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Greatness Restored: The Development of an Alternative to Suspension Program

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GREATNESS RESTORED: THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN ALTERNATIVE TO

SUSPENSION PROGRAM

by

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SYNTHESIS*

MASTER OF ARTS

CRITICAL AND CREATIVE THINKING

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* The Synthesis can take a variety of forms, from a position paper to curriculum or professional development workshop to an original contribution in the creative arts or writing. The expectation is that students use their Synthesis to show how they have integrated knowledge, tools, experience, and support gained in the program so as to prepare themselves to be constructive, reflective agents of change in work, education, social movements, science, creative arts, or other endeavors.

ABSTRACT

I have been fortunate enough to work with at-risk children within the youth services and education fields for over 20 years now and through this experience I have learned much about the successes and difficulties that these young people face as they navigate life and work their way toward adulthood. An at-risk youth is a child who, because of various life circumstances, is less likely to transition successfully into adulthood. This success could include in the academic realm, job readiness as well as the ability to become financially independent as an adult. In working directly with these students and their families I have seen firsthand just how detrimental the use of exclusionary discipline by schools can be for them. I will outline the development of a sustainable programmatic alternative to exclusionary discipline within this synthesis integrating my own professional and personal experiences with the foundation knowledge of critical and creative thinking I have gained through my participation in the Critical and Creative Thinking (CCT) program. I also describe how my UMASS Boston journey has informed and impacted my thinking in regards to this topic. The goal is for my program to offer schools and administrators an alternative to suspension that simultaneously holds students accountable for their choices and actions without jeopardizing their chances for a successful present and future.

Introduction

For some problems in life we, as humans, really need to channel our creative inner selves in search of solutions. By creative inner selves I mean that limitless place we all have within ourselves which allows us to see life from different and imaginative angles. I've always believed

this. But it wasn't until I came into the CCT program at UMASS Boston that I realized that there were many creative and critical thinking avenues within myself which I hadn't explored yet. This was an epiphany that carried with it both bitter and sweet feelings I was forced to acknowledge. On the one hand I was excited to see that there lay before me a wonderful growth and evolution process out of which I could choose to deepen my understanding of problem-solving processes using a more open-minded and expansive compass. On the other hand, I had to admit to myself that the scope within which I'd been viewing both my professional and personal lives had been quite limited and obtuse in the time leading up to my Umass Boston experience. I have chosen to focus on the positive, which isn't always a natural inclination for me, and re-direct both my reflective practices as well as my mind frame moving forward and choose gratitude for the new lens with which I now view and approach life.

I knew from a very young age that I was going to be working with young people in some form or capacity in my career as an adult. I began working at a Counselor in Training (CIT) a summer camps when I was 13 years old and truly valued the feelings I got from being a leader and role model to younger children. This passion is what led me to become a child and youth service worker early on in my career. As an adult I immediately found myself drawn to young people who didn't quite fit the mold in regards to norms and rule following. This is probably

because of my own experience as a "boundary pusher" as a pre-teen and teen myself. Perhaps a capacity for empathy was born from my own experiences as a child. But for whatever reason I

knew early on in my career I wanted to work with "at-risk" children and those who found themselves on the fringe of societal and school-based norms. It was this desire that led me to the position I have found myself in for the past 19 years which is that of a Behavior Specialist and Intensive Outreach Worker for a public-school system in Connecticut.

The population that has been my primary focus is that of middle and high school aged students, with the majority of my work being done in the middle school level. I have had the good fortune to work with some of the most amazing students and families in my time with the district and I could easily fill up a novel, or profile some of these stories as case histories, with both proud stories of successes and happy endings as well as sad and frustrating outcomes to boot. Part of this work is knowing that the success and outcome of a young person's educational and life experience is dependent upon far more factors than just one positive and concerned adult influence in their lives. As the saying goes, "it takes a village to raise a child." I can tell you from firsthand experience that this is true. And I think that when I began to become aware of this truth is the same time I began to identify the many factors that influence the educational experience of students and their families. Again, to write about those varying factors would be a project in and of itself, so for the purpose of this paper I will simply point out that the variables that make up the proverbial onion of a young person's experience in early life are many including intelligence,

motivation, self-concept, emotions, family and home environment, socio-economic situation, community and peer groups, etc. My hope is to, for this project, focus on one variable that I see as an obstacle to success for many at-risk students I have worked with over the years and that is the use of exclusionary discipline by administrators and superintendents as an outcome to behavior that does not meet the specified expectations of a school or district.

Let me be clear here, suspending students has negative consequences on a their educational, and overall life, experience both in the short-term and long-term. Let me also state that suspension does not deter recidivism or repeated instances of specified behaviors of concern.

I am by no means saying that a young person should not be held accountable for their actions and behaviors, in fact, I am a firm believer in instilling the awareness of natural life consequences to actions in young people. What I am saying is that there is a way to simultaneously hold students accountable for their choices in life without jeopardizing their chances for a successful present and future. Within this paper I will be outlining the logistical development and implementation of an Alternative to Suspension Program that, if utilized and managed correctly by a board of education, could achieve just that.

Reflecting on my work with Bella

I began working with Bella and her family when she transferred to the school in which I work approximately half way through her sixth-grade year. Her move to my school brought the tally of the total school locations she had attended to seven by the time she was 11 years old. It was clear to see after speaking with Bella on only a few occasions that she was a smart, capable and insightful young person. It also became clear to me rather quickly that Bella exhibited

several behaviors of concern for which it would be my role to help her improve upon. Within two weeks she was assigned to my official caseload which meant I would be spending a substantial amount of time each day with Bella attempting to help her make the necessary growth and changes needed for her to achieve and work to her potential.

I often choose not to review a new student's file when they transfer to my school unless they are identified as a student I will be working with directly. I do this because I prefer to create

my own opinion of new students without the influence of past behavior or concerns consciously or subconsciously clouding my lens (unless of course there is a concern surrounding safety either physically or emotionally). And this was how I chose to approach Bella. I certainly overheard a few co-workers stating that they had heard this or that about Bella based on feedback from peers at another school in our district (Bella had spent the previous four months at a middle school within the same district as the school I work). But I did my best to filter these overheard comments out of the opinion I was forming of Bella as I got to know her in the halls and classrooms of our school.

Once Bella was assigned to my caseload by one of the administrators in my building it became necessary for me to review her past educational files in order to decide how to proceed in the development and implementation of her Student Success Plan (SSP). I was not at all surprised to see that between the grades of fourth through her current grade of sixth Bella had been in or out of school suspended on fourteen separate occasions with a total of 41 days in which suspension was the disciplinary outcome of her behavior. That's 41 days in which this student was excluded from the traditional education process involving peers and certified teachers in the past two and a half years. I was terribly saddened when I read this but as I stated earlier I wasn't surprised in the least. It has become very common, in my experience working in the public-school setting, for administrators to use suspension as a disciplinary option in reaction to behaviors and situations in which there is no involvement of drugs, weapons, violence or threats of violence. And this was the case for Bella. Of the fourteen suspension occasions in her file only 2 involved threats or violence and both were documented as being superficial and not of significant concern in their description. I would like to take a moment here to offer some

historical context and background to the use of exclusionary discipline in the public school setting here so as to offer a clearer view of how we have arrived at this point.

Background Context

Exclusionary discipline refers to interventions that remove students from their regular learning environment as a form of punishment. This may include in-school suspension (ISS), out-of-school suspension (OSS), expulsion and school-based arrests. Other more informal forms of exclusion from the classroom may also be utilized based on teacher and administrator discretion. Students may be observed sitting in hallways, offices or other settings outside of their typical classroom. While these examples do not always get recorded as a suspension, students are missing out on valuable class instruction. Disciplinary school exclusion was created to discourage students from engaging in violent or drug related behavior in an effort to keep school safe (Allman & Slate, 2011). It has been argued that students who are already unmotivated to attend school find exclusion to be reinforcing and creates the probability that students will be home or in the community unsupervised (Welsh and Little, 2018). Many studies report that there is no evidence of school exclusion deterring future behavior infractions (Skiba & Losen, 2016).

Disciplinary exclusion has evolved from a punishment utilized with discretion and reserved for the most severe violations to a more common, and sometimes preferred, punitive approach (Allman & Slate, 2011). It is theorized that the arrival of zero tolerance policies in the 1980's influenced this shift to a more casual use of suspension and expulsion (Allman & Slate, 2011). Zero tolerance policies were created to target drug use on school property and address violent behavior. In cases where students engaged in these forms of acts, the use of suspension

and expulsion was enforced. It is also argued that the 1994-gun free act attributed to the acceleration of the use of exclusionary discipline practices in the U.S. as it was created with the intent to send a forceful message that school violence would not be accepted (Skiba & Losen, 2016). Allman & Slate (2011) bring up the relevance of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) as another influencer of continued use of school removal (Allman & Slate, 2011). With the passing of NCLB, schools were required to demonstrate improved academic outcomes (specifically in regards to students of color) to counteract the achievement gap (Cregor &Hewitt, 2011). This led to a more frivolous use of suspension or expulsion before standardized tests to remove underperforming students that could risk academic outcomes (Allman & Slate, 2011; Hewitt, 2011). These policies-NCLB, zero tolerance, 1994 gun free act- began to loosen the criteria for receiving exclusionary consequences. School districts began including minor, non-violent behaviors under zero-tolerance policies such as insubordination, disruption and noncompliance (Skiba et al., 2014). Rather than attending to the developmental needs and learning experiences of developing youth, the answer to address misbehavior has been to exclude youth from their peers and their education.

There are many documented negative impacts of school exclusion. School exclusion utilized as a form of discipline has been found to be detrimental to the social, academic and behavioral development of children and adolescents (Lacoe & Steinberg, 2018). And although students commonly receive external suspensions as a way to modify behavior, there is no research to prove that suspensions work or that they modify inappropriate behavior (Fenning et al., 2012). What's even more concerning is that the students who need to be in school the most in

order to help decrease the achievement gap are often the students who are suspended more frequently, only serving to further broaden that disparities in educational outcomes.

One of the most concerning documented outcomes of repeated suspension is student drop out. Dropping out refers to leaving high school for practical reasons, necessities, inability, apathy, or disillusionment with the system from which the individual in question leaves (Losen, 2011). Removing students from the classroom reduces the amount of instruction they receive and is associated with lower educational outcomes, including the risk of dropping out (Losen, 2011). Dropping out of school causes short and long-term effects. Dropping out of high school is associated with numerous detrimental consequences, including low wages, unemployment, incarceration, and poverty (Wilson et al., 2011). And this is only becoming more evident as the trend of economies around the world keeps moving us toward a global marketplace (Wilson et al., 2011). Education, now more than ever, has critical importance as a primary factor in allowing young adults to enter the workforce and advance economically, as well as to share in the social, health, and other benefits associated with education and productive careers (Wilson et al., 2011). And in addition to this, the National Dropout Prevention Center reports that school dropouts in the United States earn an average of $9,245 a year less than those who complete high school, have unemployment rates almost 13 percentage points higher than high school graduates, are disproportionately represented in prison populations, are more likely to become teen parents (2009).

Back to Bella: Isn't there any other option other than suspending her?

It wasn't long, less than five weeks actually, before Bella was involved in her first incident resulting in suspension at my school. The incident was documented in our data tracking

system, PowerSchool, as "repeated disrespect toward adults" and resulted in a two day out of

school suspension ruling by the administrator who handled the incident. I was asked to meet with

Bella and her father and grandmother, who are her primary caregivers, and process the situations

leading to the suspension and create a re-entry plan in which the student would require either her

father or grandmother to bring her to the school building on the day of her slated return so that

her mood and ability to "maintain a respectful attitude and tone with staff" could be evaluated

followed by the signing of a behavior contract by myself, Bella and an adult caregiver. This is

where I heard the same concerns and pleas that I had heard from parents and guardians countless

times in the past. "I can't afford to miss any more time at work." "Suspensions are just like

vacation days for her at this point." "How is it in her best interest to keep her away from learning

in school?" "Isn't there any other option other than suspending her?" "This type of discipline

clearly isn't changing her behavior, she needs more help not more time away from school."

Every time I have had to take part in a conversation like this my heart breaks for the

family. Everything Bella's grandmother and father stated to me rang true. They were right.

Suspensions were not changing Bella's behavior, Bella was beginning to enjoy, and possibly

working toward purposely, the idea of suspension days, and it was not in her best interest as a

student to be away and excluded from the classroom. I can say that myself, Bella's caregivers,

the administration, and teachers did all have the same goal and hope when we boiled down the

conundrum of these circumstances, and that was for Bella's school performance and behavior to

improve. And if all the adults in the equation were being honest I am willing to bet that we

would all agree that suspending Bella was not the solution to the problem. But if not that, then

what? Perhaps if within the district I work we had an alternative to suspension program where

students like Bella could go on days in which they were suspended from school we would finally have that answer we are all so desperately looking for. Well, that's what this paper is about. But what exactly would this program look like and how would it work? These are the questions I set out to answer in the following sections.

The First Alternative to Suspension Program (ASP): Common Themes and Factors that I have Considered in Developing an ASP Model

In my research I was able to trace the idea of developing and implementing an alternative to suspension program as far back as 1977 (it's quite possible many progressive and forward-thinking educators were considering and even developing similar models much earlier than this date). In the programs I researched and reviewed I saw several common themes and factors that I have considered in developing my ASP model. It was through my participation in the CCT Action Research for Educational, Professional & Personal Change and Processes of Research and Engagement classes that I became well acquainted with the idea of seeking out and accessing work and information done previously by others within the field of interest in regards to this topic. I feel much more confident in my ability to learn from other researchers as well as collecting and analyzing data and outcomes in my own efforts of creating a unique product. This is yet another area where I feel I have professionally evolved since entering the Critical and Creative Thinking Program.

One document which focused on the description and analysis of an ASP was based on a program implemented within the middle school population in Salina, Kansas in 1979. What first drew me to this article was the stated realization that suspension incidents and cases often lead to

families, students and schools becoming further alienated from one another as a result of the suspension action (Dilling, 1979). This is a phenomenon I have repeatedly encountered in my career as well. When a child is having repeated behavioral concerns at school this generally results in an increased amount of communication home by teachers and administrators. While this communication is necessary, and certainly can be beneficial, it can create a divide and an animosity between parents and school personnel. I have spoken with parents who have stated to me that this form of communication can cause them to feel "blamed" for their child's behavior or criticized for their performance as a parent. Disciplinary action resulting in an exclusionary outcome such as suspension often does serve to widen that already present gap. An essential part of an effective ASP will be the intentional bridging of that gap on the part of ASP staff.

I also was drawn to the outlined program goals of the Salina program. I believe that for any ASP to be effective it needs to be clear in stating what the intended and hoped for outcome will be for students and families. In Salina the program narrowed down their view of expected outcomes to aiming at improving academic productivity (and attendance when case appropriate) of student participants, pulling family, student and school together (I plan on adding a community-based resource component to this sentiment as well), and a renewed sense of belonging within the academic system of student and parents (Dilling, 1979). One aspect of programming that the Salina program did not seem to integrate or mention is Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) components. Given that the SEL revolution is relatively new to the educational system it would make sense that a program created in 1979 would not have had this as part of its makeup. In a later section of this paper I will be dedicating time and space to my belief in the importance of SEL in public education and why it would be a cornerstone of my ASP.

Historical Operating Procedures, Philosophy, and Support Systems of an ASP

In this document another early incarnation of an ASP is outlined and analyzed, this one taking place in the middle school population of the public-school system in the city of Forest City, Ak in the 1977-1978 school year. This paper interested me because part of its stated abstract focus was the operating procedures, philosophy, and support systems of the ASP (Kennedy, 1986). This program differed from the Salina program in that it had a very clearly stated component of involvement of community organizations which serve local youth (Kennedy, 1986). The value of collaboration between community youth serving organizations, families and schools can't possibly be overstated. This speaks to the sustainable and holistic nature of the program I am developing for this project. It was while participating in the CCT Dialogue Processes and Collaboration and Organizational change classes that my understanding of just how important this facet of my ASP would end up being and what an important role it would play.

Right off the bat this paper spoke to one of my biggest concerns regarding the use of exclusionary discipline. "suspension quite often meant that the student would be turned loose, without supervision, on the community. For some that meant a vacation away from school, while for others it meant an opportunity for mischief, or worse, crime" (Kennedy 1986). This statement rings quite true to me and parallels my experience of how the young people I have worked with view suspension. I have had many candid conversations with students I have worked with directly in regards to the structure of their time during suspension. The majority have told me that they feel free to sleep in late, have very little to no supervision from a parental figure, and basically enjoy themselves for however many days they have been assigned their suspension. In

follow up conversations with parents and guardians about this I am often met with a very saddening tale of inabilities to miss out on paid work opportunities or an inability to control what their child does and how they behave at home. These facts speak to the importance of a structured and supervised alternate to traditional school suspension. It also speaks to why connecting parents with community resources such as counseling, youth services and youth group programming is so important for the further growth and evolution as the student as a whole child.

Another aspect of this paper which was useful to me was its outline of staffing and location of their program. In developing my program, I will be looking very keenly at the staffing needs as well as the physical placement of the program within district. In its first-year phase of programming their staffing was comprised of one head teacher (who also served as a program administrator of sorts) and one teacher's aide. The following year a full-time social worker was brought on as well. This second-year staffing make-up was very much in line with what I had in mind for my program. The certified teacher will obviously be the lead on academic curriculum with the paraprofessional teacher's aide providing addition individualized support to students as needed. The social worker would take the lead as far as counseling and SEL individual and group-based work. The diverse make up and skill set of the team will be absolutely vital to the success of the program. In a perfect world where finances were of no concern an additional staff member or two would be ideal. But I want my proposed program to be realistic in nature as I do plan on presenting it to the superintendent of the district where I work and want to offer a viable solution once I identify the problem of exclusionary discipline within our schools. It is easy for a person to speak of all the problems or things wrong within their workplace, but it is another thing entirely to follow that talk up with proposed solutions.

The final piece of this document which was quite enlightening for me was its outline of the day to day logistical scheduling and functioning of the program. I believe structure and routine is vital for the success of young people in a school setting in general, and I believe even more so in a program such as the one I am developing. The author titled this section "operating procedure" and I felt that wording was appropriate given that much of the success of any program like this will rely on an orderly and specific operation of daily scheduling and events.

Many of the students who are suspended, and therefore referred to an ASP, will be lacking some level of structure in their lives both at school and home. It is important that the expectations and procedures of the daily functioning are very clear to both the student and the family. I want a day in my program to almost mirror a day within the school building in that there are specific time blocks set aside for academic learning, SEL learning, counseling, lunch and sensory breaks. This will limit any possible room for misunderstandings on the students end as far as what is expected of them throughout the course of their day at the ASP.

Incorporating the Five Core Elements of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) into an ASP

Kids do well if they can. I know that sounds like a significantly boiled down, and possibly overly simplified, statement. But it's true. And for many suspended students one of the biggest reasons they are having difficulty meeting the behavioral norms and expectations of their buildings is that they lack important skills (Greene, 2009). This is why the SEL component of my ASP is so strongly weighted. Young people with challenging behavior are having difficulty mastering the skills required for becoming proficient in handling life's social and emotional challenges (Greene, 2009). As someone with an educational and experiential background, I feel

the SEL learning is as important, and for some students even more important, than the traditional academic curriculum that is focused on so prominently in public schools across the country.

The term Social and Emotional Learning is over 20 years old so by no means is this a new aim or purpose. It's that only recently have we seen a rapid surge in interest among educators and policymakers (Jones & Doolittle, 2017). It was approximately seven years ago that the importance of SEL was brought to the forefront within the school district I work. With a changing of the guard within the superintendent's office I have noticed a sincere effort to incorporate this learning into the day to day functioning of my school. The problem is that with so much riding on outcomes of testing scores and grades within the traditional academic realm we still fall far short on the amount of time we need to dedicate to SEL. In my building we practice a 5-minute feelings identification process each day and in each classroom. While this is a wonderful addition to our school day routine it is a far cry from what is needed for the students who most often end up incurring disciplinary action. My ASP would offer that opportunity to reinforce in these young people the skills they so desperately lack and need.

At its core, SEL is speaking to a child's ability to learn about and manage their own emotions and interactions in ways that are of benefit to themselves and others (Jones & Doolittle, 2017). These are the skills that, when built foundationally in young people, will help them succeed in school, the workplace, relationships and as citizens of their community (Jones & Doolittle, 2017). For some of these students who will be accessing the ASP, this may be their only exposure to the skills we are speaking about. In a perfect world, children would be learning these skills at home and in their neighborhoods but the truth of the matter is that that just isn't the

case for some young people. This is why it is so important for school districts to become leaders in the institution of SEL curriculum in their buildings.

The five core competencies of SEL include the topics of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making skills. Within the sub context of each pillar of learning lies a seemingly endless possibility of lessons and skill building activities. Given that SEL is built on a foundation of five core competencies it makes it very easy to offer one topic for each weekday within the frame of my ASP. And given that there is so many possible lessons and activities, if a student was to participate in the program more than once it can be ensured they won't have to experience the same lesson twice. The Social Worker within the ASP would be the lead on facilitating and proctoring the SEL lessons.

GRASP

Greatness **R**estored: **A**lternative to **S**uspension **P**rogram

Statement of Purpose

GRASP is an alternative to suspension program designed to remove students with disciplinary referrals from the classroom for a period of time designated by their building administrator, while still allowing students to attend school, maintain their academic progress and learn the skills needed to better manage their behavior moving forward. At GRASP we strive to help create a future of wellness, resilience, and productivity for young people. While working at GRASP every student will be seen, heard, valued, supported, and provided with a safe and supportive space to maintain the academic pace of their peers while also learning tools to better handle the challenges they face when re-entering the classroom.

Program Components

GRASP focuses on raising and restoring a student's responsibility and internal motivation as learners and school citizens to help them achieve all of their academic and behavioral goals. The main components are described in further detail below. These include program expectations / rules, positive educational environment and connections, negative consequences to choices and actions, daily scheduling, and re-entry planning. Students, while in attendance at GRASP, will be expected to follow our very clearly defined behavior expectations and have the opportunity to earn select privileges as a positive outcome to behaviors which fall in line with our prescribed expectations.

Program Expectations / Rules

At GRASP we follow the SHARP model for the behavior expectations of our students. While in attendance at our program we expect students to behave in a way that is Safe, Honest, Always

Respectful, Responsible, and Productive. These expectations will be clearly operationally defined for students and parents/guardians below, explicitly taught by all staff at GRASP, discussed on a regular basis throughout each day, and clearly posted and identifiable throughout the programs' classrooms.

GRASP Students are *SHARP*:

Expectation 1: Safe:

- Keep hands, feet, objects to self (use property the correct way/keep personal space)

- Manage my emotions and behaviors

- See how my actions affect others around me

Expectation 2: Honest

- Tell the truth

- Take ownership for words, choices, and actions

Expectation 3: Always Respectful

- Appropriate tone/volume of voice

- Polite language to peers and adults

- Cooperate and take the perspective of others

- Recognize the feelings and point of view of others

- Communicate effectively with others

- Value similarities and differences in others

- Prevent and resolve problems with others

Expectation 4: Responsible:

- Follow directions

- Be prepared for learning

- Keep the program and classrooms clean

Expectation 5: Productive:

- Complete your work to the BEST of your ability all the time

- Active listening (eyes, ears, body)

- Be organized and prepared

this program can be individualized at any time and for any student based on the needs deemed appropriate by referring school and / or GRASP staff

Fostering a Positive Program Environment

It is important to remember that although we may only interact with students on a very short-term and temporary basis, it is still imperative that we model healthy adult / child interactions and remain committed to reinforcing and motivating positive student performance.

General: general ways to keep the GRASP environment reinforcing and motivating

Positive educational experiences are available to all students on a daily basis at GRASP, regardless of the length of their imposed time with us and away from their traditional school building. Positive interactions should outweigh negative or redirected interactions at a 5:1 ratio. Positive praise is given for instances of positive behavior, work completion or other desirable behavior throughout the day. It is imperative that GRASP staff take time to build rapport with students coming into the program. Some examples of this include:

- Greeting students and engaging in non-contingent conversations about their day, life interests, etc.

- Words of acknowledgement for meeting expectations

- Words of encouragement

- Opportunities to complete jobs assisting school staff

- Positive recognition in peer milieu setting

Individual based: (based on work performance and adherence to SHARP expectations)

- Daily Breaks: students are able to earn sensory breaks inside the classroom throughout the day. Teachers use discretion based on a combination of behavior and work habits throughout the day. Computers or other quiet activities are available during a break time a total of once per day.

- Students also have the opportunity to earn bonus points for working through issues that may arise and for getting back on track if there was an issue that caused a disruption in the learning process. Bonus points may be used to earn additional sensory break time.

Program Wide: The classroom as a whole has the chance to earn

- "Positivity that Pops": ongoing classroom wide reinforcement system that allows the whole class throughout the course of a school day to earn incentives just as a board game or additional classroom wide sensory breaks. At the GRASP staff discretion, students earn a "piece" of figurative popcorn for compliments given to peers or adults, sustained adherence to the SHARP expectations, successfully navigating a difficult classroom situation, etc. Once the class as a whole earns 10 pieces of popcorn, the classroom is able to decide on an earned incentive outcome.

Negative Consequences

*Verbal consequences are given in a firm, but neutral tone, in close proximity to the student, and in a consistent manner so that expectations do not change.

1st time: Cue/Redirection – Expectations will be clearly stated.

- **Ex**. "The current direction is to complete your assignment quietly at your desk"

- o   Staff can remind student of how the expected direction can be carried in a timely and appropriate manner.

- o   Give 1-2 minutes of response time, allowing the student the chance to make a

- o   positive choice and / or change his or her behavior, if not:

- **2nd time**: Effective Questioning: Check for Understanding of what level students believe they are behaving at. Use an open-ended approach to assess the level to which the student is lacking understanding of what is expected of them vs. purposefully presenting as oppositional or defiant.

  - o   **Ex**. "Can you explain to me what your direction is right now and if your choices are in line with that direction? or "What do you need to do right now to meet your "SHARP" expectations?"

  - o   Give 1-2 minutes of response time, allowing the student the chance to change his or her behavior.

- **3rd time**: If the student continues to engage in negative or oppositional behavior, remind them of what the next step and course of action will have to be by the GRASP staff. Clearly indicate to the student once again what is expected of them and use an encouraging phrase to push them toward a SHARP choice.

- **Unsafe behaviors/continued, noncompliance:** use the following definitions and criteria to help determine the level of consequences and when a student is not responding to redirection.

  - Unsafe behavior: to determine if another behavior is unsafe:

    - o   Is student's safety at risk?

    - o   Is the behavior causing other's safety to be at risk?

- o   Is the situation an emergency?

- Aggressive Physical Contact is defined as: Any instance physical contact is made with another individual; may include but not limited to hitting, pushing, punching, kicking, making forceful contact with item or throwing item at another person.

- At this point a student may be offered a "calm down" area within the classroom to assess their current choices. Student will be joined by a staff member when deemed appropriate to individually counsel and guide student toward a positive outcome.

- If the student is unwilling to use the calm down area or is unwilling to work with staff to get back on a positive, expectation meeting behavior track then student will be reminded that a parent / guardian will be notified and possibly to pick them up from the program for that day.

Behavioral Level descriptions and staff response protocol:

Level:	Mild:	Moderate:	Severe:
Description:	-Redirectable with verbal prompts -instance ends after 2-3 minutes -property misuse-minor disruptions-tapping, making loud noises -disruptive under 2-3 mins	-refusal to comply for more than 10 minutes -Unable to redirect to task at hand within 10 minutes -disruptive behavior for more than 10 mins -property misuse: throwing items -teasing, instigating, being rude, inappropriate tone, sarcasm, name calling	-any forms of aggressive physical contact to self or others -property misuse that is aggressive -swearing at others, threatening others -continuous statements involving self-harm, swearing that continue for more than 5 minutes -unsafe behavior
Response:	Handle in class, follow protocol in GRASP program handbook	Handle in class, follow protocol in GRASP program handbook, calm down area in class -if removed from classroom setting with have individual conference with staff.,	Automatic dismissal from GRASP program via parent/guardian notification. Result will be reported to referring school administration.
Automatic GRASP dismissal: Theft, harassment, drugs/alcohol/tobacco use, weapons, vandalism, unsafe behavior			

Daily Schedule

- 8:30 – 9:00: Welcome, Breakfast, Daily community meeting, Outline of daily program expectations, SEL check-in / welcoming activity.

- 9:00 – 9:45: SEL activity

  Monday: Self-awareness

  Tuesday: Social Awareness

  Wednesday: Responsible Decision Making

  Thursday: Self-Management & Emotional Regulation

  Friday: Relationship & Social Skills

- 9:45 – 10:30: Mathematics

- 10:30 – 11:15: Social Studies

- 11:15 – 11:45: Lunch

- 11:45 – 12:30: Science

- 12:30 – 1:15: Language Arts

- 1:15 – 1:45: Check-out activity, Exit Survey, Program Exit Discussion / Reflection for Student's Serving Final Day at GRASP

- 1:45 – 2:00 Dismissal, Parent Check-in

Re-Entry Plan

On a student's last day at GRASP, they will participate in a discussion and reflection with GRASP staff focusing on their:

- Review of learned skills to be used in the future to avoid suspension in the future.

- Identification of supports in and out of school (referrals to community-based agencies where deemed appropriate by GRASP staff / parents).

- Suggestions on ways their school can support them moving forward.

GRASP staff will, separate from students and families, complete:

- Summary of student engagement and performance at GRASP and send copies to referring school / administrator and parents.

- Identify any community referrals for services that were recommended to the family and forward information to referring school / administrators.

- Schedule any required follow up meetings with referring school and parents.

PLEASE READ, SIGN, AND RETURN PAGE

GRASP PROGRAM

I have read the attached program description. My signature below indicates that I have read and understood the program components and information presented in the description regarding the GRASP program.

_____   _____

Parent Signature   **Date**

_____   _____

Student Signature   **Date**

- If there are any questions regarding the content of the program please call or email:

GRASP Coordinator: **Matthew Jose** @ MatthewJose@bristolk12.org

(860) 584-7822

KEEP THIS COPY FOR YOUR RECORDS

I have read the attached program description. My signature below indicates that I have read and understood the program components and information presented in the description regarding the GRASP program.

_____   _____

Parent Signature   **Date**

_____   _____

Student Signature   **Date**

- If there are any questions regarding the content of the program please call or email:

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GRASP Coordinator: **Matthew Jose** @ MatthewJose@bristolk12.org

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