

## Creating a Re-Set – An Open Letter

For many, the last several years have been a struggle for educators, administrators, students, and parents. The term “normal” is not what educators witnessed in our classrooms, hallways, bathrooms, lunchrooms, and other areas within the school grounds. Vast amounts of disrespect have become, in some cases, the norm. I predict that we will continue to struggle with students not knowing how to “play School” for another three years before we regain a sense of normalcy within our buildings.

Veteran as well as new teachers experience verbal abuse from both students and parents. Students are treating each other with a lack of kinship, kindness, and respect. Those who suffer the most are the outstanding students who want to learn and who try to be kind to others. Teachers who try to build relationships and work hard on creative lessons feel underappreciated and ignored. “I am not doing that,” has become a common phrase from students. Our students and staff have forgotten the rigor of school and learning. And by the time we try to regain some control of our buildings it is too late, and we feel defeated.

For the longest time we have asked for teachers to “buy in.” As we all know, this means having teachers support each other and the efforts to make changes within the school, when in reality some educators feel that this is not *their* battle. I assure you, if we don’t work together, this will not pass, and we will see more and more teachers leaving their profession. We must bond together to fight the battles we are now facing in education so that these negative experiences are not repeated. We must ask ourselves if we want a repeat of last the last several years. In so many cases the answer is, “No.” That means we need a re-set within our schools and part of that re-set is our willingness to make the changes necessary to provide a safe and supportive environment for our staff and students.

This year we need to embrace the concept of “All Means All.” Every educator and administrator need to be on the same page. No longer can one teacher say, “I am not enforcing *that* rule.” This sends a mixed message to our students. We also need to stop saying that these rules come from the top (Administration). Let’s be honest, that mantra has not worked – student handbooks have been around for 50 years, and we still have some teachers not enforcing the rules. “I don’t care if they wear a hoodie,” is a prime example of top-down school expectations. Our students crave consistency, and we are not providing that based on teachers’ personal preferences of enforcing rules.

In order to re-set the upcoming school year, we need to hold each other accountable, have honest discussions about what is working, and present a strong and unified front to our students. This means seeking 4 or 5 non-negotiables that all of us must enforce. This will not be easy and may need some personal reflection, “Am I the obstacle?” “Will my lack of enforcing these expectations lead to another year of struggle, and in some cases, students running our schools?”

If you don’t want to repeat last year, then now is the time to step up and create some common expectations for yourself and your students. Breaks in the school year are also the perfect time to implement a reset – don’t wait for the new school year! Once again, for this to work we all must be on the same page, “All” really does mean “All.”



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## **Creating a Re-Set, Cont'd.**

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### **How to transform the 6th Grade Building: Middle School**

To create consistencies, norms, and high expectations you must start with 6th grade or the lowest grade in your building. Why? Because you need to start somewhere. Yes, you can do this for the entire building, but I recommend starting off small with a grade level or even a team. In many cases, 6th graders are in a self-contained area or a specific part of a building. This can provide an easier environment to set common expectations within the school building.

At some point all 6th grade teachers (or a team) need to meet to set up common procedures, student expectations, and reward systems. They must also look at strategies to hold each other accountable. Discussions should include hallway and common area etiquette, possibly walking students to electives (Essentials), and maybe even lunch protocols. All aspects of student procedures need to be discussed to create the necessary changes. That includes even reward systems, bathroom breaks, and potentially recess/break.

### **Staff Activity: Speaking from the Heart**

**Have the staff sit in a circle and allow each person to share some of their thoughts regarding the questions below. The goal is to speak from the heart about their perception of the last school year, or past several years.**

- Do you want to repeat the last school year?
- What was your biggest struggle regarding connecting with students?
- What shocked you the most last year?
- Have your students forgotten how to “play School?”
- Did we offer a consistent environment for our students?
- What student expectations need to be enforced next/this school year by every teacher?
- Answer this question: “I can’t believe our students don’t know how to.....”
- What issues or items are your students are struggling with?

## Creating a Re-Set, Cont'd.

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### Entire Staff Activity: Consistency issues and how we hold each other accountable

In order to re-set, you must start with some personal reflection on how you need to create changes within your school, hallways, classrooms and common areas. Part of this change focuses on each teacher and their willingness to be consistent regarding 5 to 7 common expectations for students. For this to work “ALL MUST MEAN ALL.” Each teacher needs to be willing to hold students accountable to various issues in a consistent manner that is aligned with all the teachers in the building. *Success will be based on the ability of the weakest link to enforce common student expectations.*

To start, **you must identify the issues** that your students are struggling with regarding general behaviors. Here are a few examples:

1. Use of cell phones
2. Walking on the right side of the hallways
3. Dismissal from classes
4. Running in the hallways
5. Being late for class
6. Use of profanity

Next, you need to generate ideas on how to hold students accountable. These are referred to as **Observable Behaviors** (in the table below).

Then, you will need to discuss and agree on how to hold each other accountable – this includes students as well as teachers. The section for comments could include concerns on how to implement this plan.

And finally, think about some common reward systems that can be used to help promote good behaviors.

**Creating a Re-Set, Cont'd.**

Issue	Observable Behaviors	Accountable - Teacher and Student	Comments	Common Rewards
Hallways	<p>Staggered dismissal by teams</p> <p>Walking students to classes</p> <p>Staying on the right side of the hall</p> <p>Every student must have a pass when not accompanied by a teacher</p> <p>Teams will rotate cleaning up hallways</p> <p>Teachers in hallways during passing period</p> <p>Hallway sweeps before team meetings</p>			
Cell Phones	<p>Not visible</p> <p>Placed in backpack</p> <p>Put in clear plastic phone holder</p> <p>Used for rewards?</p> <p>Used in class when used as a lesson</p> <p>Only during Lunch time?</p> <p>Notice to parents about proper use of cell phones</p>		<p><i>NOTE: These are just examples - schools need to talk about what their policy will be regarding cell phone usage</i></p>	

## Creating a Re-Set, Cont'd.

Issue	Observable Behaviors	Accountable - Teacher and Student	Comments	Common Rewards
Profanity	Teacher using common response on language			
Office	Treat the secretaries with respect  Use "please" and "thank you"			
Lunchroom	Seating is assigned  Raise hand when done  Clean area before leaving  Protocols for dismissal  Teachers will escort students from the lunchroom			
Classroom Dismissal	Use same phrase when releasing students - "Have a nice day."  Before students leave, floors need to be picked up, chairs pushed in, and desks cleaned off			
Reward Systems	Establish based on short-term goals			