

Hoy & Tarter Simplified Shared Decision Making Model

Case No.: Kowalski 12

What is the problem?

A popular and, by some measures, effective principal has sparked district-wide controversy with his liberal use of suspension as a tool for student discipline. Students' in-seat time is being sacrificed in the name of preserving order in the school, but there is no data to support the use of suspension for improving behavior.

Who are the stakeholders that you are considering involving?

- principal
- teachers
- parents
- students
- School Board

What are the criteria for a satisfactory solution?

Middle school students should feel safe and supported in their school environment while having the chance to learn and grow as individuals.

| Hoy & Tarter Simplified SDM Model | Principal Sanchez | Teachers | Parents | Students | School Board |
|--|-------------------|----------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| 1. Relevance Question: | Yes/ No | Yes/ No | Yes/No | Yes/ No | Yes/ No |
| 2. Expertise Question: | Yes/ No | Yes/ No | Yes/ No | Yes/ No | Yes/ No |
| Zone of Acceptance: | | | | | |
| 3. Trust Question (if necessary): | Yes/ No | Yes/ No | Yes/No | Yes/No | Yes/No |
| Situation: | Conflictual | Conflictual | Stakeholder | Stakeholder | Stakeholder |
| Involvement: | Limited | Limited | Limited | Limited | Limited |
| Decision Making Structure: | Group Adv. | Group Adv. | Group Adv. | Group Adv. | Group Adv. |
| Role of Superior: | Educator | Educator | Educator | Educator | Educator |

Plan of Action Based on Decision Style

Programming

Clearly, a policy change is needed. If the current system of arbitrary suspension were effective in improving student behavior, the number of suspensions would have fallen by now. My first step is to gather information from all of the stakeholders affected by the current lack of a cohesive school discipline policy. It is only a matter of time before the arbitrary application of harsh punishments (like suspensions) turns into a liability for the district.

I'll first meet with Principal Sanchez and his assistant principal to gather information about how suspensions are affecting student behavior as well as the types of infractions that are resulting in suspension. I'll ask them to spend some time collecting data about the last two years of student discipline so we can use this data to inform policy-making decisions moving forward.

Next, I'll attend a faculty meeting to talk with teachers, using this opportunity to gather information and reassure teachers that the suspension "policy" is being reviewed. I'll also hold a meeting with parents, inviting both parents who support Principal Sanchez as well as parents

whose students have been suspended, to hear from them about how this policy has affected them and their students (in this case, parents will serve as the voice for their students). Finally, I'll meet with the school board to hear their opinions and look at the district-wide effects of suspension policy.

After hearing all sides of the issue, I will draft a policy proposal, to be voted on by the School Board before the end of the school year. The specifics of this policy will depend on the types of feedback I receive from each of the stakeholder groups involved. However, some general policy changes are definite:

- Students need additional supports to prevent chronic suspensions and to make sure they stay on track academically.
- At a minimum, broad categories of behaviors that warrant suspension must be defined (e.g., physical violence, drug use/possession on campus, terroristic threats). Student behaviors that do not rise to this level of seriousness must be dealt with through other channels.
- Additional supports need to be in place to offer principals alternatives (e.g., counselor mentoring and remediation, after-school detention, or in-school suspension) to suspension for more minor offenses.

Communicating

In my role as an Educator, it will be vital that I help Principal Sanchez and his teachers understand what is developmentally appropriate for middle school students. Since middle school is a time of growth and self-acceptance, students need the opportunity to make mistakes and learn from them in a safe environment. Suspension takes away the opportunity to learn and removes children from what should be a safe and supportive environment. I will work with all principals and teachers regarding better ways to communicate with students in a supportive, non-combative tone, so that situations like the one with Jimmy Malenga can be avoided in the future.

I will also work to educate the School Board about why we need a clearly defined policy regarding student discipline. As a district, we're setting ourselves up for major liabilities by not having a uniform policy. After it is drafted and accepted by the school board, I will share the new policy with parents and community members.

Monitoring

All principals will submit semi-annual school discipline reports, charting the number of suspensions and other disciplinary actions taken. The new discipline policy will be reviewed annually to account for changing school cultures and to incorporate new data as well as feedback from teachers and parents.

Evaluating

A successful outcome here is one in which the number of suspensions accurately reflects the number of serious infractions in the school. Also, I would hope to see suspension being used as a last resort, with many other supports and alternatives in place for teachers and principals to get students back on track before resorting to suspension. Finally, success in this case involves many stakeholders who all need a chance to have their opinions heard and valued.