



Columbia Gorge

EDUCATION SERVICE DISTRICT

Mosier
Community
School External
Evaluation of
Behavior
Approaches

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To: Mosier Community School Board

Re: Request from Board Chair Bernadine Herlihy to conduct an external evaluation of the implementation of the Responsive Classroom and Multi-Tiered Systems of Support behavior approaches

Submitted by: Patricia Sublette, Ph.D.

Process

1. Review MCS school mission and strategic goals to evaluate the alignment of approaches for behavior with Multi-Tiered Systems of Support and Responsive Classroom.
2. Interview with Kieran Connolly, Executive Director of Mosier Community School
3. Behavior team meeting
4. Observations at Mosier Community School
5. Community Forum (using a World Café model)
6. SWISS survey of parents, students and staff.

Results

1. Mission alignment check

Mosier Community School Mission: Fostering independent learning and citizenship in partnership with and for the benefit of our Mosier community. Students will become global citizens who analyze work in a critical and equitable manner, while respecting the richness and diversity of all living things.

Strategic goals include:

- *Best Education:* MCS is recognized in the region as a leader in outdoor-focused, place-based education
- *Right Facilities:* Facilities and infrastructure meet health, safety and educational needs of the school
- *Financial Stability:* There is adequate funding to support MCS's needs and goals
- *Engaged School Community:* MCS parents, alumni, volunteers and community members are warmly embraced into the school community creating a web of support for carrying out the school mission

Responsive Classroom

- *Responsive Classroom* is an evidence-based approach to education that focuses on the strong relationship between academic success and social-emotional learning (SEL). The Responsive Classroom approach empowers educators to create safe, joyful, and engaging learning communities where all students have

a sense of belonging and feel significant. Responsive Classroom uses a community building approach to support students in logical consequences.
<https://www.responsiveclassroom.org/>

- In the 2018-19 school year Mosier Community School teachers adopted the Responsive Classroom approach. Responsive Classroom provides supports that allow students to self-calm and teaches strategies that help students solve problems independently. If needed students are able to work on problems outside of the classroom as well but most issues are solved in the classroom. The goal is to offer supports that students can use to remain engaged in the learning process while teaching students to learn the social skills needed to become productive student citizens who are able to participate in the community. All teachers (and most staff) received 4 days of training on the approach at the beginning of the year as is recommended.

Multi-Tiered Systems (MTSS) of Support

- A Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) is an integrated, systemic framework designed to use data-based problem-solving to respond to the needs of all students. MTSS aligns school systems that efficiently use resources while focusing on improving learning outcomes for all students... All MTSS aligned frameworks are founded on the installation of effective systems such as shared leadership, using data to inform decisions about a continuum of supports and evidence-based instruction and intervention and partnerships between families, schools and communities. MTSS done effectively compels a shift in thinking to the responsibility of all stakeholders to ensure that the systems and environments of the school support and enable student learning
<https://www.oregon.gov/ode/students-and-family/GraduationImprovement/Documents/MTSS.pdf>
- MCS received a grant to implement Multi-Tiered System of Support in the fall of 2019-20, which works across content areas (e.g., Behavior, Math and Reading) to create and offer a system of supports for all students across the school. This process is a multi-year effort. It supports the development of Tier 1 supports for all students (100% of student body). Tier II supports implemented for a smaller group of students who need more structure (20% or less of the student body). Tier 3 supports are developed and put in place for students with the highest level of need (typically 5% of the student population). The Multi-Tiered Systems of Support fits well with a Responsive Classroom and community school approach because these approaches seek to create a community of learners who have the supports to become high achieving independent students and productive citizens.

Conclusion: The theory and practice behind both Responsive Classroom, Multi-Tiered Systems and Supports align well with the MCS Mission and strategic goals.

2. Interviews with Kieran

Kieran offered an overview of the Responsive Classroom program as it is happening in Mosier Community School. He explained the role of Joclyn Paris (behavior specialist) and mentioned that some parents have concerns regarding the changes in behavioral approaches and student safety in general. All teachers and most staff attended a 4-day training to learn how to implement the program in the late summer. He invited me to observe any time at MCS in order to get a good understanding of the school community and implementation of the Responsive Classroom approach. Kieran also invited me to attend the behavior team meeting to get a better understanding of the goals and overarching work the team is trying to accomplish in support of students, families and staff. We discussed the parent forum and possible questions and topics to cover.

3. Behavior Team Meeting

The behavior team met to discuss ongoing process development for Multi-Tiered Systems of Support Tiers I and II supports. The first year of implementation focuses on establishing supports for all students (e.g., Responsive Classroom). Although tiers II and III may be partially addressed in year one they are not the focus. Supports for tiers II and III are addressed directly in the second and third years. Establishing and embedding supports for all students' leads to a reduction in the number of students needing Tier II and III supports. This also aligns with the Responsive Classroom approach of community building and teaching students to make good choices for themselves and others. When compared to more traditional approaches that offer pre-established punishments when a student and teacher may be angry or in an escalated state, these approaches recommend students calm first and then participate in rectifying the situation. This means students participate in making retribution or righting any wrong they caused. Using Responsive

Classroom, students are given time to calm down and then both the student and teacher (or fellow student if appropriate) give input on a logical action that is designed to teach appropriate social skills and holding the student who misbehaved completely accountable for their actions. Holding students accountable is an important part of learning needed social skills.

This approach uses a growth mindset meaning there is an underlying belief that all students are learning and will improve when given the right conditions. This is a shift from more traditional or compliance based models of school behavior management. This approach is used because a punishment does not teach the student to improve thinking or behavior in similar situations in the future. This also aligns with best practice for teaching students social emotional skills.

At the Behavior Team meeting, the results of an outside evaluator for the Responsive Classroom model were shared and included the following:

- On 3/7/19, Jenny Spero, an expert external evaluator observed the implementation of Responsive Classroom at MCS and found the following visible in most classrooms.
 - Management was effective because there were clear routines/procedures, proactive reminders and signals for attention
 - Engaging Academics was visible because there were opportunities for students to be active participants in the learning that is happening
 - Developmental responsiveness was apparent because spaces in classrooms were reflective of student learners and learning opportunities match the developmental needs of students
 - There was evidence of a positive community because positive student-to-student interactions were visible and positive student to teacher interactions were visible.
 - Areas for growth included: Reminding of rules as a behavior anchor; balancing visual and verbal directions;

give specific feedback. The biggest area of growth she recommended was in the use of reinforcing language.

- She observed K, 1, 2, 3, 4/5, 6, 7/8 classrooms.

Other topics at the behavior meeting included a review of interventions currently in use including de-escalation techniques that help students calm down before they can learn how they might amend a situation or become accountable for their actions. Interview with Joslyn Paris- Behavior Specialist. Joslyn's goal is to support teachers in using the new approaches and offer supports to help to teach students to make good behavioral choices. She also works directly with students who need additional supports. Jocelyn does this by calming students who are in a heightened state due to anger or other upsetting emotions. Then, she and the student discuss the incident, how it might have been avoided or handled more successfully and how the student should be held accountable. Then her goal is to coach the student to make retribution. Joslyn also works with fellow students who may have been wronged by the action of the offending student.

4. Observations

- Fewer office referrals compared to 2018-19 school year. During lunch or at breaks any problems were being handled in the classroom rather than relying on interventions at the principal's office. This saves time away from the classroom for students and results in greater student learning.
- When asked, students understood the routines and function of the Responsive Classroom Techniques. Sample questions: What is the chime for? Why are some students were wearing purple t-shirts? (peer mentors). What is the cardboard box for and when would you use it? (We can go there when we need a break).
- Students were engaged, attentive and using strategies that are part of Responsive Classroom approaches (class meetings, calming tools, problem solving strategies and chimes to gain attention of the class). On the playground, on three different occasions I observed one student tease another. The student being teased used words to stop the situation saying, "Stop it" or " I don't like that please stop" (or something similar). The teasing student. In a partner work

setting in a classroom one student was hoarding all of the manipulatives. His partner simply waited for a moment and then pointed out that their work would go faster if he shared the tokens. The student keeping the tokens shrugged and shared the tokens.

- Students quickly planned and solved a group problem before beginning their work. In that way all students knew the expectations and had a chance to voice input for the group solutions.
- In two different classes, students voluntarily entered a cardboard box they called the Calm Cave. They left the area on their own after 2-5 minutes. In a third one classroom, another student entered the Calm Cave and after 3 minutes, his teacher invited him to be her partner. He accepted the invitation and quickly became engaged in the math activity.
- Although they were extremely slight, most observed behavior challenges occurred in classrooms that were not overtly using Responsive Classroom approaches.
 - One student who was taking a long time choosing a piece of cardboard from the recycling bin while trying to catch the eye of a girl in a neighboring classroom spoke with me, explained his purpose and what class he was from (middle school). He returned to class with me as the teacher called out the window telling him to return to class.
 - Students were working on a project and several students were off task, they increased attention to task when the teacher was nearby but returned to off task behavior later in the observation.
- After school, I walked behind buildings to see if students were loitering or engaged in inappropriate behaviors and found nothing to report.
- During lunch, I observed Joslyn checking with students before they entered the cafeteria or in other transitions. She reviewed the student's plan for success during a possibly challenging time. She also checked with students to see how their day was progressing reminding them of their plans for success that day. She had an appointment with a student for an in-depth conversation and problem solving.

- Most students were on task and engaged in learning activities that focused on academic content while behavior choices and skills directly taught, practiced and reinforced.
- When speaking with staff it was apparent that although many have effectively embraced the new approaches to behavior, the adoption is not universal. It was also interesting to note that those teachers who were not using the new system reported greater dissatisfaction or wanted more training with the behavior program and more discipline issues. One teacher related that building a community and other approaches utilized by Responsive Classroom were not appropriate in the Middle School- because middle school students are too old for those techniques. I also observed middle school students in detention working on assignments that were late or because of poor grades.
- Most teachers and students were eager to show me the strategies and tools in their classrooms that help students make good choices.
- Throughout most of the school, students were engaged in the business of learning or activities after the first bus left. Frankly, it is rare to be able to observe such high levels of student engagement, community participation, social skills and independent problem solving in a school setting.

5. Parent Forum

Columbia Gorge ESD held a parent forum on April 15, 2019 using a World Café approach. Parents, teachers and older students were invited. After hearing an overview of MTSS and Responsive Classroom from Kieran Connelly, ED. And Joslyn Paris, Behavior Specialist, participants responded to questions through discussion and recording responses on large pieces of paper. After 15 minutes, participants changed tables and responded to a different question.

Responses to questions resulted in the following themes:

Things Mosier Community School does well

- School Climate
 - Warm atmosphere
 - Small school so everyone knows everyone else
- Approaches to behavior
 - Behavior specialist is getting everyone on the same page
 - Behavior specialist supports kids and teachers

- This approach to students (MTSS and Responsive Classroom) are more in tune with social needs of students. It makes the most sense given what is known about brain development
- Responsive classroom and tiered approaches to behavior focus on creating community, which fits with the school's mission
- The behavior approaches fits with what research states about brain development in students.

Mosier Community School could use more support in these areas

- Communication
 - Internal and external communication
 - Between school and parents broadly
 - Communication between administration and staff, community, kids
 - Community and school communication and relationship building
 - Ongoing communication about the implementation of the behavior program
 - Phone calls, personal communication is better than email
 - Communicate shared MCS vision with staff and community
 - Ongoing conversations needed with the community and parents
 - Ongoing problem solving needed with community, parents and staff
- Greater unity between staff, parents and students.
 - Staff implementation of the Responsive Classroom behavior program and tiered approaches differs between the elementary and middle school
 - Middle school staff has not fully embraced/ implemented the program
 - Request more training for middle school, staff support, walkthroughs etc.
 - Middle school and second grade parents seem most confused and dissatisfied with new behavior approaches.
 - Loss of old traditions yet, nothing new to replace those traditions

What will success look like?

- Increased Communication and Community Relationships
 - More community meetings like this one
 - Internal and external communication is happening
 - Traditions restored, adapted or replaced
 - Full implementation of programs

- Parents
 - Parents are heard and communicated with in meaningful ways
 - Parent input is valued in a meaningful way
 - High parent involvement
- MCS Students
 - Emotional intelligence/ self-control is being taught
 - Happy kids
 - Students are recognized for good work and other attributes that help the community
 - Kids are known and supported

6. SWISS Climate Survey data

A school climate survey was used to gather input from the MCS community (families, students and staff). A digital link was sent to parents, students (grades 3-8) and staff using the SWISS School Climate Survey. This instrument gathers information on topics such as: school safety, parental involvement, academic achievement expectations, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning. Items were scored on a 1-4 scale with 1 being the lowest possible score and 4 being the highest possible score available. This provides a 3-point range and means that scores above 2.5 fall are above average and scores below 2.5 are below average.

- Student perspectives:

Elementary students in grades 3-5 believe the school climate is very good overall. Students believe strongly that the school wants them to do well, they are treated with respect and the school has clear rules for behavior. Most elementary students reported that they get along well with other students and feel safe (all scores on these items were rated above average with rankings of 3.0 or higher).

Middle school students (grades 6-8) believe they are treated with respect (a score higher than 3.0). Students feel safe at school and they know a trusted adult at school they can speak with (2.8) and most students like school (2.69) and feel successful. Clear rules for behavior were average at 2.5. Middle school students rated that students are rewarded for their behavior in the below average range at 2.13.

- Parent Perspectives:

Parents rated the overall school climate above average at 2.83. Parent involvement was highly rated at 3.37 indicating parents see themselves as participating, attending conferences, and are actively involved with school projects. Parents also rated interpersonal relationships with school staff above average. They indicated their students feel successful and parents feel welcome and are very comfortable speaking with teachers (all rated as 2.8-3.35). This led to an above average rating of 3.06 for Learning and teaching. Parents also believe teachers have high standards for achievement, and are working hard to make sure that students do well. The instructional environment rankings also indicate above average performance on the part of MCS in that parents see that classrooms are clean, organized, textbooks are up to date and in good condition and the buildings are well maintained (2.78).

Most family rankings were very high for student safety going to and from school (3.5). Families believe their student feel safe at school at 2.45 overall, which is below average. Male family members rated students being safe at school at 1.67 and female family members ranked the same item above average (2.61). A similar difference in responses appeared in recognizing students for good behavior (males ranked this at 1.77 and females ranked this above average at 2.72).

Families rated staff communication with parents at 2.43, which included teachers giving explicit requirements for good behavior (2.33) and students treated fairly at school (2.29). Clear rules for behavior and rules being consistently enforced rules, and fair procedures were below average (1.92).

- School Personnel

School personnel rated school climate above average overall (3.02). Staff connectedness (3.23). Structures for learning was also above average (3.03) and school safety and physical environment (3.0 each). Peer relationships and parental involvement were both rated 2.9. The scores ranked average were student recognition for good behavior, follow-up when reporting unsafe behaviors and students treating each other with respect.

Summary and Recommendations

- Mosier Community School has many strengths to celebrate. It is a warm community school where students feel safe and know that the adults in their world care about them. Students, parents and fellow staff believe teachers care and have high expectations. Students work and play well together with minimal disruptions compared to other schools of a similar size. Implementation seems to be well underway for the newly adopted approaches to behavior and there is appreciation for the support of the behavior specialist.
- The MCS Mission and strategic goals support the implementation of the Responsive Classroom behavior program and Multi-Tiered Systems of Support. These approaches support the creation and growth of a community of learners that is progressing toward becoming contributing members of in a larger community. The approaches are evidence-based meaning they have both been researched and found effective in multiple settings. In observations (my own and an outside person trained in implementing Responsive Classroom) the implementation of Responsive classroom is well under way and effectively supporting most students at MCS. Student accountability was apparent throughout the school. Both programs (MTSS and Responsive Classroom) are being implemented with fidelity in many classrooms. When any new program or approach is adopted, it is common that 100% of staff will fully adopt a new program.
- Student Safety- Although student safety was a concern in interviews and the parent forum, a majority of the survey participants did not support this concern. Nor did I observe bullying on the playground or in classrooms. Both elementary and middle school students reported feeling safe at above average levels. According to survey results, male family members in particular did not believe their students felt safe at school although female counterparts did not report the same levels of concern.

Based on information gathered from the sources above, I am making the following recommendations:

1. Improving communication is a growth opportunity for Mosier Community School. Creating a communication plan that will assist in improving both internal and external communication with parents and community members will assist in strategically improving this area.
2. It is important that the staff and the board at MCS recognize the high levels of parental involvement while creating meaningful opportunities for proactive parental input on decisions and problem solving school issues that may be or are causes for concern.
 - a. Engage parents, staff and students in problem solving and solution generation processes that aligns with the schools mission and strategic goals. An outside facilitator or a combination of board, staff and parents could run problem-solving groups and/or survey for input. Encourage direct and appropriate communication by adhering to group norms.
 - b. Create a parent advisory committee to assist with the implementation of the new behavior initiatives and bring parent voices to the process. This group could serve as a communication conduit to other parents and add important perspectives for the implementation process.
 - c. Offer families the opportunity for more information and engagement in ways that help guide and support the school. In particular parents are requesting:
 - i. More information on the new approaches to behavior
 - ii. Clarified expectations for behavior
 - iii. Reinstating or adapting traditions that recognize outstanding accomplishments.
 - iv. More opportunities to celebrate accomplishments
 - d. Reinforcing what a Community school is and how it differs from other schools seems important information to repeat often. Celebrate this difference often. Helping families, students and staff to embrace the underlying philosophy of education that supports community based schools is foundational.
 - e. Part of communication with the community and school staff is how the board interacts and follows policies. The board may wish to adapt their complaint policy and procedures if those procedures are not working effectively. Currently, it appears that parents are complaining directly to

staff and the board rather than using procedures established in policy. This creates a back channel that does not support an effective flow of communication within a school system. Oregon School Board Association may be able to assist the board in creating, adapting or supporting the current policy and procedures.

- i. If families feel their concerns aren't being heard, the board and administration can address this issue directly through a new process. If issues are addressed in a complaint process outside of the board meetings it will assist the board to function with less disruption.
3. Lack of engagement in some school staff regarding the behavior approaches is common when new approaches are implemented. At MCS however, it is also symptomatic of a need for greater unity including adoption of the new approaches to behavior. Most concerns from parents appear to stem from those classrooms that are not fully implementing the new programs. Thus, engaging classrooms while addressing the concerns of parents that are less than enthusiastic is important.
 - a. Offer staff and parents, and older students an opportunity to observe classrooms that are effectively using Responsive Classroom or other community building approaches at middle and high schools. Speaking with other parents from these schools could also be advantageous. This will help address concerns raised by staff. It would also allow staff and parents to gain a clear picture of what a community based or Responsive Classroom approach looks like when it is implemented with older students.
 - b. Support teachers as they increase the use of reinforcing language as was recommended by Jenny Spero.

Respectfully Submitted,

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Columbia Gorge Education Service District

One Page Summary of MCS Behavior Implementation Analysis and Recommendations

Mosier Community School is implementing Responsive Classroom and Multi-Tiered Systems of Support. These systems align with the MCS mission and goals. Both Responsive Classroom and the overarching framework Multi-Tiered Systems of Support are being implemented according to plan and fidelity. The exception is that not all classrooms have adopted the new approaches and this is noticeable in both teacher and parent opinions in those grades that are slower to adopt.

After interviewing, overserving, holding a parent forum and surveying students, staff and families the following recommendations are offered:

1. Create and implement a communication plan to assist in strategically improving both internal and external communication at MCS.
2. Create opportunities for meaningful parent involvement. Hold forums or gather parental input on decisions and problem solving school issues that may become or are already causes for concern. An outside facilitator or a combination of board, staff and parents could run problem-solving groups and/or survey for input. Encourage direct and appropriate communication by mutually agreeing on and adhering to group norms.
3. Create a parent advisory committee to assist with the implementation of the new behavior initiatives. Parents are asking for more information on:
 - i. New approaches to behavior
 - ii. Clarified expectations for behavior
 - iii. Reinstating or adapting traditions that recognize accomplishments of kids.
 - b. Reinforce what a Community school is and how it differs from other schools. Celebrate this difference will help families, students and staff to embrace the underlying philosophy of education that supports community based schools is foundational.
 - c. The board may wish to adapt their complaint policy and procedures to assure complaints are heard outside of board meetings and follow established policy. Oregon School Board Association may be able to assist in creating, adapting or supporting the any established policy and procedures.
4. Offer staff and parents, and older students an opportunity to observe classrooms that are effectively using Responsive Classrooms or other community building approaches to discipline at middle and high schools. Speaking with other parents from these schools could also be advantageous.