

News Release

Edgewood Elementary Progresses by Staying Positive

The Edgewood staff was named a school of merit by the Wisconsin PBIS Network for its implementation of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports – From Greenfield Patch. Article by David Cotey

When you walk into Edgewood Elementary School next fall, you're likely to hear another language being spoken by students, teachers and principal Sue Sterner.

No, not Spanish or German, but rather the language of PBIS, or Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports, a Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction-funded initiative aimed at improving student behaviors and learning atmospheres.

"We have a voice level system. You can walk into any room, and any teacher can say, 'Can you put your voices at zero and (the students) all go silent,'" Edgewood kindergarten teacher Sarah Jegier said. "Anyone in the building can use the language and they know what to do."

Said Sterner: "If you say, 'Give me five,' they all know to put their hand up, stop talking and turn to face the speaker."

Change in the school culture

PBIS is much more than just a special language the dozens of staff members and hundreds of students at Edgewood learned during the 2011-12 school year, and it's even more than just a behavioral program, as its name suggests.

It's become a way of life at Edgewood that revolves around three Rs: being respectful, responsible and ready.

"It's a change in the school culture," Sterner said. "It involves the lunchroom people, the custodian, all 44 people that work here. Everybody's on board and everybody's involved."

PBIS promotes positive behaviors students engage in, and hoping those behaviors are repeated, or better yet, become contagious. And when they are repeated or spread, students theoretically spend less time out of class and more in class learning.

Students are rewarded for good behavior with a ticket that could result in classroom prizes, which are awarded at bi-weekly school assemblies that start and end with school-wide chants. Sandwiched between are teacher-led behavior reinforcement demonstrations.

Earlier this month, Edgewood was recognized by the Wisconsin PBIS Network as one of 114 schools of merit statewide for its implementation of PBIS, which was used in approximately 40 percent of Wisconsin schools in 2011-12.

The program has been implemented at all district schools, but Edgewood is the furthest along, according to Sterner, largely because of team leaders Jegier and guidance counselor Jackie Michlig, and the rest of the 12-member team that spent several hours last summer creating a system that would work at their school.

Three tiers for different students

Edgewood teachers and administrators implemented Tier 1 of PBIS last year, a universal tier meant to get all students and teachers on board in a basic way that can impact all students. Edgewood will implement Tier 2 next fall, giving behavior-challenged students more structured attention. Tier 3, the last of the program, is designed to be even more specific attention.

“It’s all about collecting data,” Sterner said. “I think what’s so great about it, if we try something and it’s not working, it’s not the kid. It’s our system of how we’re doing it. We need to find something else that’s working for that kid. What can we do as a system, a school?”

During the 2011-12 school year Edgewood used PBIS to manage a variety of common grade school woes, including issues of bad behavior on buses. The teachers and administration brought in busloads of students during the school day, went over the behavioral expectations of students and gave reward tickets to bus drivers to hand out to students who behaved well. Just like that, most issues vanished.

“And if kids were still having problems, we do something different for them, maybe an assigned seat toward the front,” Sterner said.

Jegier noticed her students were struggling with bathroom etiquette, like lining up quietly to use the restroom and behaving properly on their way to and from the restroom.

But after re-teaching the expectations and pointing out the positive behaviors she saw children participate in, she turned her students into model citizens, Sterner said.

Those are just two examples of teachers identifying problems through data collection, using the three Rs to address it, and then pointing out positive behaviors to fix it.

“You really have to tell (students) what they’re doing right,” Sterner said. “What people should realize, it’s not, ‘These are the rules, don’t cross them.’ We’re looking for what kids do right. When they get specific feedback about what they’re doing right, they’ll want to do it again, and it becomes part of what they do.”

Sterner said the implementation of PBIS at Edgewood has exceeded expectations. She said she’s received positive parent feedback, and the program has become a community-builder at the school.

Jegier called it a change in attitude.

“Adults in general are very good at finding the negative things that are happening, and it’s a shift to leaving the negative things alone, and instead talking and looking at the positives,” she said. “The kids see you talking about the positives; that’s what they’re going to want to do.”

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