

How We Want School to Be

It's first thing on a Tuesday morning in early November. The fourth and fifth graders are making the transition from first bell, heading from school breakfast, morning activities, and homework centers to their classrooms. A new student, this his second day, bumps into a smaller boy toting a heavy backpack.

"Watch it, jerk!" the new student shouts angrily.

A fifth grader spins around and says to the new student, "Whoa, we don't talk like that around here. You're new here. This is Jason. I'm Carla. Be cool, we're not gonna be late."

Down the hall, Ms. Perez is walking her second grade class to PE. A student leads the line, while Ms. Perez walks at the back of the line, where she can see the whole class. The children walk quietly in single file to keep themselves and each other safe and not disturb students in the classrooms they're passing, a way of walking they've practiced since August. As they near the office, many of the children glance up at the prominent poster of their school-wide rules. Farther down the hall, as they file past the beautiful display of student self-portraits, some students gaze and smile proudly.

When two students begin kicking each other's feet and giggling, Ms. Perez calmly moves up the line and quietly but firmly reminds them, "Hallway rules," and the two students go back to walking quietly, with hands and feet to themselves. Soon the class arrives at the gym, ready for PE.



This is just a glimpse of what school is like when school discipline is working. There is a living ethic of care. Children feel safe. They know what the expectations are and want to meet them because the adults at school

have helped them understand the reasons for these expectations. They know *how* to meet the expectations because the adults have taught them the necessary skills and positive behaviors. Now these behaviors have become what students expect from each other.

This book offers school leaders strategies for achieving this kind of learning environment. Such an environment is the result of work in classrooms and at the schoolwide level. In classrooms, teachers must help students articulate classroom rules, teach children how to live by those rules, and consistently respond to misbehavior in ways that restore safety and learning and preserve the dignity of the child. At the schoolwide level, school leaders must set up systems and do the leadership work that ensures that this same kind of discipline is maintained throughout the school—not just inside classrooms, but at recess, lunch, special area classes, and everywhere in between.

This book focuses on the latter—what school leaders can do to ensure positive discipline schoolwide. For in-depth information on how teachers can achieve discipline in their classrooms, see *Rules in School: Teaching Discipline in the Responsive Classroom*, 2nd edition, by Kathryn Brady, Mary Beth Forton, and Deborah Porter, Northeast Foundation for Children, 2011, available from www.responsiveclassroom.org.

The strategies presented in this book are ones that school leaders across the nation have used with success and that you can adopt or adapt in leading your school to become a place of safe, joyful learning for every child throughout every school day.

What Is Responsive School Discipline?

The *Responsive School Discipline* approach is a way of creating a school climate that enables optimal academic and social growth in students. Just as teachers use the discipline practices of the *Responsive Classroom* approach to support children's positive behavior and productive learning in their classrooms, school leaders use the *Responsive School Discipline* approach to ensure that positive behavior and productive learning take place throughout the school.

About the *Responsive Classroom*® Approach

Although the strategies in this book do not demand or assume that the teachers in your school are using the *Responsive Classroom* approach, the strategies will be even more effective if they are using it. For information about the *Responsive Classroom* approach, visit www.responsiveclassroom.org and see the recommended books and DVDs in Appendix D.

The goals of the *Responsive School Discipline* approach are to ensure that children:

- Feel physically and emotionally safe in school so that they can learn at their best.
- Develop self-discipline and the skills for working and learning cooperatively with others.

School leaders using the *Responsive School Discipline* approach achieve these goals through the following steps:

- 1. Ensuring that all adults in the school have consistent behavior expectations of students.** This means planning and leading the school's articulation of a set of schoolwide rules that apply everywhere in school and that make sense to children; establishing procedures for lunchtime, recess, and dismissal that are consistent with the schoolwide rules; and providing professional development for all staff and orchestrating communications with parents so that the whole school community has a shared understanding of the school's behavior expectations.
- 2. Providing staff with professional development in the teaching of positive behavior.** Discipline is about teaching, not controlling, children. School leaders can use staff meetings and other means to help staff adopt the mentality of teaching discipline and to give them concrete skills for this teaching. An important skill to help teachers develop, for example, is using interactive modeling to teach students what following the schoolwide rules looks and sounds like in the hallways, bathrooms, cafeteria, playground, and buses.
- 3. Establishing schoolwide procedures for responding to misbehavior.** An important task for school leaders is to name, or lead a committee in naming, a set of steps that all adults in the school will use in responding to student misbehavior, and then provide training for all staff—teachers as well as lunch and recess and other nonteaching staff—so that all school adults know how to use the procedures. Taking these actions ensures that when children make mistakes in their behavior, they consistently experience respectful adult responses that help them restore positive behavior.

Using the *Responsive School Discipline* approach doesn't mean your school will stop seeing challenging student behaviors. It does mean that your school will have practical and positive ways to reduce the number of behavior problems. And it means that when children's behavior does go awry, the adults at your school and the children themselves will have practical strategies for getting behavior back on track.

How Does This Fit With Anti-Bullying?

Although the strategies in this book are not intended as a specific anti-bullying program, they, along with the strategies of the *Responsive Classroom* approach (visit www.responsiveclassroom.org for information), create a safe, respectful, and caring school climate and give students a baseline of social skills competency. Regardless of the specific anti-bullying program or approach your school uses, *Responsive School Discipline* and *Responsive Classroom* strategies can enhance your school's success in addressing bullying.

For example, by giving every child a voice in morning meetings, opportunities to role-play social dilemmas, and chances to talk in class discussions, we help students develop comfort in speaking up. Speaking up when they feel unsafe or when they witness bullying will then be easier. A school using *Responsive School Discipline* and *Responsive Classroom* practices is daily helping children build the mental and moral muscles that they'll need when they confront mean behavior, and thus laying the foundation for safety against bullying.

How Long Will It Take to Implement These Strategies?

How long it takes to implement the strategies presented in this book can vary widely from school to school and depend in part on how comprehensively a school chooses to reform its discipline. If you decide that your school should focus on one specific area of concern—lunchroom discipline, for example—you would need to implement fewer strategies, and you could accomplish your goals in the course of a year. If you decide to undertake comprehensive schoolwide discipline reform, however, you may need several years.

Regardless of whether you choose focused or comprehensive reform, bear in mind that the *Responsive School Discipline* approach is not a quick fix, but a deep fix. Your school will be most successful if you model patience and persistence and allow your staff time to learn and practice positive discipline techniques meaningfully.

Also allow students time. Children don't learn and use positive behavior skills overnight any more than they do their times tables. It takes practice. It also takes courage to put the skills they've learned into action the way Carla did in the story on page 1. Children don't just find that courage in their backpack one day. They learn it from examples set by adults. They learn it through the daily problem-solving and small encounters of school life, such as navigating whom to sit with, how to share space in line, and how to listen to someone even when they disagree.

Why We Need *Responsive School Discipline* More Than Ever

People who have worked in elementary schools for many years share the observation that children are coming to school today with less-well-developed social skills than in past years, regardless of their socioeconomic background. In all grades, children seem to need more instruction in listening, staying on task, cooperating with a partner or small group, being a good loser (or a good winner, for that matter), and being assertive but not aggressive.

At the same time, academic standards have gotten more rigorous. Learning occurs in a social context. So if children are to meet the higher academic demands set before them, schools have to teach the social skills that enable this academic learning, skills like listening with an open mind, self-regulation and self-control, empathy, assertiveness, problem-solving, and taking responsibility. The *Responsive School Discipline* approach gives schools the tools to do this teaching so that children can meet the academic challenges we're setting before them.

Toward Social Skills Learning Standards

Given our children's great need for discipline supports, many educators have come to believe that at the national and state policy levels, we need to place as much emphasis on the teaching of social skills as on the teaching

of academic skills. Their belief is bolstered by growing research showing that such social supports work—that they, among other things, correlate with higher academic achievement. (As just one example of such research, a 2001–2004 study by the University of Virginia’s Curry School of Education found that in schools using the *Responsive Classroom* approach, children showed greater increases in math and reading test scores, had better social skills, and felt more positive about school [Rimm-Kaufman, 2006].)

So, what if we undertook the same kind of standards-based examination of social learning as we have done with academic learning? What if our mandated state standards included both academic and social skills in a way that recognized the linked nature of the two? What if we thoughtfully integrated key social standards into our curriculum guides, pacing charts, and report cards? Think of the legitimacy and associated supports the teaching of discipline would gain in our schools.

There is movement on this front. As this book goes to press, the U.S. House of Representatives is considering the Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning Act, under which the government would set up a national technical assistance center for social-emotional learning (SEL), provide grants to support evidence-based SEL programming, and conduct a national evaluation of school-based SEL programming (“Latest policy developments,” n.d.).

At the state level, in 2004 Illinois became the first state to adopt student social-emotional learning standards, giving those standards equal footing alongside standards in English language arts, math, science, social science, physical development and health, fine arts, and foreign languages (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2008, p. 2). Now every school district in the state must adopt and submit to the State Board of Education a policy for incorporating social and emotional development into its education program (“Illinois learning standards,” 2006). Similar measures have passed or are under consideration in California, New York, Wisconsin, New Jersey, and Ohio (“Latest policy developments,” n.d.; “National review of state SEL learning standards,” n.d.).

So we have reason to be optimistic. There is action being taken to make social skills teaching the national education concern that it ought to be. At important policy-making levels of the education establishment and in

countless schools carrying out the daily work of educating our children, there is a clear and bright vision of social skills learning occupying center stage alongside and integrated with academic learning.

About This Book

The first chapter of this book names a set of key global leadership actions to be taken by school leaders wanting to improve discipline at their school. The rest of the book offers specific strategies for this work. Part 1 focuses on setting the foundations of positive behavior: creating a safe and orderly climate, establishing schoolwide rules, teaching positive behaviors, building school-home partnerships, and ensuring collaborative learning among staff. Part 2 focuses on responding to children's misbehavior: establishing clear response procedures, making sure all staff use them consistently, and, when conferencing with parents is needed, doing so in a respectful, productive way. Finally, Part 3 focuses on discipline on the playground, in the cafeteria, in hallways, and on buses.

Browse, bookmark, dive in, reflect, and discuss with colleagues. You may decide to use some strategies as is and to adapt others to meet your school's needs.

As you lead your school in improving school discipline, keep your eyes on the ultimate goal of optimal student learning. May your work be rigorous, productive, and joyful.

EDITOR'S NOTE: *As a co-authored work, this book weaves together the voices of two experienced school administrators. The authors share similar convictions and approaches, though they have experienced different schools and educational settings over their careers. This book represents their joint articulation of the essentials of improving school discipline.*