

# DOINGWHATWORKS



Audio

FULL DETAILS AND TRANSCRIPT

## Behavior Interventions to Help Students Establish Attainable Goals

Sleepy Hollow High School, New York • February 2009

Topic: Dropout Prevention

Practice: Social/Behavior Programs

### Highlights

- Over the past 15 years, the approach to discipline at Sleepy Hollow High School has transitioned from being punitive and negative to proactive and positive.
- Students at Sleepy Hollow are counseled into making good choices.
- The Discipline Committee at Sleepy Hollow adopted a referral system that tracks patterns in student behavior. This tool allows them to analyze the data, explicitly teach expectations, and provide students with tools necessary to follow through with them.

### About the Site

Sleepy Hollow High School

Sleepy Hollow, NY

### Demographics

51% Hispanic

37% White

9% Black

2% Asian

24% Free or Reduced-Price Lunch

28% English Language Learners

Sleepy Hollow High School serves an ethnically and economically diverse student population. The school operates a broad range of programs to support students:

- Young Parents Achieve programs serves pregnant and parenting teens
- Play It Smart to ensure athletes stay focused on their academics
- Bridge classes for non-native English speakers to help them master essential content
- After-school homework support centers available to all students
- Ninth and tenth grade Humanities Team to help students make a successful academic transition to high school
- Positive behavior approach

## Full Transcript

Carol Conklin: Hi, my name is Carol Conklin. I'm the Principal at Sleepy Hollow High School in Sleepy Hollow, New York.

Alan Alterbaum: Hi, my name is Alan Alterbaum. I'm the Assistant Principal at Sleepy Hollow High School in Sleepy Hollow, New York.

Conklin: When I arrived at Sleepy Hollow High School 15 years ago, the discipline system, including the processes and the experiences, was pretty typical to what one might expect in any high school around America. Students were busy breaking rules, and we were busy providing negative consequences in the belief that detentions and suspensions and that kind of constant negative reinforcement would bring around the change that we believed was necessary and get kids back on track.

Alterbaum: What we've done over the last 15 or so years is transition to a system where we are more proactive; we are teaching kids about expectations. We teach kids about what they are doing wrong, and we attempt to counsel them into making good choices.

Conklin: We have eliminated in-school suspension as an option. Our out-of-school suspension statistics have dropped off. We no longer have fights in the hallways on a daily, weekly, monthly basis. We can go half a year without any kind of an episode that looks like a fight or an abusive situation. So, the statistics really bear out a significant change in approach, and discipline is how we operationalize that.

Alterbaum: Our referral tool was revised a number of years ago, after we had consulted with a number of gurus from outside of our own school community, to include those things that we may be able to track to

find patterns on, so that when a teacher fills out a referral, it gets logged into our system. We look for the number of infractions in a particular area. For example, last month we noticed a spike in students who were being defiant to teachers, and that raised a red flag about why students all of a sudden were becoming more defiant.

Conklin: So as Alan and his discipline committee analyzes the kinds of data that we're seeing in terms of spikes of behaviors or patterns, if we see a misuse of technology is cropping up in the ninth grade, well that's information that we then use with teachers in the classroom for instruction, at the library level, or the after-school support program level, as well as broad stroke in community meetings where we explicitly teach those expectations and proactively plan to make sure kids have the tools and are held accountable for following through.

Alterbaum: One of the best testaments is the number of students who come back after they've graduated to thank either one of us for what we try to do or what we accomplished while they were students here at Sleepy Hollow. I also have had the opportunity to stay in touch with a good number of the students after graduation and watch them become adults and become proud of the way they have turned their lives around as a result of what we tried to do with them at Sleepy.