Effective Student Behavior Interventions in Safe and Orderly Schools

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Paper submitted to Dr. Louis Watts of the Marshall University Graduate College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the course

LS 690

Education Specialist Degree Leadership Capstone Course

South Charleston, West Virginia, 2014

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# Introduction

The Correlates of Effective Schools have become a guide for educators around the world as to what practices are most efficient in helping all students to succeed in education. The Correlates are designed around the assumption that all children can learn and that schools control the factors that affect student mastery of the core curriculum (Lezotte, 2001). They are the organizational and contextual indicators that research has found to be the most important factors in student learning (Suggs, 2007).

The first correlate focuses on the importance of a safe and orderly environment within schools. There is a growing concern within schools and communities alike over the issue of a safe school environment. A particular concern is how a safe school environment affects students’ achievements. Many educators feel that neither teaching nor learning will occur if the staff and students do not feel safe in their schools (Adams, 2003). Therefore, these events have been the catalyst for new state legislation around the country. West Virginia, in an effort to outline what constitutes proper student behavior and appropriate interventions to negative student behavior, has developed a detailed guide which both district and building level administrators are to follow. This policy states that at a minimum, schools shall: (a) Analyze school climate/culture yearly; (b) Make data driven improvements; (c) Implement school-wide plans that provide appropriate interventions to support and reinforce expected behaviors; (d) Implement programs/practices that promote youth asset development to support expected student behaviors, positive education and health outcomes; (e) Implement comprehensive and effective intervention programs/practices that target identified behaviors that are disruptive to the education process and that place students at higher risk of poor education and health outcomes; and (f) Develop appropriate and reliable referral procedures for intensive intervention that enlist school and community partnerships (Expected behavior in safe and supportive schools, 2012).

It is with the need to implement comprehensive and effective intervention programs and practices that this study is most concerned. What interventions are effective in reinforcing positive behavior? What interventions are not effective? Furthermore, what does it mean for an intervention to be effective; what must it accomplish?

## Rationale

The current literature stresses the need for further study on each specific correlate and how to effectively implement each (Suggs, 2007). In particular, recommendations have been made to study which intervention strategies are effective and which are not when used on various populations (Adams, 2003). This would include studying the policies, procedures, routines and programs used by building level administrators to influence schools’ safe and orderly environment (Marsden, 2005). The data gleaned from studying such factors could be invaluable to school administrators concerned with creating and maintaining a safe and orderly environment within their own schools through effective interventions and positive behavior supports. After all, instruction and learning in schools will not be realized if there is not a safe school environment (Adams, 2003).

# Literature and Research Basis

## Effective Schools Research

The seven correlates were derived from Edmonds’ 5 Correlates and the Connecticut Department of Education’s 7 Correlates (Lezotte, 2014). Edmonds, building on earlier research by Weber, agreed that to equalize education for students of low socioeconomic status, effective schools must have strong leadership, high expectations for all students and make student acquisition of reading skills an essential goal (Weber, 1971). Edmonds went on to conclude (1979):

It seems to me, therefore, that what is left of this discussion are three declarative statements: (a) We can, whenever and wherever we choose, successfully teach all children whose schooling is of interest to us; (b) We already know more than we need to do that; and (c) Whether or not we do it must finally depend on how we feel about the fact that we haven’t so far.

Lezotte, working on his own effective schools research at the time, was also interested in the factors that high performing schools have in common, and agreed with Edmonds that all students are capable of learning, regardless of socio-economic background. The seven factors outlined by Lezotte are what are widely known today as the Correlates of Effective Schools. These correlates, according to Lezotte, can be used by schools as a guide to becoming more effective in ensuring all students learn no matter what the background of the students or the school.

## The Correlates of Effective Schools

The Correlates of Effectives Schools, as outlined by Lezotte, are (2004):

1. Safe and Orderly Environment
2. Climate of High Expectations for Success
3. Instructional Leadership
4. Clear and Focused Mission
5. Opportunity to Learn and Student Time on Task
6. Frequent Monitoring of Student Progress
7. Home-School Relations

These correlates have been adopted by many building and district level school leaders as the foundation for meaningful change in schools. In fact, Lezotte would eventually expand the correlates with a broader, more in-depth approach to describing the factors that represent effective schools. These updates became known as the “Second Generation.” In reference to the second generation correlates, Lezotte states, “There are two underlying assumptions to keep in mind: First, school improvement is an endless journey. Second, the second generation correlates cannot be implemented successfully unless the first generation correlate standards are present in the school” (1991).

Understanding the language within the first and second generation standards for Safe and Orderly Schools is paramount to understanding school improvement. Therefore, in the next section, the original and second generation standards for Safe and Orderly Environment will be explored.

## The First Correlate: Safe and Orderly Environment

For the purposes of this study, the correlate of Safe and Orderly Environment will be the main focus because the first concern of administrators and teachers alike should be that of a safe school climate (Adams, 2003). In the first generation of the standards, Lezotte states of Safe and Orderly Schools, “In the effective school there is an orderly, purposeful, businesslike atmosphere which is free from the threat of physical harm. The school climate is not oppressive and is conductive to teaching and learning”. He goes on to state in the second generation of the Correlates (1991):

In the first generation, the safe and orderly environment correlate was defined in terms of the absence of undesirable student behavior (e.g., students fighting). In the second generation, the concept of a school environment conductive to *Learning for All* must move beyond the elimination of undesirable behavior.

Lezotte and other effective schools researchers have found that there are significant correlations between a school’s safe and orderly environment and student achievement (Marsden, 2005). Considering this, it is no wonder that so many district and building level school leaders are interested in maintaining a safe and orderly environment for the students they serve.

## Expected Student Behaviors and Meaningful Interventions

A safe and orderly school environment is a critical component contributing to the academic achievement of students (Suggs, 2007). When staff members perceive that their schools are safe environments they are more able to concentrate on the task of educating students. Likewise, students can then devote more of their “mental energies” to being academically successful in the classroom, and not to worrying about safety (Davis, 2005).

Therefore, the perceptions of students and staff as to how safe they are at school are very important to how each will perform while at school. Unfortunately, the media’s attention to shootings and other school emergencies leads many students and communities to believe that schools are no longer safe. This is not necessarily the case. Many states have mandated violence prevention programs, developed safety plans, identified prevention and intervention strategies, identified risk factors and behavioral problems of their student population, and actively sought parent, student and community involvement. The result is that students are reporting feeling safer at school and that schools remain one of the safest places for school-aged children (Davis, 2005).

It is through factors such as school leadership, community involvement and intervention strategies, which schools are able to create and maintain learning environments for students which are safe and orderly. The following is an exploration of a few of the most important factors to maintaining a safe and orderly environment in schools. Each of these stakeholders and interventions must play an integral role in the safety plan of any effective school.

### Administration.

The role of the administrator is paramount to the creation and stability of a positive school climate. This leader is under tremendous pressure to meet a diverse range of needs from any number of internal and external sources, and must strike a balance between fairness, consistency, and now, policy (Crawford, 2003).

#### Visibility.

Crawford found that principals feel the need to promote a highly visible administrator presence. By placing themselves in and around the school and its grounds, these school leaders were convinced they proactively prevented any number of potential student incidents from happening. And in most cases, their presence was all that was required; they were not usually called upon to intervene, to lecture, or to discipline. The fact that students were aware of their principal’s presence and power was enough to maintain a certain acceptable standard of behavior among them. This visibility sent a message that the administrator was active in the school, was aware of what students were doing, and cared enough to make the effort to ensure everyone’s safety throughout the school day (2003).

Principals are often faced with many other challenges while continuously striving to make effective instructional decisions for highly diverse populations (Suggs, 2007). However, in certain situations being visible on the school grounds is much more important to creating a safe and caring environment than paperwork. By patrolling the hallways, or eating in the lunchroom, or perhaps monitoring the parking lot before and after school, principals make their presence felt, stress their commitment to the school, and prevent any number of problems before they get a chance to occur (Crawford, 2003).

#### Fairness and consistency.

Above all else, principals must maintain consistency when implementation of behavior policies and assigning of behavior interventions. Research suggests that with the continuous and consistent implementation of policies and procedures, the fair and appropriate delivery of reinforcement for positive behaviors, the addressing of inappropriate behaviors with corrective consequences, and restructuring schools for academic, behavioral, and social success, students perceived that their schools were safer and predictable environments (Davis, 2005).

In addition to the need for administrators to be consistent, the leadership must also ensure that all other staff members are being consistent in the application of expectations and consequences to students. In an effective school, the leader requires all staff members to be on duty at all times. The leader expects staff to correct inappropriate behavior when viewed, whether or not the student is in his or her class (Suggs, 2007).

#### Reasonability and common sense.

It is important for administrators, especially beginning administrators, to remember that literal interpretation of school, district and state policies may not actually be the recommended method by which to make these policies work most effectively. Crawford found that principals were adamant that there was a need to be flexible within the policy parameters, to be willing to interpret each incident on its own merit, and to know the difference between a situation that requires their discretion and one that is beyond their control. Policy should be used to strengthen a leader’s philosophies, not replace them (2003).

Crawford also found that administrators often stressed the need to use common sense and good judgment when dealing with most incidents of student violence. Discretion requires looking at the motivating factors leading up to the incident, considering the student’s past history for misbehavior, talking with the students involved, possibly contacting parents, and providing consequences that are fair for the situation (2003). Table 1 lists many of the factors which could be considered by administrators when administering interventions and consequences to students.

##### Table 1

**Possible Factors Affecting Negative Student Behavior**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Factor | Category |
| Discipline history | Student |
| Special education status | Student |
| Illness | Student |
| Emotional problems | Student |
| Learning difficulties | Student |
| Parental support | Home |
| Economic situation | Home |
| Possible abuse | Home |
| Parent/sibling illness | Home |
| Homeless status | Home |
| Divorce/remarriage | Home |
| Target of bullying | School |
| Academic performance | School |
| Cognitive functioning | School |
| Fairness and consistency | School |
| Reasonability and common sense | School |
| Classroom management | School |

### Classroom management.

Not all the responsibility for maintaining an effective school through the use of a safe and orderly environment lies on the shoulders of administrators. All school staff, but especially teachers, are responsible for maintaining order in their classrooms and using their own personal strengths to create a positive atmosphere for learning.

Research shows the importance of the role of classroom teacher in effectively managing student behavior, especially behavior needs of more difficult students. Administration and teachers alike need to provide a systemic response to inappropriate behavior to ensure the reinforcement of effective classroom management practices (Marsden, 2005).

### Counselors.

Counselors should also play a vital role in any school’s discipline intervention program. Counselors are skilled in helping students experience success and gain the skills necessary to make effective school-to-life transitions. They can do this through creating, implementing, and supporting school-based interventions that specifically target at-risk children (Jackson, 2010).

Also, counselors have the difficult job of meeting with students after they’ve made poor choices and been assigned intervention to discuss the students motivation for participating in poor behavior and how to make better choices in the future.

### Community.

When the community has an active role in educating children on proper and acceptable modes of behavior, the results often carry into the schools (Crawford, 2003). Community involvement is fast becoming a focused part of school behavior programs. For instance, West Virginia state code requires schools to establish community partnerships which provide the school with a variety of supports and resources to develop appropriate behaviors in safe and supportive schools. These partnerships may be both formal and informal (Expected behavior in safe and supportive schools, 2012).

### Climate.

School climate has become important to administrators, students, teachers, and parents. Safety issues, achievement, and healthy development of students often appear in the media, which further puts the focus on the educational climate. This focus has encouraged school districts to put equal emphasis on a safe school climate and academics (Adams, 2003). Furthermore, the building level principal has become the person to whom others look to set the tone for the entire school. It is his or her vision and leadership abilities that shape and school’s climate and direction in many areas (Crawford, 2003).

One of the tasks of administrators when considering school climate is the condition of the physical school environment. Research has found that a well-maintained physical plant, a positive climate, well communicated school rules and clear promotion of those rules are important factors in creating a positive climate (Suggs, 2007).

### Law enforcement.

In order to provide a safe and orderly learning environment, many schools have added law enforcement officials, or school resource officers (SROs), to their professional team. Research has shown that SROs contribute to an atmosphere of caring, trust, and respect; maintain strong communication; support rules and expectations; improve staff and student morale, and generally promote a feeling of safety and security (Dickerson, 2005). However, research has also shown that there is a difference between feeling secure and feeling safe at school. Administrators may lock doors and have visible uniformed officers to make schools secure, but will probably not make students feel safe. Feeling secure comes when there is a uniform police officer or other means of security. A feeling of safety comes when there is a feeling of “ease,” whereby the students feel valued and safe (Adams, 2003). Therefore an SRO program should be complemented with the maintaining of a positive school climate where the SRO is part of a larger culture of respect and security.

### Character education.

School leaders, policymakers, and those who hold stake in the public schooling system need to advocate a sound character-building program that is reinforced by the entire school community in and beyond the school walls (Marsden, 2005). These programs should focus on the development of student self-esteem, communication skills, problem solving skills, and understanding their school’s environment. They should also support specific counseling techniques, staff development for teachers, parent training, and identification and monitoring of students’ behavior (Jackson, 2010). Schools which have implemented a successful character education program have reported that teachers and principals believe the programs to be very important in creating a safe and effective learning environment. These teachers and principals also reported that personal responsibility was among the most important elements in creating a safe environment (England, 2009).

### Intervention strategies.

Implementing effective intervention strategies to curb negative student behavior has become a focus of all school systems. Schools are more likely than ever to remove students who exhibit violent behavior from the larger school setting. However, at the same time districts have become less likely to support removal from school for non-violent infractions. West Virginia policy states that out-of-school suspension strategies should be used sparingly and shall never deny a student access to instructional material and information necessary to maintain their academic progress (Expected behavior in safe and supportive schools, 2012). This philosophy requires districts and administrators to develop meaningful interventions that do not infringe on student educational progression.

Providing a safe and orderly school environment for students to learn is of paramount importance to school administrators, teachers, students, and the general public; however, the learning process should not be compromised while trying to maintain such an environment (Jackson, 2010). Considering this, many districts now support in-school suspension (ISS) programs. Because there is a positive relationship between school attendance and academic success, ISS provides students with all the services necessary to ensure their academic success. ISS is not complete isolation. The student is still in a school environment with support (Jackson, 2010).

But, OSS and ISS are not the only intervention strategies at the building principal’s disposal. Interventions such as various detentions, restitution, community service, etc. may all be used in different circumstances as proper interventions to negative student behavior. For example, West Virginia state policy prescribes certain interventions and consequences (Table 2) to be used by school administrators in response to negative student behavior.

##### Table 2

**West Virginia Interventions and Consequences for Negative Student Behavior**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Interventions and Consequences | Infraction Level |
| Administrator/student conference or reprimand | 1-3 |
| Administrator and teacher-parent/guardian conference | 1-3 |
| Academic sanctions to deny credit for work resulting from cheating | 1-3 |
| Counseling referrals and conference to support staff or agencies | 1-3 |
| Daily/weekly progress reports | 1-3 |
| Behavioral contracts | 1-3 |
| Change in the student’s class schedule | 1-3 |
| School service assignment | 1-3 |
| Confiscation of inappropriate item | 1-3 |
| Revocation of privileges | 1-3 |
| Restitution/restoration | 1-3 |
| Detention (lunch, before and/or after school) | 1-3 |
| Denial of participation in class and/or school activities | 1-3 |
| Immediate exclusion by teacher from the classroom | 1-3 |
| Voluntary weekend detention | 1-3 |
| In-school suspension | 1-3 |
| Law enforcement notification | 1-3 |
| Out-of-school suspension with a recommended maximum of three (3) days | 1-3 |
| Out-of-school suspension with a recommended maximum of five (5) days | 2-3 |
| Recommend placement in an Alternative Education program | 2-3 |
| Notification of appropriate Health and Human Resources | 2-3 |
| Out-of-school suspension for up to ten (10) days | 2-4 |
| Expulsion | 2-4 |

# Research Questions

1. What interventions and consequences as outlined in West Virginia State Policy 4373, if any, do school administrators perceive to be the most effective deterrents of negative student behavior?

2. What interventions and consequences as outlined in West Virginia State Policy 4373, if any, do school administrators perceive to be the least effective deterrents of negative student behavior?

3. What factors, if any, do school administrators perceive to be the most important to consider when administering school discipline?

# Methods

This research plans to measure the perceptions of building level administrators in West Virginia as to which interventions and consequences prescribed by State Policy 4373 are the most and least effective. This will be done by means of a digital survey instrument sent by e-mail through the West Virginia Access mail list-serv. The survey (Table 3) will contain a listing of the consequences and interventions outlined as acceptable by state policy and a Likert scale through which respondents can rate their effectiveness.

##### Table 3

**Survey Instrument**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Interventions and Consequences | Very Ineffective | Ineffective | Average | Effective | Very Effective |
| Administrator/student conference or reprimand |  |  |  |  |  |
| Administrator and teacher-parent/guardian conference |  |  |  |  |  |
| Academic sanctions to deny credit for work resulting from cheating |  |  |  |  |  |
| Counseling referrals and conference to support staff or agencies |  |  |  |  |  |
| Daily/weekly progress reports |  |  |  |  |  |
| Behavioral contracts |  |  |  |  |  |
| Change in the student’s class schedule |  |  |  |  |  |
| School service assignment |  |  |  |  |  |
| Confiscation of inappropriate item |  |  |  |  |  |
| Revocation of privileges |  |  |  |  |  |
| Restitution/restoration |  |  |  |  |  |
| Detention (lunch, before and/or after school) |  |  |  |  |  |
| Denial of participation in class and/or school activities |  |  |  |  |  |
| Immediate exclusion by teacher from the classroom |  |  |  |  |  |
| Voluntary weekend detention |  |  |  |  |  |
| In-school suspension |  |  |  |  |  |
| Law enforcement notification |  |  |  |  |  |
| Out-of-school suspension with a recommended maximum of three (3) days |  |  |  |  |  |
| Out-of-school suspension with a recommended maximum of five (5) days |  |  |  |  |  |
| Recommend placement in an Alternative Education program |  |  |  |  |  |
| Notification of appropriate Health and Human Resources |  |  |  |  |  |
| Out-of-school suspension for up to ten (10) days |  |  |  |  |  |
| Expulsion |  |  |  |  |  |

##### Table 3 (Continued)

**Possible Factors Affecting Negative Student Behavior**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Factors | Very Unimportant | Unimportant | Average | Important | Very Important |
| Discipline history |  |  |  |  |  |
| Special education status |  |  |  |  |  |
| Illness |  |  |  |  |  |
| Emotional problems |  |  |  |  |  |
| Learning difficulties |  |  |  |  |  |
| Parental support |  |  |  |  |  |
| Economic situation |  |  |  |  |  |
| Possible abuse |  |  |  |  |  |
| Parent/sibling illness |  |  |  |  |  |
| Homeless status |  |  |  |  |  |
| Divorce/remarriage |  |  |  |  |  |
| Target of bullying |  |  |  |  |  |
| Academic performance |  |  |  |  |  |
| Cognitive functioning |  |  |  |  |  |
| Fairness and consistency |  |  |  |  |  |
| Reasonability and common sense |  |  |  |  |  |
| Classroom management |  |  |  |  |  |

# Findings

This research hopes to add to the literature in the field of Safe and Orderly Environments in schools by collecting and interpreting insight garnered from the responses of building level administrators as to which interventions and consequences are the most and least effective in dealing with and preventing negative student behavior. Through the survey instrument (Table 3), the perceptions of principals can be gathered and collated into viable data for use by other administrators, especially new building principals. West Virginia State Policy 4373 outlines what interventions and consequences are suggested for each broad level of infraction, but gives no guidance as to how one must interpret and apply the policy in the field. The data collected from this survey could offer insight to principals as to which interventions should be used in different situations.

# Recommendations

This research would most likely support further study of the many facets of school discipline and maintaining a Safe and Orderly Environment. One such recommendation could be to study the perceptions of teachers as to the effectiveness of certain interventions and consequences. Another could be the recommendation to study principals’ perceptions of their own power to make informed decisions about disciplinary procedures in the light of so many new prescribed guidelines.

# Summary

The best way to combat violence is to stop it before it begins. Safe and effective schools are proactive in dealing with the possibility of violence and crises. Such schools anticipate and plan for violence with the hopes that violent events and behaviors will not occur (Davis, 2005). This should be the goal of every building-level administrator, to set such structures in place that many disciplinary problems do not happen in the first place. However, principals should also have the knowledge to apply interventions and consequences to students who exhibit negative behaviors as they occur. The purpose of this research is to help administrators by giving them more information as to the most effective strategies for creating and maintaining a safe and orderly school environment.

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