

BETTER BEHAVIOR SEEN AT SCHOOLS OFFICIALS TOUT NEW PROGRAM

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Author: Ken Byron

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The number of disciplinary cases at Plainville Middle School has dropped dramatically in the first three months of this school year, a finding administrators attribute to a program they have started that promotes good behavior.

Statistics compiled by school administrators show a 42 percent drop in September, 55 percent in October and 28 percent in November, over the same periods in 2005.

Disciplinary cases are defined as those in which a student's conduct leads to a punishment ranging from reprimand to suspension.

When school started this fall, the school implemented a program called Positive Behavioral Support to promote good behavior. Officials say the drop in discipline problems has proven its effectiveness.

"I'm amazed things changed so quickly," said Superintendent of Schools Kathleen Binkowski. "This won't eliminate everything, but it has been good for the students at the middle school. The school is a much better place."

The middle school got help implementing the program from the University of Connecticut.

When school started this year, special classes were held to teach students the behavior that was expected of them. Those lessons will be reviewed at the beginning of each marking period, Binkowski said. She said a key part of the program is a reward system. Students earn written citations when teachers and other staff see them doing something good and those citations can be used to buy things at the school store and enter school raffles.

"We don't just put code of conduct rules in the student handbook or on posters on the wall, we teach positive behavior just like we would regular academics," said Thomas Laudadio, dean of students at the middle school. "The idea is that there is a smarter way to enhance the school's environment. We have a good staff and reams of information about student discipline --how do we make better use of that?"

Another key part of the program's success is that expectations of how students should behave remain consistent, Binkowski said. Before the program was implemented, students might hear one thing from one teacher and then something else from another teacher, which Binkowski said contributed to disciplinary problems at the school.

Laudadio said a number of other schools in the state have implemented the program. One of them is DePaolo Middle School in Southington. DePaolo Principal David Telesca, who is due to start as assistant superintendent in Plainville in January, said the program has been a success there.

"The number of discipline cases is a third of what it was when we started four years ago," Telesca said. "It's more than discipline. It changes the way you talk to students and manage their behavior."

Although early results are encouraging, Binkowski said school officials want to see how the program does for the entire school year before expanding it. She said staff at the elementary schools are looking at using the program to improve children's behavior on the bus.

Contact Ken Byron at kbyron@courant.com.

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