School-Wide Values, Expectations and Routines — Focusing on Consistency and Support in Elementary and Middle Schools

Description:

A school-wide system of values sets the foundation for a community of shared expectations for behavior of students and adults. These expectations guide all aspects of the school’s operation in and out of classrooms, including interactions amongst students, between students and teachers, transitions between classrooms and behavior in public spaces. A school-wide value such as respect, for example, would be used to help students and teachers establish a common understanding of how to work collaboratively in a group during class and communicate when feeling frustrated. All students and adults are responsible for following and reinforcing these values through their behaviors. These routines do not replace the role of a more formal social-emotional curriculum, but can be used to reinforce and complement it.

School-wide values also underpin common behavior systems which guide how rewards and consequences are administered across classrooms. Consistent routines also help foster a sense of belonging to the broader school community, particularly at the elementary and middle school levels.

Establishing school-wide values, and setting up associated systems and routines, prioritizes clarity for adults on how values translate to desired behaviors. It does not, however, take away teachers’ discretion to determine the more granular behavior systems that exist in their respective classrooms (e.g. how students in a second grade classroom should transition from their desks to the classroom rug). The level of specificity that a school requires of its teachers in designing and executing these types of systems will likely depend on teachers’ experience and skill level, as well as students’ developmental stage.

Rationale:

Students and teachers are motivated to uphold school-wide values, systems and routines when they explicitly reinforce a school culture that fosters a positive learning environment and strong relationships. The focus of these routines, therefore, is less on compliance or following rules and more about how to sustain a culture that is valued by everyone. This helps students feel safe, cared for and respected, and minimizes teacher and administrator time on re-directing behavior. Fewer behavior referrals to the main office result in more instructional time for more students and make it easier for students and teachers to focus on learning.

Ensuring expectations and related routines are practiced school-wide reduces pressure on individual teachers to design their own behavior management systems, which can be especially useful for new teaching staff. Consistency also helps students, because they know what to expect in every classroom. In middle schools, where students typically begin to see more than one teacher
during the day, these common expectations help set up students to be successful because they are not required to navigate widely-varied preferences across multiple teachers.

Finally, establishing common routines in the context of positive values represents a proactive rather than reactive approach to behavior. Students are more likely to be successful when they are given the tools, resources and encouragement needed to regulate their own behavior and build healthy relationships.

**KEY COMPONENTS**

At its core, building school-wide values, expectations and routines requires:

1. Shared values, which translate into specific expectations for student and adult behavior
2. A clear process through which students and teachers can learn, practice, and reinforce common values and expectations through defined routines
3. Administrative support of rigorous implementation

**District Level Enabling Conditions**

Districts can support schools looking to develop school-wide values, expectations and routines by:

- Prioritizing resources and providing flexibility to school leaders to onboard students and staff to shared values and common expectations through summer PD, student orientations, or similar structures
- Providing access to programs and external resources (Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports, Responsive Classroom, etc.) to support building capacity among school leaders and teachers alike
- Including leadership roles at schools that focus on school climate and culture into the district’s career pathways, and providing sample job descriptions and/or support to school looking to customize roles
- Administer student and teacher climate surveys that enable the identification of bright spots as well as common areas of need
Clarify purpose: Before making decisions about how to organize resources in support of school-wide values, systems and routines, clarify what purpose this building block should serve in your school’s unique context.

- Given your understanding of students’ and teachers’ most urgent needs, what aspects of culture are most important to address? Core challenges might include inconsistent teacher expectations across classrooms, bullying and/or weak personal relationships between students.

- Which grades or student subgroups should be targeted for support? Although new values and systems should exist school-wide, additional resources (e.g. coaching for teachers or time for students to practice) may need to be targeted to students and teachers who need the most help.

- What are one or two high-level goals that you might use to measure success annually? What quantitative targets might you set with respect to those goals in each of the first few years of implementation?

Note: All school-wide expectations should be adapted to their school’s context, but developing these expectations does not require starting from scratch. See the section on Other Resources below for tools to get started, as well as the school profile at the end of this template for a concrete example of what this looks like.

MAKING IT WORK: RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

1. SHARED VALUES which translate into specific expectations for student and adult behavior

Defining school-wide values and the specific expectations for the student and teacher behaviors that follow them is a task that should be broadly shared by the school’s stakeholder community, in order to ensure the right buy-in for implementation. Typically, a school forms a committee to lead the work, which works over a period of two to three months in the spring to seek input from other staff members, students and parents. Time should also be dedicated to exploring how school-wide values, systems and routines have been set up in other contexts (i.e. at other schools, etc.), and asking stakeholders to react to different options or approaches. Clear and transparent parameters around how many people will be engaged, and the timeline for doing so, will be important to ensure this work is carried out efficiently.

Key Questions:

- Who will comprise a committee that collects stakeholder input and develops draft school-wide expectations, values or habits of learners, among other artifacts to define expectations? Who will lead this committee’s efforts?
• Will the members of the committee receive a stipend for the work of developing shared values and the associated supporting materials?

• Will the committee need funds to explore culture systems of other schools or tools available to supporting building shared values, expectations, and routines?

• Who will provide expert support to the school’s leadership committee during the development phase of work?

• Who are the specific stakeholder groups this committee will need to engage? When and how will those stakeholders be engaged? Who will be responsible for that process?

• How much time is required to collect input from stakeholders and when will it happen? The variety of stakeholder groups, method of engagement and how the committee chooses to delegate work will all inform the length of this work.

2. A CLEAR PROCESS RESOURCES through which students and teachers can learn, practice, and reinforce common values and expectations through defined routines

Learn values, expectations, and routines:

• **Startup Professional Development:** To implement school-wide systems and routines with fidelity, teachers and other staff members need resources to process new values and learn new systems and routines that should govern school-wide behavior. This professional development is also needed to orient new staff to the building and to update current staff when changes are made (e.g. the introduction of a new type of technology may necessitate a new routine). Often, this takes place before the start of the year in order to ensure teachers are aligned before they start interacting with students, and typically occurs as part of a school’s summer institute or orientation.

Key Questions:

• **When will staff have time to learn and norm around new school-wide expectations and structures?**

• **When will new staff to the building have time to learn school-wide values, systems and routines?**

• **If professional development is needed from an external vendor, how will it be delivered (train the trainer, school-wide or both), and at what cost?**

• **Who will provide expert support to individual teachers and teaching teams as they plan to implement?**
• **Technical Assistance:** If a school is pursuing a particular type of system as part of its new values and systems, e.g. Restorative Justice, it may wish to contract with a vendor in order to more deeply understand how to implement best practices. This type of professional development may occur in the form of a train-the-trainer model, where a subset of teachers attend an intensive training in order to act as in-house expertise. It may also involve a vendor providing professional support to the entire staff. Because the effect of one-time workshops is typically low, teaching teams and observation and feedback cycles should aim to continue building expertise over time.

  **Key Question:**
  • *If professional development is needed from an external vendor, how will it be delivered (train the trainer, school-wide or both), and at what cost?*

• **Student Onboarding:** Students will need dedicated time to learn new values, systems and routines, which should include time to practice. If the school year cannot start early for this purpose, a portion of time during the first weeks of school typically focuses on it. In preparation for this time, and after foundational expectations and structures are defined, there is usually roughly 20 to 30 hours of work time to create the collateral needed to explain and promote these new values and expectations, which might include:
  • Lesson plans that all teachers use to teach values to students
  • Student and parent handbooks outlining expectations, including school-wide systems and routines, rewards, consequences, etc.
  • Calendar of celebrations or other events during the school year to motivate students
  • Posters, t-shirts, and/or other venues to communicate values visually around the school

  **Key Questions:**
  • *When will all students learn the expectations? Will there be startup time at the beginning of the school year, such as an orientation?*
  • *Who will develop the collateral listed above in preparation for student onboarding?*

• **Practice & Reinforce:**

  • **Organize teaching teams:** Once school-wide systems are established, teachers will need to continue to collaborate with each other to ensure routines are implemented with fidelity across all classrooms. Grade level teams typically work best for this purpose, since teachers tend to share students at a similar developmental stage, and at the middle school level typically share the same
students. If these teams are not possible due to small grade level size, cross-grade teams may be more appropriate. As with any teaching team, clear agendas, protocols and use of a meeting facilitator will help ensure their time is used productively.

Key Questions:

• Who are the people who need to collaborate on common systems and routines after systems are implemented? How much time will teaching teams need to collaborate and continue to norm on school-wide values, systems and routines, and when will this time occur in teachers’ schedules?

• Within each teaching team, who will act as the meeting facilitator?

• What type of agenda or protocol will guide teaching teams’ time?

• When will all staff have time to receive updates on school-wide systems and routines as they evolve over time to meet new needs?

• Ongoing student time: Although time for students to learn new values, systems and routines should be concentrated at the beginning of the school year, time is also typically needed throughout the year to sustain and reinforce these systems. This type of ongoing time may include daily or weekly time to reinforce values, desired behaviors and a sense of community. This time could be dedicated through repurposing a portion of class time as a morning meeting or creating a separate class period such as advisory (see our Building Block Profile on advisory for more information).

Key Questions:

• Will ongoing time be embedded to the daily structure (such as advisory) or be incorporated into classroom activity?

• If a social emotional learning (SEL) curriculum will be adapted to teach expectations, which curriculum will your school purchase and at what cost?

• Recognition & Celebrations: Recognizing students who demonstrate the shared values consistently through the defined routines is a key way to ensure those values and behaviors are reinforced. This can include recognizing and celebrating individual students or classrooms for fulfilling values on a daily or weekly basis. These can also be structured as periodic school-wide celebrations to reinforce a sense of community. With a school-wide approach, some schools choose to repurpose class time for part of the day three to five times a year to ensure a maximum number of students can participate.
Key Question:

• How much ongoing student time is required to maintain systems and celebrate students for upholding school values, and when will this be scheduled in the school’s calendar and/or master schedule?

3. ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT & focus on implementation fidelity

1. Developing the knowledge base, amongst both the school’s leadership committee and staff more broadly, on what effective implementation would look like

2. Linking to appropriate outside resources when necessary

3. Targeting additional support for specific grade teams, subgroups of students, or individual teachers or students through observation and coaching

4. Supporting teaching teams in identifying common challenges in the implementation of new systems and determining how to overcome

5. Monitoring progress over time

Key Questions:

• Which expert will own progress monitoring and efforts to evolve systems as needed?

• Will your school use existing staff or hire new staff in order to provide expertise? If existing staff will be used, how will their roles and responsibilities need to redefined?

• On what frequency are teams expected to revisit and monitor progress on these values, systems and routines?

• When will all staff have time to receive updates on school-wide systems and routines as they evolve over time to meet new needs?

• Data systems to support record keeping: Collecting and analyzing relevant student behavior data will help determine if school-wide expectations are having their intended effect. This type of data might include the incidence of student referrals for both positive and negative behavior, as well as views of students who are on and off track to graduate. Simple record keeping may be available at no cost, but more sophisticated systems will likely need a data tracking system from a third-party vendor (e.g. Kickboard). The costs of these more sophisticated systems depend on the functionality and support needed, as well as the number of students. Most range between $2-4 per student.
Key Question:

• Is an investment needed in data systems to track the metrics relevant to school culture and student agency?

**SUMMARY OF KEY QUESTIONS TO GUIDE THE PLANNING PROCESS BY MAJOR MILESTONE**

**ASSESS THE NEED**

• Given your understanding of students’ and teachers’ most urgent needs, what aspects of culture are most important to address? Core challenges might include inconsistent teacher expectations across classrooms, bullying and/or weak personal relationships between students.

• Which grades or student subgroups should be targeted for support? Although new values and systems should exist school-wide, additional resources (e.g. coaching for teachers or time for students to practice) may need to be targeted to students and teachers who need the most help.

**DESIGN THE STRATEGY**

• What are one or two high-level goals that you might use to measure success annually? What quantitative targets might you set with respect to those goals in each of the first few years of implementation?

**MASTER SCHEDULE**

• When will new staff to the building have time to learn school-wide values, systems and routines?

• When will all students learn the expectations? Will there be startup time at the beginning of the school year, such as an orientation?

• Who are the people who need to collaborate on common systems and routines after systems are implemented? How much time will teaching teams need to collaborate and continue to norm on school-wide values, systems and routines, and when will this time occur in teachers’ schedules?

• Will ongoing time be embedded to the daily structure (such as advisory) or be incorporated into classroom activity?

• How much ongoing student time is required to maintain systems and celebrate students for upholding school values, and when will this be scheduled in the school’s calendar and/or master schedule?
TEACHER AND JOB ASSIGNMENT

• Who will comprise a committee that collects stakeholder input and develops draft school-wide expectations, values or habits of learners, among other artifacts to define expectations? Who will lead this committee’s efforts?

• Who will provide expert support to the school’s leadership committee during the development phase of work?

• Who will provide expert support to individual teachers and teaching teams as they plan to implement?

• Which expert will own progress monitoring and efforts to evolve systems as needed?

• Will your school use existing staff or hire new staff in order to provide expertise? If existing staff will be used, how will their roles and responsibilities need to redefined?

STAFFING AND BUDGET PLAN

• Will the members of the committee receive a stipend for the work of developing shared values and the associated supporting materials?

• Will the committee need funds to explore culture systems of other schools or tools available to supporting building shared values, expectations, and routines?

• If professional development is needed from an external vendor, how will it be delivered (train the trainer, school-wide or both), and at what cost?

• If a social emotional learning (SEL) curriculum will be adapted to teach expectations, which curriculum will your school purchase and at what cost?

• Is an investment needed in data systems to track the metrics relevant to school culture and student agency?

ANNUAL PROFESSIONAL LEARNING PLAN

• When will staff have time to learn and norm around new school-wide expectations and structures?

• If professional development is needed from an external vendor, how will it be delivered (train the trainer, school-wide or both), and at what cost?

• When will all staff have time to receive updates on school-wide systems and routines as they evolve over time to meet new needs?

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IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

• Who are the specific stakeholder groups this committee will need to engage? When and how will those stakeholders be engaged? Who will be responsible for that process?

• How much time is required to collect input from stakeholders and when will it happen? The variety of stakeholder groups, method of engagement and how the committee chooses to delegate work will all inform the length of this work.

• Within each teaching team, who will act as the meeting facilitator?

• What type of agenda or protocol will guide teaching teams’ time?

• On what frequency are teams expected to revisit and monitor progress on these values, systems and routines?

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<tr>
<th>POTENTIAL CHALLENGES</th>
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| Some teachers do not buy in to the system, either because they don’t agree with certain routines or because it feels like an unnecessary time burden. | • Some teachers are more likely to buy in if they have the opportunity to engage directly in development, while others may be more likely to do so if the resulting plan can simply be rolled out to them efficiently. Developing and distributing common lessons to teach relevant school values, as well as common referral processes and related collateral, will minimize the amount of time that the typical teacher must spend preparing to implement.  
• Lack of agreement with new decisions may indicate a deeper lack of trust amongst staff. Deeper challenges with professional adult culture require work above and beyond the development of school-wide systems and routines, and should likely be addressed in the context of a summer institute and ongoing work within teaching teams. |

| Teachers seem interested in helping develop new school-wide values, systems and routines but the time commitment for leading this work seems too high. | • To reduce a concentrated time commitment in the late spring or summer, the planning work could be spread out over a longer period of time in the year prior to implementation.  
• A small stipend could be used to compensate teachers for the extra time required to lead the development of school-wide values, systems and routines.  
• Serving on the leadership committee could be framed as a leadership opportunity; members should be recognized and celebrated publicly. |
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<td>Administrators and teachers do not have enough time or expertise to provide expert support.</td>
<td>• Consider investing in a new position (full or part time) such as a Dean of Culture or Dean of Students, or consider existing positions in your school that may be a good fit (e.g. guidance counselor, coaches, etc). Note that redefining roles may require first checking relevant labor contracts as well as ensuring sufficient time is available in the person’s schedule to cover all core responsibilities.</td>
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| Parents do not seem to buy into efforts to improve the school’s culture through new values, systems and routines. | • Lack of awareness may be mistaken for lack of buy in. A clear communication effort needs to be made with parents, in advance of the school year and at the beginning of the school year, to ensure they have the information they need. This may include written materials, phone calls home, and/or parent nights hosted at the school. Communication efforts should take into account the native languages of students’ families.  
• Collecting parent input on the front end, during the development stage, is critical for ensuring their concerns and ideas are taken into account.  
• Consider inviting parent representatives to serve on the leadership committee that leads the development of new systems. |
| Some students struggle to meet new expectations for behavior, even when they are applied consistently across all teachers. | • Some students may not meet expectations for reasons that may be outside the school’s immediate control. If consistent support and consequences are provided with little improvement, a school may need to seek help on behalf of the student from specialized district staff and/or professional social workers. This type of targeted social-emotional support serves as the safety net for students who have needs above and beyond what teachers and administrators may be able to meet independently. |
| Students seem to comply with values and expectations but there has been no improvement in student performance | • Conducting a root cause analysis on the lack of rigorous instruction may yield focus areas for improvement: teacher expertise, curricular tools, expert support, etc. Improving instruction, while focusing on consistent expectations can improve the efficacy of any school culture efforts.  
• Individualized teacher support through professional growth cycles of observation and feedback can help specific teachers in most need of support. |
Design Interactions
Strategic school designs have many interconnected components. Well-designed school-wide systems, values and routines should be integrated with the following design essentials:

• Expert-led Collaboration and Professional Learning
• Growth-oriented Adult Culture

Research


Other Resources

• The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) supports the Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), which offers a wide range of publicly available resources and tools. Highlights include:

  ○ Introductory presentation on PBIS: https://www.pbis.org/common/cms/files/pbisresources/SWPBS_Intro_10_04_07.ppt

  ○ Videos to showcase best practices: https://www.pbis.org/media/videos

  ○ Guidance for schools implementing PBIS: https://www.pbis.org/school

  ○ Sample costs for PBIS professional development opportunities: http://www.pbis.org/common/cms/files/pbisresources/20120802_WhatDoesItCostToImplementSWPBIS.pdf

• The Center for Restorative Justice offers resources on how to implement restorative practices, which are commonly used as a component of positive school-wide values, systems and routines: https://www.suffolk.edu/college/centers/14521.php
• Sample technology to support behavior data tracking:
  ○ Kickboard for Schools: https://www.kickboardforschools.com/
  ○ Consolidated list of classroom management software options: http://www.capterra.com/classroom-management-software/

• Sample evidence-based social-emotional curriculums to complement and strengthen the implementation of school-wide values, systems and routines:
  ○ RULER: http://ei.yale.edu/ruler/ruler-overview/
  ○ Responsive classrooms: https://www.responsiveclassroom.org/
School-wide Values, Expectations and Routines at Ridge Road Middle School
CHARLOTTE, NC

“It was really important for me, as well as our whole school community, to have more than just rules. We used to recite the rules, but we didn’t necessarily live by them. We needed to have values in addition to rules to guide behavior. And we want these values to guide behavior not only in our school but out in the community as well. I hope these values stay with students forever—including when they transition to high school and college.”

—Principal Jametta Tanner

Context: Ridge Road Middle School is a middle school serving over 1,400 students in grades 6-8 in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School District. When Ridge Road Middle School saw a need for more consistent expectations for student behavior, teachers developed the “Raven Way”: school-wide values, systems and routines to promote a stronger school culture and empower teachers to effectively manage student behavior. The Raven Way’s values revolve around the expectation that students be respectful, responsible, motivated, and safe.

MAKING IT WORK: RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

1. Shared values, which translate into specific expectations for student and adult behavior

   • Raven Way Leadership Committee: a voluntary committee of four to six teachers and a Dean of Students took responsibility for designing the components of the Raven Way, including its values and supporting routines

   • Raven Way collateral and celebrations: Although teacher time was the main investment required to create the Raven Way, nominal non-personnel spending helps bring the system to life. This includes the development of special Raven Way posters hung around the school, Raven Way t-shirts that are given as prizes to recognized students, and food to support both student and teacher celebrations. Quarterly block parties also typically have some type of treat for students, such as ice cream and/or hiring a DJ. This amounts to less than $5,000 in non-personnel spending per year.

2. Dedicated resources for students and teachers to learn and practice common routines or processes

   • Start-up teacher time: The original Raven Way committee spent roughly 30 voluntary hours developing the Raven Way and associated collateral over the spring and summer prior to the first year of implementation. In addition to designing the system, this time included drafting student and teacher handbooks on the Raven Way, common lessons for use in the first week of school, and a common referral form.
• New teacher bootcamp: Ridge Road dedicates three days to its New Teacher Bootcamp to introduce new teachers to the “Raven Way” and model the teacher expectations for the behavioral system. The time new teachers take to attend is voluntary, as is the five to eight hours in prep time that more experienced teachers spend planning for it.

• Dedicated collaborative planning meetings: Grade-level teaching teams meet to discuss trends in student behavior, align on how to respond, and determine interventions or plans needed to support struggling students. Ridge Road integrates roughly 30 minutes of “Kid Talk” into its weekly grade level collaborative planning meetings to discuss student behavioral needs in the context of the Raven Way system.

• Student orientation: Ridge Road ensures that expectations for student behavior are clearly communicated, modeled, and reinforced throughout the year by embedding lessons on character education into all classes during the first week of school. These lessons typically take 40 minutes out of each first block, and 15 minutes out of each subsequent block. Students are thus exposed to relevant values, systems and routines in every single class for the first five days of the school year.

3. Administrative support of rigorous implementation

• Expert support: The Dean of Students facilitates the Raven Way Committee’s ongoing work and pushes into grade-level team meetings to support progress monitoring efforts.

• Administrative support of professional adult culture: A strong professional adult culture underpins the Raven Way. At least monthly, administrators dedicate time and create opportunities for staff to know each other personally. They consistently communicate both appreciation and feedback, and celebrate teachers’ efforts at regular intervals over the course of the school year. This positive and proactive approach to teacher culture reinforces how teachers support a strong student culture.

• Incentives and celebrations: An integral part of The Raven Way is positive incentives and celebrations. Incentives primarily come in the form of public recognition, including the public announcement of students each week who have been nominated by their teachers for upholding Raven Way values. These students are celebrated once a week and receive prizes such as Raven Way t-shirts, which a student committee designs. Celebrations for students who have minimal referrals take place through quarterly “block parties,” which are one to two hour events that are re-allocated away from core subjects on a rotating basis.
LEARNING FROM IMPLEMENTATION

• Importance of teacher leadership: Ridge Road’s new values, systems and routines were initiated and then developed by teachers who formed the Raven Way committee. Administrators trusted that teachers had the deepest understanding of behavioral challenges in the school, and gave them the autonomy to propose solutions.

• Importance of professional adult culture: Administrators, with strong leadership from the principal, invest ongoing efforts to form strong professional relationships with teachers, and create opportunities for teachers to form these relationships with each other. Teachers are actively appreciated on an ongoing basis, and personal milestones are celebrated. This has created a culture in which staff members feel accountable to each other and to all students, which the principal articulates as an “all in” mentality.

RESULTS

Ridge Road’s sense of community has strengthened significantly as a result of the “Raven Way” system, which has had a positive impact on its academic results.

After the first year of implementation, the suspension rate at Ridge Road decreased by 50%. The school’s performance on North Carolina’s end-of-grade assessments also increased by 14%. Ridge Road has consistently exceeded the state’s expectations for its rate of academic growth since 2009.

Ridge Road’s Principal, Jametta Tanner, was named district Principal of the Year in 2014.

ARTIFACTS

• Sample lesson plan to teach the Respect value during first week of school: http://bit.ly/2vKfddQ
• FAQs on the role of after school detention (ASD) and before school detention (BSD) in the Raven Way: http://bit.ly/2h3HTLj