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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

ACCOUNTABILITY IS POWER

BY KATE SALAS



Greetings, Massachusetts school counselors! It is my pleasure to serve as your 2016-2017 MASCA president. I was a school counselor in grades preK-12 for 20 years before recently becoming an administrator. Three years ago, I received my doctorate in educational leadership with a dissertation that explored model school counseling programs. I am also a counselor educator. In short, my mission is to help support school counselors from many different angles.

This is an exciting time to be a school counselor. Although accountability can be stressful and uncertain, it is an opportunity for school counselors to showcase their programs and prove to stakeholders just how much we do and how what we do has a direct impact on our students. MASCA can help! Through professional collaboration, development and advocacy, we can help you define your role and keep abreast of current issues. Most important, we can also provide you with a network of support. Sometimes being a school counselor is lonely, especially if you feel like others are defining your role and its not what you think it should be.

My hope is that you will become an active member in MASCA. Enjoy the publications and our professional development opportunities and then please consider joining a committee or being on the MASCA board. I want to hear your ideas! Please email me at president@masca.org.



Although accountability can be stressful and uncertain, it is an opportunity for school counselors to showcase their programs.

Contact Kate Salas, Ed.D., MASCA president, at president@masca.org.

CUT CAFETERIA CHAOS ON A ZERO BUDGET

One school reduced referrals and refined its program with data tracking and feedback from all fronts.

BY BARBARA MICUCCI

Tired of kids being sent to the office immediately following lunch and recess? Frustrated by the responses from students as to why they are there and not in their classrooms? These are typical scenarios in elementary schools across the country. Unfortunately, these less-structured environments often breed unexpected behaviors. After considering this problem for a few years, we at Caley Elementary School decided to take action.

Caley is an ethnically diverse, kindergarten through fourth grade school in King of Prussia, Pa. In 2012 we began to track our discipline referrals and developed a tracking form. Over the next two years, we tracked where the behaviors occurred and the type of infraction, and patterns of behavior were apparent.

With the arrival of principal Steven Van Mater in 2013, we became more intentional with how we dealt with discipline referrals. Pennsylvania has a response to intervention and instruction program in place for academics and recently adopted a multitiered systems of support, which includes behavior. We were already using a multitiered system of support for reading, so we decided to implement a tiered system for behavior, too, and this cut our referrals in half. When we disaggregated our data, we found that 40 percent of our remaining referrals came from the cafeteria in 2013 and 46 percent in 2014. We knew we had to take action.

To our many existing Tier 1 behavior interventions in the classroom, we wanted to add schoolwide expectations in the cafeteria that addressed behavior and volume. My principal and I engaged Jacquie Montemuro, our school district



behavior analyst, to help us create our own version of a positive behavior intervention system (PBIS). We developed a systematic plan to address these nonstructured areas to maximize instructional time and create a schoolwide plan with no additional expenditures. This plan incorporated evidence-based practices and used data analysis as our foundation.

First, we came up with consistent language to use in the cafeteria: “Caley’s Fast Five” and a “Voice Choice Chart.” Our Fast Five was a take-off on our Community of Caring values. Our Fast Five cafeteria expectations are:

Be Safe – Remain seated and walk when your table is called

Be Caring – Use kind words and actions

Be Respectful – Follow directions and keep hands, feet and objects to yourself

Be Responsible – Raise your hand if you need help

Be a Team – Keep your table clean

Our Voice Choice Chart designated what voice volume was expected in the cafeteria.

- **0** – Adult talking
- **1** – Partner Talk
- **2** – Table Talk
- **3** – Outside Voice

The Voice Choice Chart also became widely used and reinforced in our classrooms.

Over the summer, Montemuro developed a school-wide presentation including a rationale based on our school data, a PowerPoint to show in every classroom, and a scripted lesson plan. Prior to school starting, Van Mater, Montemuro and I met with our four cafeteria and recess aides to discuss the new cafeteria expectations and address their questions and concerns. We provided them with referral forms that matched our new language and gave them materials for a ticket reinforcement system. Another change was assigned seats for the students. Each classroom teacher had to come up with two different rotations for the cafeteria.

Communication with all staff occurred during our in-service days. We showed the teachers the same presentation that the cafeteria/recess aides saw and the PowerPoint they were to deliver in their classroom on the first day of school. We also discussed taking their class to the cafeteria to show the students where they would be sitting. On the third day of school, we held grade level presentations in the cafeteria, reviewing the expectations. Staff demonstrated the inappropriate choices, and the students got a kick out of seeing their teachers misbehaving. Students practiced only the appropriate expectations. Common signage was placed on each cafeteria table showing the

Fast Five on one side and the Voice Choice Chart on the back.

As with any new program, we encountered some bumps along the way. The ticket system was overwhelming for our cafeteria and recess aides. The initial idea behind the tickets was reinforcing students who were making the appropriate choices. Staff would tell them which Fast Five they were seen demonstrating and give them a ticket. After a class received so many tickets, they would get a reward, such as being called first for lunch and snack, getting extra recess time or being able to sit wher-

ever they wanted at their table. The limited number of aides struggled to make sure they were giving out enough tickets for classes to earn. With class rewards, students who were making inappropriate choices were able to get the same reward as their peers. The kids were also savvy and started to demonstrate a behavior and then ask for a ticket. The aides decided to stop the tickets with all the grades except fourth. In fourth grade, they gave individual tickets to students and those students received special privileges including getting extra recess time.

As the program got underway, we made sure to stay in communication with the aides to get their feedback so we could support this process. I surveyed the cafeteria aides to identify their biggest challenges, what we could do to help improve the system and to get a sense of what rewards were most doable. The aides reported that students were unhappy with the seating, it was too noisy and that doing the ticket system well in a short period of time was overwhelming. During this time we also had staff turnover and we lost a long time aide.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 8

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I also conducted focus groups with the students in first through fourth grades to see how they felt lunch was going and what types of incentives they wanted. Interestingly, the students felt the cafeteria was too loud. They said that kids were breaking some of the Fast Five rules like not throwing away their trash and getting out of their seat. They were also unhappy with the assigned seating. One thing that they did want was public acknowledgement. Henceforth, Caley Kudos began.

After our winter break, it was time to give the students a review of the Caley Fast Five, acknowledge their feedback and introduce Caley Kudos. Kudos are praise for a job well done. We created a form listing

all classes by order of lunch and showing the Caley Fast Five next to each grade level. After lunch each day, the aides would decide which class demonstrated the Fast Five and select a class at each grade level and circle the behavior they demonstrated. That class would get their name read over the loudspeaker at the end of the day — public recognition for a job well done. That class also got lunch and snack first the next day and lined up for recess first. Once they got three recognitions, they received a certificate to hang outside their classroom.

Our plan was making a noticeable improvement. We reduced our discipline referrals in the cafeteria by 28 percent, from 28 referrals to 20. We continued to notice patterns.

This year, our referrals seemed to be dual in nature: instead of one child getting referred, it was two students. Many new students joined us, and our demographics continue to change. We are continuing to review our data and look at ways to address our cafeteria discipline to create a stress-free environment at lunch. We will be focusing our efforts next year on creating a community of respect. It takes a team to run a cafeteria. In the meantime, we will continue the Caley Fast Five and our Volume Choice Chart and do our best to cut cafeteria chaos at Caley. ■

Barbara Micucci is the school counselor at Caley Elementary School and was named School Counselor of the Year in 2010. Contact her at bmicucci@umasd.org.



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COPING THROUGH MOVEMENT

BY AMANDA HUDSON ALLEN, PH.D.

Have you ever noticed that regardless of how frustrated or stressed you are, exercise can clear your head, calm you down and leave you feeling refreshed? When you think about what happens to the body during exercise, these immediate benefits from physical movement should not come as a surprise. Your body experiences an increase in heart rate and blood flow, endorphins are released and your mind is forced to focus on the activity at hand. Physical movement is like hitting a reset button for your brain.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if students could benefit from physical movement throughout the school day? That question inspired me to acquire stationary sets of pedals through grant funding for teachers who were willing to let students pedal throughout the day. The pedals were lightweight and fit under students' desks for minimal distraction during class time.

In the two years following the introduction of pedals to classrooms, I interviewed students and teachers to understand the related pros and cons. I learned that physical movement could improve student issues with anxiety, emotional outbursts, focus, hyperactivity, behavior, motivation, frustration and alertness. As a school counselor, I quickly recognized that these issues were not only barriers to learning, but also common reasons for counseling referrals. Therefore, collaborating with teachers to introduce movement to the classroom setting provided an indirect way to meet academic and some personal/social needs of students. The following shared experiences and lessons learned illustrate how physical movement can be used to benefit students within your school.

Coping with Anxiety. Anna was a fifth-grade student who had frequently visited my office for her worries about her dad's constant



travel obligations. When I interviewed her about using pedals in the classroom, she explained that she used them anytime she wasn't able to focus because she was worrying about her family. When she began to pedal, her thoughts would refocus to her schoolwork and she was able to get her mind off of home-related concerns. Anna was also one of the students who chose to use her pedals during classroom tests. This allowed her to think clearly rather than panicking due to test anxiety.

Decreasing Emotional Outbursts. We introduced pedals to both general education inclusion classrooms and self-contained classrooms. Penny, a self-contained classroom teacher who taught students with low-functioning autism, witnessed a profound change in her classroom after introducing pedals. She used pedals with students who had trouble regulating their emotions at times of extreme frustration and anger. Prior to the use of pedals, one student only knew how to express himself through spitting, hitting, kicking and screaming. Penny was able to redirect this student to pedal when he became frustrated or upset. This concept caught on and as students were constantly sent to pedal (with either their legs or arms) at times of typical outbursts, the classroom became a calmer environment. As

a pleasant side effect, students' physical abilities improved, which assisted with their required physical therapy sessions!

Supporting Focus. Lily, another fifth-grade student, explained how pedals forced her to focus by physically preventing her eyes from roaming too much. Prior to pedal use, she would look around and turn her head in different directions. When pedaling, if Lily did not look forward, she had difficulty keeping her feet on the pedals.

Calming Hyperactivity. For Wilma, a second-grade teacher, pedaling improved some students' ability to sit and read for an extended time. One of her most hyperactive students spent his independent reading time flipping through the pages of books without reading, frequently getting up for a new book. When a pedal reading station was introduced, this student was able to release energy and calm down enough to read books from start to finish.

Refocusing Behavior. Margaret, a third-grade teacher, witnessed major improvements in student behaviors. She shared a story of one student who bothered his neighbors throughout the day. He picked at items on his peers' desks, talked to them while they tried to work, or played with things in his own space, distracting others. This student needed an outlet. When it was his turn to use the pedals at his desk, he kept his hands to himself and demonstrated on-task behaviors. Instead of bothering others as a way to fidget and stay entertained, pedaling provided enough stimulation to improve the classroom experience of this student and his surrounding peers.

Improving Motivation. A fourth-grade teacher, Zola, felt she was able to build rapport with her students by introducing pedals as

CONTINUED ON PAGE 10

weeks, students who truly need to move to best access learning will be the only ones consistently using movement practices.

INTRODUCING MOVEMENT

When beginning to integrate movement into your school, consider how you'll attain funding, administrative support and teacher buy-in. The experiences in this article can help begin your argument that movement can benefit your students. For funding, check grant availability within your school district, with local or corporate businesses in your surrounding area and with money-raising websites like *DonorsChoose.org*. The concept of integrating movement in schools is still a new and innovative practice that groups are excited to fund.

When approaching administrators and teachers, remember that you are the salesperson on this initiative. Point out the foreseeable benefits and emphasize that adopting movement in classrooms does not have to be a permanent change, so there should not be harm in trying it. Make yourself available to work out the kinks. It is important to share clear expectations with students the first time they are given access to pedals or other methods of movement. This assists in student buy-in by teaching individuals about potential benefits. It also assures that movement will be implemented safely, without risk of equipment breaking or students hurting themselves.

Overall, physical movement through the use of stationary pedals is a beneficial practice for

classrooms and shows promise in individual counseling sessions. The use of pedals has potential to decrease student issues that are typically addressed by teachers and counselors. Therefore, introducing such a concept should be a collaborative effort between both groups of professionals to support the academic growth and whole school experience of students. ■

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SOLVING OUR STRESS: SEEING IS RELIEVING

BY DONOVAN DREYER

Imagine how much more effective you could be if you literally could bring the inside out and see the stress level of a student. In one two-week span at my high school, three students took their lives. As staff and students struggled to cope, I wondered what lesson we could find in the tragedy. The message was clear: we need to see the stress that is so often hidden. I developed Solving Our Stress (SOS) to provide relief for school counselors by helping them see the difference a counseling session can make. SOS also provides relief for students because they can easily understand the SOS chart and see inside of themselves.

WHY IS STRESS SUCH A DIFFICULT PROBLEM?

We have difficulty perceiving mounting stress before it becomes destructive and debilitating. Stress can cause the brain to narrow focus and slip into depression and cause a host of other mental illnesses, according to an [article in Psychology Today](#). We have to get better at preventing stress and the damage it can cause. Unlike an obvious, external medical problem, stress has signs that are easy to miss. And if we can't see stress grow, it can grow out of control.

A SEEING SOLUTION FOR A SEEING PROBLEM

Solving Our Stress provides a visual approach for addressing undiagnosed rising stress or extreme stress. It is a visual therapy tool for an increasingly visual world.

The SOS system is designed to be simple and user-friendly, with a Green Zone that can be the target area when we consider proactively adding to a student's protective

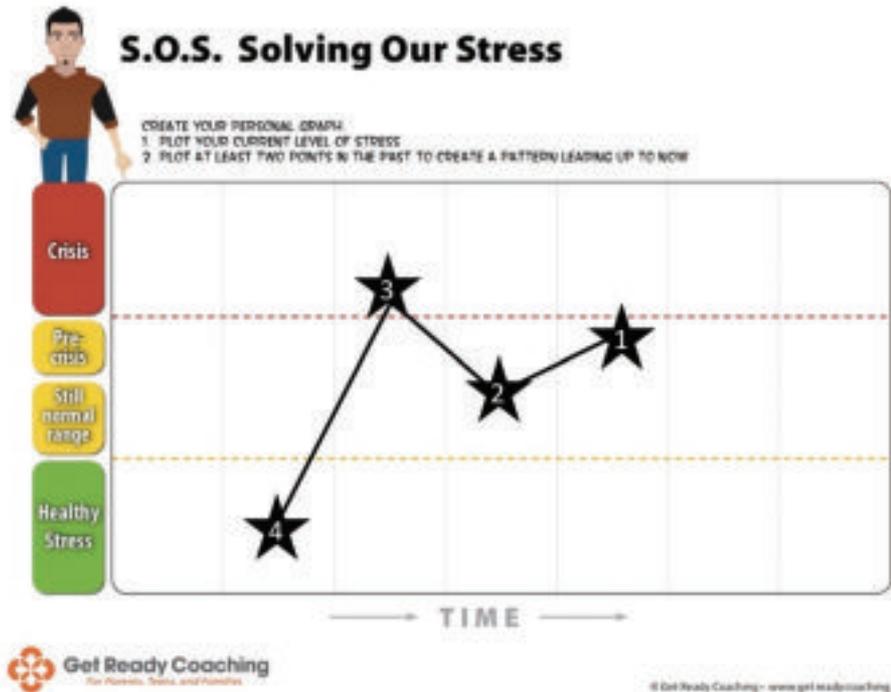


Chart example 1 - assessing stress

factors. A school counselor can train an entire school community to eliminate the red and accentuate the green, and the greening of the inner world has unlimited possibility both for students and counselors.

As school counselors, we have become accustomed to scaling the level of intensity when students struggle internally. SOS adds dimension and context to traditional scaling approaches.

WHAT IS SOLVING OUR STRESS?

Solving Our Stress is a charting system for showing patterns that are invisible; it makes the invisible visible. You need multiple points to see a pattern. The time element in SOS adds the key factor that creates the patterns. Is a student

SOS adds dimension and context to traditional scaling approaches.

in the Red Zone? If so, asking and plotting how long provides a greater depth of information — and the student may have not even begun to tell their story or pinpointed a particular feeling. Is the student's stress marching up steadily through the Yellow Zone? If so, a proactive approach can turn the momentum around. Imagine Suzy bounding into your office stating, "I am in the Red Zone; I really need to talk to you." Use of the simple-to-understand, visual language of SOS can transform an entire school culture.

HOW DOES SOLVING OUR STRESS MAKE THE INVISIBLE VISIBLE?

Solving Our Stress has three simple steps:

1. Assess stress
2. Address stress
3. Reassess stress

ASSESS STRESS

Assessing stress is the step of seeing the level of stress. Multiple plot points across time create a vivid picture. With teens — sometimes of few words — the picture is worth a thousand words, so to speak. To effectively address an issue, accurate assessment is key. Chart example 1

Each of the three levels of stress aligns with a different type of help or way to address the stress.

shows a typical preassessment on the scale with star number one. The other plots (stars two through four) go to the left because the context of the visual comes by going back in time.

ADDRESS STRESS

Once the picture is clear, the school counselor can act. Each of the

three levels of stress aligns with a different type of help or way to address the stress. The Green Zone (healthy stress) is defined by what the student can cope with utilizing their current skills and abilities. The Yellow Zone requires additional help; students often turn first to trusted family members and friends. The Red Zone is the bright line that crosses over into professional help territory. The student's own skills and even the most trusted Yellow Zone supporters are not sufficient for Red Zone situations. In a school using SOS, if Suzy

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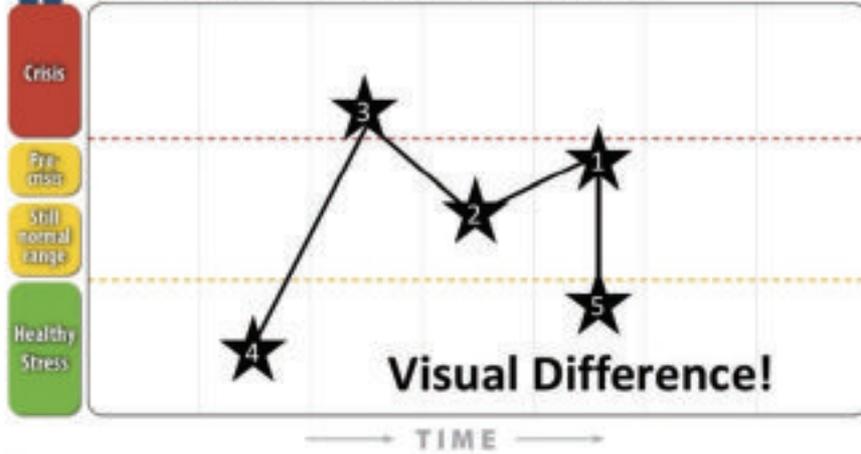

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2. PLOT AT LEAST TWO POINTS IN THE PAST TO CREATE A PATTERN LEADING UP TO NOW



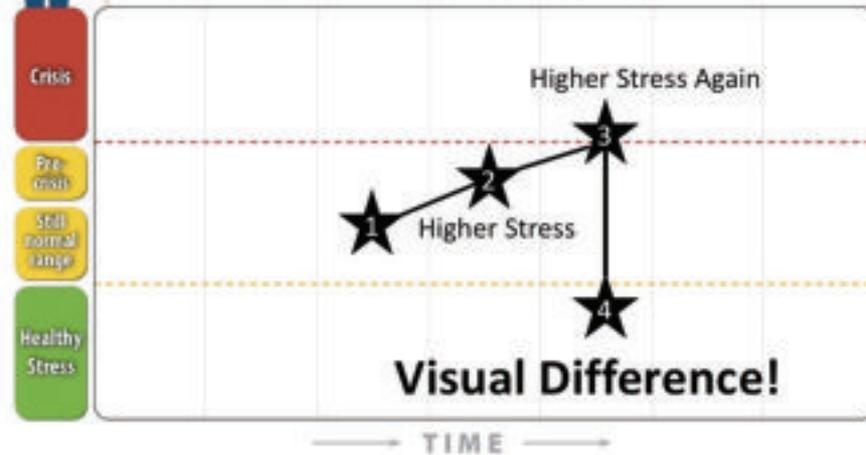
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Chart example 2 – showing stress reassessed



S.O.S. Solving Our Stress

CREATE YOUR PERSONAL GRAPH
1. PLOT YOUR CURRENT LEVEL OF STRESS
2. PLOT AT LEAST TWO POINTS IN THE PAST TO CREATE A PATTERN LEADING UP TO NOW



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Chart example 3

told her friend John that she is in the Red Zone, John would know that this territory is reserved for the school counselor. John could escort Suzy to the counselor's office.

REASSESS STRESS

The final plot on the chart (star five) comes when you determine that you can release the student. This is where the relief comes in

for you, the counselor. We can all benefit from tangible feedback that we made a difference in a way that both counselor and student can clearly understand. Seeing clearly provides that understanding and it is an immediate relief. I don't always use SOS in my work with students, even though it gives a very quick read. Some issues don't warrant the deeper look inside.

Without tangible feedback, the danger is assuming that we help students every time they see us. With two of my students, I didn't use SOS the first two times they visited me, but when each boy quickly returned a third time, it was time to go to the chart. Both boys had a high-stress reading on their third visit due to a prior meeting with their mother in attendance. Those meetings ramped up the stress, which continued to get worse in the day or two that followed. In both cases, the boys needed a concrete plan to reduce stress. For example, one of the students just needed to determine which of two assignments to focus on immediately. The chart for these boys looked like example 3.

WHAT IF SOS FAILS?

One of my ninth-grade students solved the problem of what to do if SOS doesn't work. At first, he looked at chart example 4 and said he would look closer for clues.

I shared that the emojis were cut and pasted to represent wearing a mask that hides the extreme stress. A moment later, this young man had the solution. Normally, "How are you doing?" is a rhetorical question made in passing. Instead, he suggested that we create a code question to use with friends we trust. Every so often, we would simply ask, "How are you *really* doing?" This indicates that you have time for your friend. The mask may or may not come off, but a message of care is sent. SOS and this code could become essential aspects of school culture at any school.

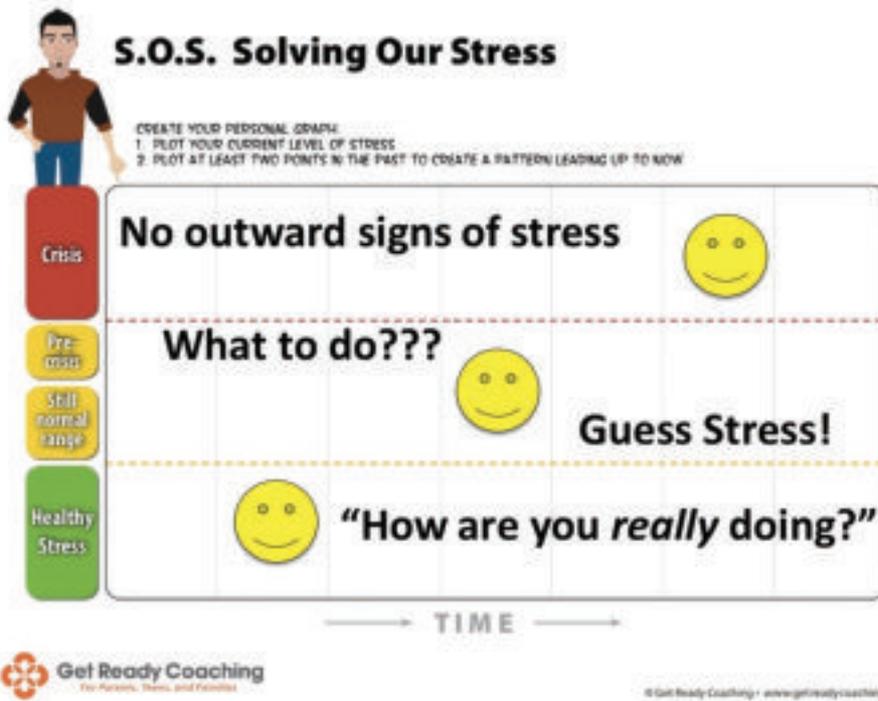


Chart example 4 - when SOS doesn't work

HELP REFINE THIS SOCIAL INNOVATION

Technology is not the only place for innovation. The world we live in is hungry for social innovation. We have to improve in the social realm as our news reports prove all too often. Solving Our Stress is a social innovation and I believe that it, like other innovations, should have constant scrutiny, testing and improved versions. I invite school counselors interested in a beta test of the SOS program to contact me by texting SCHOOLCOUNSELOR SQUAD to 33444. ■■■

Donovan Dreyer presented on this topic at the 2016 ASCA Annual Conference and in an ASCA webinar. He is a high school counselor in the St. Vrain Valley School District in Colorado. He also coaches school counselors and provides trainings to schools through his company, Get Ready Coaching, www.getreadycoaching.com.



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“EVERYONE COUNTS” REALLY WORKS

A school counselor shares her program that reduced bullying by focusing on the positive.

BY KATHY CORNELISON

Bullying happens when there is a void in relationships and connectedness and when children lack the relationship skills necessary to interact appropriately. Although the staff at Robbinsdale School were working to address bullying, we did not have a consistent, comprehensive program in place. Our principal, Patty Hamm, called several staff members together to assign us the task of creating and implementing a new antibullying program. I had already begun to formulate an idea for such a program and it would not mention the topic of bullying — just the opposite.

At the meeting, I presented an outline describing a proactive relationship-building program that I called Everyone Counts. I explained to my coworkers that I thought the best way to prevent bullying from happening was to create a framework in which students could really get to know each other and were allowed to spend a designated time every day on relationship building.

Everyone Counts is a tool to change school climate, one that discourages bully behavior from happening in the first place. Everyone Counts teaches social graces, empathy, cooperation, acceptance of differences, patience and problem solving. The program is designed to be used every day in every classroom and consists of two parts, Circle Up and team-building activities.

Successfully implementing the program depended on buy-in from our principal and all staff members. Giving her full support, Hamm requested that all classroom teachers begin the program that spring (2011), which they did. She also changed the school schedule for the following fall to allow 25 minutes at the beginning of each morning for Everyone Counts in ev-



At the end of the fall semester, Everyone Counts was responsible for a dramatic drop in the number of discipline referrals and bullying incidents from the previous year

ery classroom. I reminded teachers that time invested in doing Everyone Counts would be time saved later for teaching by reducing the need to interrupt learning to deal with discipline issues.

At the end of the fall semester, Everyone Counts was responsible for a dramatic drop in the number of discipline referrals and bullying incidents from the previous year, from 94 discipline referrals in December 2011 to 41 referrals in December 2012. The following December (2013), our school had 32 referrals for discipline. From 2010 to 2012, we had 279 fewer discipline referrals overall. Giving stu-

dents the opportunity to interact on a personal level each morning and giving them time to share what was happening in each of their lives resulted in better social relationships and fewer discipline referrals.

As a school counselor, I knew what some of our students were dealing with when they came from home many mornings: a parent with substance abuse problems, parents who may have had an angry argument, homelessness or some type of abuse toward the children. It is not surprising that some students are not ready to tackle math or reading class first thing upon arriving at school.

Everyone Counts encourages students to begin to think about their classroom as a team or a family and consider how teams have to work together to be successful and a family has to watch out for and support each other. Everyone Counts is a tool to create a place where students can feel safe and meet their goals in a supportive environment.

Every classroom displays a poster with the Everyone Counts pledge: “We will work together to make sure every student in our classroom

is successful both as a learner and as a friend.”

Teachers were asked to do one of the two components of Everyone Counts (Circle up or team-building activities) with their students each morning. Most chose to do Circle Up but some teachers would scatter team-building activities throughout the month. Most team-building activities required at least some preparation on the teacher’s part. We saw the most success when teachers used both components.

CIRCLE UP

Students and the teacher gather in a circle, usually on the floor, then the teacher begins by asking

EXAMPLE SENTENCE STARTERS FOR CIRCLE UP

Someone I admire is... Yesterday was a good day because... I help my class by... My best day ever was... Being responsible means... Being a friend means... I can help my classmates by... My hero is... I try my best when... The best thing about me is... Words that encourage me are... I have discovered that... I want to be remembered for... I handle my mistakes by... Something I would like you to know is... I need help with... I appreciate... I feel safe when... My family helps me by... I do my best when... My pets are... One thing I do well is... My best tool for handling frustration is... Being a caring person means... A worry I have is...

a question or making a statement (see a sample list of sentence starters, above). The rules for Circle Up are simple: everyone participates, everyone is respectful to each other and everyone is heard. Sometimes students may have happy news to share and sometimes their news is sad or even scary. I advise teachers to tell their students if they have something bad or scary that has happened to them to ask the teacher if it is appropriate to share during Circle Up time. If it is not appropriate to share with the

class, then the teacher can take a few minutes to listen to the student individually or refer them to the counselor or another adult who can take time to listen so the student is allowed to tell their story. Circle Up is not the time to talk about or do academic work.

Issues that arise in the classroom such as friendship problems or inappropriate behavior can be a topic for Circle Up, but it is not the time for teachers to give lectures

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on behavior or poor academic performance.

TEAM BUILDING

The activities should be able to be completed within the 25-minute time period. The teacher should take time to present the rules for team building and keep in mind that safety is paramount. Safety rules will need to be addressed each time students do a team building activity, because the safety rules may change depending on the activity. Failing to present the rules will likely result in the activity not going as planned, and

this may cause frustration for both teacher and students. Take the time to explain how students are to act as they participate, including what the activity will sound like and look like.

ACTIVITIES FOR TEAM BUILDING

Most of the activities our school has used for team building have come from Tom Jackson's series of books called "Activities That Teach," a wonderful resource for classrooms. One team building activity I have used is having students line up according to the beginning letter of

their first name. Depending on the age of the students, it can be done with or without talking. Just about any activity where students have to work together to accomplish a goal will work.

It has been five years since Robbinsdale School began the Everyone Counts program and it is still being used today as a positive, proactive approach to relationship building. ■■■

Kathy Cornelison is a recently retired school counselor who lives in Rapid City, S.D. Contact her at kac@rushmore.com.

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SURVIVING YOUR FIRST YEAR AS A SCHOOL COUNSELOR: A TOP 10 LIST

An elementary counselor shares what they don't teach you in grad school.

BY REBECCA M. CORDISCO

I feel so lucky to have found my dream job as an elementary school counselor after a lot of education, hard work and collaboration with professionals in the field (not to mention my awesome, supportive, also-a-school-counselor mom). After finishing my first year on my own as a school counselor for two elementary schools, I feel incredible. I am so happy to have my summer off and rest easy knowing I worked hard to help the students and families of Hillsborough, New Jersey. However, so much of what I dealt with during my first year was never discussed in my graduate school classes. As a result, here are the top 10 things I wish I learned in graduate school.

1 Keep notes electronically. Our district uses Google for everything, and Google Drive became my best friend. It is very user friendly, and I set everything up (color coded and separated by grade level) so that I could keep each grade — and each of my schools — straight. Google Drive allowed me to make folders electronically containing all my student files so that I don't ever have to keep paper notes after sessions with students, teachers or parents.

2 Find a mentor. This can be done formally or informally, and some districts assign mentors to new staff members. Although I was not given a mentor, I learned quickly that I needed someone in my corner who has been around a long time and knows the ropes. I put the extension of another elementary school counselor in the district on speed dial and am so



So much of what I dealt with during my first year was never discussed in my graduate school classes.

grateful for her advice, counsel and expertise. I have no doubt that will continue into year two.

3 Befriend the secretaries and custodians. I can't stress this enough. Our secretaries and custodians are among my favorite people in each of my buildings. They have been invaluable to me in terms of logistical information, but even more, they have become friends and mentors to me on a personal level.

4 Practice self-care. You have to take care of yourself before you can help others. As they say on airplanes, always secure your own mask before assisting others. I established self-care Saturdays

for myself — I took myself out to breakfast, went to the gym, got a manicure, etc. Carving out that time to recharge and regroup was a lifesaver, and some of my friends have adopted the self-care Saturday concept, too.

5 Document everything and never act alone. Everything. When sending emails, think about what you're writing and don't put anything in writing that could come back to haunt you. If you have concerns, speak to the person face to face or give them a call. On the other hand, put in writing anything you may need to revisit later. Being able to refer back to an email or a document helps make sure you are on the right track. My go-to people in my buildings for these situations are the school nurses — they are willing to listen to each individual situation and they share that oh-so-important umbrella of confidentiality.

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6 Be present with the students.

I am always out greeting the students as they come off the buses in the morning and waving goodbye in the afternoon when they leave. Having them see you involved in their education makes you more accessible and it is such a happy part of my day. I also love popping in randomly to classrooms to listen to a story with kindergarteners, hear presentations about weather by the fourth-graders, chat with first-graders in the cafeteria about what's on the menu, or have an impromptu dance party with second-graders during a "brain break." The kids get such a kick out of seeing you and it only takes a few minutes out of your busy day.

7 Make positive phone calls or send positive emails to

parents, especially if things have been challenging for that particular student or family lately. I have been told countless times by parents that my email or phone call made their week, or that they cried while reading what I wrote to them about their child. I love being able to provide genuine positive feedback to the families of the students I serve.

8 Offer to cover classes for teachers for five minutes while they run to the bathroom.

I often forget that teachers do not have the flexibility I do. I can close the door to my office and have some quiet working time, use the bathroom whenever I feel like it, and take lunch whenever I want to. I have found that teachers are so grateful when I offer to stay with their students for a minute or two while they run to the bathroom.

9 Check in monthly with classroom teachers to see if they have any concerns.

Being split between two K-4 schools (over



I've found that the good always outweighs the bad and each new work day is a new opportunity to change a child's life.

800 students) presented a constant challenge to make sure I was meeting all the needs of every child. Checking in monthly with the teachers ensured that anyone who was on the teacher's radar also got on my radar.

10 Never respond to emails at night.

This is a big one and I preach it to everyone who will listen. Just don't do it! Not even once! (Unless it's an emergency, of course.) Most of us have smartphones; my work emails come right to my phone and I see them pretty quickly after they come in. But I do not, I repeat, DO NOT answer at night or after work hours. Even doing it once shows parents that you are accessible 24/7 and they will take advantage of that like crazy. Most, if not all, emails or phone calls that come after hours can wait until Monday morning. Parents and guardians have to realize that in this world of instant gratification, they need to wait until you are on

the clock, in your office. Promise me you will practice self-care on this one and just say no!

My first year as a school counselor was huge in terms of personal growth, learning, and professionalism. I forged new friendships with staff members and met and worked with community members, parents and students in the district. Believe me, I go home some days, put pajamas on right away and need to be alone for a while before rejoining the world again. But I've found that the good always outweighs the bad and each new work day is a new opportunity to change a child's life. Seeing the children come off the bus in the morning gives me such renewed energy every day and their excitement is contagious.

Finding a balance that works for me has been crucial to navigating through my first year. I appreciated the well-intentioned advice from so many people in the district and certainly used bits and pieces to form my counseling program, but I found that listening to my own brain and creating a program that was tailored to me was the best way to go. I stay organized with the help of technology and make sure to wrap things up as best I can before I go home at the end of the day. Graduate school is a wonderful arena to learn the basics of theories, ideas, and concepts before stepping into your first position. But only after you are in the trenches can you truly understand what it means and what it takes to be a successful school counselor. ■

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