

Routines

Routines are ways of doing everyday tasks that are practiced until they become habit. In school, routines help create a familiar, safe environment so that children and adults can focus their energies on learning. Just as academic routines are a basic element of successful teaching and learning, schoolwide routines lay the groundwork for success in many areas of school life.

For instance, teaching students how to walk quietly and respectfully through the halls at the beginning of the year establishes expectations that help keep hallways calm. The details of such routines vary from school to school—students might be allowed to wave silently to friends as they pass, or they might be required to pause at hallway intersections for an adult’s direction. The common denominator is that after being given time to practice, everyone in the community knows and is expected to follow the routine.

Developing successful routines requires students and staff to “live their rules” by translating them into actions. For example, thinking together about what it might look and sound like to live by a rule such as “Stay safe and respectful” in the lunchroom or on the playground is typically the first step in building schoolwide routines for those places.

Routines are most likely to succeed if all members of a school community are involved in their creation. When they are developed collaboratively and are in harmony with the values of a school, routines can strengthen its sense of community.

In this section, you’ll see examples of routines for shared spaces and times at six schools. By establishing a welcoming and calm tone as children arrive for school,

creating a calm and respectful atmosphere in the cafeteria, making dismissal a smooth, positive experience, and striving for “more good days on the bus for everyone,” these schools make a positive impact on the learning environment for their students. Some of the key characteristics shared by their stories are:

- Routines are built on skills students have already learned and practiced in their classrooms.
- Routines are modeled, taught, practiced, and reinforced over time.
- When appropriate, input from staff members and students is solicited, considered, and incorporated into the design of the routines.
- Families and others in the extended school community know about and respect schoolwide routines.
- Routines are reviewed and revisited in school at the beginning of each year.

As you read this section, think about shared spaces or times in your school. Use the featured schools’ stories for inspiration, considering ways that your situation is similar to and different from theirs. Then, when you are ready, turn to the discussion and planning questions at the end of the section and begin exploring ways routines might be used to build community at your school.

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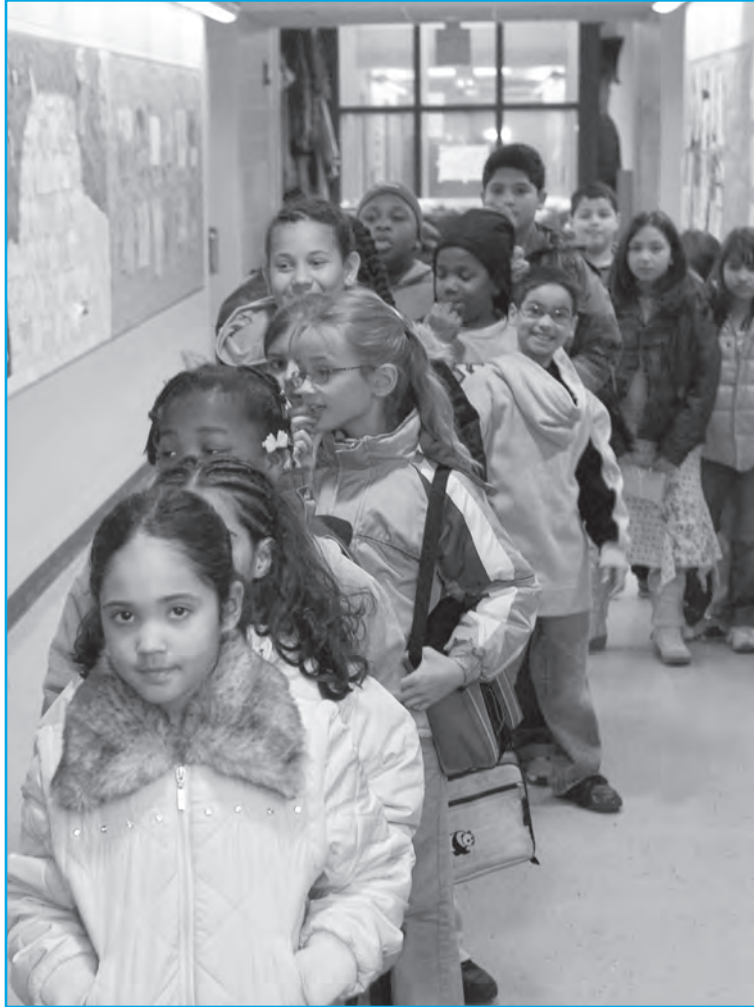
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PURPOSE

To establish a welcoming, calm tone as children enter the school building

Arrival Time

Clear expectations and warm welcomes keep arrival time calm and safe

As soon as she hears children entering the building at the beginning of the school day, Linda Stephenson, the guidance counselor at Dame School, steps out of her office and stands by her door. As the children head down the long corridors that lead to their classrooms, they pass Linda and several other adults, who each smile and greet them: “Hello, Kyle! Good morning, Evie!”

Some children respond to the adults’ greetings with a cheerful “Good morning!” Others return a quiet nod, rush over for a quick hug, or share a brief conversation. Then, within a few minutes, the flow of students through the hallways becomes a trickle, and the classroom day begins.

The hallways at Dame School used to look different at arrival time. Children would enter the building haphazardly, talk loudly, and run down the halls. This unruly and potentially unsafe transition from playground to classroom frustrated and worried the staff. “You could just feel the tension in this place, from the start of the day to the end,” says first grade teacher Dawn Morris. School leaders addressed the problem with a two-pronged approach: by teaching students clear expectations for hallway behavior, and by asking adults throughout the school to be greeters in the hallways during morning arrival time.

The Dame Leadership Team, which consists of administrators, teachers, support staff, and parents, led this effort. They arrived at their two-pronged solution by first articulating a clear goal: to achieve a pleasant atmosphere by helping children maintain self-control as they traveled through the long hallways. And, in thinking of ways

Dame School, Concord, New Hampshire

suburban; public ■ preK–2 ■ 305 students ■ 17 classrooms ■ 46% of students receive free or reduced-price lunch
■ building also houses a comprehensive neighborhood family resource center

Since the expectations for hallway behavior were the same for everyone in the school, the children received consistent feedback about what they were doing well from many different adults.

to achieve this, they focused on proactive, positive strategies rather than reactive, punitive ones. Here's how the school worked on each aspect of the solution.

Teaching hallway behavior

The first step was teaching the children how safe, friendly hallway behavior looks, feels, and sounds. The adults began by agreeing among themselves what constituted such behavior, from walking at a safe speed to looking where you're going. Then the teachers discussed this with their students and modeled the desired behaviors. For example, Ms. Morris asked the children in her class to observe her as she walked down the hallway, and then afterwards asked them to share what they noticed about her "calm, safe walking." The children noticed things like "You went straight," "You kept your hands at your sides," "You walked slowly the whole time." Ms. Morris guided

them to name further details, for example by asking, "Who noticed what I did with my eyes?" so students would identify "look where you're going" as a behavior.

Then, once many qualities of safe walking had been named, the children began to practice, first by having a few at a time model while others observed, and then together as a class. For the next few weeks, all teachers watched carefully for instances of hallway behavior that met expectations. They reinforced the children's learning by pointing out specifically what they were doing well, using comments such as "I noticed that you kept your hands at your sides the whole way to gym. You were also quiet." Since the expectations for hallway behavior were the same for everyone in the school, the children received consistent feedback about what they were doing well from many different adults.

Adults become hallway greeters

As the children were learning and practicing self-control in the hallways, the adults in the school were preparing for their new role as hallway greeters. Teachers at Dame who held Morning Meeting in their classrooms had already noticed the powerful effect that greetings could have on children at the beginning of the day: how being greeted by a teacher or classmate assured each child that he or she belonged in the classroom and was welcome. By having morning greeters, the leadership team hoped to extend that experience out into the school's hallways, so that children would feel welcome from the time they walked into the school. (To learn about Morning Meeting, see *The Morning Meeting Book* by Roxann Kriete, NEFC, 2002.)

Therefore, the leadership team asked the adults in the school to be in the hallways greeting children as they entered the building in the morning. Using a friendly tone and making eye contact with the children, adult greeters welcome as many children by name as possible. They also remind children who get off track what walking through the hallway should look and sound like. Principal Ed Barnwell explains that a hallway greeter's role is "very different from hallway monitoring. Monitors watch, but don't engage, and they usually focus on punishment for misbehavior. We know you can't punish kids into learning social skills."

BENEFITS

Since Dame School began teaching hallway behavior and having greeters in the hallways, "things have been much calmer and happier," says Pat Steiner, the student support room program assistant. The number of students running through the hallways has decreased, and the noise level has dropped considerably. Adults and children start the day off feeling calmer and more connected, which leads to more productive learning days for all.

Another significant benefit of having hallway greeters is that this simple practice gives adults and children a chance to interact in an informal, positive way. Through their greetings, adults make it a point to convey excitement about the day, especially with children who may have struggled with self-control the day before. A cheerful adult greeting reminds these children that this is a new day and encourages them to keep trying. "It lets the children know that we really care about them, want to get to know them, and are ready to help them do their best," says Linda Stephenson.

Another exciting change, notes Ed Barnwell, "is that now the kids are initiating greetings and conversations. Children ask adults how their evening was, or how they're feeling that day. It's really amazing to see small children taking an interest in adults' lives. And it speaks to the kind of community we're building at Dame."

KEYS TO SUCCESS

Teach expectations to children Dame School leaders might have chosen to address their arrival time challenges with a long list of “don’ts,” such as “Don’t run in the hallways,” “Don’t yell,” and “Don’t horse around.” However, that approach wouldn’t have helped students understand what they were supposed to do, and it would have started the day out on a punitive, rather than a positive, note. It also would have been a confusing contrast to the positive disciplinary approach teachers were using in their classrooms. By teaching expectations thoroughly and explaining how following them would help everyone at school, adults at Dame help the children learn to manage their own behavior, ensure consistency in teaching approaches inside and outside the classrooms, and achieve their goal of creating a welcoming atmosphere for the beginning of the day.

Provide adults with as much direction as needed When this initiative started, the leadership team provided school staff with respectful guidance and reminders about effective ways to greet the children, emphasizing the value of a consistent approach. This helped ensure that all the hallway greeters understood what was expected of them.

At one point, when the leadership team noticed that hallway greeters were “clumping up” in the hallways, they asked support staff to station themselves in certain areas and classroom teachers to stand at their doors so that the adults would be spread throughout the building at arrival time. Now that the routine has been in place for several years, there’s less need for such a specific structure. Now any available adult acts as a hallway greeter, and having friendly adult greeters throughout the corridors is simply part of life at Dame.

Review and reteach regularly Routines need to be retaught at the beginning of each year. At Dame, each class reviews expectations for hallway behavior and practices the routine during the first weeks of school. Adult hallway greeters get a friendly reminder about how to do their part at the year’s first all-staff meeting. This approach ensures that children know exactly what is expected of them and that they understand the connection between their behavior and the goal of calm, safe hallways.

PURPOSE

To welcome children, parents, and teachers to school in a way that emphasizes learning and community

Daily Message Board

Beginning the day by reading all-school news

Gabe, a third grader, bounds through the door into the foyer of Chilmark School and heads right for the message board. He joins Sophie, a first grader, who is reading the day's message with her mother:

Good Morning!

It's the 100th day of school. We'll all celebrate this afternoon by doing special activities, games, and art projects about the number 100. What is your class doing?

Today's Morning Circle challenge: Make a K-1-2-3-4-5 pattern.

Sophie's mother asks Gabe what his class is doing for the 100th day celebration, and he shares enthusiastically and then asks Sophie what her class has planned.

"Sounds like it will be a great day!" says Sophie's mother to both children, who head off to their classrooms full of anticipation.

When students, parents, and teachers enter Chilmark School in the morning, they immediately make their way to the whiteboard in the entryway and read the message written on it. The message is typically composed of a sentence or two about the day

Chilmark School, Chilmark, Massachusetts

rural; public ■ K-5 ■ 60 students ■ 3 multi-age classrooms ■ one of several schools serving year-round residents of the island of Martha's Vineyard

The wording
and topics for all-
school messages
are selected care-
fully so they will
be engaging for
students at all
grade levels.

ahead and a “circle challenge,” which tells students how to arrange themselves later at Chilmark’s daily all-school meeting. (See “Morning Circle” on page 79.) The routine of stopping to read the message helps children settle down and focus, brings together students of different ages, gives them a meaningful reading experience, and increases parents’ sense of connection to the school.

Chilmark’s teachers and principal take turns writing the message each day. The format is similar to the daily morning message each teacher writes for her or his class; it begins with a friendly greeting, followed by a couple of sentences about school news. Often there is a question or some other interactive element. (To learn more about morning messages for classrooms, see *The Morning Meeting Book* by Roxann Kriete, NEFC, 2002 and *Morning Meeting Messages, K–6: 180 Sample Charts from Three Classrooms* by Fisher et al, NEFC, 2006.

The wording and topics for all-school messages are selected carefully so they will be engaging for students at all grade levels. “The all-school message usually gives information about what’s happening that day,” says K–1 teacher Robin Smith, “schoolwide events, what’s going on in classrooms, or other news.” The interactive elements are related to the news and invite school members to make connections, as in the opening scene, where the question about plans for 100th day celebration got Gabe, Sophie, and Sophie’s mother talking.

Because Chilmark’s sixty students come to school on foot, by bus, or with parents during a twenty-five minute window at the beginning of the day, the area around the announcement board is rarely crowded, and each student has time to read the daily message. Everyone enters through the school’s front door, which leads into a large foyer where the all-school message is placed. The whiteboard occupies a prominent spot at the children’s eye level and is situated so that small groups can easily gather around and read it together.

BENEFITS

Robin Smith says that since Chilmark started using an all-school message, “calmness starts the day.” This routine helps children enter school with a purpose. Rather than running to their classrooms, they pause, read, converse, and connect,

all of which help smooth the transition from home to school. Starting the day this way also underscores the importance of reading; children are motivated to read the message because they want to know what it says.

Reading the all-school message also helps students of different ages get to know each other. Older children help younger classmates by reading the message aloud or guiding them in sounding out words, and the content of the message sparks conversations. This routine creates a daily opportunity for children to listen to each other and practice cooperation.

The announcement board connects parents with school life by providing information and giving them an opportunity to interact with students of all ages. “Parents love knowing more about what’s going on across grade levels,” says Ms. Smith.

KEYS TO SUCCESS

Prevent overcrowding at the message board Chilmark’s way of doing a school-wide message works well for them because students don’t all arrive at the same time. Everyone has ample time to read the message before the day begins. Other ways to achieve similar results might include posting duplicate messages in multiple places, or using a public announcement system to deliver a community-building morning message. (See “Morning Announcements” on the next page.)

Keep messages focused on community building Ms. Smith emphasizes the importance of using “language that develops a sense of cooperation and community” in all-school messages. All-school messages should make everyone feel welcome and should focus on what’s happening currently in the school, so they aren’t a good place to recognize individual accomplishments or to remind parents about logistics.

Morning Announcements

Designed to set a positive, unifying tone

At many schools, there's no central place to display an all-school morning message where all students will see it. An alternative is to use the public announcement system to broadcast a message that sets a positive, unifying tone for the day. Principal Karen Casto used this approach at Penn Valley Elementary School in Levittown, Pennsylvania.

Every day, promptly at 9:05, she'd go on the air, beginning with a greeting, "Good morning, Penn Valley!" and then naming the people in the school who had birthdays that day. The birthday announcements not only helped people get to know each other—they also got the children's attention because students liked seeing which of the birthday people they recognized.

A few general announcements followed, each selected carefully for its pertinence to all grade levels. "As a teacher, I had endured morning announcements that went on and on, or that were meant for specific grade levels or for staff only. I knew that people would stop listening if the announcements didn't apply to them, and that wouldn't be an upbeat way to start the day," explains Dr. Casto. At Penn Valley the content of the announcements varied from day to day, but they were always brief, focused, and relevant.

Morning announcements always concluded with words of encouragement such as *Have a great day*, *Do your best*, and *Take care of each other*. "How the day begins can impact how the rest of the day goes," says Dr. Casto. "Just as teachers set the daily tone for their classrooms, as principal, I used these words to set a positive daily tone for the school, reminding students what was expected of them and what was possible if we focused on our common goals."

Penn Valley Elementary School, Levittown, Pennsylvania

suburban; public ■ K–5 ■ 310 students ■ 18 classrooms ■ 5 self-contained special education classrooms

PURPOSE

To make the cafeteria an enjoyable environment for all children and adults

Learning to Do Lunch

Students and staff collaborate on developing rules and procedures for lunchtime

Recently, Simone and Khaliyah have really gotten into thumb wrestling, and today, as soon as they get to their lunch table, they push their trays aside in order to get a few rounds in before eating. When Ms. Khan, the lunch supervisor, sees the girls playing, she comes over, gets their attention, and gestures at the list of lunch rules and procedures on their table.

“We have to eat first,” says Khaliyah, showing that she knows what the problem is.

Ms. Khan nods and says, “You may play when you’ve finished.” The girls reach for their trays and settle down to lunch.

At Garfield Elementary School in Springfield, Virginia, “Eat first” is one of the lunchtime procedures developed as part of a schoolwide rule making process that helped transform this school’s lunchroom atmosphere from chaotic to its current vibrant hum. Students were involved at every stage of the process, an approach that increased their willingness to live by the rules and ensured that they really knew how they were expected to behave. Here’s how it worked:

School leaders decided to focus on addressing lunchtime behavior problems before school opened one year. But instead of jumping right in, they deliberately started with establishing an effective, consistent classroom-based approach to discipline. For the first months of school, the focus was on helping children create classroom rules and learn to live by those rules. “Although we were eager to begin work-

Garfield Elementary School, Springfield, Virginia

suburban; public ■ K–6 ■ 350 students ■ 17 classrooms ■ 48% of students receive free or reduced-price lunch ■ 37 home languages ■ high rate of student transience

ing on the lunchroom problems,” says principal Maureen Marshall, “we knew our efforts would be more successful in the long run if we built on a strong foundation that started in classrooms.”

During those first months of school, children and teachers in each classroom shared their hopes and goals for the year and generated classroom rules that would help everyone in the class realize his or her goals. Teachers introduced procedures that would allow the class to live by their rules, modeled them, and provided the children with lots of opportunities to practice. To help the children learn to make independent decisions in situations when there is not just one correct way of behaving, they role-played scenarios and discussed ways of behaving that fit with the rules.

Throughout this time, teachers used positive comments to reinforce appropriate behavior and introduced logical consequences that would help children learn from their mistakes. Each class also established a “time-out” area in their room for people who needed to take a break in order to regain self-control. (To learn more about the positive use of time-out and other aspects of the approach to discipline that Garfield uses, see *Rules in School* by Brady et al, NEFC, 2003.)

While this groundwork was being laid in classrooms, faculty and administrators observed at lunchtime. Garfield’s lunch schedule is typical of many public elementary schools: Classes eat in thirty-minute shifts on a staggered schedule that moves 350 students through the cafeteria over the course of two hours. The observers noticed the loud, chaotic atmosphere, as well as numerous instances of students treating others, including Ms. Khan, the lunch supervisor, disrespectfully.

The intensive focus on improving lunch began in December and lasted for three months. The first step was that for two full weeks, instead of just being in the building at lunchtime, Ms. Khan stayed all day. With Janet Dougherty, Garfield’s guidance counselor, she visited each of the school’s seventeen classes and asked the children, “What’s working at lunchtime? What’s not? What would you like lunch in the cafeteria to look, sound, and feel like?”

The children had lots of ideas. Many of them said they wanted lunchtime to be less rowdy. They voiced concerns about bullying, disruptive behavior, and rules that seemed to be enforced inconsistently. Ms. Khan and Ms. Dougherty listened carefully to each class’s ideas and wrote them down on large sheets of chart paper.

Next, Ms. Khan and Ms. Dougherty took the information they’d gathered to the Student Cooperative Association (SCA), an elected group of about twenty fourth, fifth, and sixth graders. Using a process similar to the one students at the school use to make their classroom rules, the SCA members organized the ideas into common themes. They found that most of the ideas fit under one of three themes: Respect Yourself; Respect Others; and Respect the Environment. These became the new Garfield lunch rules.

Next, staff designed lunch-room procedures that would foster the atmosphere of respect called for by the new rules. These guidelines state specifically how students are expected to move around the cafeteria, eat, and clean up. There are also procedures for adults to follow when students break the rules. For instance, part of the new lunch-room discipline policy says that a student who is not following the rules will be reminded of them, but only once. If the student continues to misbehave, she or he will be directed to leave the table and finish eating at one of several desks placed around the edge of the room for students who need a break from their classmates.

Teachers introduced the new procedures to the members of the Student Cooperative Association, and then those children modeled them for the rest of the student body at an all-school assembly. The students also did role plays to show ideas for situations in which there are numerous possible appropriate ways to behave: for example, they showed what “eating with good manners” and “cooperating with others” could look like. The presentation was videotaped so it could be used for review in the future.

Finally, before the rules and procedures were officially implemented, each class visited the cafeteria during a scheduled guidance period to practice the procedures and to do some role playing for themselves. For instance, they practiced placing trash carefully in the bin when Ms. Khan wheeled it to their table, using inside voices, pushing in chairs, and responding to the “lights off” signal for silence. They role-played ways of behaving in specific scenarios that required independent decision making, such as deciding what to do if they finished eating sooner than others at their table. Once children had completed this hands-on experience, they were expected to follow the lunch rules and procedures.

To ensure that the rules and procedures students and staff crafted will endure, a review is now included among beginning-of-the-year activities at Garfield. The videotaped examples of students modeling expected behaviors are updated as needed and shown during an annual all-school spirit assembly on the lunch rules, and each class visits the cafeteria to practice lunch procedures.

Teachers used positive comments to reinforce appropriate behavior and introduced logical consequences that would help children learn from their mistakes.

BENEFITS

Since making these changes, lunch has become a more enjoyable experience for everyone at Garfield. “It’s not perfect, but it’s much better,” says Dr. Marshall, the principal, noting that she’s getting fewer discipline referrals from the lunchroom.

The process has increased students’ respect for Ms. Khan and made her more effective in her role. “We’ve always talked about how Ms. Khan has the biggest classroom in the school,” says Dr. Marshall, “but having her spend time in classrooms really helped the children start perceiving her as a teacher.” An added benefit was that by visiting classrooms Ms. Khan got to know the children better and was able to observe the discipline methods classroom teachers used.

The expectations for lunchtime behavior and consequences for misbehavior are fair and are applied consistently. Ms. Dougherty, the guidance counselor, says that because the whole community was involved in creating and learning the new lunch rules, adults at the school feel confident that “the children really do understand what’s expected of them. The children are motivated to follow the new rules because the rules are connected to what they said they want the cafeteria to be like.” When problems do come up, staff members say that simply pointing to the copy of the rules on the table is often enough to help a child who has lost self-control get back on track.

KEYS TO SUCCESS

Groundwork laid first in classrooms Dr. Marshall believes that the school’s decision to wait until classroom rules and discipline were in place before beginning schoolwide work on lunch rules was crucial. It allowed the school to model the lunchroom rule making and rule-teaching process on the classroom rules process that students were already familiar with. Because teachers use a consistent approach to classroom discipline, this mirroring of lunch and classroom processes also helped all teachers approach lunchtime discipline in a consistent, effective way.

Involvement of student leaders Both Dr. Marshall and Ms. Dougherty say that engaging members of the Student Cooperative Association in the process of crafting the rules and then having them act as role models for their peers was a very successful strategy. “Having student leaders demonstrate the expected behaviors was very powerful,” says Dr. Marshall. “The SCA members are popular kids, and their example carried a lot of weight with their classmates.”

Collaboration for a common purpose Perhaps the most important key was that Garfield’s approach to improving the lunchroom climate engaged stakeholders from throughout the school in ways that encouraged them to grow and to see each other differently. Administrators and teachers spent time in the lunchroom and became more invested in what happened there. Lunch staff learned about classroom practice and listened to children’s ideas. Student leaders collaborated with adults to find ways to make lunchtime more comfortable for their classmates. The end result was a school that felt more unified.

PURPOSE

To make time on the school bus safer and more pleasant for children and bus drivers

Bus Communities

Teachers lead an effort to improve bus behavior and build community among bus riders

Fifth grade teacher Martha Hanley surveys the group of thirty-five third, fourth, and fifth graders gathered in her classroom for the first bus group meeting of the year and says, “Welcome, riders of Bus Number 2! My name is Ms. Hanley, and I’ll be your bus teacher this year. We’ll be working together to make sure that everyone has as many good days on the bus as possible. To start, who wants to share an idea about what makes a good day on the bus for you?” Half a dozen hands shoot up.

At Grafton Elementary School, every student is assigned to a bus. “That means fifteen buses with all the usual problems, including bullying,” says fifth grade teacher Martha Hanley. Recognizing that children’s experiences on the bus affect their ability to learn in school, she and seven other teachers formed a study group focused on improving bus behavior, and then volunteered to be “bus teachers,” adults who helped students and drivers solve problems that came up on the bus. Their efforts to build bus communities included working with students to create bus rules. At the end of the first year, after bus incidents had decreased significantly, school leaders at Grafton decided to formally adopt the program and expand it to include more staff.

Starting with student rule making

The process began when members of the study group read about how other schools had addressed bus problems in *Creating a Safe and Friendly School* (Northeast Foundation for Children, 2006). After considering which ideas could be adapted for a school of their size and grade range, they decided that having students create bus rules was a good place to start. They also decided that rather than creating a set of rules for all buses, it made the most sense at their school for each bus to create its own set of rules.

Grafton Elementary School, Grafton, Massachusetts

suburban; public ■ grades 3-5 ■ 707 students ■ 33 classrooms ■ 10% of students receive free or reduced-priced lunch
■ 10-12 classrooms at each grade level

Bus 1 Rules

*Our behavior is appropriate
for the bus:*

- 1. We are nice to each other.*
- 2. We are respectful, polite,
and welcoming.*
- 3. We are safe on Bus 1.
We keep our hands
to ourselves.*



Bus 2 Rules

- 1. Be safe. Sit and keep
hands to yourself.*
- 2. Be friendly, respectful,
and cooperative.*
- 3. Help each other
follow the rules.*

*Rules created by two of Grafton Elementary
School's bus groups*

Each member of the study group assigned herself to be the bus teacher for one or two buses. Then each bus teacher arranged for her bus riders to come to a twenty-minute meeting with her early in the school year—one meeting per bus group. At these meetings, the children got to know each other better, shared ideas about what good days on the bus were like, and produced a short, general list of rules that, if followed, would result in more good days on the bus. (See “Creating Schoolwide Rules,” p. 34, and “Learning to Do Lunch,” p. 53, to read more about rule making with mixed-age groups.)

The rule making approach they used was adapted from the process Grafton teachers use with students to create classroom rules. In both settings, involving students in rule creation helps them feel more invested in the rules. Also in both settings, the rules are a few statements that emphasize what chil-

dren should do, such as “Be respectful to yourself and others” and “Be safe,” rather than a long list of No’s, as in “No hitting” or “No standing in the aisle.” As with classroom rules, no two bus groups’ rules were exactly the same. “Having rules for their bus in their own words makes them more meaningful,” says Ms. Hanley, “and even though each bus ended up with slightly different rules, they all covered similar ideas about being safe, respectful, and kind to others.” The students were told that each bus driver would be given a copy of that bus’s rules to keep on the bus.

Because the children were still expected to follow the “Bus Riders’ Code of Conduct” in the Garfield student/parent handbook, the bus teachers helped children to understand that the code’s requirements, such as “Sit down when the bus is moving,” fit with the children’s own rules about being safe and respectful.

The bus teachers concluded by explaining that they would continue to be their group’s bus teacher for the rest of the year, which meant that they’d check in with them from time to time about how things were going on the bus. If any problems came up, the students were told, they were to let their bus teacher know by putting a note in that teacher’s mailbox or finding that teacher during the school’s daily ten minute morning break.

Involving the bus drivers

Next, the study group members followed up with the bus drivers, explaining their new bus teacher role and presenting each driver with his or her bus’s student-created rules. In addition, they introduced a new system for drivers to report problems on the bus.

Before, bus drivers had reported all problems to the office; in the new system they would report their problem to their bus teacher instead, and she would handle the problem with that group of students and bring it to the attention of administrators as appropriate. Ms. Hanley noticed that some bus drivers started communicating a lot more as a result. “Some drivers were reluctant to report minor problems to the office, because they didn’t want to get the kids into trouble. Telling the bus teacher was not as big a deal, so we heard about more issues as they came up. That made it possible for us to address problems before they escalated.”

Bus teachers followed up on reports of trouble in ways that emphasized problem solving. They met with students individually, in small groups, or as an entire bus group and guided the students in applying the same conflict resolution techniques and problem solving meeting formats they were learning to use in school.

Bus teachers also checked in informally with bus riders and drivers just to see how things were going, and at midyear, they gathered each bus group and took another look at the bus rules they’d made. After assessing how well the rules were working, some groups made adjustments; for all groups, the midyear meeting helped keep the rules meaningful and fresh.

Learning from the pilot period

As the year continued, the study group devoted some time to reflecting on the successes and challenges of their pilot effort. Everyone agreed that the bus communities program should continue, but they also acknowledged that it had taken a lot of

their time. They saw that if the program were to continue, it would need to be restructured to make the workload more manageable.

They recommended therefore that in the second year of the program, almost all of the teachers in the school become bus teachers. This meant that each bus group would have three bus teachers, who would share responsibilities. Each bus group would meet with their bus teachers early in the year to create their bus rules, then gather twice each marking period to continue community-building activities and problem solving on bus issues. To minimize planning time for the teachers, the original study group would create an outline for each meeting. Finally, a group of four adults—Ms. Hanley, assistant principal Leigh Petrowsky, and two other teachers—would be the designated “go to” people if any teacher needed help with solving a bus problem.

The administrators, impressed by how much bus problems had declined during the program’s pilot period, supported these recommendations. The school’s teachers were willing to try the program because they could share bus teacher responsibilities and get help with any serious problems, they’d receive meeting outlines to simplify their planning, and time for bus meetings would be built into the school schedule. Most of all, they had seen the value of the bus program during the pilot year. Students were arriving at school calmer and more ready to learn, and when problems did come up, there was a system for addressing them that didn’t take away from instructional time.

“With this approach, we are headed in the right direction,” says Ms. Hanley. “Now we’ll be able to have all the bus groups meet regularly, to start earlier in the year, and to involve many more teachers without taking a lot of their time.”

BENEFITS

This bus initiative has had a positive impact on bus behavior. Office referrals have dropped, and problems are resolved more quickly. Bus incidents inevitably distract children from their classroom work, so improvements in this area have had a positive impact on learning as well. Martha Hanley explains, “Children can concentrate better when they know that a problem will be worked on in a caring way, without blame and shame. After talking with students about bus problems, I could see their agitation ease. Even though we didn’t solve all of the problems all of the time, the students knew that they had help, and that made for a better learning environment.”

In their role as liaisons between bus drivers and the school, and between students and bus drivers, bus teachers help everyone in the community stay focused on the common goal of “more good days on the bus for everyone.” Their work sends a clear message that this community is committed to making the school a safe and caring place, and that time spent on the bus is part of being at school.

Because children from a mix of grades ride each bus, the bus communities program provides opportunities for children of different ages to work together, and for teachers to interact with students outside of their classes. In a large school like Grafton, with at least ten classrooms at each grade level, this program offers a welcome opportunity for cross-age learning.

KEYS TO SUCCESS

Piloted by a small, committed group The members of the study group that piloted this effort at Grafton were motivated because they chose this project for themselves. “Starting out with a group of people who really wanted to do it” was important, says Ms. Hanley. “As a small group we were willing and able to work through the kinks that are a part of starting anything new.”

Built on familiar routines and established foundations The study group designed an approach that capitalized on routines and skills that were already in place at Grafton. For instance, students were already familiar with the meeting formats they used and had experience participating in discussions from their classrooms. They used a rule making process and steps to conflict resolution that were already being used successfully in other areas of the school. This consistency simplified planning for teachers and showed students that skills learned in the classroom are applicable in other settings as well.

Supported by administrators and colleagues Support from the school community was vital to this project’s success. From the beginning, the administrators approved the study group’s use of professional development time to research and plan this project. During the pilot period, colleagues provided coverage during the study group’s meetings with bus riders.

Work shared among many When the program rolled out to involve the whole faculty, it was vital that supports were built in to keep each individual teacher’s responsibilities manageable. Although everyone valued efforts to decrease bus problems, the program may not have survived had there not been deliberate changes to keep workloads feasible.

“As a small group we were willing and able to work through the kinks that are a part of starting anything new.”

Growth guided by goals At the end of the pilot period, the study group was, rightfully, excited by the success of their initial efforts. As they reflected on their first year of work, they made an honest assessment of the program's strengths and weaknesses and adjusted their plans for going forward accordingly. In addition to restructuring the program to share responsibility among more teachers, they set longer range goals for the future, such as involving bus drivers more actively and helping students get to know their bus drivers better.

PURPOSE

To make dismissal time a smooth, positive experience for the whole school

Dismissal Time

A calm, orderly send-off with a personal touch

It's the end of the day in Ms. Overstreet's fourth grade class. When everyone has packed up, Ms. Overstreet leads the class down the hallway toward the front door. Seeing that Ms. Conz's first grade class is already there, she stops the fourth graders a few paces back to prevent crowding. The students wait, chatting quietly, adjusting backpacks and zipping up coats.

After a few moments it's their turn to exit. Ms. Overstreet stands by the open front door and gives each child a quick, friendly "high five" as he or she passes through. The children climb onto buses, into cars, and head off on foot. Ms. Overstreet smiles as she heads back to her classroom.

Four Corners staff developed this simple routine for dismissal more than ten years ago to move all 229 students out the front door in an efficient and orderly fashion, and to end the school day on a positive note for teachers and students.

To reduce the bottleneck that formed at the main door, they decided that teachers would walk their classes out, and that one class would exit at a time. Instead of dismissing all students simultaneously, teachers would bring their classes out as they were ready between 2:50 and 3:00.

Another challenge was that multiple classes often converged at the spot where the school's two main hallways merged. The solution was that teachers would stop their lines and classes would take turns exiting, with one class from each side going out at a time. The teachers' way of negotiating this turn-taking with each other would provide students with a model of courtesy and respect.

Four Corners Elementary School, Greenfield, Massachusetts

small city in a rural area; public ■ K-4 ■ 229 students ■ 12 classrooms ■ 54% of students receive reduced-price or free lunch

Four Corners' dismissal routine makes this potentially chaotic time of day orderly and efficient.

Having teachers say a quick, personal goodbye to each student was a natural extension of the way Four Corners already used greetings at arrival time and in classroom Morning Meetings. School staff had already seen the powerful positive effect a warm greeting from an adult could have on a child's day, so it made sense to them that sending children off with a friendly goodbye could be equally beneficial. They chose a gentle "high five" because it was quick, playful, and interactive, creating a moment of connection between the teacher and each student.

As they would when teaching any new routine, Four Corners teachers "taught dismissal" by showing students what each part of the journey was supposed to look, sound, and feel like. Then students practiced the new routine, while the adults watched and named specifically what children were doing well, such as "I noticed that your hands stayed at your sides when you walked down the hallway today." Because the expectations for moving through the hallways were the same schoolwide, any adult could offer such reinforcement or provide reminders when students needed them.

The dismissal routine caught on quickly. In the years since the routine began, "teaching dismissal" has become a part of Four Corners' schoolwide curriculum for the first weeks of school.

BENEFITS

Four Corners' dismissal routine makes this potentially chaotic time of day orderly and efficient. On a typical day, it takes about ten minutes for twelve classes to exit the building. Because all students pack up and leave together by class, dismissal time is less rushed and children are less likely to miss their buses. Teachers check off their names on a list after they've high fived all of their students, so principal Gail Healy knows when all the classes have been dismissed, and she can wave the buses to go.

Walking down the hallway together and doing high fives at the door creates a relaxed atmosphere and ends the day on a positive note for students and teachers. Time spent waiting while another class exits allows teachers to touch base with students informally, and for students to chat and wave to friends in other classes. Many staff members help out at dismissal time as well, making this a daily time when the whole school community comes together.

Over the years, Four Corners' dismissal routine has become part of school culture. Ms. Healy points out that the routine is now so well integrated that when they teach dismissal procedures, teachers know they can ask returning students to model expectations for children who are new to the school.

KEYS TO SUCCESS

The whole staff is involved Collaborative visioning and problem solving led this school to a coordinated approach. Ms. Healy says that getting all staff involved from the beginning was a key to success. They started with discussions at staff meetings about how they wanted dismissal time to be, and they agreed that improving traffic flow was their main goal. They arrived at the new dismissal procedures after identifying trouble spots and brainstorming for solutions as a group. "Decide what you will do as a whole staff," says Ms. Healy. "It's important that everyone feels ownership and agrees to give it a try."

Foundational skills were in place first Four Corners was able to implement their dismissal routine fairly quickly because the children already had most of the requisite skills, and the school already had schoolwide standards for hallway behavior and greetings. For example, all the children knew how to walk safely in line, how to wait respectfully, and how to do a gentle high five because their classes had focused on learning these and other skills during the first weeks of the school year and had been practicing them ever since. Also, the adults at school were already all using a common approach to teaching new routines that involved interactive modeling and practice. All this foundational work made it easier to introduce a new practice and have it take hold. (To learn more about interactive modeling, see *Rules in School*, Brady et al, NEFC, 2003.)

Scale and size match the school At Four Corners, all children are dismissed out a single front door, and the whole process takes a manageable ten minutes. Other schools may need different ways to organize dismissal to meet the same goals of efficiency, orderliness, and friendliness. For example, a school that uses separate exits for bus riders and walkers might have adults other than teachers take part of the class to one door while the classroom teacher takes the rest of the class to another door.

Discussion and Planning Questions

These questions are intended for use by groups such as school leadership teams, parent-teacher partnerships, and cross-grade committees who have chosen to work together on building schoolwide community.

The suggestions on these pages are intended to help guide your group through the process of considering, planning, and implementing routines at your school.

Before choosing a routine to focus on:

Assess Look for places and times at your school where having a routine might help things go better.

- What do you notice?
- What, specifically, are the problems?
- How might a routine help?

Envision Imagine what each place and time could be like, ideally. Then choose one to focus on and develop a routine that will help achieve this vision.

- What is the vision? What are your goals?
- What will students be doing?
- What will adults be doing?
- What else needs to happen to make the vision a reality?

Take stock Decide which skills, knowledge, and procedures need to be in place before you start using your new routine. Make a plan for building those skills and practicing procedures in classroom or smaller groups.

- What do students and staff already know how to do?
- What needs to be taught? To whom? By whom?

Once you have selected a routine:

Introduce Make sure all who will be involved understand the reason for having a routine and their role in it.

- How will you introduce the routine to staff?
- How will you introduce it to students?
- Does this change need to be shared with students' families? If so, how will you do so?

Teach the routine Model the behavior you want to see. Ask learners to observe closely and describe what they notice in detail.

- How will you model the routine?
- What do you want the observers to notice?

Practice and reinforce Provide learners with opportunities to practice the routine before holding them to it. Watch them carefully and point out what they are doing well.

- How will the routine be practiced?
- How will participants get feedback?

Afterwards:

Monitor Plan to observe and check in with participants frequently.

- How will you gather information about how the routine is working?

Evaluate Take time to reflect on whether the routine you've established accomplishes the goals you set.

- What positive changes have adults and students noticed?
- How will you share that good news?
- What adjustments are needed?

Review Plan to reteach the routine on a regular basis, at least once a year.

- How and when will expectations for this routine be reviewed?