



OP ED FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

December 17, 2019

The Importance of Positive School Culture

Every school is different. Every student is different with his/her unique strengths and needs. Each school community is unique as well, with its various contributions, partnerships with families, and focus areas. One thing is consistent though – that is the importance of a healthy, welcoming and positive school culture. Our students, staff, families and community partners all contribute to this culture. So, what are we doing to enhance a positive culture in our schools? Here are some of the ways.

School-wide use of best practices with strong leadership support sets the tone. Our elementary schools use Positive Behavior Intervention System (PBIS) strategies through clear expectations and positive incentives. Our junior high schools implement CHAMPS, a system to help motivate students to put forth their best efforts, reduce misbehavior, and increase academic engagement. Our high schools implement Link Crew (a peer mentoring project), student clubs, a variety of electives and extracurricular options, and other site specific efforts to achieve a positive school climate. Our junior high schools and high schools also implement AVID (Advancement via Individual Determination) which supports student learning and builds a positive career/college-going culture. See www.avid.org for more information.

Social emotional learning (SEL) is a key part of our positive school cultures. Through SEL, students acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary for being a healthy adult. This includes problem-solving skills and teaching students to embrace diversity and build healthy relationships that will last well into adulthood. Our elementary teachers and counselors use Second Step and Sanford Harmony curricula to support this important work. Our secondary school counselors provide a lot of support for our students and the 9th grade health course includes lessons on research-based mental health and wellness strategies. For more information, you may go to:

http://www.safeandcivilschools.com/services/classroom_management.php

<https://www.sanfordharmony.org/>

<https://www.secondstep.org/>

Despite our very best efforts, sometimes students make poor decisions and don't follow school rules. This may include bullying, disrupting learning for other students, etc. When this happens, depending on the seriousness of the offense, a restorative and/or a disciplinary approach may be used. Many of our teachers and principals have been trained in the use of these effective strategies. See the chart below for an explanation.

Traditional Discipline	Restorative Practices
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School and rules violated • Justice focuses on establishing guilt • Accountability = punishment • Justice directed at offender, while victim is ignored • Rules and intent outweigh whether the outcome is positive or negative • No opportunity for remorse or making amends 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People and relationships violated • Justice identifies needs and obligations • Accountability = understanding impact and repairing harm • Offender, victim, and school all have direct roles in justice process • Offender is responsible for harmful behavior, repairing harm, and working toward a positive outcome • Opportunity given for making amends and expression of remorse

What about that new law that says teachers can no longer suspend students? I’ve heard that question a few times. Here is some helpful information.

Beginning July 1, 2020, teachers and principals will no longer be allowed to suspend elementary and middle school students from school for disrupting classroom activities or defying school authorities. Current law already bans out-of-school suspensions in grades TK-3 as a result of a 2013 law signed by former Governor Jerry Brown. Senate Bill 419, authored by state Senator Nancy Skinner includes grades TK-5 and, for a five-year trial period, grades 6-8. “Ending willful defiance suspensions will keep kids in school where they belong and where teachers and counselors can help them thrive,” Skinner said. <https://edsources.org/2019/california-to-ban-pushing-students-out-of-school-for-disruptive-behavior/617326>

Keep in mind, this is related to non-violent defiance and disruption. Suspendable offenses, such as fighting, damage to school property, possession of a firearm, brandishing a knife at another person, selling a controlled substance, sexual assault, and possession of explosives are still cause for suspension out of school. Our principals and assistant principals take all student discipline cases very seriously. They thoroughly investigate each case, communicate with parents/guardians about their children, and make careful decisions about the appropriate consequences. Yes, we want to keep all of our students in school. At the same time, we must make sure our schools are safe. We are committed to this.

If parents/guardians have questions about this information, they may contact their child’s principal. If members of the community who are not parents/guardian have questions, they may contact me at (209) 257-5353 or Mr. Sean Snider, Assistant Superintendent of Educational Services, at (209) 257-5334. As always, we thank you for your support!

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