Organizational Management: Deciding On Discipline

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Introduction

✳ Problem

 ✳ Management of student behavior at a rural southern high school has become difficult due to a high number of referrals and suspensions.

✳ Context

 ✳ This action research examined the organizational structures which contribute to misbehavior at a rural, predominately black, high school. The high school is in the second stage of school improvement and has struggled with student achievement and misbehavior. As a result, managing student behavior has become a problem to which many stakeholders respond with frustration or apathy. The assistant principal responsible for disciplinary issues has informed teachers that there is a backlog of students assigned to detention and has requested help in deciding what to do about the behavior problems at the school.

 ✳ The Owls, LLC consultant conducted a discipline audit in order to analyze the problem and found that there were ways to address the problem through more efficient organizational management.

Questions

✳ Why do students repeatedly engage in disruptive behavior?

✳ What organizational factors are contributing to this problem?

✳ What changes can be made to decrease the number of behavioral incidents?

✳ How can the school develop a discipline policy that will be supported by all stakeholders?

Relevant Research: Maslow

✳ Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

   ✳ Organized into five levels comprised of basic, psychological and self-fulfillment needs. (Poston, 2009)

   ✳ Demonstrates that successful schools will fulfill students' basic needs while promoting student achievement.

   ✳ Suggests that schools where students feel safe and loved will have less behavior problems and higher levels of student achievement.

Relevant Research: Kounin

✺ Wuest cites Kounin's research on preventative discipline:

  ✺ The "ripple effect" demonstrates that when teachers correct misbehaviors in one student, it positively affects the behavior of other students.

  ✺ "Withitness" describes a teacher's awareness of all aspects of the classroom at any given time.

  ✺ Effective teachers will have good multitasking abilities, transitions, management and student engagement.
  (Wuest, 1999)

Research Research: Dempsey

✳ Doris Dempsey (1996)

  ✳ Common Reasons for Misbehavior

    ✳ 1. Retaliation for perceived unfairness or mistreatment

    ✳ 2. Academic frustration can be caused by:

    ✳ Feelings of powerlessness, dislike for instructor, perceived weakness of the instructor, response to disorganized environment, response to unpleasant environment, or academic standards that are too low or insulting.

Research: Wohlstetter

✸Wohlstetter & Mohrman (1993)

  ✸ Districts need to design plans that transfer real authority to school sites and include control over information, knowledge and rewards.

  ✸ A strong central leader, like the principal, is key to successful management. An effective leader can set the school's vision, serve as an instructional leader, coordinate reform efforts and rally support for the school.

  ✸ Mini-enterprises in schools could be groups of students organized into "houses" or "cadres" and taught by teams of teachers, similar to school designs advocated by Theodore Sizer and Henry Levin...empowered to make decisions about resource allocation and is given incentives to optimize performance.

Participants

* 187 high school students who received in-school or out of school suspension as a consequence of behavior

  * Ages range from 15 to 19

* 39 teachers and staff who wrote referrals in response to student misbehavior

  * Average number of years teaching from 11-15

Materials

* Daily In School and Out of School suspension reports provided by assistant principal

* Google image of school layout

Procedure

* The daily suspension list was analyzed to determine:

    * The number of offenses each month

    * The most frequent offenses

    * The teachers with the highest number of referrals

    * The number of students with multiple suspensions

Procedure

✳ Incidents were plotted on a map of the school

✳ Graphs were created to represent collected data

Results
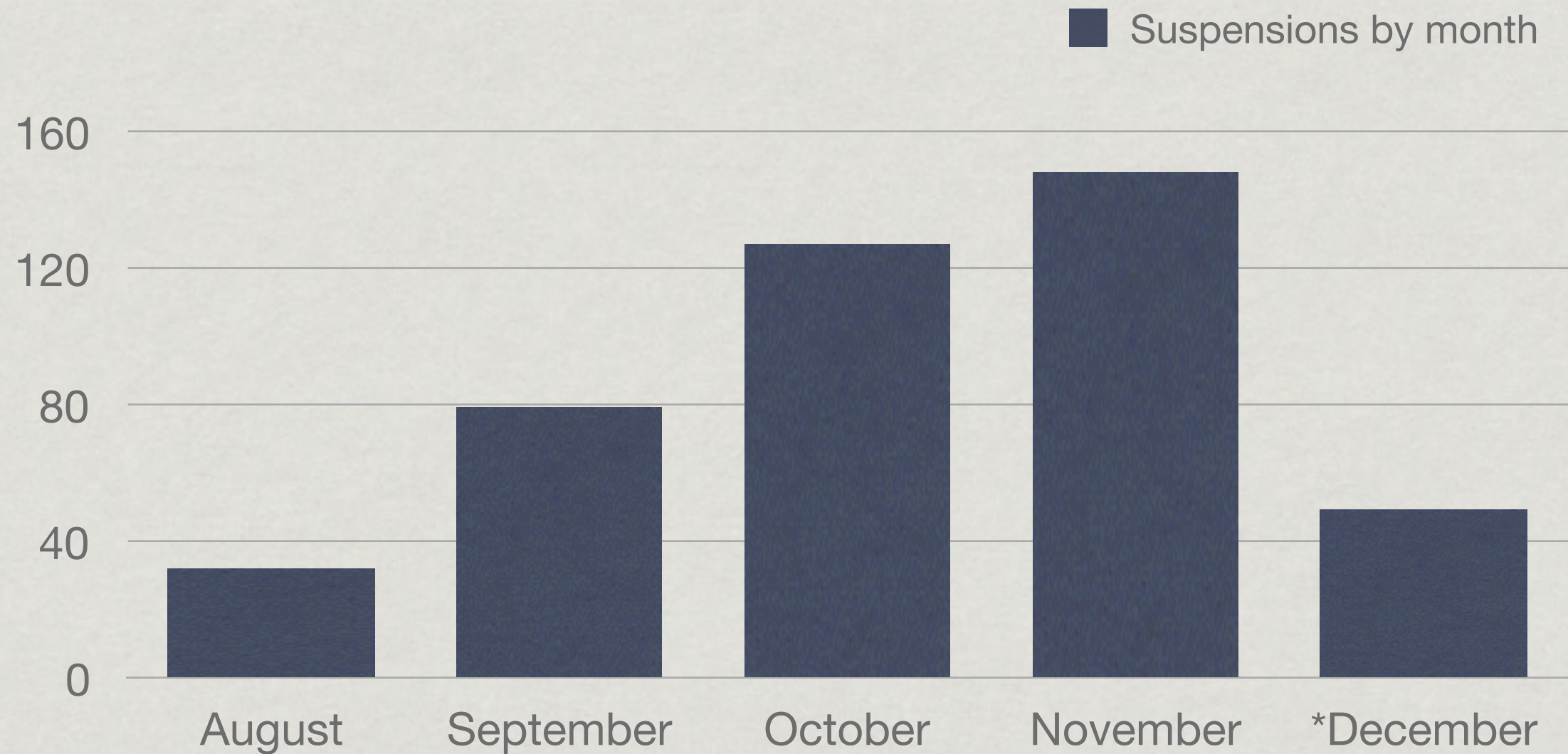
The number of suspensions has steadily increased during the first semester and is on track to exceed 150 during the month of December.
*December numbers reflect the first four days of December only.
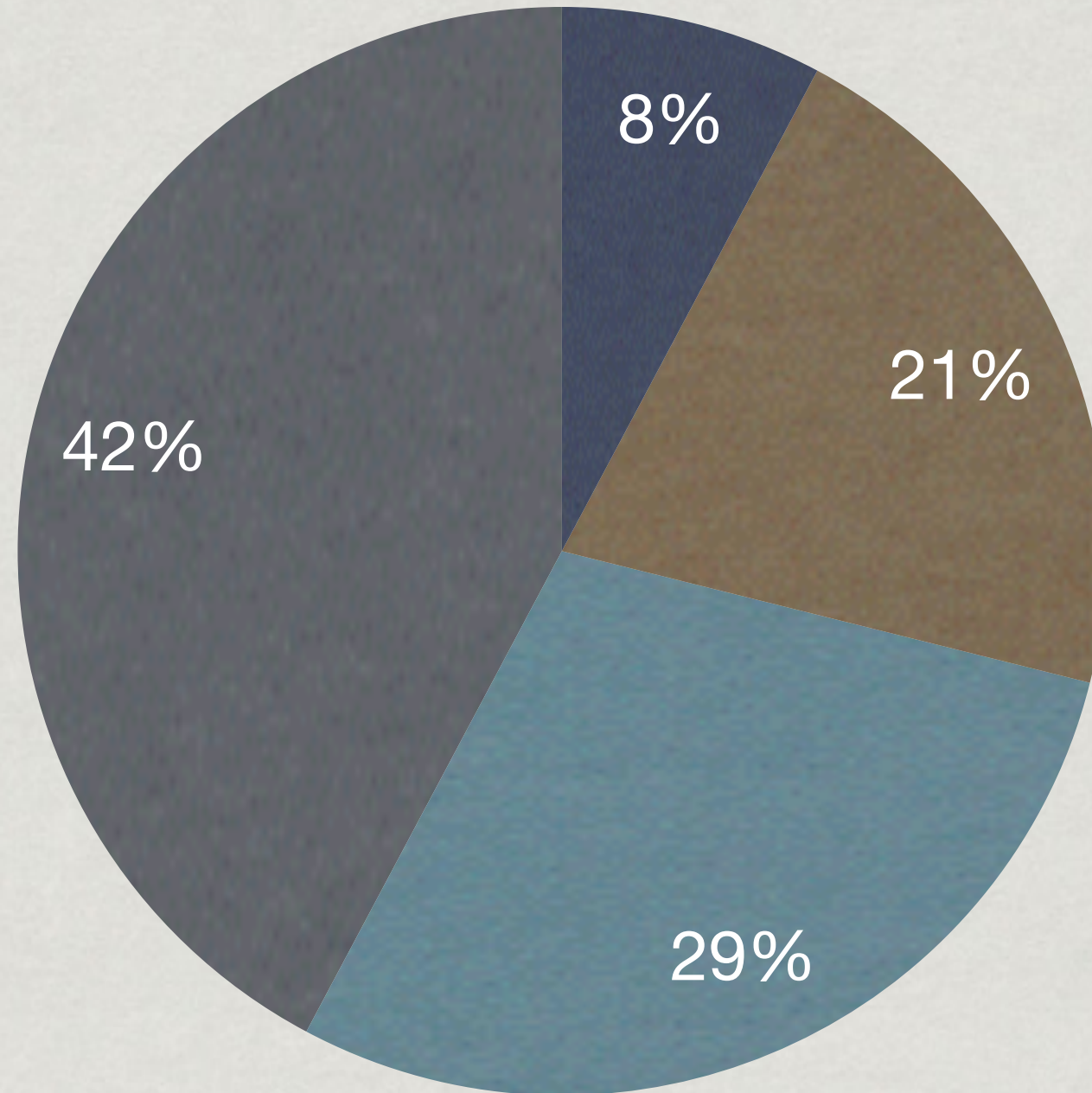
Results

Legend:
- Fighting
- Skipping
- Disrespect
- Chronic Inappropriate Behavior
- Excessive Tardies
- Other

Pie chart values: 25%, 27%, 19%, 12%, 8%, 8%
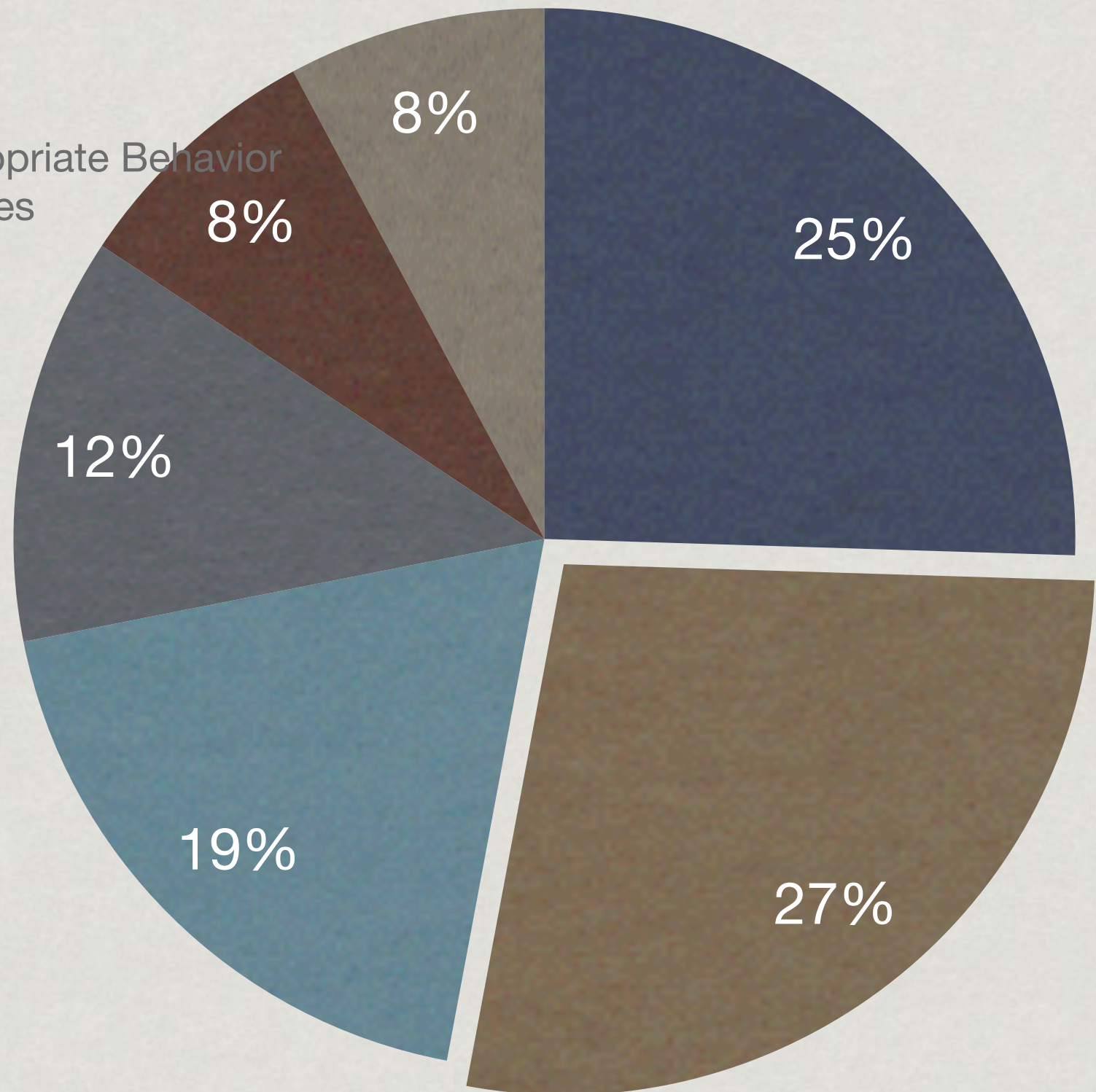
✳ The majority of suspensions results from behavior that teachers describe as chronic.
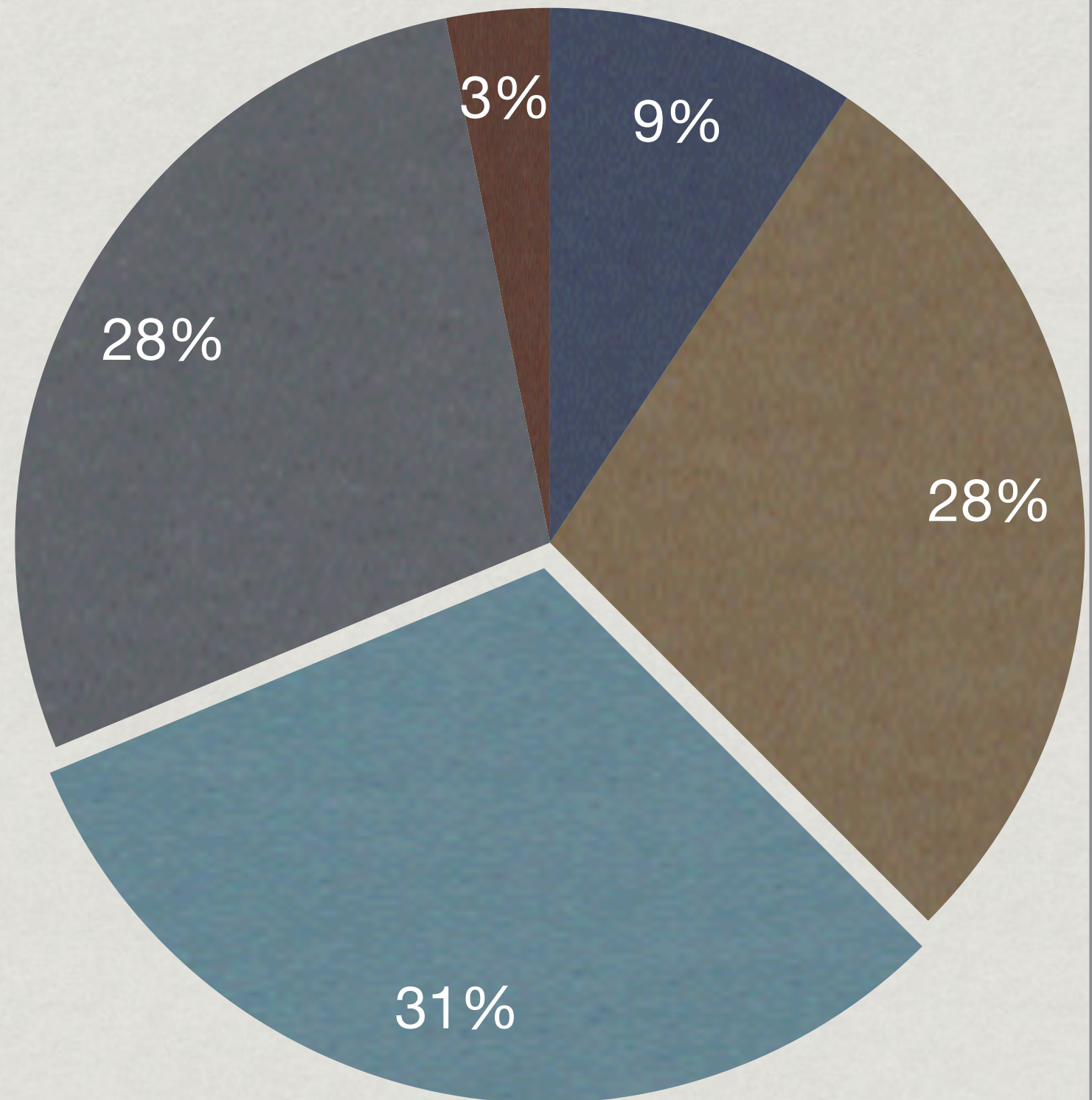
Results

- More than ten
- More than 5
- More than 1
- Only 1 suspension

8%

21%

42%

29%

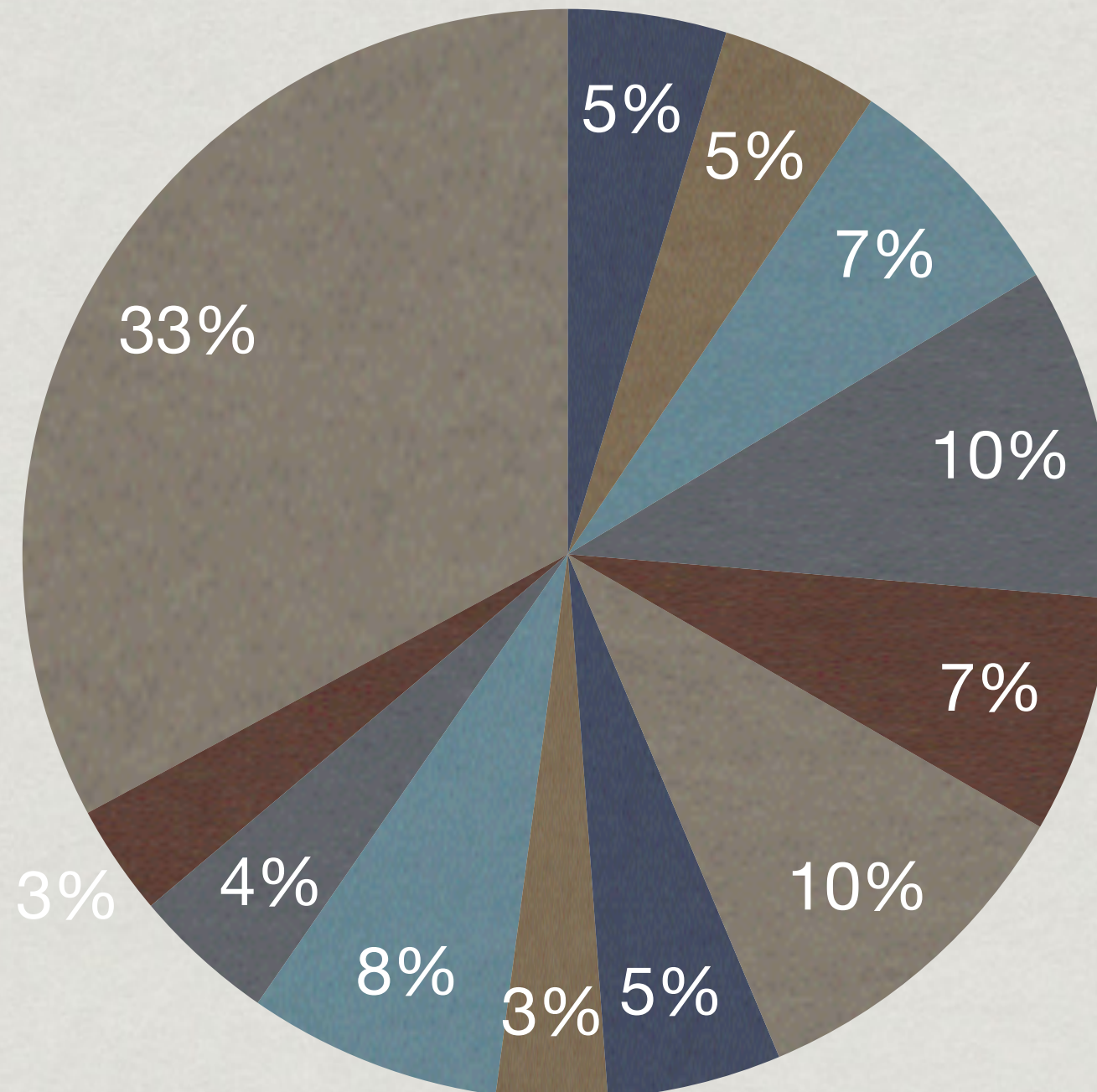✳ Approximately 60% percent of suspended students were repeat offenders.

Results

The greatest number of offenses are committed by juniors.

Results

- Teacher A
- Teacher B
- Teacher C
- Teacher D
- Teacher E
- Teacher F
- Teacher G
- Teacher H
- Teacher I
- Teacher J
- Teacher K
- Other

5%
5%
7%
10%
7%
10%
5%
3%
8%
4%
3%
33%

Ten teachers account for approximately 75% of office referrals

Results
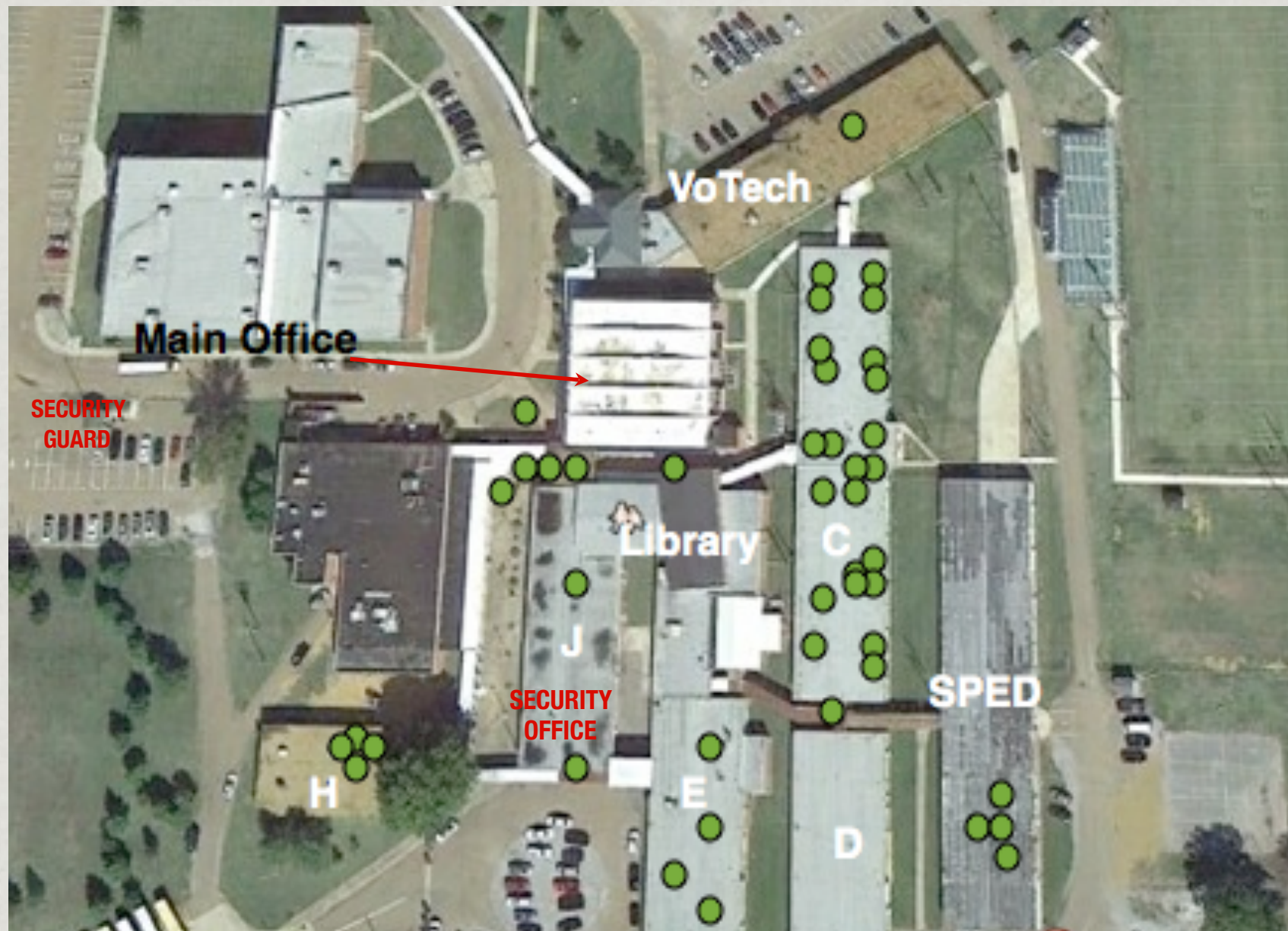
🌸Incident Plot (each dot equals approximately 5 incidents)

Conclusions

* Decreasing the amount behavior problems at this school will require strong, site-based leadership from teachers and administrators who must all present a united front when training students to meet expectations for the school culture.

* The district will have to restore decision-making ability to the professionals at the schools so that rewards and consequences that best suit the school are consistently employed.

* There must be immediate planning and implementation of a behavior support plan based on proven research.

Conclusions

❇ Student misbehavior has increased steadily because students understand the lack of real consequences for their actions. Furthermore, student behavior is slowly building with more and more fights and gang related activity. Both students and teachers feel unsafe and react in a way that negatively affects the school environment.

❇ Maslow's hierarchy suggests that creating a safe and secure environment will not only decrease behavior problems but increase academic success. Dempsey (1996) demonstrated that academic frustration may be a cause of misbehavior in the first place.

❇ Therefore, it appears that raising academic performance and scholarly behavior are interrelated.

Conclusions

✳ The majority of misbehavior is characterized as chronic because teachers do not have the tools and training to address misbehavior in the classroom on this scale.

✳ Fighting is the biggest specifically identified problem.

   ✳ The number and magnitude of fights have increased since a fight on October 2nd involving 23 students.

   ✳ Those students were sent to alternative school but had those sentences overturned.

   ✳ At least three of these students have been involved other altercations since then.

Conclusions

✳ Common areas are where problems occur most often.

✳ Freshmen students are contained in communities and have the fewest number of suspensions.

✳ The structure of the campus contributes to student truancy and misbehavior.

✳ Some teachers need support with classroom management.

Implications

✳ Common Areas

  ✳ Students often congregate in these areas when fights are about to happen so high traffic areas should be attended by security guards during transitions, lunch and release since these are the areas and times when most incidents occur.

  ✳ Students should be rerouted to avoid congestion on C Hall and between buildings by using alternative exits.

  ✳ All teachers and staff must work to push students towards classes and keep them from congregating in undesired locations throughout the school.

Implications

* Learning Communities (Mini-enterprises)

  * Students should be organized into smaller academies within the school by grade level

  * Students seem to do well when their movement is limited and they learn in small, tight-knit communities within the school.

  * This will minimize travel and increase the sense of security and belonging students need to be successful in school.

  * Students who have strong connections with both teachers and peers are more likely to resist the pull of gangs that offer an alternative form of connection for alienated students (Goldstein & Soriano, 1994)

Implications

* School Structure

  * The openness of the school's layout contributes to truancy and leaves the school open to intruders.

  * If each building becomes an academy, teachers can monitor students more effectively because they know the students who belong.

  * Administrators should conduct sweeps of bathrooms and spaces in between buildings.

  * Where possible doors should remain locked during school hours and be accessible only to staff.

  * The structure of the school demands strong centralized leadership and support from the office to be successful.

Implications

❋School Structure

❋ This high school is a large school encompassing several small buildings.

❋ The various entrances and exits provide many avenues for students wanting to avoid classes as well as consequences.

❋ There exists no real barrier between school grounds and outside elements since the gates are often open and do not surround the entire campus.

Implications

✳ Positive Behavior Support

✳ Teachers are in need of alternatives to writing student referrals and incentives for positive behavior.

✳ Teachers who met several of Kounin's criteria had fewer behavior issues and wrote fewer referrals.

✳ Students need positive reinforcement and a clear vision of the acceptable school culture.

✳ According to Andrea Cohn, "Appropriately implemented PBS can lead to dramatic improvements that have long-term effects on the lifestyle, functional communication skills, and problem behavior in individuals with disabilities" ("Positive Behavior Supports," n.d.).

Implications
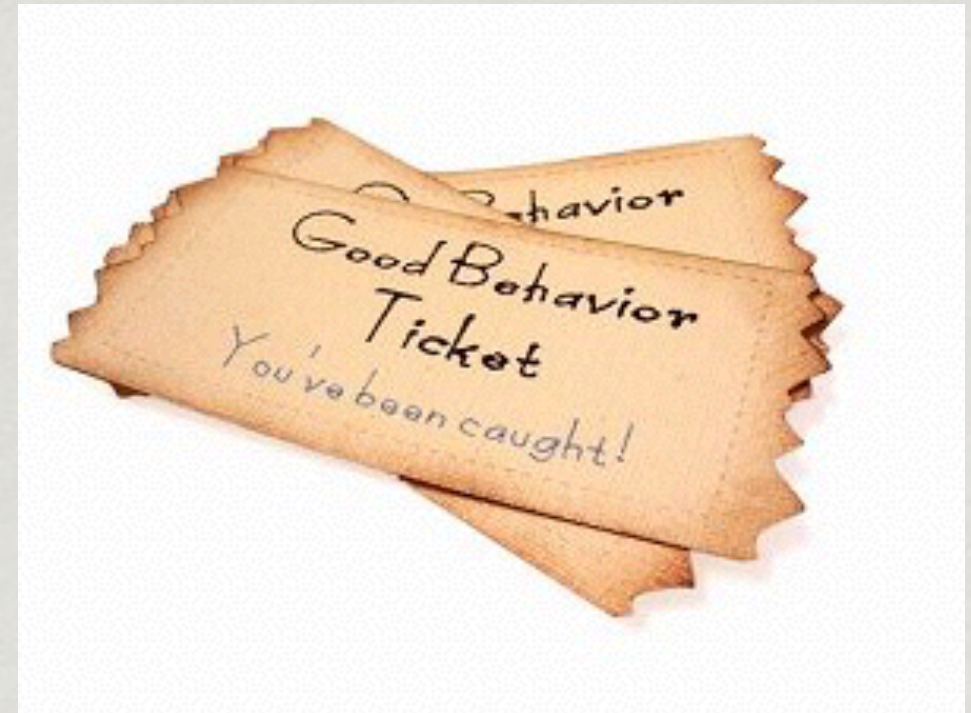
✳ Positive Behavior Support

✳ A successful discipline policy begins with positive behavior support to encourage students to follow rules and be responsible for their own behavior. This involves a system of rewards and character reeducation. The entire community benefits from this practice because students become better members of the global community as they learn to be good members of the school community.

Implications

* Rules and Consequences

  * Consequences must be enforced consistently.

  * The school must develop a way of addressing students with chronic inappropriate behavior such as behavior plans, alternative placement, or expulsion.

  * One student involved in the fight on October 9th has received at least 12 suspensions this school year but is allowed to participate in extracurricular activities.

  * Urban schools can promote discipline by being clear about expectations, stating them positively, and posting them visibly in order to train students to meet these expectations (Designs for Change, 2003).

Implications

✸ Rules and Consequences

  ✸ Students who do not respond to the behavior system should receive more intensive behavior interventions. After a functional behavior assessment, these students will be put on a behavior plan or contract. They should not be allowed to participate in extracurricular activities or other privileges until they demonstrate acceptable behavior. They may be considered for alternative placement or other changes of venue. Support will be provided by counselors or social workers to try to determine the underlying reason for behavior. Ultimately, students must come to understand that the entire school body is united, dedicated to improving the school and that their behavior will not be tolerated.

Implications

✳ Rules and Consequences

✳ Teachers should be given a matrix to determine when disruptive or insubordinate behavior has reached tier two and should be reported to administrators. More importantly, students will be given immediate consequences for their actions. A good behavior support system is easy for students to understand and clearly evident in the classroom. This system will ensure that disciplinary issues do not escalate unnecessarily or too frequently so that more attention can be paid to students with severe behavioral issues.

Reference List

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