

# 13 TEACHERS TEACHING TEACHERS™

FOR A DYNAMIC COMMUNITY OF TEACHER LEADERS

## COACHES ZERO IN ON **BEHAVIOR**

By Valerie von Frank

**A**s dean of students at one high school and now assistant principal at Cabrillo High School

in the Long Beach (Calif.) Unified School District, Matt Brown was familiar with the complaint: How can we teach when students are so disruptive and defiant?

"The names and faces of the kids changed, but it was always the same issue," Brown said. He said that in Cabrillo, a school with high transiency and truancy rates, he saw that a group of



teachers needed support to take on the challenge of meeting all students' needs. So he did what many in his district are now doing. He called in a team of specialists.

For two years, Long Beach has offered schools the services of a coaching team to work with staff specifically on classroom management and student behavior. The team members provide ongoing training, conduct classroom observations, coach and support teachers, and collect and analyze data to inform behavioral practices across the district. Either administrators or individual teachers can request coaching services.

The three specialists on the team come from different backgrounds. Two were part of the district's special education department, where they worked as team leaders and facilitators,

### What's inside

#### Lessons from a coach

The coach is no longer just a resource provider, says Luis Planas.

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#### Focus on NSDC's standards

Motivate team members and meet the Learning Communities standard.

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#### NSDC tool

Learn what motivates your team.

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and a third has a background as a school security officer trained in nonviolent crisis intervention.

**A widespread challenge**

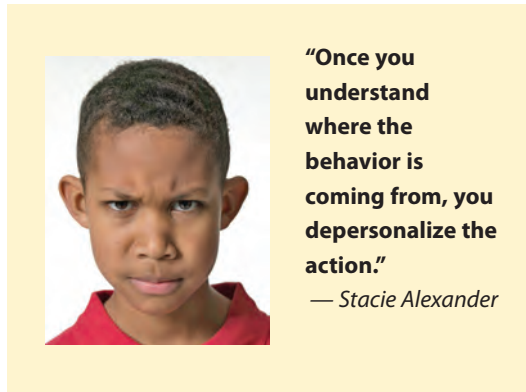
Behavior remains a significant challenge for teachers across the country, according to national surveys. The *MetLife Survey of the American Teacher: Past, Present, and Future* (2008) found that only half of those responding agreed that they spent the majority of their time teaching as opposed to dealing with discipline or other matters. *Teaching for a Living: How Teachers See the Profession Today*, a 2009 report from Learning Point Associates and Public Agenda, found that nearly seven out of 10 teachers believe addressing student discipline would improve their overall effectiveness. And in 2000, a survey by Scholastic Inc. and the Council of Chief State School Officers, *Teacher Voices*, showed that 86% of respondents identified classroom management skills as the area of greatest need for new teachers' professional development.

Stacie Alexander, one of Long Beach's Behavior Intervention and Coaching Team (BIC) members, said most teachers are not prepared well in classroom management. "Credentialing programs don't focus on behavior," Alexander said. "Typically, it's covered in one class that's not mandatory. A lot of teachers are prepared to teach content, but are not prepared to manage the behavior of human beings in the classroom."

Alexander noted the problem does not necessarily go away with experience. Brown said his first observation at Cabrillo showed him a teacher who was managing fairly well, having students comply and focus on the task, but who could have improved the lesson by providing a measure showing students whether they achieved the objective. Other classroom observations revealed veteran teachers struggling, with students talking over the teacher's lecture, introductory warm-ups that took 20 minutes of a 55-minute period because of student disruption, and the same students volunteering answers again and again while others sat idly, not even taking notes.

**Leveraging professional learning**

For Brown, the answer was a dose of pressure along with support. Once a month during a



departmental meeting, Brown has turned the time to professional learning. Three of this term's sessions will focus on classroom management. He has asked several teachers to meet individually with the coaches as well.

"Increasing routines is essential to get the curriculum across," Brown said. "If you don't have a well-managed classroom, you could have the best instruction in the world and students will not be able to learn."

Alexander said teachers need to learn to depersonalize students' misbehavior. "The behavior isn't about them, about bugging the teacher," she said. "Teachers need to understand that they have the power and control as classroom managers to change student behavior, but that change doesn't come from saying, 'You must do ... .' It comes from building relationships and being able to connect with kids on a personal, yet professional level. Once you understand where the behavior is coming from, you depersonalize the action."

Children, Alexander noted, "don't pick behaviors out of a hat. They act in ways that work for them." Some may be focused on concerns outside of school; others aren't developmentally able to focus for the length of time the teacher is expecting students to sit. The key is discerning factors that contribute to poor behavior, a process helped by the data Alexander and the coaches collect during classroom observations.

The coaches observe teachers, collecting data on environmental factors, such as space within the classroom for students to move around, instructional pacing, student engagement, and clearly posted rules and consequences that are referred to

**NSDC'S BELIEF**

Every student learns when every educator engages in effective professional learning.

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— Matt Brown

during instruction. In all, the team has developed 20 factors and an implementation rubric of what the factor looks like when practiced (or not) on a scale of one to five. Two coaches observe the lesson together for about 45 minutes. While one collects the environmental data, the other collects data on teacher interactions with students.

The BIC coaching follows the cycle of meeting, observing, problem solving with the teacher, and then coming up with strategies to address concerns. The coaches offer tips for being proactive in classroom management, including such ideas as reducing the number of directions aimed at students at one time and providing specific praise to individual students, including making sure that the praise to directive/criticisms is a ratio of at least 4:1.

“A lot of the teachers say, ‘I used to do that; I don’t know why I stopped,’ ” about some of the suggested strategies, according to Alexander. “Others say, ‘I can’t believe the solution was that simple’ ” after they’ve made changes in the classroom that positively affect student behavior.

The coaches follow up through e-mail, through administrators’ direct support, and with subsequent observations four to six weeks after the initial observation. Specific data remain confidential, although Alexander noted that some aggregated data may be provided to the administrator if the coaching was part of an evaluative process and initiated at the administrator’s request. Otherwise, aggregated data are provided to the teacher.

**A systemic solution**

The district decided to use the coaching model, Alexander said, to give teachers the skills to implement strategies themselves rather than simply solving issues one child at a time. With 95 buildings and 88,000 students, a systemwide effort is required to make a difference, she said.

“If we have Johnny struggling and being disruptive and we help with Johnny, if the teacher doesn’t see what we do as helping her gain skills in classroom management, when Johnny leaves there’s going to be another Johnny next year,” Alexander said. “This isn’t about a kid. It’s about an environment. Even in the best environments, there are improvements that can be made. We saw a need to provide skill building to teachers in a supportive,



collaborative process.”

While Alexander isn’t claiming the BIC team is the sole cause, she said those schools which have worked intensively with the behavior coaches are seeing decreases in the number of students referred for discipline problems to the office and to suspension centers.

While any changes at Cabrillo aren’t yet noticeable since the coaching has just begun there, Brown says he’s hopeful.

“It’s a gradual process to change the culture,” he said. “The true measure will be a reduction in referrals to the office and an increase in student attendance — and because of fewer referrals and increased attendance, an increase in student achievement.”

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