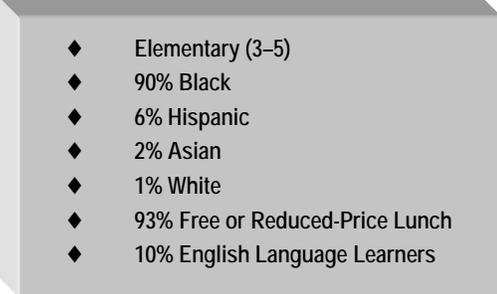


P.S. 269

1957 Nostrand Avenue
Brooklyn, NY 11210
Principal: Phyllis Corbin

P.S. 269 draws the majority of its students from low-income temporary housing apartment complexes. Many of the students live below the poverty index as measured by the Title I Free Lunch Eligibility Survey. Seven years ago, P.S. 269 was classified as a “Corrective Action School.” This means that the school did not make adequate yearly progress (AYP) for several years. Phyllis Corbin, the school principal, likened the climate of P.S. 269 during those years to a “war zone”: “The building was not safe. Staff morale was low and students were afraid. Disruptive behavior was rampant.” Many of the children’s lives were (and still remain) affected by criminal activity. However, over the course of seven years, the school has become a place of peace. The occurrence of violent incidences among students at P.S. 269 is nearly nonexistent, and there have been no student fights or district suspensions reported for the 2008–09 school year. The school now implements social-emotional programs and initiatives that help to facilitate academic growth, which has earned the school a grade of A, according to district standards. P.S. 269 has transformed into a positive learning community.

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- ◆ Elementary (3–5)
 - ◆ 90% Black
 - ◆ 6% Hispanic
 - ◆ 2% Asian
 - ◆ 1% White
 - ◆ 93% Free or Reduced-Price Lunch
 - ◆ 10% English Language Learners

Identifying and Addressing Student Behavior

Inappropriate student behavior can have a negative effect upon learning. Therefore, the staff of P.S. 269 monitor student behavior regularly, while paying special attention to the antecedents for inappropriate behavior.

Teachers who are struggling with behavior issues in their classrooms have strong support from school psychologists and counselors. These trained professionals collaborate with teachers and assist them in developing effective strategies for reducing problem behaviors. Mr. Fequiere Lazare, the school psychologist, observes students in the classroom setting, spends one-on-one time with students who have chronic behavior problems, and identifies students with chronic behavior problems for participation in the Jaguar Academy.

The Jaguar Academy is a social-emotional behavior support group designed for students with chronic behavior problems. These students meet with the school psychologist in a small group format. They use the time together to discuss and reflect on ways of behaving appropriately in school. Students who participate in Jaguar Academy also engage in a leisure activity after the meetings, such as basketball. This social interaction teaches the students important lessons in friendship, acceptance of others, and following rules. An important component of the program is goal setting; the students

and their teachers collaborate with the school psychologist to determine and document attainable behavior goals.

Teachers at P.S. 269 also use behavior logs to communicate with parents about a student's behavior. When necessary, behavior logs are sent home daily. The parents are asked to sign the log, and the student returns it the following day. This form of communication helps parents and teachers remain connected and informed.

Many teachers at P.S. 269 utilize a student behavior contract. This is an agreement between a student and his or her teacher that outlines behavioral expectations for the student. Each student assists in the creation of the expectations so that he or she feels a degree of ownership with regards to the behavior plan. Student behavior contracts are individualized as teachers recognize the need to differentiate their approaches with the students. Other methods of documenting student behavior include the tally-mark data collection system, in which a teacher notes each time a student displays a positive behavior.

Social-Emotional Learning

Students at P.S. 269 receive instruction about conflict resolution skills through a schoolwide social-emotional program initiative designed to train students to work together to resolve disagreements. Teachers and students participate in class meetings known as "family gatherings" as often as necessary to engage in social-emotional learning. During the gatherings, the teacher presents a structured mini-lesson on a social skill or character value, such as respecting others. Students have the opportunity to share their thoughts and participate in a reflective activity following the discussion.

Family gatherings also are used to address a problem that may have occurred over the course of a school day, such as a conflict on the school playground or inappropriate behavior in the cafeteria. Teachers also can use the gatherings as a time to review the classroom rules and provide feedback to the students on the quality of their behavior. A particularly popular social-emotional awareness gathering topic includes the use of a "feeling barometer." During this activity, the teacher asks students to express how they feel on a scale of -5 (being the lowest) and +5 (being the highest). The students must also tell the class why they selected a particular number to represent their emotions. Examples of student responses included, "Today, I feel +5 because I am having my hair braided after school." Or, "I feel -2 today because I woke up late and I didn't have breakfast." The students listen to the responses of others respectfully and quietly. Lessons such as these train students to develop skills such as listening, understanding, sharing, and caring.

Classroom Management Strategies

Teachers at P.S. 269 convey behavioral expectations to their students by modeling positive behavior and providing concrete, positively stated guidelines for student behavior. The teachers establish procedures for entering and leaving the classroom, turning in assignments, transitioning to new activities during class, and minimizing disruptions.

One strategy that teachers use to minimize disruptions in class is the use of hand gestures. For example, fourth-grade teachers train students to use eye contact, head nods, and other signs—some of which are based on American Sign Language (ASL)—to signify when they need assistance with work, require permission to use the restroom, or need a drink of water. This simple strategy helps teachers sustain a classroom environment that is free of high-level disruptions and distractions. Students can communicate with the teacher silently as opposed to distracting other students from a learning task.

Teachers at P.S. 269 greet students at the doorway before class. Teachers look each student in the eye, address them by name, and welcome them to class. This allows teachers to make one-on-one contact with each student, and adds a degree of personalization to the school environment.

Many attractive and welcoming classrooms can be found at the school. Teachers have added personal touches such as couches, beanbags, lamps, and student photographs to help students feel more comfortable. It is also common to see posters of notable African American leaders to help motivate the students towards excellence and high achievement.

Building a Peaceful Community

“Building peace” is a theme pervasive throughout the P.S. 269 community. Each morning, the school principal and two students lead the school in a pledge that is designed to signify the school’s commitment to maintaining a safe learning environment. This ritual serves as a way for students to renew their commitment to behave in a manner that promotes peaceful interactions within the school. The pledge is displayed on large banners throughout the hallways and in the classrooms. Some students have copies of the Peace Pledge laminated to their desks as a gentle reminder of the importance of behaving in ways that are congruent to the school’s mission.

May is Peace Celebration Month at P.S. 269. Although teachers and students emphasize peace building throughout the school year, it is given special attention during the month of May as students create banners, poems, songs, and other creative media to express the importance of peace. In preparation for the month’s activities, teachers present lessons on themes such as tolerance, social responsibility, good behavior, and nonviolence four weeks prior to the event. As the culminating activity of Peace Celebration Month, school leaders organize a peace rally involving members of the community as well as community service organizations. The principal hopes to transform this rally into a community parade within the next couple of years.