

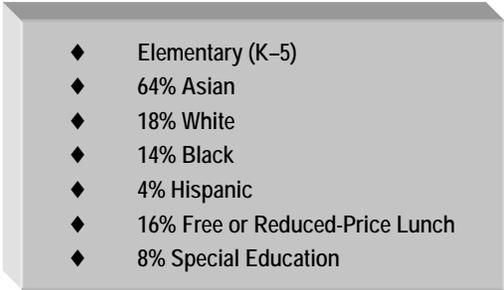
Martin Luther King Elementary School

285 Tingley Lane

Edison, NJ 08820

Principal: Diane Wilton

Martin Luther King Elementary School implements a comprehensive schoolwide program that emphasizes positive behavior by highlighting those students with exceptional, positive, and prosocial behavior. A recent teacher survey indicated that the practices that have worked the best in reducing behavior problems were a) a schoolwide focus on positive behavior rather than negative behavior; b) clear communication about how one should behave in the classroom, cafeteria, school halls, playground, and other school areas; and c) positive reinforcement (e.g., rewards and recognitions).

- 
- ◆ Elementary (K-5)
 - ◆ 64% Asian
 - ◆ 18% White
 - ◆ 14% Black
 - ◆ 4% Hispanic
 - ◆ 16% Free or Reduced-Price Lunch
 - ◆ 8% Special Education

A Comprehensive Schoolwide Approach

The school has received a grant to implement Positive Behavior Support Inside Schools (PBSIS), which was provided through a partnership between the New Jersey State Department of Education Programs and the Elizabeth M. Boggs Center on Developmental Disabilities at the University Medical and Dentistry New Jersey Center (UMDNJ) at the Robert Wood Johnson Medical School. A PBSIS Team sets the direction and monitors the implementation. The team is comprised of teachers at various grade levels, parents, guidance counselors, a curriculum resource teacher, and a school psychologist.

PBSIS uses a three-tiered approach. On the universal implementation level, teachers implement classroom management practices and social skills learning programs in all classrooms using a common language shared by all students and staff throughout the school. On the secondary implementation level, the school provides programs for students who may benefit from additional enrichment and training. For example, the school provides a computerized social skills training program, Ripple Effects, for all students in the upper elementary grade levels who exhibit challenging behavior. Working with a computer software program, students select hypothetical social interaction scenarios they would like to practice and learn more about. This self-directed practice aims to promote a range of skills including labeling and managing emotional states, assertiveness, decision-making, effective communication, and collaborating with peers. The third and most intensive level of implementation is individualized assessment and intervention for students who display chronic behavior problems.

Clear Communication About Behavior Rules

According to a recent teacher survey, nearly all teachers have a “rules and procedures chart” and a “consequences list” posted in their classrooms. The school puts an emphasis on creating rules that are meaningful to students. In order to promote a sense of ownership, students participate in the process of creating classroom rules. Then, teachers provide consistent and clear reminders of the classroom rules throughout the year. Schoolwide behavior expectations also are communicated through posters in the hallways, near the cafeteria, the gym, the water fountains, bathrooms, and other places considered to be prone to conflicts among students. In addition, at the beginning of the school year, expectations are communicated through school assemblies. The parent liaison on the PBSIS team communicates the behavior expectations to parents.

The whole-school approach that communicates clear and coherent standards and expectations to all students, teachers, and parents is believed to have led to a substantial decrease in office referrals and number of suspensions. In the past, teachers used to send students to the office for minor violations of classroom rules. The students’ behavior, however, did not improve. Today, teachers use a poor choice chart. A student who receives four marks in one day is sent for a conversation with the principal or a member of the PBSIS Team. If the same student receives a fifth mark after this conversation takes place, his or her parents are called. Teachers’ job-embedded professional development, the positive reinforcement system, and conversations with trained members of PBSIS are believed to have kept the number of students receiving a fifth mark to very few individuals a year.

Positive Reinforcement

One key to the school’s success has been the strong focus on positive reinforcement. The principal is often in the hallways handing certificates to students observed acting in a prosocial manner (e.g., helping others, sharing with others) or to students showing progress in meeting behavior expectations. Students receiving those certificates are entered into a raffle for individual rewards. Inside the classrooms, teachers recognize students’ good behavior by writing their names on a “proud cloud” poster or sending a small note to parents. Teachers also may select individual rewards for students based on their grade level and students’ preferences. For example, in a kindergarten class, one teacher provides coupons for going to the front of the lunch line, having lunch with three friends in the beanbags area, special snacks, or participating in a game with small prizes.

Students also are encouraged monthly to find and report a fellow classmate who has helped others or displayed other positive character values. Students who are honored and rewarded for their positive behavior are recognized at rallies among their peers. This type of positive reinforcement has been implemented following the pillars of the Character Counts program, a character education program that has been adapted to the school needs and melded with the PBSIS program.

The school has adopted the “Marble-ous” theme. Whole classes are rewarded once they reach their behavior goals, measured by the number of marbles in the marble jar. The good behavior of individual students contributes to the number of marbles in the jar.

Once the class has reached a predetermined goal (e.g., 100 marbles), they are entitled to a reward. Rewards may include pajama day, no homework certificates, make your own frozen yogurt day, teacher exchange day, special snack day, popcorn/video time, bagel breakfast, extra outside play time, show and tell tag day, free choice learning centers, and choice of seats.

Between October 2008 and March 2009, only three classrooms did not meet their goals, while 33 classes have met their goals at least twice. Students also take ownership in selecting the class reward for good behavior. For example, in one fifth grade classroom, the whole class worked together to create a list of rewards they would like to receive. One of those rewards was a teacher-student exchange day. For a whole day, the students (rather than the teacher) conducted the lessons (based on lesson plans approved by the teacher). Lessons included mummification in Egypt, hair braiding, and recommending a book.

Summary

The school's philosophy is to be concerned about the child rather than concerned about the behavior exhibited by the child. The school has designed and implemented policies and programs that aim to increase students' sense of connectedness to the school and the feeling that they are a part of a caring community.