Changing the Conversation About School Discipline

Garry McGiboney, Ph.D.
Deputy State Superintendent
Georgia Department of Education
LISTEN TO THE MUSTN'TS

Listen to the MUSTN'TS, child,
Listen to the DON'TS
Listen to the SHOULDN'TS
The IMPOSSIBLES, the WONT'S
Listen to the NEVER HAVES
Then listen close to me-
Anything can happen, child,
ANYTHING can be

-Shel Silverstein, Where the Sidewalk Ends
LISTEN TO THE MUSTN'TS

Listen to the MUSTN'TS, friend,
Listen to the DON'TS
Listen to the SHOULDN'TS
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-Shel Silverstein, Where the Sidewalk Ends
No significant and sustainable change has ever taken place without first changing the conversation.

It’s time to change the conversation about student discipline: Data, Decision-Making, and School Climate.
Student Discipline is Multi-faceted

- Complexities of human behavior
- Environmental and social factors – health, family, social media, peer pressure, poverty, drugs, gangs, etc.
- Inconsistencies of discipline consequences
- Conflicting opinions about consequences – tougher or too tough
- Consequences of suspensions – instructional time lost
- Legal requirements and due process protections
- School safety considerations
The Challenge…

- Many teachers cite student discipline problems as the number one issue they face on a regular basis.

- Many administrators cite student discipline as the most time-consuming problem they address each day.

- Many students indicate that student discipline is a problem in the classroom that keeps them from learning.

However…
However...

- Georgia ranks 10th in the nation in the rate of out-of-school suspensions.

- Over 128,000 students were suspended from school during the 2013-2014 school year and over 174,000 students were assigned in-school suspension.

- Of the 20 high schools in the United States with the highest percentage of students suspended, 6 are in Georgia.

However...
However...let’s look at Georgia’s data...
Richard Woods, Georgia's School Superintendent

“Educating Georgia’s Future”

gadoe.org

1/8/2016

53% Decrease in Expulsions

State of Georgia
Discipline Action - Expulsion
Total Number of Students
Richard Woods, Georgia's School Superintendent
"Educating Georgia's Future"
gadoe.org

State of Georgia
Discipline Action - Out-of-School Suspension
Total Number of Students

25% Decrease in OSS

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of Students</th>
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<tr>
<td>2005</td>
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<td>2013</td>
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1/8/2016
“Experts often possess more data than judgment.”

- Colin Powell
Change the conversation about how we look at data
Epidemiology

• Adopt the use of epidemiological concepts to provide a basis for developing surveillance measures and prevention strategies for groups and at-risk populations

• Adopt epidemiological methods to identify possible causation and strategies that impact both groups and populations, thereby also allowing individual treatments to be effective

This represents a shift from targeted reactions to population-based prevention and intervention
Look at the Data from Epidemiological Basics

*Diseases* do not occur by chance: there are always determinants for the disease to occur

*Diseases* are not distributed at random: distribution is related to risks factors that need to be studied for the population in order to identify solutions
Look at the Data from Epidemiological Basics

*Diseases* do not occur by chance: there are always determinants for the disease to occur

*Diseases* are not distributed at random: distribution is related to risks factors that need to be studied for the population in order to identify solutions

*Disruptive behaviors* do not occur by chance: there are always determinants for the disruptive behavior to occur

*Disruptive behaviors* are not distributed at random: distribution is related to risks factors that need to be studied and for the population in order to identify solutions

**LOOK FOR PATTERNS and CLUES**
Expulsions decreased 53%; OSS decreased 25%; ISS decreased 25%

72% Increase in Alternative Education
• Changing the way we look at data is a good start, but it’s not enough

• We must also change the way we look at decision-making

• How we characterize behavior in large part determines how we respond to the behavior
Attribution Theory:

- The attempt to understand the behavior of others by attributing causation to feelings, beliefs, intentions, personality and/or situations
- Reactions are determined by the assignment of cause to the behavior
Two students do the same thing…

**Attribution:** He did that because he has no respect for authority - **Consequence:** Sent out of class and suspended

**Attribution:** He did that because he’s so immature and peer pressure - **Consequence:** Stays in the classroom
Fundamental Attribution Error is assigning the incorrect cause to the behavior.

**Attribution:** “The student is just mean and doesn’t like authority figures.”

**Fact:** “The student is picked on and is socially isolated.”
With **Fundamental Attribution Error** there is a tendency to place an **undue emphasis on internal characteristics, motives, perceived attitudes, or personality of the person to explain behavior rather than considering situational factors**

*The causes of events always interest us more than the events themselves.*  -Cicero
**Fundamental Attribution Error Applied**

We attribute other people’s behavior to internal motives, but we attribute our own behavior to circumstances.
When FAE becomes the norm
Attribution Theory Applied to Training

- **Leadership training**: applying principles of attribution to leadership style and influence, including interactions with staff, students, and parents
- **Teacher training**: applying principles of attribution to classroom management, student behavior, and classroom design
- **Student motivation**: applying principles of attribution to cause and effect (i.e., student attributing outcomes to preconceived beliefs)
Changing the conversation about data

Changing the conversation about decision-making

“Culture eats strategy for breakfast.”
-Peter Drucker

Now, let’s try to change the conversation about school climate
• We can all remember when we felt **safe** (or **unsafe**) at school
• We can all remember when we felt **connected** to a caring adult (or **frighteningly alone**) in school
• We can all remember when we felt **engaged** in meaningful friendships (or **not**)
• We can all remember when we felt **engaged** in meaningful learning (or **not**)
**School Climate** is the experience of school life and reflects norms, goals, values, social interactions, access, engagement, connections, teaching and learning practices, building quality, safety, and organizational practices

**Research:**
A positive school climate has been shown to affect middle school students’ self-esteem (Hoge), mitigate the negative effects of self-criticism (Kuperminic), improve a wide range of emotional and mental health outcomes (Way, Reddy, & Rhodes), increase student self-concept (Cairns), lower levels of drug use (LaRusso), reduce psychiatric problems among high school students (LaRusso), and increase psychological well-being (Ruus)
If students do not feel safe at school, do not feel welcomed at school, or not treated with respect and are not given opportunities to learn, engage, interact, mature and grow, they will not meet their academic potential, develop emotionally or learn positive social lessons.

**Research:**
- Studies show that there is a significantly positive difference in student achievement between schools with a good school climate and those with a negative school climate.
- A positive school climate is correlated with decreased student absenteeism in middle school and high school (DeJung & Duckworth). Research indicates that positive school climate is critical to effective risk prevention (RAND Corporation; M. C. Wang, Haertel, & Walberg).
• It is important to define school climate
• It is important to understand school climate
• It is important to measure school climate
Changing the conversation about the importance of school climate requires measuring it in such a way that it helps schools understand school climate and what they need to do to improve school climate.

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