



GETTING INVENTIVE WITH INCENTIVES

REVISITING PBIS IN SCHOOL CULTURES



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PRINCIPAL EVALUATION CRITERIA

*Creating a Culture, Ensuring School Safety,
Planning with Data, Improving Instruction,
Closing the Gap*

As educators, we aren't just teaching math, reading, and other subjects, but shaping students into caring and respectful adults. To do that, we must create and sustain school cultures that support the social and emotional needs of children, a topic of continual discussion in educational forums.

As a building principal and a classroom teacher, I have spent decades exploring how to best support students when we can only

truly control the seven or eight hours a day that they are in our care. How do we find ways to make a positive impact on students and our campus cultures that is self-sustaining, while keeping the learning rigorous and the programs relevant?

PBIS: IN NEED OF FRESH THINKING

One way we have seen positive impacts on school campus is through the framework of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS). According to the PBIS website, PBIS is

a framework or approach for assisting school personnel in adopting and organizing evidence-based behavioral interventions into an integrated continuum that enhances academic and social behavior outcomes for all students (pbis.org). According to Horner, Sugai and Lewis (2010), PBIS is a systems approach to establishing the social culture and behavioral supports needed for all children in a school to achieve both social and academic success.

Clearly, PBIS receives considerable acclaim and is one of the best ways to

ensure student learning and a healthy school climate. Nevertheless, PBIS is a framework that must be implemented with fidelity. It also requires revisiting with fresh thinking and a creative approach to keep the climate positive and productive.

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With PBIS, we have multiple incentives and reminders for positive behavior, and they are worthy and powerful change agents for behavior. School mottos and rules are painted vibrantly, bright banners decorate the chain-linked fences and cafeteria entries, and school entryways remind students of expectations. Even so, spirit shirts, bracelets, tickets, drawings, water bottles, lanyards, bumper stickers and banners, complete with school mascot and motto, can grow tiresome for staff and students. What was once shiny and new simply becomes part of the daily routine and we become less inspired by the well-intentioned and positive messages around us.

A CARING GESTURE?

Years ago, at a school where I was principal, I was blessed with bus duty at 7 a.m. on a cold December day in eastern Washington. The bus was late, and when it finally arrived, students scrambled to disembark and walk to class. Backpacks, coats, scarves and hats — a flurry of students passed me as I greeted, “good morning” through chattering teeth.

Suddenly, an upper grade student slipped, falling hard on her bottom in the ice and snow. Another student put down his backpack and reached out to help her up. My heart warmed to witness such an act of kindness. Not wanting to let this moment pass by

without proper principal recognition, I called him over to thank him for his caring gesture. I cheerfully recognized his helpful and responsible choice to help her up.

“Wow! That was so kind!” I said.

The student responded, “Well, can I get a PAWS award?”

Incredulously, I said, “Um, no.”

He looked shocked and responded, “Why not?”

“Well, because sometimes it’s just awesome to do the right thing,” I said.

With a frown, he turned to walk away, and then turned back, irritated, and retorted, “Well, if I had known you wouldn’t give me a PAWS award, I wouldn’t have helped her up,” and sauntered off to class, leaving me speechless.

THE REWARD IS THE ACTION

This question of “Do I get a PAWS award?” recurs throughout my tenure as a principal. Each time, I have been perplexed by incredulous faces of students looking to “get something” in return for behavior that should be expected as part of our daily routine. This mentality has forced me to reflect with an action plan in mind.

Of course, we know that teaching students to demonstrate respectful and responsible behavior is part of our daily routine. However, we must find ways of recognizing those moments of kindness, of simple courtesy, of caring, without always providing a prize, a sticker, or a PAWS award. We must teach that the reward is in the action itself, in the feeling of

care, kindness, affection we feel for our fellow human beings.

If we cannot emphasize this truth to our students, we make no real progress. If we do not teach this important lesson, we will continue to prepare our students for a society where the reflective question continues to be, “What’s in it for me?” rather than “How can I make the world a better place?”

THE RIGHT THING TO DO

I wish I held the magic fairy dust to sprinkle on our playgrounds, in our classrooms, in our cafeterias and parking lots that transform our students into human beings with a natural sense of integrity. However, the real magic starts with the adults in students’ lives. If we promote, tolerate or even participate in the “What’s in it for me?” philosophy, we have a real challenge with changing students’ behavior.

We live in a society where “us vs. them,” and “not my problem” reign as the excuses the day. As educators whose moral imperative is to prepare students for successful life experiences and post-secondary pursuits, we must challenge such thinking. In taking the high road, hopefully we model for students what true respect and responsibility look like, sound like and feel like and that the real reward is in the act, not in the prize. If we can do this, then maybe the next one of us stumbles and falls getting off the school bus of life, we are helped up by a by-stander, not looking for a reward or because someone else is watching, but rather because it’s the right thing to do.

Dr. Julie Perron has served a school principal for 16 years; this is her 26th year in education. Her PhD is in Leadership Theory, and she currently works as a professor for National University, as well as a consultant in the areas of school leadership, climate, culture and reform. ■