

School Nurses: A Critical Part of the Educational Team

By Christine Marcos



About the Author: Christine Marcos is the Senior Program Officer for Strategic Initiatives at Moses Taylor Foundation, a private, charitable health foundation based in Scranton, Pennsylvania. In this role, she oversees the foundation's work to reduce older adult isolation, champion capacity building and expand school-based health.

Mrs. Marcos holds a Bachelor of Arts in communication studies and brings more than a decade of experience in the nonprofit and philanthropic sector to her role.

As schools continue to deal with the ongoing impacts of COVID-19, such as learning loss and mental health issues, it is more important than ever for principals and other administrators to ensure they have a strong relationship with their school nurses.

School nurses are a vital part of school communities, but many people have an outdated view of their critical role at the intersection of health and education. Students who are healthy have better attendance and improved graduation rates (Maughan, 2016; Maughan et al., 2018). School nurses help improve students' attendance and decrease the number of early dismissals (Moricca et. al., 2013; Tellojohann, Dake & Price, 2004; Hill & Hollis, 2012; Pennington & Delaney, 2008). This impacts academic test scores and leads to improved high school graduation rates. Additionally, a cost-benefit analysis identified that school nurses prevented an estimated \$129.1 million in teachers' productivity loss in the 2009-2010 school year (Wang et al., 2014).

Clearly, school nurses are an important, yet often overlooked, piece of the puzzle when it comes to many timely issues at the forefront of the minds of principals.

As Senior Program Officer for Moses Taylor Foundation, a private, charitable foundation that seeks to improve the health of people in Northeast-

ern Pennsylvania, I've been immersed in understanding and supporting the many roles of school nurses for the past few years. With so many pressing health needs in our community, the foundation's deliberate focus on expanding school-based health and supporting school nurses was specific and strategic. We encourage you to visit our website at www.mosestaylorfoundation.org/sn to view materials we created and gathered detailing the role of the modern school nurse, what school nurses need to be more fully supported and our foundation's strategy to address these issues.

Of course, the school districts in our region have been key in helping us to develop our strategy. For example, North Pocono School District offers a helpful model for ensuring school nurses and administrators work together well. Matthew Montoro, Principal of North Pocono Middle School, has said, "I have a strong partnership with the school nurse in my building and the rest of the school district. There is a mutual respect and high regard for my school nurse's clinical background, ethics and standards of practice...With their help, I can focus on keeping students in school and provide the best learning environment possible." He added, "With all the demands placed upon school nurses, I hope for opportunities for these incredible professionals to have the space and time to promote health education for classrooms and individually obtain professional development and continue to build connections with health care providers. They are an integral part of our school community."

Some recommendations we gathered from strong school nurse/principal partnerships like those in North Pocono, that may be helpful for you to consider in your school, include:

- Exploring opportunities to further engage school nurses in back-to-school nights, new staff orientations and/or a school wellness committee to build their connections with the rest of the school community.
- Setting a regular process for reviewing and updating school health policies with input and guidance from the school nurse.



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- Encouraging teachers, staff, and parents to keep the school nurse informed about student challenges that may be health-driven or health-related, including emotional concerns and changes in family dynamics.
- Instituting regular meetings between administrators and nurses to improve communication on school health goals and needs.
- Ensuring proactive, open communication with parents, caregivers and guardians, so they are aware of any state-mandated health requirements for students to remain in school.
- Supporting school nurses in their pursuit of relevant continuing education, such as covering the cost of membership to a professional organization.

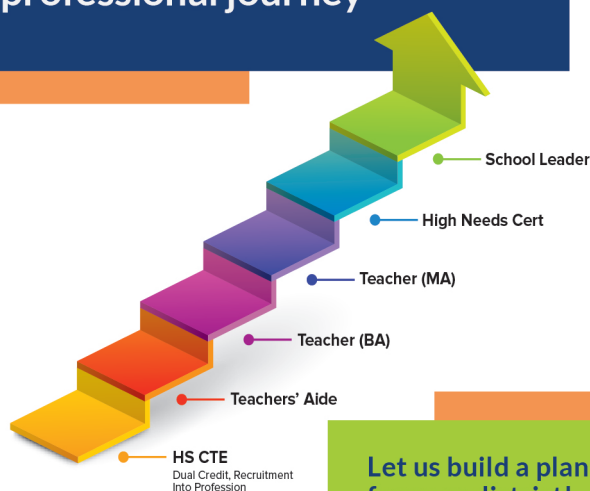
vant continuing education, such as covering the cost of membership to a professional organization.

Principals, administrators, staff and board members are always looking for ways to incorporate research and best practices into their work, and the link between student health and academic achievement has been well-documented. School nurses are on the front lines of children's health, reducing barriers that lead to absenteeism and improving learning outcomes. With your support, their work can have an even broader impact on the countless student lives they touch during their career. For more information, contact the author at cmarcos@mosestaylorfoundation.org

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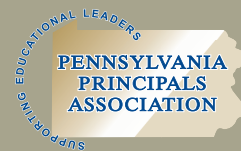
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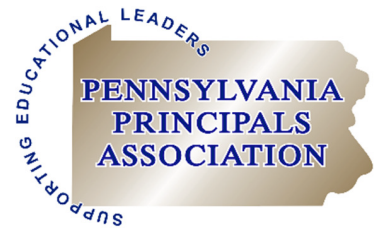
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PA Principals Association PIL Program

The Team: Building Leadership Success that Improves Student Learning

30 Act 45 PIL Hours



The Pennsylvania Principals Association will bring this PIL workshop to your school or district.

Goals of the Program:

This course is designed for building and district level teams or individuals looking to improve their leadership skills regardless of position. The text for this course is *The 360° Leader* by John Maxwell. Beyond the author's excellent leadership advice, chapters focus on leading down if you are the boss, leading up if you are the assistant and leading across to members on your team.

Participants could include any of the following:

- A principal and assistant principal. **(1&2)**
- A superintendent and assistant superintendent (and other cabinet members). **(1&2)**
- A principal, or group of principals in a district, without an assistant principal(s) who wants to improve their leadership ability. **(1-1-1)**
- An assistant principal who wants to improve their "leading up" leadership ability. **(2-2-2)**
- A school or district team. **(1-2-3)**

Learning Objectives:

- Review, discuss and improve upon the **team relationship** at the building level / district level to improve overall effectiveness and improve student learning.
- Establish routine opportunities for **communication** between the team and others.
- Assess **trust** at the building level / district level and identify pitfalls and opportunities to improve the importance of trust.
- Assess and reflect upon their personal **leadership style** to maximize impact on the team.
- Develop strategies for **leading up, leading down** and **leading across**.
- Create **daily, weekly, monthly and yearly** opportunities to talk about building leadership, building culture and student learning.

Program Requirements:

- Read text and complete **Book Read Summary**.
- Complete an **Action Plan Summary**.
- Complete a **Performance Goal Template**.

If you have additional questions or would like to schedule this PIL program, please contact Dr. Michael Snell at msnell@paprincipals.org

Closing the Gap: How Online Learning is Helping to Fill Teacher Shortages

By Holly A. Brzycki



About the Author: Holly A. Brzycki is the Supervisor of Online Learning at the Capital Area Intermediate Unit (CAIU15). For the past 14 years, she has managed the Capital Area Online Learning Association (CAOLA), a consortium of online learning programs for over 140 schools, districts and intermediate units in Pennsylvania. She has been in the education field for over 25 years as a teacher, director, principal and supervisor in traditional and cyber schools/programs.

Mrs. Brzycki is also an executive director on the Virtual Learning Leadership Alliance board and represents Pennsylvania with the Distance Learning Collaborative. She recently won the national 2023 Individual Excellence in Digital Learning Award for contributing to online learning for over a decade.

Mrs. Brzycki holds a Bachelor of Arts from King's College and a Master of Arts in educational leadership from Jones International University. She is completing her Ed.D. in instructional technology from the American College of Education.

The teacher shortage has been a growing concern for schools worldwide, with many struggling to find qualified educators to fill their classrooms. However, online learning brings hope to many schools trying to provide students with a quality and equitable education. With its flexibility and accessibility, online education has become integral in helping schools manage teacher shortages. This article will explore how online learning provides teaching support to school entities and increases course options, creating student equity.

Evolution of Online Education

For over 25 years, online learning and teaching have existed in Pennsylvania (Article XVII-A charter schools, 1997). Since then, online learning has undergone many changes and innovations. Today, it is an integral part of education, helping schools manage the teacher shortage by providing educators with curriculum and instruction in subjects experiencing shortages. Today's platforms are user-friendly and offer a variety of features that make learning more engaging and effective. Schools are using online courses to give students more flexible schedules and provide additional resources for struggling learners. Online learning is flexible enough to bridge the gap for teachers who are absent short or long-term due to illness or other reasons.



A Solution to Traditional Teacher Shortages

The teacher shortage in traditional schools is a real and pressing issue in the United States. Across the nation and in Pennsylvania, schools are struggling to find enough qualified teachers to fill all their classrooms. However, despite a traditional teacher shortage, there is no shortage of online teachers. Currently, the online teaching job market is experiencing a boom. Online learning companies that hire teachers are sharing that they have multiple applicants for open positions. Representatives from Accelerate Education, Edison Learning, eDynamic Learning and Strongmind report that they have anywhere from 10 to 57 applicants for every open teaching position. This point emphasizes that schools can turn to online learning to fill their empty teaching positions temporarily or permanently with quality online teachers. These companies employ Pennsylvania-certified teachers and offer Pennsylvania Common Core aligned curricula. Online learning companies require teachers to adhere to strict grading and communication standards aligned with the National Standards for Quality Online Teaching (NSQT).

Experts Providing Guidance and Support

In Pennsylvania, many intermediate units (IU) offer online learning options to their member districts. IU programs like the Capital Area Online Learning Association (CAOLA), operating out of the Capital Area Intermediate Unit 15, help districts manage online learning tailored to the schools' needs. IUs have seen an increase in schools offering online learning to students when they cannot secure a traditional teacher. The director of curriculum & instruction/educational technologies at Carbon Lehigh Intermediate Unit 21, who oversees eLearn21, a CAOLA partner, shared:

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“When several schools were faced without filling teaching positions in more specialized subject areas like world language, having a viable and vetted online learning program allowed students in those schools to continue their studies and progress forward in their academics. An additional value that our intermediate unit was able to provide within this context was onboarding, orientation and logistical support for these scenarios that were previously unfamiliar to the districts. They have been immensely appreciative of a partnership in resolving these teacher shortage needs.”

School districts that decide to use online learning options to fill their teacher needs appreciate the support that the local IUs can provide. Moving to online instruction involves making many logistical decisions. The IUs provide expertise to help the process move smoothly. The principal at myCyber Campus, Southern Tioga School District, an eQUIP and CAOLA member, said:

“In the fall of 2022, the Southern Tioga School District found itself short of certified teachers in a tested high school subject area. Knowing that we can provide content and teacher-of-record oversight, we engaged with eQUIP Online Learning, a CAOLA partner, to offer the two sections of this class in a hybrid format. The students would report to the classroom, be supervised by a teacher and complete the work online. Our myCyber Campus teacher provided scheduling oversight and real-time support and guidance for the students. With a few emails to sort out any confusion, we have been up and running for the year. We have worked on communication with all parties to keep the process running smoothly.”

This past fall, many schools faced shortages in core subjects and turned to online learning to provide students continuity in learning. The lead teacher of ELANCOline for Secondary at Eastern Lancaster County School District explained how his district, through Lancaster Lebanon IU 13's Lancaster-Lebanon Virtual Solutions (LLVS) program, is using online learning to address the teacher shortage in his district:

“Like many school districts, we have been faced with the problem of staffing shortages and open teaching positions. This spring, we had an open teaching posi-

tion in our math department with no candidates to fill it. Almost 90 students were faced with a semester of vital algebra content without a certified teacher to lead them through it. The online curriculum provided by our existing ELANCOline virtual academy (EOL), powered by LLVS with CAOLA, was utilized in a new way to provide instruction within the building facilitated by our own local teachers. By using the vendor course from LLVS, EOL gave the school the flexibility to overcome the obstacles and provide our students with an equal opportunity at a high-quality education during these trying times.”

Increased Course Options

Not only does online learning assist with the teacher shortage, but it also allows students to take courses not offered at their school. Students can explore new subjects and expand their academic horizons. One of the great benefits of online learning is that it provides students with more choices. In a traditional school, students are limited to the courses offered at that school. But with online learning, they can take over 400 K-12th-grade courses. This gives them a much more comprehensive range of options when choosing a course of study. Offering more courses creates equity by giving students more opportunities to take advanced placement and career pathway courses that may not be offered due to teacher shortages or limited financial resources.

Next Steps

The teacher shortage is a real and pressing problem in Pennsylvania. In response, many schools are turning to online learning to help manage the shortage. Online learning can allow schools to offer more courses and programs that otherwise would not be possible due to the shortage. This can help students receive the necessary courses to graduate on time and prepare for their future careers. Most intermediate units manage online learning programs for their member district. Reach out to your local Intermediate Unit to learn about online learning options for your school. Intermediate Units have managed online learning programs for over a decade and are experts in quality online curricula. Their support provides advocacy, saves you money through consortium pricing and offers best practices for implementing online learning. For further information, please contact Mrs. Brzycki at hbrzycki@caiu.org

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One District's Action Plan to Systematically Combat a Mental Health Crisis in Our Schools

By Kathleen Coulter and Dr. Steve Werner



About the Authors: **Kathleen Coulter, M.S., LPC**, is the Supervisor of Pupil Services for the West Chester Area School District. She has been in the mental health field for over 25 years, and the field of education for over 15 years. Mrs. Coulter specializes in and has a passion for ensuring that the best people and processes are in place to reach the most students in the most impactful way. She has been a private practice therapist, a school counselor and now an administrator; each adding to her expertise in the field.

Dr. Steve Werner is the Assistant Director of Pupil Services for the West Chester Area School District. Dr. Werner has worked in the field of education for over 15 years, specializing in school psychology, K-12 Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) framework and cultural- and language-informed special education assessment.

544 students. That is how many students expressed a concern significant enough to prompt a Suicide Risk Assessment (SRA) during the 2021-22 school year within the West Chester Area School District (WCASD). The rate of SRA referrals this school year is easily on track to eclipse that number. The mental health crises our students are facing feels almost insurmountable – almost, but not quite. While 544 SRAs are 544 too many, each and every one of them is an opportunity for staff to reach out to those students and their families with the mental support, assistance and resources they require.

According to the WCASD's Director of Pupil Services, Melissa Kleiman, "We want our students to feel like our schools are safe spaces for them to express their thoughts and feelings to trusted and trained adults. Our fear was, prior to our current level of supports being in place, we may not have fully captured the daily struggles our students were going through." Facing rising student mental health needs along with the potential for staff burnout, district leaders recognized the urgency of the mental health crisis for students well before COVID-19. Students and staff were struggling, and change wasn't an option, it was a necessity.

With an increase in mental health staff, a clear intervention pathway with tiered levels of support and an overall prioritization of student wellness, students in the WCASD are now able to experience mental health support that makes this crisis surmountable. For the purposes of this publication, the focus will be on how tiered levels of mental health interventions have made it possible to best utilize mental health staff and supports in a wide reaching and equitable manner.

Located in southeastern Pennsylvania, the WCASD serves nearly 13,000 students in 17 school buildings spread out across a 75-square mile footprint. The student demographic consists of 76.6% White, 9.1% Asian/Pacific Islander, 6.9% Hispanic, 4.5% Black and 2.9% Multi-Racial. An academic and mental health leader within Chester County, the district is consistently listed among the best on state and national reports such as *U.S. News and World Report*, *Newsweek* and *Niche*. Our mission statement is "to educate and inspire our students to achieve their personal best." Academically, we are achieving our mission. It is time to put equal emphasis on our social, emotional and mental health goals.

The WCASD uses a Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) to address the needs of its students. The source document, *Advancing Comprehensive School Mental Health Systems: Guidance from the Field*, states that, "Many schools deliver instructional or behavioral intervention to students in varying intensities, also known as a Multi-tiered System of Support (MTSS), to address the academic needs of the larger student body, including (but not limited to) students with identified disabilities" (National Center for School Mental Health, 2020). These approaches focus first on interventions for the good of all students, often implemented in a classroom or large group setting. Then, using data to make informed decisions, it applies evidence-based approaches to the continuing, possibly more intensive needs, of smaller groups of students. For individual students with the most significant needs, even more intensive and one-on-one interventions are utilized. At the WCASD, MTSS has, for years, been an extremely effective means of academic and behavioral support. Within the past few years, the district

“The WCASD uses a Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) to address the needs of its students.”

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has developed an MTSS model with a mental health framework that concentrates on tiered levels of staff support, interventions and focused mental health processes.

Tier I supports generally focus on teaching and reinforcing positive social, emotional and behavioral skill sets. These school and classwide activities are proactive and preventative. For nearly 10 years, the WCASD has implemented the SecondStep® curriculum in our kindergarten through fifth-grade classrooms (Classroom for Children, 2017). Second Step® follows the five CASEL social and emotional learning competencies of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, responsible decision making and relationship skills. These competencies lay the groundwork for strengthening our students' continued social and emotional learning at the secondary level.

In addition, most of our elementary schools are trained in Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports (PBIS). This is an evidence-based, tiered framework for supporting all students' behavioral, academic, social, emotional and mental health (Center on PBIS, n.d.). At the secondary level, the skills taught in elementary grades are reinforced further by classroom meetings, restorative practice circles and school-wide assemblies on topics such as suicide prevention or Question, Persuade, Refer (QPR Institute, n.d.), drug and alcohol awareness and prevention and social media savvy, just to name a few. It is critical that parents and families are as educated and comfortable with these topics as their children. To that end, the WCASD provides coordinated monthly parent workshops on complementary topics and many others. To reach as many parents as possible, these workshops are offered in English with simultaneous interpretation in Spanish.

Tier II supports are provided for students who have been identified through self, teacher or parent referral, needs assessments and the MTSS process. They may be experiencing less severe mental health challenges or mild distress that is causing academic, social or emotional impairment. These students may be seen in groups or possibly individually, depending on their needs. Thankfully, the WCASD has a robust mental health staff that can identify issues early and put appropriate mental health supports in place.

At the Tier II level of intervention, school counselors and intervention specialists are generally the first layer of support. Individual and group counseling, student check-ins, implementation of motivational behavior plans and “flash



passes” are some of the more common strategies utilized to support students. Schools have recently begun teaming with their safety personnel in order to encourage “mentoring” relationships that foster healthy and positive interaction with law enforcement in and out of the school setting. The WCASD is extremely fortunate to have several other area partners that team with our staff to bolster positive mental health, as well. This past year, the district partnered with West Chester University’s (WCU) PsyD program. Their students completed

needs assessments to determine what types of groups will be beneficial for Tier II high school students. They found that improving executive functioning and increasing anxiety reduction strategies were two areas where students could benefit from group work. The groups were quite successful and during the 2023-24 school year, the district is planning to utilize these WCU students in the three middle schools, as well.

One of the most important and influential factors affecting Tier II mental health supports is consistent, positive and authentic interaction with students’ family and outside of school support systems. The WCASD staff, including counselors, intervention specialists, psychologists, case-workers and administration, build and maintain relationships that allow school and home to come together in support of students.

Of course, there are times when whole-class or even small-group intervention may not be specialized or intensive enough to address the mental health concerns of students who need individualized interventions for the significant distress and functional impairment they are experiencing. Tier III interventions allow staff to determine the level of this need and then implement appropriate mediation.

The WCASD employs several methods of assessing need. Again, the most personal and immediate data collection comes from either the student’s own report, parent input or staff observations. In addition to this, the WCASD uses several mental and behavioral health screeners to assess challenging areas more accurately. At the secondary level, Behavioral Health Works (BHW) is provided to students for self-administration and staff scoring (BHW, n.d.). The results of this screener drive the possible need for a greater level (Tier III) of intercession. One example of Tier III interventions provided by the WCASD includes the opportunity to recover academic credits in a small, supportive setting within each high school. In this special program called APT (Achieve, Progress, Transition), students meet with trained

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academic staff and have ready access to mental health support. In addition to credit recovery, students who may be transitioning in or out of mental health placement are able to transition back into the school setting with a smaller class size and more one on one attention.

Another Tier III intervention available to students with more intensive mental health needs is the opportunity to see a mental health specialist. The WCASD partners with the Chester County Intermediate Unit (CCIU) to provide licensed counselors at all 17 of the district's schools. This supportive school counseling typically occurs once a week and is goal driven and needs based. Mental health specialists, although employed by the CCIU, work closely with our schools' MTSS and Individualized Education Program (IEP)

teams to coordinate cohesive services for our neediest students.

In many school districts across America, the MTSS model of tiered supports has been proven successful in academic achievement and remediation. At the WCASD, this model is proving to be just as effective at allowing students to thrive socially and emotionally at school. Again, the WCASD's mission statement is "to educate and inspire students to achieve their personal best" – that includes the entire student...their academic best, their personal best and their emotional best.

For further information, please contact the authors at kcoulter@wcasd.k12.pa.us or swerner@wcasd.k12.pa.us

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PA Principals Association is Offering NEW EdCamp Across PA

Transforming Student and Teacher Learning through the EdCamp Model

Qualifies for 40 PIL Hours! 40-Participant Minimum to Hold EdCamp

Cost:

\$99 for PIL hours (*discounted from the standard PIL course cost*); **FREE** to anyone attending for experience only.

Schedule:

8:00 - 8:30 a.m. - PIL Orientation (*for those attending for PIL hours*)

8:30 a.m. - 12:00 p.m. - EdCamp

Presenters:

Primary Facilitator/PIL Coursework Coordinator: Dr. Beth Haldeman

Co-Facilitators may include: Dr. Melissa Patschke, Dr. Nicholas Indeglio & Dr. Jonathan Ross

Dr. Haldeman, Dr. Patschke, Dr. Indeglio & Dr. Ross are PA Principals Association Board Members and Practicing Administrators.

PLEASE NOTE: EdCamp can be offered virtually. If you wish to hold it in your district, this is an option. In addition, this new EdCamp would be perfect for a Saturday, a day off school, after school hours or summer inservice.

For more information, such as program requirements or to schedule an EdCamp in your district, please contact Dr. Beth Haldeman, EdCamp Facilitator, at Tabetha_Haldeman@cocalico.org

Welcome NEW Elementary Members

Enrolled Between 12/30/2022 - 3/29/2023

<u>Name</u>	<u>District</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>District</u>
Tyler Blaise	Montoursville Area SD	Shannon Metzgar	East Stroudsburg Area SD
Erin Brouse	Williamsport Area SD	Lindsay Moore	Bethlehem-Center SD
Sarah Brubaker	Mid-West SD	Jennifer Moriarty	East Stroudsburg Area SD
Traci Budd	Coudersport Area SD	Dr. Renee Mosser	Haverford Township SD
Andrew Cress	Woodland Hills SD	James Poleto	Williamsport Area SD
William Delaney	West Shore SD	David Portzline	Mifflin County SD
Christopher Dickerson	Upper Merion Area SD	Tara Ricci	Methacton SD
Melody Dunn	Pottsgrove SD	Jacqueline Rivas	Schuylkill Valley SD
Christine Estright	Harisburg City SD	Peter Shahda	Allentown City SD
Nichole Garthwaite	Otto-Eldred SD	Ashley Stern	Eastern Lancaster County SD
Matthew Hathaway	Exeter Township SD	Tara Strouse	Methacton SD
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Zachary Just	Belle Vernon Area SD	Anthony Trozzi	South Park SD
Julie Kehr	Reading SD	Brooke Walton	Central IU 10
Laura Koehler	Eastern Lancaster County SD	Jennifer Zunic	Brentwood Borough SD
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Dawn Lynn	Huntingdon Area SD	Tracey Sartoris	Butler Area SD
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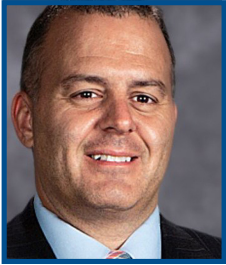
Welcome NEW Secondary Members

Enrolled Between 12/30/2022 - 3/29/2023

<u>Name</u>	<u>District</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>District</u>
Melissa Andrews	Octorara Area SD	Justin McCord	Phoenixville Area SD
Robert Arrick	Eastern Lancaster County SD	Tamara McGill	Wissahickon SD
Khaled Ashraf	Reading SD	Shelly McGowan	West Shore SD
Stephanie Barnhart	Shippensburg Area SD	Dwain Messersmith	Line Mountain SD
Breanna Bell	Bentworth SD	Hope Migliacco	Reading SD
Diana Caiazza	Lawrence County CTC	Angel Moser-Fisher	Reading SD
Cheryl Clark	Allentown City SD	Frank Nagy	Armstrong SD
Kimberly Clarke	Reading SD	L. Hope Palm	Mount Union Area SD
Cheyenne Coladonato	Columbia-Montour AVTS	Heather Pinero	Haverford Township SD
Chris Conroy	Shenandoah Valley SD	Nick Pirrocco	Stroudsburg Area SD
Kathleen Creelman	Reading SD	Erin Pittman	South Middleton SD
Timothy Dailey	Council Rock SD	James Purtell	Western Area CTC
Gregory Decina	Haverford Township SD	Carla Queenan	Norristown Area SD
Robert Fennimore	Eastern Lancaster County SD	Shaun Rohland	Wyoming Area SD
Jessica Fetterman	Pennsylvania Cyber CS	Kelley Romyne	Red Lion Area SD
April Fitz	Shippensburg Area SD	Nicole Singer	Allentown City SD
Laura Fragassi	Keystone Central SD	Dr. Colleen Slavin	Spring-Ford Area SD
Jennifer Gabryluk	Schuylkill Valley SD	Jennifer Smith	Southern York County SD
Melissa Gillard	Reading SD	Jessica Townsley	Cocalico SD
Robert Hall	Gateway SD	Jesse Tupper	Pottstown SD
Christa Keister	Great Valley SD	Brandon Whitfield	Baldwin-Whitehall SD
Sarah Kielar	Gateway SD	Erich Zaun	Oswayo Valley SD
Dr. Joshua Kuehner	Schuylkill Valley SD	Dane Zimmer	Greater Latrobe SD
Gavin Lawler	Spring-Ford Area SD	Stephanie Knell	Central Dauphin SD
William Lawless	Pottstown SD	Jessica Oliver	Pittsburgh SD
Michael Leddy	Parkway West CTC	Charles Richter	Tunkhannock Area SD
Jennifer Little	Reading SD	Brittany Wood	Tunkhannock Area SD
Kate Long	Allentown City SD	Elizabeth Yanelli	Butler Area SD

When You Wonder, You're Learning *Mister Rogers' Enduring Lessons for Raising Creative, Curious, Caring Kids*

Reviewed By: Jason E. Pappas, Ed.D., Principal, Frazier High School, Frazier School District



As a high school principal, I am always on the lookout for books that can inspire and engage students. *When You Wonder, You're Learning* by Gregg Behr and Ryan Rydzewski is one such book. This engaging and thought-provoking book presents a fresh perspective on learning and encourages readers to wonder and explore the world around them.

The authors begin the book by emphasizing the importance of curiosity and wonder in learning. They argue that a sense of wonder is the foundation of all learning, and

that children are natural explorers who constantly ask questions and seek to understand the world around them. The authors then go on to provide practical tips and strategies for parents and educators to foster curiosity and wonder in children.

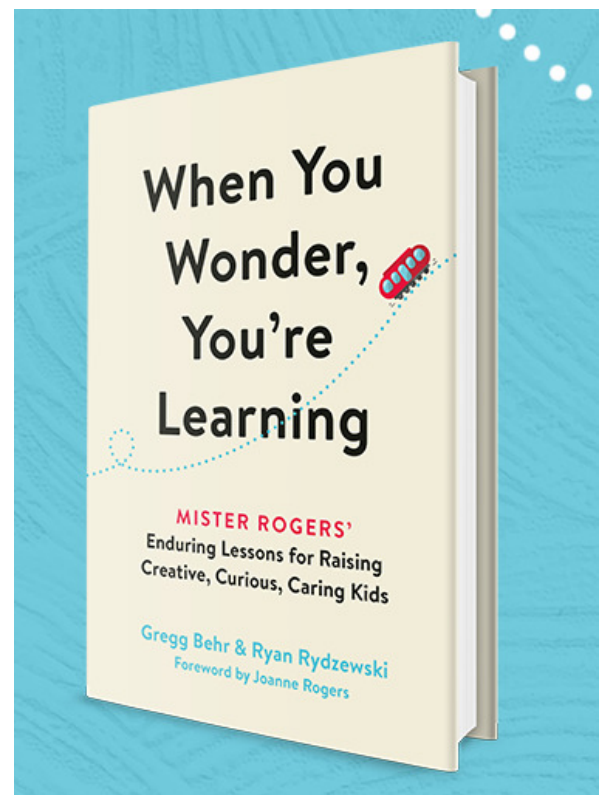
One of the strengths of this book is the way it presents concrete examples of how children can learn through wonder and exploration. The authors describe how children can learn about science through activities like collecting rocks, observing insects and experimenting with materials. They also provide examples of how children can learn about history, geography and other subjects through hands-on activities like cooking, art projects and field trips.

Another strength of this book is its emphasis on the importance of play and imagination in learning. The authors argue that play is not just a form of entertainment, but is actually a critical component of children's cognitive, social and emotional development. They encourage parents and educators to provide children with opportunities for unstructured play and imaginative exploration, and to support children's natural inclination to create and invent.


Overall, *When You Wonder, You're Learning* is an excellent book that offers a fresh perspective on learning and provides practical strategies for fostering curiosity, wonder and exploration in children. I would highly recommend this book to parents, educators and anyone who is interested in promoting lifelong learning and creativity.

One minor critique of the book is that it could benefit from more specific examples of how these strategies can be applied in high school settings. While the book is primarily geared toward parents and educators of younger children, I believe that many of the principles and strategies outlined in the book could be adapted for older students as well.

In conclusion, *When You Wonder, You're Learning* is a valuable resource for anyone who wants to inspire children to learn and explore the world around them. It is a well-written and engaging book that provides practical advice and strategies for fostering curiosity, wonder and creativity in children. I would highly recommend this book to parents and educators alike, and I believe that it has the potential to make a significant impact on the way we approach education and learning.



For further information, please contact Dr. Pappas at jpappas@fraziersd.org



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How Jostens Renaissance Has Changed Warrior Run High School



By Dr. Andrea A. Heller Landis



About the Author: Andrea A. Heller Landis, Ed.D., is the Principal of Warrior Run High School in the Warrior Run School District in Northumberland County, Pennsylvania. Dr. Landis is in her 12th year in education at Warrior Run School District and serving in her sixth year as an administrator within the district.

This is Warrior Run High School's third year of implementation of the Jostens Renaissance results formula framework for building a positive climate and culture where students and staff truly want to come to school.

Jostens is a Silver-Level Sponsor in the PA Principals Association. Above and beyond our breadth of customized and personalized products, Jostens also has a longstanding commitment to improving the overall culture and climate of the schools we serve. For over 30 years, Renaissance Education has helped school administrators, faculty and students build positive climate and culture through programs like Commitment to Graduate, The Harbor video series and our Jostens National Renaissance Conference – the nation's largest convening of school and student leaders to share best practices and celebrate the impact of positive school climate and culture.

With roots firmly planted in tradition, and branches sprouting innovation, Jostens is proud to be your most trusted partner in celebrating moments that matter.

As a district, Warrior Run has been developing a Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) for a number of years. During the 2019-20 school year, a district team of educators was engaging in professional development to improve our Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) system at the high-school level.

In February of 2020, members of this team, along with some of our students, attended their first Jostens Renaissance National Conference, held at a local high school. Afterward, the students shared that it was the best conference they had ever attended and that they had a multitude of ideas to implement right away. For more than 30 years, Jostens Renaissance Education has been helping schools at any level to improve their building climate and culture, and increase leadership and school engagement.

Unfortunately, we all know what March of 2020 brought. So, these great ideas were put on the back burner as we pivoted to teaching and learning from home. During the pandemic, I engaged in every online professional development opportunity offered by Jostens Renaissance Education and fell in love with this movement. When we returned to in-person learning in the fall of 2020, we had a soft start implementing the Jostens Renaissance Results Formula due to all the restrictions and protocols that never were lifted.

The Renaissance Results Formula contains 6R's: Respect, Recognize, Reward, Reinforce and Relationships will equal RESULTS. When words become actions for all students, that is when we will see a change in our school culture. It occurs within the walls of our classrooms and the halls of our school.

We were looking to create an energized culture where recognition runs broad and deep, is purposeful in identifying achievements of all stakeholders and thoughtful in recognizing them and focuses on catching students and educators doing something awesome. We recognize students for living out what it means to be a Warrior Run Defender.

We reward students for actions and achievements that align with what we respect. Rewards show appreciation for the efforts of students and teachers, reinforce the behaviors that are valued and respected and provide motivation for more achievements. By implementing a system of rewards, we can illustrate how students' and educators' hard work comes with benefits. We need to reinforce what it is we respect all year long to see the results of our efforts (from the 2020 Jostens Renaissance National Conference).

As a team, we identified what we **respect** and adopted these as our core values.



The Student Council hosted a food drive collecting over 2,575 items that were delivered to families in the Warrior Run community. The local food bank also provided a frozen turkey for each box. #defendersgivethanks

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Students being **Positive, Responsible, Involved, Dedicated** and **Excellent**, which means showing P.R.I.D.E. A matrix was developed to explain what P.R.I.D.E. looked like in the various locations within our building.

We utilize Defender P.R.I.D.E. cards to **recognize** students and *staffluty* (staff or faculty) who are living our core values. Students turn the cards into the office where they are put into a drawing to be **re-warded** with a gift card to various locations in our community. The purchase of the P.R.I.D.E. cards is to **reinforce** students' positive behaviors consistent with P.R.I.D.E. expectations and to help build connections and **relationships** between students and staffluty.

After reflecting on the 2020-2021 school year, we knew that the new year must be different. We kicked off the 2021-2022 school year with a packed gym for a welcome back pep rally presented by the high school administration. (Yes, we followed all the safety protocols that were in place.) Despite the obstacles in our way, we were committed to making this year the best one yet.

From there, our student council advisors and students hit the ground running with ongoing events and activities to keep this excitement alive. The events included:

- "My Jersey, Your Impact" – Each of our seniors involved in a fall sport or in the band had the opportunity to recognize a teacher/staff member for having a positive impact on them. The Student Council planned the event, including coordinating which student was recognizing which faculty member, what time the recognition would occur and where the students' jerseys would be hung outside of the teachers' classrooms. The emotions were high as students presented their teachers with their jersey and shared the reasons why that teacher had made an impact on them. *This event will likely become a tradition at the conclusion of each sport's season.*
- Monthly Spirit Weeks
- Commitment to Graduate
- Veterans Day Recognition
- Thanksgiving Pep Rally (Pie a teacher and pie-eating contest)
- Canned Food Drive
- Faculty vs. Senior Basketball Game
- What it Means to be a Defender Video (Video created by older students focused on re-teaching expectations)



Senior Peyton Meehan presented Nicole Morgan with her basketball jersey at the conclusion of our winter sports' season as a 'thank you' for the impact she made on her during her high school career. #myjerseyyourimpact

- 12 Days of Holiday Cheer
- Spread the Love Month in February
- Food Cart Fridays
- Special Education Field Day
- Powderpuff Game
- Teacher Appreciation Week
- Eggstra Special Egg Hunt
- Teachers' Choice Awards
- Senior Recognition (Future Plans Wall, Senior Walk, Senior Impact Cards, Senior Parade)
- End-of-Year Rally/Defender Day

In the fall of 2021, we conducted the Pupils Attitude to Self and School (PASS) screener.

The initial data supported our thoughts that our students were struggling to return to what would be deemed as a normal school year, but was turning out to not be so normal. Our data also showed that our students had low to moderate satisfaction with their school experience in a number of categories.

What we had on our hands was a Tier I issue that we needed to address. The PBIS team and the Student Council were determined to make our school a place where students wanted to be and to improve our culture. When the screener was administered at the start of this school year (fall 2022), our students' perceptions of school improved in many components, but especially toward their feelings about school. In every component measured by the PASS screener, our data indicated students reporting a HIGH satisfaction with their school experience in just a year's time.

- Our Class of 2026 had a 28.9 percentile increase in their feelings about school and 24.9 increase in general work ethic.
- The Class of 2025 had a 14.1 increase in their feelings about school along with a 24.2 increase in their attitude toward teachers.
- Both Classes of 2023 and 2024 showed an increase in their attitude toward attendance and their feelings about school.

Embracing the Jostens Renaissance Results Formula has helped us to improve the Tier I framework of our MTSS with a concentration on behavior by focusing on improving our high school's climate and culture. It works! Follow us on **Twitter @wrhsprincipals** to stay up to date on our latest activities! For further information regarding this article, you may contact the author at **alandis@wrsd.org**. For information pertaining to Jostens' products and programs, please contact Bernie Shaughnessy at **bernard.shaughnessy@jostens.com**

The Learning Recovery Opportunity: Meeting Student Needs One Session at a Time

By Dr. Susan Mowrer Benda



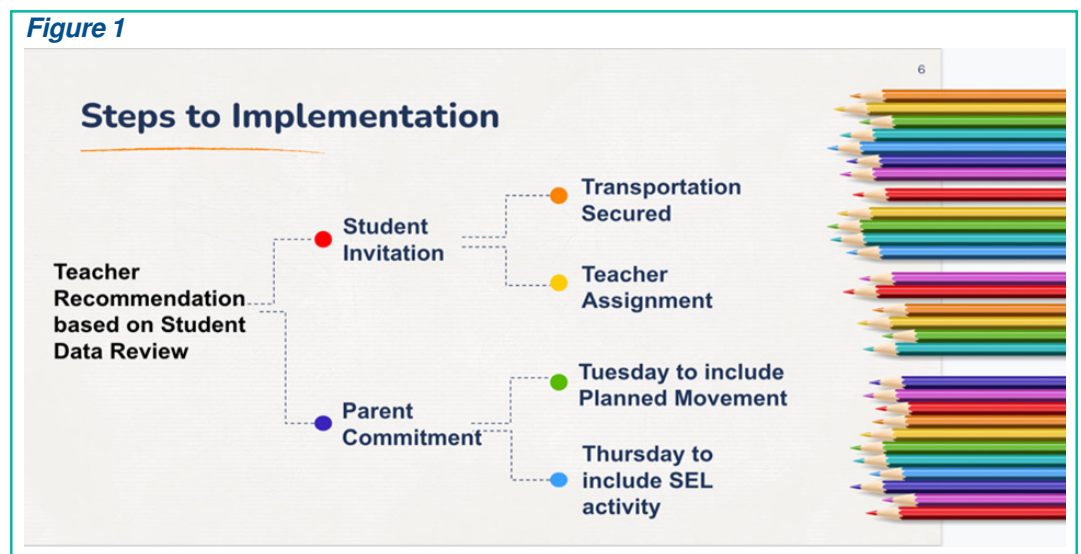
About the Author: Susan Mowrer Benda, Ed.D., serves as the Director of Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment for the Pleasant Valley School District in Brodheadsville, Pennsylvania. For 33 years, she has served in various roles and levels of responsibility in public schools, including the elementary principalship, director of elementary education, assistant superintendent and acting superintendent.

Long before the onset of COVID-19, the Pleasant Valley School District (PVSD) pondered ways to create a K-12 after-school learning program that would be socially enticing and enable the enhancement of student proficiency and achievement. In the past, the district has supported summer learning programs for primary and intermediate students and credit recovery for middle and high school students but often wondered how we could best increase student actual learning, (measured growth and proficiency) as well as their 'will' (self-motivation) to learn through the use of supplementary learning opportunities. As they say, "every cloud has a silver lining," and with the support of Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funding, our district created a *Vision* for an after-school program that would provide students the opportunity to benefit from additional, face-to-face student support and resources to increase academic achievement and educational confidence as well as bring out the educational best in our district instructional team.

A recent study from the University of Missouri (Consiglio, 2022) touts the benefits of a learning environment that is founded on strong relationships between teachers and students. These relationships not only support student learning but increase instructional prowess as well. With this in mind, the Learning Recovery Opportunity (LRO) began with the idea to merge student academic needs with social and emotional learning and planned movement after the completion of the school day in a small group, rotational setting.

Our first step was to identify key details for implementation including the eligibility of students; the academic and behavioral needs of eligible students; availability of teacher leaders for instruction; the delivery model of instruction; the location and timing for instruction; and opportunities for student transportation and nutrition during learning. The next step focused on instructor support and included the creation of the LRO Teacher Handbook, the establishment of Google and SeeSaw Tools for Communication between classroom and LRO teachers, parents and guardians and the planning for data-driven, student-centered instructional design and delivery. The district sought teacher participation by grade level, content, special education and nursing certifications to best meet the needs of our K-12 students. To this end, we are able to run the program concurrently in all four district school buildings for students K-12. (See Figure 1 below.)

Figure 1



Students invited for participation were identified using real-time data indicating jeopardy of not attaining academic proficiency during the quarterly reporting period. LRO is offered to K-12 PVSD students, at no charge, for English Language Arts (ELA) and mathematics at Pleasant Valley Intermediate and Elementary Schools, and all core content areas at

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Pleasant Valley Middle and High Schools. Our goal was to pre-emptively bolster students who may demonstrate a need for additional skills support before the need for credit recovery becomes a reality. LRO is held twice weekly after school during the school year and is offered to students who have not achieved mastery (2 or lower on the report card in grade K-2, 60% or in lower grades 3-12). Selection for the program begins at the mid-quarter point when progress reports are assigned. The program runs quarterly and provides students the opportunity to gain proficiency for the course/subject chosen (of the most recent quarter only) by completing this grade-level, content-specific, student-centered, *just-in-time* academic recovery opportunity.

Every session of LRO begins with student *social time* where they meet to share their snack and the events of the day. It is during this time students prepare for the learning to come by identifying their personal learning needs. At the high school level, students collaborate with LRO teachers during *social time* to determine their academic need for the day's session and what will be accomplished. Additionally, during this time, LRO teachers also collaborate to accommodate student cross curricular needs and what materials and resources may be needed.

Students work fluidly during LRO time often moving between teachers, content areas and classrooms to gain the 1:1 attention needed for work completion, elevation of self-esteem and providing opportunities for planned movement. At the close of LRO sessions, students come together to participate in social emotional learning lessons that are modeled by their teachers. Each lesson is designed to build understanding, acceptance and empathy among all LRO students and teachers through focused dialogue and expression.

Our target audience for this program included teacher-nominated students in need of academic and social and emotional support, as well as those volunteered by their parents and guardians. Participation is fluid from quarter to quarter based upon student need. LRO instructors are PVSD grade level and content certified and use the school board-approved ELA, mathematics, science, social studies and social emotional learning curriculum during instruction. Transportation is provided as well as a healthy snack. Students are also required to utilize their district-provided Chromebook as an additional resource.

This program began in November of 2022 and has doubled in size in terms of student participation and instructors. In particular, participation in the high school program has also been highly sought after by students who seek to enroll themselves taking responsibility for their own learning and personal development.

A key component to its success is the ability of district teachers to respond to student learning needs through ongoing communication and collaboration between daily classroom and LRO teachers and parents/guardians regarding student academic, social emotional and behavioral needs. Communication is both verbal and written, ensuring



accurate and weekly response to student needs and progress. This communication and collaboration provide for the timely completion of work assignments as well as skills review and an increase in student self-motivation and self-confidence.

Early data provides 80% of participating students from PV High School and PV Middle School have raised their achievement to a minimum of 65% proficiency level. Students at PV Elementary and PV Intermediate Schools have elevated their skill, proficiency and independent learning path levels as identified in their middle of the year ELA and math diagnostic testing results. Behaviorally, students enrolled in the LRO program have shown a marked decrease in disciplinary referrals as tracked by the district Student Information System. Teachers of the Learning Recovery Opportunity program continually 'sing its praises' for the meeting of student needs, including the opportunity to build key relationships that are paramount to academic and behavioral success. In the words of Rasheed Ogunlaru, "Just as the sun knows; even the sky is not the limit." For this program, we are 'shooting for the stars.'

For additional information, please contact the author at mowrerbenda.susan@pvbears.org

Reference

Consiglio, B. (2022, March 7). *Positive teacher-student relationships lead to better teaching*. College of Education & Human Development, University of Missouri. <https://education.missouri.edu/2022/03/positive-teacher-student-relationships-lead-to-better-teaching/>

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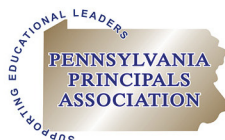
- A Micro-credential is not a course. It is an online, on-demand way to earn a badge that demonstrates your competency. The process includes submitting artifacts to be evaluated by an assessor in order to earn a sharable badge that you can use in your resumé, email signature as well as social networks.
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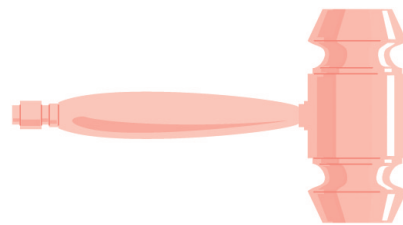
<https://player.vimeo.com/video/489415306>

Visit our website at www.paprincipals.org to see our full listing of micro-credentials and to register.

If you have any questions, please contact Julie Sunday at sunday@paprincipals.org



Legal Corner



By Michael I. Levin, Esq., PA Principals Association General Counsel

Did You Write This? Student Handbooks as Legal Documents



One of the most important publications that a school may issue is the student handbook. The student handbook provides valuable information to students and parents. Some of what is conveyed is intended to provide the basic information necessary for students to navigate the school day. For example, contact information is a common feature of such handbooks. However, student hand-

books are more than informational brochures. They are legal documents and must be treated as legal documents.

If you, as a principal, have been tasked with the duty to write or edit a student handbook for your school, I suggest that you should insist that it be reviewed by legal counsel before it is finalized, before it is approved by the school board and before it is distributed to parents and students. “Loose” language can impose legal liability that was never intended or trigger unnecessary duties and processes that were unforeseen. Unnecessary language can trigger duties that do not otherwise exist. Conversely, the failure to contain legally required language can place the district in legal peril. “Sloppy” or imprecise language can mean the difference between winning or losing a case. Consequently, it is important to ensure that student handbooks contain all of the things that are legally required and contain language that best positions the school and school district legally. For that, just like counsel should be reviewing contracts and other documents of legal significance, skilled legal counsel is required to review the student handbook.

I. Legal Notice Checklist

State and federal law requires that school districts provide notice to parents and students of a wide range of topics. Although some of the legal requirements can be met by posting on the school district’s website, it is recommended that student handbooks contain all of the legally required notices. The following is a *checklist* of legal notices that should be included in a student handbook:

- School board approval of handbook. The school board should approve the handbook at a public meeting and the handbook should contain a statement that it has been approved and the date of approval should be indicated.
- Anti-Discrimination Notices
 - Contact information for Title IX coordinator(s)
 - Contact information for ADA coordinator(s)
 - Contact information for Section 504 coordinator(s)
- Sexual Harassment Notices
- Student Records Notice
 - Contact information for the Student Privacy Policy Office of the United States Department of Education
 - Contact information for school’s student records administrator
 - Description of directory information
 - Method of opting out of certain directory information rules
- Student Privacy and the Protection of Pupil Rights
 - Amendment Notice
 - Contact information for the Student Privacy Policy Office of the United States Department of Education
- English as a Second Language Notice
 - Contact information for administrator regarding English as a Second Language
- Special Education Programs and Services Notice
 - Contact information for administrator responsible for special education services
- Notice of wellness program in accordance with the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act
 - Contact information for the administrator responsible for school district’s wellness program
- Child Nutrition Program Notice
 - Contact information for the administrator responsible for school district’s wellness program
- Children’s Internet Protection Act Notice
 - Contact information for the administrator responsible for school district’s wellness program

- Contact information for the Federal Communications Commission
- Student Services
 - Notice of Guidance Services
 - McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act notice
 - Contact information for the administrator responsible for school district's wellness program
 - Working papers notice
- Allergies
 - Contact information for Section 504 coordinator
- Asbestos Hazard Emergency Response Act (AHERA) Information
 - Contact information for AHERA coordinator
- Audio Recordings on Buses and Vehicles Notice
 - Code of Student Conduct

II. Notices Required or Implied by School Board Policies

In addition to the notices that the law requires, it is common for school board policies, or the administrative regulations adopted to implement policy, to require that students or parents be provided certain notices. Principals need to review the policy manual and administrative regulations to ensure that any required notices are provided in the student handbook. Many times, policies contain the same requirements as law. For example, policy 250¹ requires that notice of student recruitment be provided to students and parents. Other policies may not expressly require notice, but implementation of the policies suggests that notice be provided in the student handbook. For example, policy 203.1 allows students to be excused from HIV Infection education when such instruction conflicts with the religious beliefs or principles of the student or parents/guardians. It only makes sense to include notice of such rights in the student handbook. Similarly, many school districts have policy 915.1 regarding booster clubs and parent organizations. It only makes sense to provide some information about such organizations in the student handbook, with contact information about the responsible administrator.

III. Ensuring Consistency Between Student Handbook and School Board Policies and Applicable Law

I have seen student handbooks that contain provisions that are inconsistent with school board policy. For example, Section 1303.1-A of the School Code grants discretion to school boards to determine whether the anti-bullying provisions prohibit conduct that occur outside of the school setting. 24 P.S. §13-1303-A(d). However, I have seen student handbooks that contained language inconsistent with what was contained in the school board policy on that point. It is therefore of the utmost importance that there be no inconsistencies between what is in policy or administrative regulations and what is in the student handbook. Another example concerns the burden of proof. The federal

regulations adopted in 2020 governing sexual harassment required school districts to determine and state in their policies whether the burden of proof would be a “preponderance of the evidence” standard or a “clear and convincing evidence” standard. 34 C.F.R. §106.45(b)(1)(vii). The handbook references to Title IX need to be consistent with the standard adopted by the school board.

IV. Code of Student Conduct

The “meat” of student handbooks is the code of student conduct. Codes of student conduct are highly regulated by law. The state board regulations provide:

- (c) Each governing board shall adopt a code of student conduct that includes policies governing student discipline and a listing of students' rights and responsibilities as outlined in this chapter. This conduct code shall be published and distributed to students and parents or guardians. Copies of the code shall also be available in each school library. 22 Pa. Code § 12.3(c).

This simple language means that if you, as a principal, include a disciplinary rule in the handbook that has not been adopted or approved by the school board, that rule is not legally valid. Hence, my recommendation is that the student handbooks be approved by the school board to ensure that all rules have been approved in accordance with 22 Pa. Code §12.3(c).

The next thing is to ensure that the code of student conduct contains all of the legally required rules. For example, the anti-bullying rules need to be stated in the code of conduct, must be posted prominently in each building and made available in every classroom. 24 P.S. §13-1303.1-A. Taking into consideration the legally required provisions and the provisions that may be required by school board policy or administrative regulations, the following is a *checklist* of items that should be addressed with specific and fulsome description of the rules.

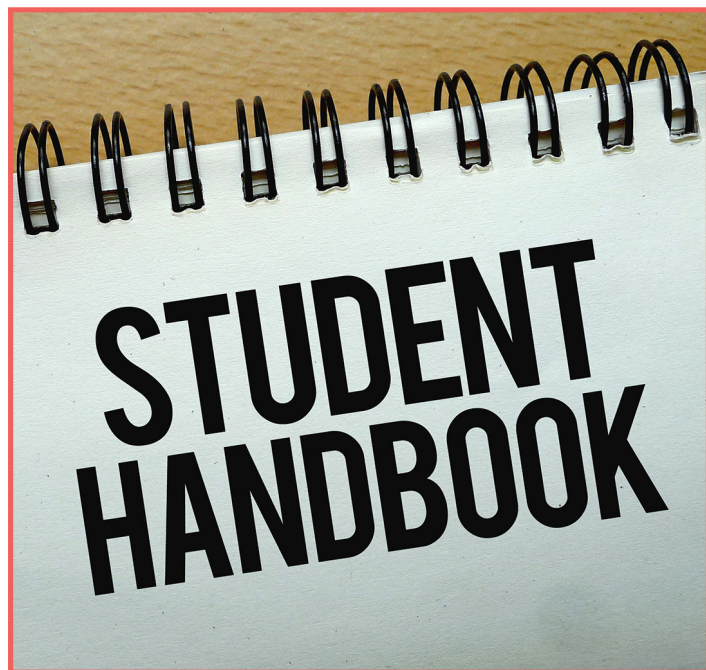
- A recitation of the student rights and responsibilities contained in 22 Pa. Code, Chapter 12
- The standard of evidence to be used in determining whether there is a violation of the code of student conduct
- The type of discipline that may be imposed
- Non-disciplinary consequences that may be utilized
- The standard for determining the disciplinary consequences
- the duties of the student, such as cooperating with investigations or reporting criminal arrests
- Attendance and truancy rules
- Compulsory attendance procedures
- Special rules or processes related to conduct by students with disabilities
- Suspension procedures
- Expulsion procedures

- ☑ In-school suspension procedures
- ☑ Hearing processes
- ☑ Cafeteria rules
- ☑ Care of school property rules
- ☑ Hall pass rules
- ☑ Lavatory rules
- ☑ Locker rules, including locker search provisions
- ☑ Field trip rules
- ☑ Fundraising rules
- ☑ Dance and social function rules
- ☑ Senior pictures
- ☑ Student meeting rules
- ☑ Visitor rules
- ☑ Grading and graduation rules
- ☑ Advanced placement rules
- ☑ Honor society rules
- ☑ Transportation rules
- ☑ Telephone usage rules
- ☑ Electronic device rules
- ☑ Health and safety rules
- ☑ Emergency closing, opening delays or early dismissal rules
- ☑ Health services rules
- ☑ Medication rules
- ☑ Academic dishonesty (cheating) rules
- ☑ Student dress rules
- ☑ Drug and alcohol rules
- ☑ Fighting rules
- ☑ Anti-bullying rules
- ☑ Anti-harassment rules
- ☑ Anti-hazing rules
- ☑ Anti-tobacco and anti-vaping rules
- ☑ Itemization of prohibited conduct
- ☑ Guidance of levels of discipline based on severity of offense and other relevant factors
- ☑ Rules regarding searches and seizures
- ☑ Acceptable use rules regarding electronic devices and technology systems

A. Building Flexibility into the Code of Student Conduct

I do not have enough space in this column to provide a complete set of provisions for the Code of Student Conduct, but I will make recommendations addressing some important issues. One critical issue is to ensure that the school has enough flexibility to address all circumstances. I recommend language like the following:

§1. Levels of Infractions. Absent the presence of mitigating factors or aggravating factors, the disciplinary consequences for rule violations are set for this **§7.4**; provided, however, that particular rules described elsewhere herein shall prevail over the levels of discipline



stated in this **§7.4**. Infractions generally are divided into the following four levels:

- §a. Level 1 Infractions.** Level 1 infractions are minor incidents that generally do not involve or affect other persons. It includes student behaviors that impede orderly classroom procedures or interfere with school operation to a minor or negligible extent. Except where there are repeated instances of Level 1 infractions or other aggravating circumstances, Level 1 infractions generally do not result in suspension, in-school suspension or expulsion.
- §b. Level 2 Infractions.** Level 2 infractions are more serious than Level 1 infractions and can be described as repetitive or frequent or cause a serious disruption to the learning climate of the school or affect other persons. Except where there are repeated instances of Level 1 or 2 infractions or other aggravating circumstances, Level 2 infractions generally do not result in suspension, in-school suspension or expulsion.
- §c. Level 3 Infractions.** Level 3 infractions are serious infractions which result or could result in the violation of the legal rights of others, violence to another person, damage or destruction of property, conduct that poses a direct threat to the safety of others in school or conduct that may constitute a criminal offense where exclusion from school would be justified. Level 3 Infractions can also include repeated Level 1 or

Level 2 infractions where progressive discipline does not appear to be working.

§d. Level 4 Infractions. Level 4 infractions are serious, perhaps criminal in nature, where expulsion from school is justified or intervention by law enforcement is justified. Level 4 Infractions can also include repeated Level 1, Level 2 or Level 3 infractions where progressive discipline does not appear to be working.

§2. Prohibited Conduct; Guidance as to Levels of Infractions.

The conduct described in the following matrix is prohibited at school or, where indicated, outside of school. Conduct outside of school that is prohibited will not consist of a suspension, in-school suspension, or expulsion unless applicable law allows it. To the extent that conduct outside of school is prohibited, and applicable law does not allow a suspension, in-school suspension or expulsion, the student may be subject to the other forms of discipline or consequences as may be allowed by applicable law. Notwithstanding anything herein to the contrary, any student who violates any of the rules is subject to discipline, including possible expulsion. The following matrix sets forth the minimum infraction level a violation would justify, absent any relevant mitigating or aggravating circumstances.

B. Extracurricular Activities

The power and authority of school districts to regulate extracurricular activities and student conduct related to such activities is much broader than it is regarding school activities. Section 510 of the School Code, 24 P.S. §5-510, governs the discretion that school boards have to adopt rules governing student conduct with regard to school. Section 510 of the School Code contains the following significant language limiting the power and authority of school boards. Specifically, section 510 of the School Code provides:

The board of school directors in any school district may adopt and enforce such reasonable rules and regulations as it may deem necessary and proper, regarding . . . the conduct and deportment of all pupils attending the public schools in the district, during such time as they are under the supervision of the board of school directors and teachers, including the time necessarily spent in coming to and returning from school.

24 P.S. § 5-510 (Emphasis added)

In contrast, the power and authority of school boards to control extra-curricular activities and student conduct with regard to extra-curricular activities is set forth in section 511 of the School Code, 24 P.S. §5-511. Section 511 of the School Code provides as follows:

- (a) The board of school directors in every school district shall prescribe, adopt, and enforce such reasonable rules and regulations as it may deem proper, regarding (1) the management, supervision, control, or prohibition of exercises, athletics, or games of any kind, school publications, debating, forensic, dramatic, musical, and other activities related to the school program, including raising and disbursing funds for any or all of such purposes and for scholarships, and (2) the organization, management, supervision, control, financing, or prohibition of organizations, clubs, societies and groups of the members of any class or school, and may provide for the suspension, dismissal, or other reasonable penalty in the case of any appointee, professional or other employe, or pupil who violates any of such rules or regulations.
24 P.S. § 5-511.

Conspicuously absent from section 511 of the School Code is the limiting language that is contained in section 510 of the School Code. This, and other differences in basic legal principles, has resulted in courts generally concluding that the right of students to continue to participate in extra-curricular activities is a lesser right than the right of students to attend school. For example, one court stated that while students have a property right in education, “students do not have a recognized, freestanding property interest in participating in athletic and extracurricular activities.” *T.W. v. S. Columbia Area Sch. Dist.*, 2020 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 176429, at *13 (M.D. Pa. Sep. 25, 2020).

However, where unnecessary language is placed in a student handbook granting students’ rights that they do not have under law, the school will trigger duties that do not otherwise exist. In *T.W.*, the court held that the school district created a property right regarding extracurricular activities by what the school said in its student handbook. The court explained:

Turning to the present case, the Court finds that the district has established a legal property interest in participating in extracurriculars. ***The handbook’s statement that all students subject to Section VII [regarding extra-curricular activities] will be ‘provided due process’***

throughout the disciplinary process is enough to establish a legal interest in these activities. That said, the district's suspension will only violate the Due Process Clause if the procedures offered do not satisfy the requirements set forth in Davis. The district will thus have provided T.W. with sufficient due process so long as it gave T.W. oral or written notice of the charges against him, and if he denies them, an opportunity to present his side of the story.

T.W. v. S. Columbia Area Sch. Dist., 2020 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 176429, at *14-15 (M.D. Pa. Sep. 25, 2020).

In other words, when the author of the student handbook in *T.W.* made a statement that students "will be provided due process," the school district triggered duties that did not have to be triggered. Had that simple statement not been made, this case against the school district would have been short-circuited and more easily defended.

C. Addressing the Differences Between Elementary School, Middle School and High School

It is not unusual for each school to have its own student handbook as there will be differences in personnel and other issues that are dependent upon the particular school. However, it is recommended that the legally required provisions and the code of student conduct be uniform throughout the school district. I have heard administrators argue that elementary students should not be disciplined to the same extent as high school students for a variety of reasons. To the extent that such reasons

exist, by having the language allowing flexibility allows the school district to treat elementary students less harshly than a high school student committing the same offense. Under the sample language proposed earlier, the level of discipline is determined only after considering "mitigating or aggravating factors." The age, maturity, intellect of young students are all mitigating factors that can be taken into account.

IV. Practical Recommendations

I strongly recommend that student handbooks be reviewed and updated annually. I recommend that the review process start no later than December 31 each year and that the student handbooks be presented to the school board no later than April each year for approval and adoption. If the school board would like changes to be made, there is time to do so. The school board should approve the handbooks no later than June 30 each year. The handbooks can then be printed over the summer in time to distribute to students when school starts in August or September.

VI. Conclusion

Student handbooks are important legal documents and must be treated as such.

End Note

¹Most public-school entities in Pennsylvania utilize the policy service of the Pennsylvania School Boards Association ("PSBA"). PSBA has developed a comprehensive format for school district policies with a detailed and consistent numbering system. I will use the policy numbers that PSBA utilizes and that most public-school entities employ. If your school entity does not use PSBA's policy service, I highly recommend that it be used.

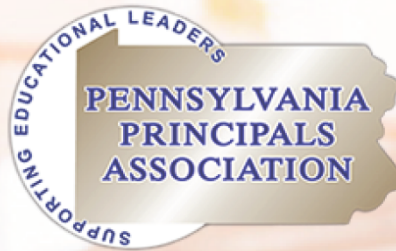
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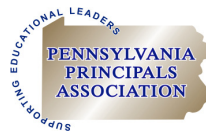
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