

Charles County School News Briefs

Board of Education of Charles County

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Schools honored for success in behavioral program success

At J.C. Parks Elementary School, positive, polite and prepared students equal Parks pride. J.C. Parks is a place where they expect the positive.

Students are taught to respect themselves, respect their environment and respect others at Daniel of St. Thomas Jenifer Elementary School. Teachers teach what is expected and model what respect is.

And, at John Hanson Middle School, they've named the Patriot mascot MOE after the school's motto: Have respect for MOE – myself, others and the environment.

This emphasis on respect, which is part of the Maryland Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) program, helps schools create better school climates, spend less time on discipline and more time on teaching and learning. Parks, Jenifer and Hanson, along with Malcolm, T.C. Martin and Eva Turner elementary schools, were recently honored as Maryland PBIS Exemplar Schools.

There are 15 Charles County schools, 11 elementary and four middle schools, involved in the voluntary PBIS program that focuses on teaching appropriate behavior. PBIS is a schoolwide system to support students and catch them being good. According to the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), PBIS is the systematic organization of school environments and routines so educators have increased capacity to adopt, use and sustain effective behavioral practices and processes for all students.

While schools have nine critical elements that they incorporate into their program, each PBIS program is unique. Hanson uses MOE money as an incentive; students at Jenifer receive "I Care Coupons" and Parks students' work for the right to attend quarterly Horseshoe events like a year-end prom.

"Good behavior creates an environment where good teaching can occur," said Milt McKenna, educational specialist for the MSDE.

"Data shows there is a cost benefit when office referrals are reduced," said McKenna. "The savings is in instructional time recovered and administrator time that can be reinvested in other areas," he added.

Administrators at Parks, Jenifer and Hanson say the program works and they have the data to support their claims. Thadine Wright, vice principal at J.C. Parks, said since 1999 when the school volunteered for the program, they have seen a 46 percent reduction in office referrals for poor behavior.

Wright said the amount of administrative time saved has allowed the principal and vice principals to create a third-grade math support group as well as provide time to mentor students.

Susie Fowler, principal at Jenifer, said the program has produced significant changes in the school climate. She said they have seen a 25 percent reduction in office referrals and, “We spend a lot less time on discipline and get fewer complaints from parents about teachers.”

Stephanie Wesolowski, principal at Hanson, can tell to the minute how much time has been saved for instruction and for administrators. She uses the data to show staff and parents the positive impact of the PBIS efforts at Hanson.

Director of Student Services Keith Grier said the next step for Charles County is to develop a specific PBIS program for the high schools. “PBIS has reduced staff turnover, dramatically reduced office referrals, provided measurably more time spent on academics and less time spent on discipline,” Grier said.

The PBIS program is supported and evaluated by the Maryland State Department of Education, Johns Hopkins University and Sheppard Pratt.

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