# Right Start Newsletter

Secondary Edition March, 2007

## Strive to get your students beyond 'I don't care'

Nothing is more frustrating than trying to discipline a student who simply won't engage. You calmly point out behavior issues, and the student simply stares back. Finally, the student shrugs and says, "I don't care."

This response (or a similar response of "I don't know") is one of the ways middle schoolers avoid dealing with their behavior issues.

Your goal in a discipline conversation must be to make students see that you care about their behavior—and why they should care, too.

Here's what you can do:

- Talk about how one student's behavior can affect everyone else. Be as specific as you can. "When you walked in late, you interrupted me and the rest of the class."
- Ask the student to consider a similar situation, but with the roles reversed. "How do you feel when other people interrupt you?"
- Follow up with some sort of accountability. What will the student do differently in the future? Ask the student to come up with several ideas.

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## Encourage higher-level thinking

Many textbooks include review questions at the end of a chapter or section. Often, those questions require simple, lower-order thinking skills.

For example, a social studies text might ask, "What three rivers flowing through Russia are connected by canals?" Students do not have to understand very much about what they have just read in order to find and copy the answer from the text.

Instead, ask questions that require higher-level thinking skills. Think about rewording the question. Or ask a follow-up question that will have students rereading, considering and thinking.

You might ask, “How would Russia’s transportation system be affected if there were no canals to link the Don, Dnieper and Volga rivers?” “What type of impact (if any) would this have on trade?”

Questions like these require your students to choose facts from throughout the text and then develop a response.

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Source: Vicki A. Jacobs, “What Secondary Teachers Can Do to Teach Reading,” Harvard Education Letter Research Online, www.edletter.org/past/issues/1999-ja/abstracts.shtml.

## Use reading journals to improve retention & comprehension

Do your students ever say that they read an assigned chapter but couldn’t remember what they read after they closed the book? One solution is “writing to learn.” When students write about what they have read, they will improve in both comprehension and retention. Here’s how it works.

Ask each student to:

1. Enter the title of the assignment at the top of a sheet of paper.
2. Divide the paper in half by drawing a vertical line.
3. Read the assigned text.
4. Fill in the left side of the paper with information from the reading such as:
   • The main idea.
   • Significant details.
   • Key vocabulary words.
   • Important quotes.
5. Fill in the right side with:
   • Questions.
   • Comments about how the reading relates to class discussions.
   • Comments about information on the topic from other sources.

Before a general class discussion, have pairs of students compare their entries. Did they both find the same key points? Did they have the same questions? Did other readings or discussions add to their understanding of the material?

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Source: “Writing Across the Curriculum to Increase Student Learning in Middle and High School” (Educational Research Service, www.ers.org, 1-800-791-9308).

## Help parents focus on specific standards

As your students get ready to take state tests, you have probably identified specific standards that individual students need to work on. Parents will help—if they know how.

Author and former educator Rick DuFour said, “Schools must give parents some direction about how to be most helpful. When schools present parents with explanations of the skills children are to learn, along with specific strategies that enable a mother or father to participate in their child’s development of those skills, everyone benefits.”

A skills checklist for at-home learning can help. First, identify the specific standards that a student is struggling with. Then offer specific suggestions of things the parent can do at home.

The vocabulary you use in your checklist is important. Rephrase the standard in a conversational tone. For example, instead of "Employ the conventions of capitalization," say, "Use capital letters correctly."

If you have identified a student's learning style, you might tailor your suggestions to it. In this way, you will increase the likelihood that what the parent does at home will be most effective.

Try to meet with parents to discuss the checklist. If you cannot, write a short letter explaining what you're doing and why you're doing it.

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Source: Anne M. Beninghof, *Meeting Standards: Instructional Strategies for Struggling Students*, ISBN: 1-570-35515-0 (Sopris West Publishers, 1-800-547-6747, www.sopriswest.com).

For a sample at-home learning skills checklist, go to www.teacher-institute.com/bt/resources/standards.pdf

**REMINDER**

**The 10 month payroll cycle for the 2006-07 school year is August 31, 2006 through May 31, 2007 even though the 2006-07 employment term is August 21, 2006 through June 15, 2007. To provide employees with a full check each month, it is necessary to pre-pay employees. Unless you chose the 12 month salary option or you work in a school that has an alternate school calendar, your last payroll check for the 2006-07 school year will be May 31st, even though you are required to work days in June to complete the 10 month employment term. We thought this might be a helpful reminder as you budget for the coming months.**

## REMINDER

**Keep your professional folder up to date! Your next principal observation should be completed by April 13, 2007.**

| Documents That Should Be Included For First Year (BT1) Teachers |
|---|
| Mentor Log |
| FODA 1- Sept. 30th Observation 1 |
| FODA 2- Jan. 15th Observation 2 |
| FODA 3-April 15th Observation 3 |
| Teacher (Peer) Evaluation |
| Summative Evaluation -April |
| IGP for Year 1 |
| Transcript from Professional Development Site (minimum of 2 CEU's) |

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