprehensive social and emotional intelligence classroom management program that empowers both teachers and students.” (Bailey 2000). The reason we chose not to implement this behavioral management system completely this school year, because we wanted to make sure that the teachers that wanted to implement certain components were invested in the initiative. We had a few teachers that were already trained by a consultant through Loving Guidance, the company that Conscious Discipline works through, the previous year. These teachers fully implemented the components that they could in their classrooms. The school is in a low socio economic area with 96% economically disadvantaged students. Currently there are 82% of the students that are considered at risk and 63% are considered LEP Students. It is considered to be an Environmental Science Magnet campus with the current enrollment of 749. The school is broken up 50/50 gender wise. Racially and ethnically, the breakdown is as follows: African American 4%; Asian/Pac. Islander 1%; Hispanic 94%; White 2%. The previous year, the discipline referrals to the assistant principal were at about 75%. This year’s referrals are at about 25%. This percentage has made a huge drop due to conscious discipline strategies being used with not just the students but the teachers as well.

List of Activities Completed

There are no set procedures or activities to using Conscious Discipline. It is about setting a child up to be able to self-regulate and giving the adult tools to help a child self-regulate. “As external

boundaries are established for children through rules, an internal belief system begins to develop that they will use to govern their own lives” (Bailey 1997). An example of a scenario could be if a child is refusing to follow directions. According to Dr. Bailey, “You will get more of the behavior on which you focus”(2000). Teachers often focus on the negative behavior and verbally express the negative behavior to the whole class. Instead of the teacher saying “No, stop running”; the teacher could focus on what behavior she or he does want and say “walk safely”. When teachers approach the child’s behavior in a positive way, the child is more likely to comply. After the child has complied with the desired behavior, the teacher should acknowledge the behavior. “All you really need to do is describe the efforts or accomplishments you see from the child” (Bailey 2000). The teacher can use positive reinforcement language such as “Wow, you are walking so that you can stay safe”. This type of noticing helps the students know and understand what the expected behavior is. The difference in language comes with the difference in the severity of the behavior. For instance, if the student continues to run in the hallway, the teacher would use an assertive tone and repeat “walk”. If the student continues to run, the teacher would then use the language of choice. The teacher then gives choices they want the child to take. The teacher could say “you have a choice, you can walk safely alone, or you can walk safely holding my hand. Which do you choose?” Giving the student choices helps them build self-regulation. “As the attuned adult continues this coaching process over time, the child matures with the ability to self-regulate: He is able to put a pause between a feeling and an action, knowing distress is temporary and will pass at some point” (Bailey 2011). This is also the process to use when a child is feeling angry, frustrated, or a feeling other than calm. Strategies to help a child go from their current feeling to calm are also a part of the Conscious Discipline Strategy. “Children cannot develop healthy self-regulatory skills unless they see

adults consistently addressing their own emotions in healthy ways.” (Bailey 2011). Using the breathing techniques often helps a child just breathe to get to a calmer state of mind. Dr. Bailey says that “Stressful situations throw us into the lower centers of our brain where we can only access survival skills” (2011). “I Calm” tools help student to disengage their stress. There are four skills that teachers can easily teach children at a young age to help them with their breathing strategies; S.T.A.R., balloon, drain and pretzel. Teachers can direct children to the visuals of these breathing techniques so that children are prompted to use them as their feeling intensify or are not at a calm state.

This coming school year, all teachers and staff will receive two day training from a Loving Guidance: Conscious Discipline consultant to begin full implementation of the management program. Teachers will receive a professional development book to go along with the training. The professional development will be an ongoing training throughout the school year through PLCs. The teacher specialist for PK-2nd grade and the principal will meet with the Conscious Discipline Action Team, CDAT for short, to implement monthly CD professional trainings as well as distribute materials and or resources necessary for the implementation of Conscious Discipline to be successful. The teacher specialist will order and materials and or resources necessary for and professional development ahead of time and store them in the instructional materials closet.

This project will have immense impact regarding safety issues on the campus because it is a comprehensive social emotional program that not only helps students but teachers and staff as well in dealing with classroom and school behavior issues. Students will have the opportunity to express their feelings and problem solve through their issues and conflicts rather than just being sent to the office to be “dealt with”.

Review of Literature

There are no set procedures to using Conscious Discipline. It is about setting a child up to be able to self-regulate and giving the adult tools to help a child self-regulate. “As external boundaries are established for children through rules, an internal belief system begins to develop that they will use to govern their own lives” (Bailey 1997). An example of a scenario could be if a child is refusing to follow directions. According to Dr. Bailey, “You will get more of the behavior on which you focus” (2000). Teachers often focus on the negative behavior and verbally express the negative behavior to the whole class. Instead of the teacher saying “No, stop running”; the teacher could focus on what behavior she or he does want and say “walk safely”. When teachers approach the child’s behavior in a positive way, the child is more likely to comply. After the child has complied with the desired behavior, the teacher should acknowledge the behavior. “All you really need to do is describe the efforts or accomplishments you see from the child” (Bailey 2000). The teacher can use positive reinforcement language such as “Wow, you are walking so that you can stay safe”. This type of noticing helps the students know and understand what the expected behavior is. The difference in language comes with the difference in the severity of the behavior. For instance, if the student continues to run in the hallway, the teacher would use an assertive tone and repeat “walk”. If the student continues to run, the teacher would then use the language of choice. The teacher then gives choices they want the child to take. The teacher could say “you have a choice, you can walk safely alone, or you can walk safely holding my hand. Which do you choose?” Giving the student choices helps them build self-regulation. “As the attuned adult continues this coaching process over time, the child matures with the ability to self-regulate: He is able to put a pause between a feeling and an action, knowing distress is temporary and will pass at some point” (Bailey 2011). This is also the process to use when a child is feeling angry, frustrated, or a feeling other than calm.

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Evaluation

As this strategy is really to change the behavior management system in place on campus, and to change the mindset of traditional disciplining teachers, there is not a real assessment of the strategy. The only assessment that can be done is through teacher interviews as well as through surveys. This year we have just interviewed teachers that have noticed a change in how children are being self-regulated students and how the culture has changes to a more empathetic culture or teachers and students. When the implementation is school wide next year, we plan on having teachers take a survey of what the disciplining system they are familiar with now and then yearly make comparisons as we implement the system. This should give us data as to how well the system and strategies are working.

So far, we have interviewed a few teachers to see if they have noticed a change in the students. The results were positive. Teachers at the beginning of the school year were more apt to send students to the office for small infractions. Now teachers are less likely to send the students to the office and more likely to try to help the student make positive choices, or help

them with self-regulating. In addition teachers at the beginning of the school year did not really have buy in of Conscious Discipline. Now towards the end of the school year, more teachers are inquiring about professional development in regards to Conscious Discipline. They have developed an interest in the behavior management strategies used. Future use of this strategy will definitely be used school wide little by little. School wide suspension rates have decreased from 45 out of school suspensions to just 2 in the few months that it was implemented.

Reflection

In conclusion, Conscious Discipline is not a strategy that can be a solve all and or fix all immediately. It begins with changing the mindset of an adult. As we begin to implement this system school wide, we will be working with helping teachers move from a punishment, consequences and rewards mindset, to a mindset of helping students and teaching self-regulating strategies. I have personally seen a school go from the typical discipline systems or the color systems to completely eliminating the need for them with the use of Conscious Discipline. The change took a few years to fully implement and even then the campus was still learning. Now that I and the rest of the administration team want to implement this system at a new campus, we know that we will have to work hard at the push back, but the results will help the students be successful in the future.

What I would do differently would be to make sure that all staff members receive the professional development, including office staff. Just as companies have their employers take customers service trainings, this would be our customer service training. The students and parents are our customers, and we must be able to help them effectively. As a leader, you must be aware of what this particular classroom management program entails. The principal has already attended an intense evasive one week session professional development with Conscious Discipline with Dr. Becky Bailey herself. Three of the four other administrators have also been

through on going Conscious Discipline training. It is important that the administrators already are on board with the new initiative so that the staff has buy in.

Reference

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