

Standard 8: Supervision of Student Conduct

Reflective Essay

The complexities of a well-organized learning environment can feel innumerable. A considerable portion of the reflections thus far have focused on leadership and instruction in some form. I believe that student conduct, or their behavioral readiness to learn, plays a substantial role in the effectiveness of a classroom. Too many students come to school unprepared emotionally or behaviorally for attentive learning. The most thoughtful, interesting lessons cannot combat this. Clearly defined, communicated, and practiced standards for student conduct have a tremendous impact on daily life in classrooms.

I have been strongly influenced by my wife's views on this subject. She is a school psychologist and has trained school teams in the area of positive behavior supports and school wide discipline. These are the two primary areas that require intentional planning so that students are engaged and prepared to learn. Positive school wide discipline policies give both students and teachers a clear set of guidelines within which to function (Sprik, 2004). Kids need limits and structure. When they understand the boundaries for behavior they feel safe. This perception of safety is internalized, freeing students to focus wholly on learning. The other critical area that educators must design and instruct is in positive classroom management techniques. Sprik (1998) developed a thorough resource guiding educators through the process of defining a vision for the classroom and then discussing the importance of active instruction related to behavioral expectations. He explains that the skills of learning the behavioral 'rules' in a class or school are just as important as learning and practicing academic concepts.

Taking these concepts to the system level is important. Teachers and parents need clear communication about what is expected from students. They also need to know how to reinforce this in a positive manner. Horner, Sugai, and Horner (2000) recommend visible reminders for students such as posters, reward tokens, etc. These approaches can effectively manage and reinforce most students. Other students will need more intensive levels of support in order to emotionally and cognitively access instruction. Packaged curriculum that addresses specific behavior issues such as bullying and violence prevention can be very useful. Implementing lessons both at the classroom and small group level to support students with greater needs gives them the repetition and intensity necessary for their success.

Behavior, behavioral supports, and managing the discipline process demands equal time in planning by teachers and administrators. This, like classroom instruction, will yield returns based on the time and effort invested in it.

Related Artifacts

The Rosa Parks Case Study is especially relevant to this standard. As I discussed in the reflection above, clear standards and practices related to student behavior establish the tone for the learning environment. Without this foundation, both behavior and learning can fluctuate wildly. Pianta (2000) asserts that educators must understand the systems that influence children outside of school as well as how those systems will impact their perceptions and performance in school. Low-achieving students such as those describes in the Rosa Parks Case Study may display behavioral patterns that conflict with school expectations. Unprepared teachers may perceive this as defiance leading to discipline referrals. This cycle can further reinforce a mismatch in beliefs

about school. This example demonstrates the absolute importance of communication and active practice of behavioral expectations.

I had the opportunity to put this concept into practice during my intern experience. I regularly met with a third grade boy who struggled with behavior in his classroom. The very issues I described above applied to his situation. His perceptions about school, about how his teacher felt about him, and about his ability to behave and succeed in class grossly mismatched what he could actually do. I used the opportunity to connect with him individually as well as to consult with his classroom teacher about how to help him reframe his thinking. It was also a great opportunity to exercise supportive leadership with the classroom teacher around strategies and responses that she could use in her interactions with the student. After a few weeks time things were much better for this student.

References

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