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Behavior Incentives in Public Schools

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Honors Project: Behavior Incentives in Public Schools

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Project Inspiration

This project came about through a combination of influences throughout my college career. I felt through all the people I had spoken with, worked alongside, or spent time observing, all of them agreed that behavior was something they wish they could change with a snap of their fingers. To begin, my mom has been working as an aide on the special needs busses for the school district I graduated from. She works specifically with behavioral students, who range anywhere from non-verbal to students who will try to stuff homemade weapons in their socks. My mom loves her students, but often feels they are at a disadvantage because outsiders do not take the time to get to know these students personally. I have also observed that students with behavioral issues are often looked down on. For example, my brother has Attention-Deficient/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), and people give him dirty looks all the time for being hyper and loud. While he is not considered an aggressive or physically abusive student, his behavior can often be a distraction for other students in his class.

While these are examples that I have directly seen, I noticed that a lot of people warned me of the behavior I would witness before my student teaching experience. When I explained that I would be student teaching in the Akron Public Schools, people often gave me very negative advice. They would say I needed to prepare to teach students who did not care, be prepared to deal with getting verbally and possibly physically abused, and handle students who had not been diagnosed with diseases like ADHD. Thankfully, I managed to get through the semester with very little verbal abuse and zero physical abuse. However, these people seem to be the ones who labeling children for their behavior rather than getting to know the child and figuring out why the child behaves this way.

When I spoke to teachers, family members, and other professionals, I found that many people had given up on trying to find a way to manage or better the poor behavior they saw in class. Many people I spoke with said undiagnosed ADHD was a huge part of behavioral issues, along with children that had not ever had any real rules remain consistent in their lives. My mentor teacher, Mrs. Amy Sommers, said that cell phone use was the most common and possible distracting issue she had to deal with in the classroom. Students would get defensive over their phones or completely ignore her to play on their phones all class period. It appeared as though many teachers and professionals had come to a dead end, but I was not going to make their experience my own. I felt it was my duty to observe, make my own opinions, and collaborate with others to try to find a solution to draw students back to learning.

On my first day of student teaching, I presented Mrs. Sommers with my project idea. She mentioned that she had tried something similar but found the cost of buying rewards to outweigh the reward. Plus, she was buying all of these prizes with her own money. I suggested we try two classes to cut down on cost. My other hope was that the two selected classes would feel special for being chosen to assist with my project. Mrs. Sommers also offered to use her Sam's Club membership so I could buy things in bulk, but for a lower cost. I also posted on Facebook and Twitter asking friends and family to donate any unopened snacks or treats they had laying around. While I still spent a lot of my money on buying products, I did get a few candy donations. It may appear that funding was the biggest issue, but figuring out the behavior we wanted students to work on or change was the biggest battle.

It is difficult to put on paper the things students do that are considered disruptive without making it seem like you are attacking them. Therefore, Mrs. Sommers and I sat down and made a list of things that we find disruptive while teaching and went from there. Both of us agreed that

cell phones and headphone use was the most common issue. This had to go on our list. We decided that students could still use phones and headphones if the teacher gave permission, but otherwise they needed to be out of sight. Mrs. Sommers also brought up that getting students to bring Chromebooks to class had grown to be a larger and larger issue as the school year continued. Over the next week as I observed the class, I noticed that a lot of students would get out of their seat and aimlessly wander around the room. They would get up, sharpen their pencil, grab paper off the back counter, stop and talk to a friend, go throw something away, and take the long way back to their desk. If they were seated, they were often moving just as much with their hands and feet as they would moving around the room. This is when Mrs. Sommers and I agreed to add not getting out of your seat, along with sitting quietly and remaining focused.

The last three we added were supposed to be easy tasks to start with. First, we put that students should come to class on time. A lot of students would stand outside of the classroom door and must be invited in after the bell rang. They would not make it to class on time if we did not go get them from the hall. Next, we added that students need to complete bell work. Mrs. Sommers would give students 10 minutes to complete bell work and they would sit and play on their phones instead. Even if Mrs. Sommers upped the point value of bell work, students still did not feel obligated to complete it. Lastly, we added that all work must be turned in and completed by the end of the period. We did this for similar reasons to the bell work, but we also found that students would complete work and not to turn it in when finished. This was causing grades to dramatically drop for no justifiable reason.

Mrs. Sommers and I agreed that if students could learn to master these tasks that we would change the goal sheets as needed, however that did not occur during the time of this project. We also chose only seven goals because we did not want to immediately overwhelm

students or make it appear as though we were attacking them. A copy of the goal sheet has been attached at the end of this document.

Changes to the Project

Due to a change in student teaching placement, some things have changed in this project. For example, my mentor teacher has changed to Mrs. Amy Sommers. Mrs. Sommers teaches 10th grade English Language Arts at Firestone High School in Akron, Ohio. She has both general education students and honors students. Additionally, the dates for this project have changed. Because of the change in placement, I had only two weeks to observe students before I had to immediately jump into the project.

In the previous proposal, it was suggested that I work with students who were struggling to meet academic reading and writing goals. However, for this new set of students Mrs. Sommers and I decided to compare a general education class and an honors class in hopes to better than behavior which would eventually lead to better performance scores. If students could change their behavior and place more focus on academics, ideally their assessment scores would increase as well.

Lastly, there was not enough space in the classroom to create the goal board that was included in the proposal. Therefore, Mrs. Sommers and I created a worksheet that students were given weekly. The worksheets included personal goals that the students felt needed work, along with goals that Mrs. Sommers and I felt would help students in the classroom. Although there were many unexpected changes, I was very happy with how this project started.

Background

The purpose of this project was to compare how students in a general education classroom and an honors classroom would change their behavior once there were varying

incentives involved. For this project, I selected the worst behavior classes for both the honors and the general education courses. I ended up selecting the 7th period general education class, and the 8th period honors class. I believe many of the issues with behavior occurred because it was the end of the day and students were ready to go home. Whatever the reason for their disruptive behavior, learning cannot take place unless the environment is calm and designed to harvest learning.

There are 24 students in the general education class, but not all 24 students show up to class consistently. We also lost students and gained new ones throughout the semester for various reasons. There are 13 boys in the class and 11 girls. Only 3-4 of the students in this class have met the graduation requirements for their grade so far. The other students are missing credits from missing school, skipping class, or failing the class. A handful of the students in this class are known trouble-makers and drug dealers, therefore the class can be a handful at times. Generally, about half of the class is on task and working, but the other half is disruptive, rude, yelling, and throwing things, which distracts the students who are trying to work. According to Mrs. Sommers, this class's behavior has gotten better since the beginning of the school year (August), but I believe there is still a lot of work to be done.

There are 20 students in the honors course, most of which show up to class daily. I have one student who leaves ten minutes early for medical reasons, but he will still show up and participate for 40 minutes he is in class. This class has 9 boys and 11 girls, with there being 1 student who consistently does not come to class. However, when this student does come to class, he is very quiet, follows directions, and is not disruptive to his peers. He even tries to help his peers when they are struggling despite that he does not always know what is taking place from being absent. This class is very chatty and has a deep attachment to their cell phones which can

make it difficult to engage students in their work. I do not think this class has much of a behavior problem, but a problem with their level of dependency on their cell phones. Either way, this class can work on their behavior which will hopefully lead to more engagement in the classroom.

While it is important to include information on the students that are being used in my research project, it is also important to give some background information on Firestone High School. Firestone is a fine-arts high school located in Akron, Ohio near Wallhaven. Students outside of the district may try-out to be a part of the fine-arts program, which slightly skews the demographics compared to the other eight high schools in the district. All students in the Firestone district are eligible for free or reduced lunch, but only 43% of students in the district use this (US News, 2018).

In addition to the fine-arts program, Firestone is known for the International Baccalaureate (IB) program, along with their Advanced Placement (AP) classes. Roughly 45% of Firestone students are enrolled in one of these programs. Students cannot be enrolled in both programs because they have different graduation requirements. However, both programs are considered extremely rigorous and are meant to challenge students academically, physically, and emotionally (International Baccalaureate Organization, 2018). A small group of students in the honors class have applied for this program but have yet to hear back.

As of 2018, there are 1,232 students enrolled at Firestone High School. This includes grade 8-12. I am currently teaching a group of 10th grade students, which is the largest class, totaling 334 students. The smallest class is the seniors, with 280 students preparing to graduate. Roughly 63% are students enrolled at Firestone are minorities (US News, 2018). The school is split almost evenly in gender, with 55% of students enrolled being female, 44% male, and 1%

unidentified (US News, 2018). Overall, Firestone is a very diverse high school that houses many opportunities for students to find their niche and be successful adults later in life.

Documentation:

To keep track of my 14-week project, I decided the best way to manage all the material I gather would be to keep a journal of the events of each week. First, I chose this method because I give my students weekly journaling time, so I thought this would be a great way to model journaling for students. It also shows them that I take writing seriously and make time to journal as well. Second, the goal sheets were ‘renewed’ each week for students; therefore I felt it would be best to document everything by week. This also allows me to keep a more organized system because I know during which weeks certain events took place. The journal entries vary, as some weeks were longer, shorter, or more exciting than others.

As for the students, students were given a weekly goal sheet on the first day of each new week. I have attached a copy of the goal sheet to the end of my paper. I would assign a set number of goals students needed to reach by the last day of each week when students would submit their goal sheets. Students were responsible for keeping their goal sheet for the entire week. If students lost their goal sheet, they were not assigned a new one. Many of the students learned the hard way that I was going to take this rule seriously, but I believe it taught a few of them responsibility. If students missed a day of class, they were not allowed to make up days they had missed, because attendance is something Mrs. Sommers and I found to be an issue. Not only did we want student behavior to improve, but we wanted students to begin showing up to class.

I wanted to keep some ideas from the original proposal, so I when I introduced the goal sheets to students, I explained that if they felt there were any goals that needed taken off,

modified, or added, we would do so. If students have a specific goal in mind, for example turning in their *Macbeth* journal packet at the end of the week, that goal would be added as long as it got the approval of Mrs. Sommers or myself. In addition to wanting to keep some of my previous proposal, I did this because I find it necessary for students to be able to create their own goals and hold themselves accountable. Creating personalized goals also allows students to hold themselves accountable for their actions and deal with the repercussions they chose for themselves. This was also a giant learning curve for some students, but they learned a valuable lesson and walked away as more responsible young adults.

The incentives for the goal sheets changed every week and students were not allowed to know what incentive they were working towards. For some students this acted as a great deal of motivation, while others took it as a joke. Either way, I felt that this added a level of interest to the students who consistently participated. They were curious to what their prize would be on Monday, so they remained attentive and ready to learn throughout the week.

For the rest of my research project, there will be the journal entries for each week, followed by an overall conclusion and reaction at the end. This was not a typical research project, but rather a way for students to learn to take responsibility of their own actions which goes much farther than the classroom.

January 14th, 2019 – January 25th, 2019

For the first two weeks of the project I simply observed students, classroom behavior, classroom procedures, and other the teaching style of Mrs. Sommers. On the first day Mrs. Sommers gave me the syllabus she hands out to students that specifically mentions some of the classroom expectations. Some of the expectations are as follows: Students are expected to place their cell phone out of sight at the start of class and should not be seen until the bell rings to dismiss students. Students are expected to come to class everyday with the material necessary to succeed (paper, OST notebook, writing utensil, novel). Students are expected to remain quiet and respectful towards their peers throughout the class period (Sommers, 2019).

After a week of observation, I felt that students had forgotten these rules as many of them were not being followed. Students would get up in the middle of class and wander around the classroom. Students would occasionally get up in the middle of instruction and walk to a new seat to be closer to a friend they wanted to talk to. This seemed very bizarre to me and extremely ineffective when trying to get students engaged in their work.

I also noticed that students were often talking, rambling, or singing in class. Mrs. Sommers would be instructing students on how to complete a worksheet and a student in the general education class would start repeating her instructions and singing them to the rest of the class. This pulled the attention away from Mrs. Sommers and onto the singing student. When Mrs. Sommers was finished explaining how to do the activity, she had to reexplain everything because no one could focus. It made me upset to see how frustrated Mrs. Sommers was with her class because this should not have taken place, especially with the pre-established rules she has for her classroom.

Although the constant singing proved to be a distraction, I felt the cell phones and headphones in the classroom were by far the biggest distraction that took away from student learning. Students were given ten minutes at the start of class to work on their bell work for the day. Students would take advantage of this free time and play on the cell phones, claiming they were doing their bell work on their phone. I even caught one student taking quizzes on BuzzFeed when she was supposed to be finishing a group activity. Every time you would turn your head you would catch a student on their cell phone. To make matters even more frustrating, Firestone will not allow teachers to take cell phones. Teachers are encouraged to repeatedly ask the student to put the cell phone away and contact the parent if the student does not comply. Unfortunately, many of the parents do not respond to calls or emails, or often try to make excuses for the child's phone activity. Students also love to listen to their music so loudly that you can clearly hear it, with headphones on, from the other side of the classroom. Mrs. Sommers would ask students to lower the volume or put the music away, but students could not even hear her requests, although they claimed to be able to hear her giving instruction.

During these first two weeks I also found that many students were not submitting assignments because they were too busy playing on the cell phones in class. For example, Mrs. Sommers would allow students to work in groups of 4-5 depending on the assignment. Students would spend the first 20-30 minutes of class laughing, joking, playing on their phones, and socializing. When Mrs. Sommers would announce that students only had 15 minutes left to complete the assignment, students would panic and claim they did not have enough time to complete the assignment in class. I also saw that many students, when given time to work in class, would claim they would do the work at home. At first I believed students, later to learn I would most likely never see that assignment again.

Lastly, I also found it extremely distracting and rude when students would wander into class ten minutes late. Mrs. Sommers had to stop the class, ask for the student's pass, and then argue with the student on why they did not have a pass and where they were, and then try to refocus the class when she realized she needed to get back to instructing. Students seemed to have very little respect for time or the bell. I also found that many students would sit wherever they wanted, completely disregarding their assigned seats. Even students who showed up to class on time seemed to seat themselves wherever they wanted that day. This was not an issue until I started taking attendance while learning names and marking students absent because I did not see them in their seat. This was extremely frustrating on my part because I did not see the point of seating charts if they were not being followed.

I learned a lot about how the classroom was run during these two weeks and made notes of things that I would like to change. I also made notes on things that I thought students would benefit from if things were changed. During these two weeks I found it difficult not to interject at times. I had to constantly remind myself that observation was part of student teaching, and part of making this project successful. That weekend I worked with Mrs. Sommers and we began creating the goal sheet that we used until mid-April. I introduced the goal sheets to students the following week.

January 28th, 2019 – February 1st, 2019

On Monday, January 28th, I decided to introduce the checklists to the students and gauge their reaction. I stood in front of the 7th period general education class and was worried about how things would go over. It took 15 minutes to settle the students before I even had their attention to explain what was going on. I explained that I was a student at The University of Akron who needed to complete a research project in order to meet some graduation requirements. I explained that the goal sheets were part of the project, and all I needed them to do was try their best to follow the goals on the goal sheet and turn them in each Friday at the end of class. I explained that students must meet the required number of goals for the week in order to receive a treat. They also needed to keep the sheet the entire week. No sheet on Friday meant no reward come Monday. I told students that the last 3-5 minutes of class each day I would go around the room and check off the goal sheets. However, it was the student's responsibility to show me their goal sheet. Unless I specifically told a student I would check them the following day, students would not get the required points for the day if I did not see the sheet. Students did not seem interested until I mentioned there would be weekly incentives. I then passed out notecards and asked students to pick their top three favorite snacks or treats. I would read these notecards and take into consideration what the students liked and what they wanted to receive. The general education class seemed very excited to get started that day.

I gave the same speech to the 8th period honors class, and only 5 of the 20 students seemed interested. Even when I explained to students there was a food or treat incentive at the end of each week they seemed to shrug it off. When I asked why students were not excited to be doing this, many responded there was no issue with their classroom behavior. I found this extremely interesting and realized these goal sheets may act as a wake-up call for a lot of the

students. Despite their lack of interest, I still had students fill out the notecards with their requests for specific food or treats.

The goal for this week was to meet 15 of the 35 possible points. On average, this meant students needed to accomplish 3 goals a day. I thought this week would be very easy, but I was quickly proven wrong. In the honors class I only had seven students turn in their goal sheets that Friday. Of those seven, only five students had enough points to receive a treat on Monday. I knew the honors students were not thrilled about doing this, but I thought they would at least give it a try. Some of the most commonly met goals for this class was being in their assigned seat by the tardy bell, staying focused without creating distractions for others, and being prepared for class. Cell phones still presented themselves as the biggest issue with this group.

In the general education class, I had 15 out of 24 students hand in a completed goal sheet. Out of those students, 14 of them had met the point requirement to receive their treat on Monday. I was very surprised but pleased with how this group performed this week. While 15 seems extremely attainable, the 7th period general education class often struggled with simple tasks like sitting in a seat. I found this group had the most trouble with their cell phones and remaining focused without making noises that would distract others. I did find that students were coming to class more prepared, they were beginning to turn in assignments, and they were more likely to stay seated during class. While both classes improved in their behavior, it appeared the general education class was motivated to get their treat. I even had a few students hand in their goal sheets, eyes lit up and excited, telling me they had met this week's goal. I was very happy with how the first week went.

February 4th, 2019 – February 8th, 2019

For this week's goal sheet I kept the goal of 15 to keep students motivated. I figured if I moved the goal number up too quickly, I would make students lose interest in the project. While I knew this was a possibility from the start, I did not want to immediately lose students and not be able to bring them back into the project.

Instead of passing goal sheets out, I placed the goal sheets on the back counter where students grabbed the other worksheets for the day. Students have been grabbing worksheets from this back counter the entire school year and understand worksheets or materials need to be grabbed on their way to their seat, not in the middle of class when we've started the activity. At the start of each class, I removed the goal sheets from the back counter and placed them in a drawer in Mrs. Sommers's desk. I told students their goal for the week was to meet 15 goal requirements again. Many students in both classes began asking for goal sheets. I explained the goal sheets were laid out in the back of the classroom and they were expected to grab a goal sheet as they came in. Many of the students claimed this was unfair and I was being mean. However, I reminded them this was a classroom procedure that had been in place since August. Students were not pleased but they calmed themselves down and realized they had made a mistake. I thought this taught student's an interesting lesson in following rules.

At the end of 7th period I passed out the students' reward of flaming hot Cheetos. The students who earned their treat were very excited. The other students who had not met their goal last week or who did not grab a goal sheet at the start of class were disappointed they missed out on such a treat. I felt many students were surprised that I upheld my end of the bargain. Majority of them pledged to do better next week so they could get a reward. However, about three students rolled their eyes and walked away without giving it much thought. I predicted this group

would be a little more difficult to engage, but I figured they would come around once we started to build some trust and mutual respect. I hadn't even been with the students for a full month yet so we were still learning about each other and figuring each other out.

I started off class the same way with the 8th period honors class. The students who had met the reward requirement were given their reward. The honors students were very rude about not receiving a reward when they did not meet the point requirement. They would claim I lost their worksheet, I was playing favorites, or I was making up numbers. I told students if they felt there was an issue with the goal sheets they needed to see me before or after class. Mrs. Sommers informed me that the honors students typically acted like poor sports, and not to take it too personally. Despite the attitude I was met with, students seemed excited to work towards a treat at the beginning of next week.

Students in both classes this week seemed to succeed at the same things as they did last week. Additionally, cell phones seemed to be the biggest issue for each class. It was difficult to get students to put their cell phones away, and they knew that I was not allowed to confiscate their cell phone. It is extremely frustrating to stand up in front of a group of students and realize that only half of them are listening to you because they are too wrapped up in their cell phones. I decided to get creative and hopefully change this behavior. I told students that on the goal sheets for the following week students needed to have 'yes' circled on at least two days of having their cellphones and headphones put away. I was met with many sighs and groans but wanted to see if students would take it seriously.

This week, attendance was very spotty in my 7th period general education class. Mrs. Sommers said that as the semester progresses we tend to lose more and more students because they stop coming, transfer, or drop out of school. Therefore, out of the 19 students that

consistently showed up that week, I had 10 students turn in their goal sheets. Unfortunately, only 4 of those 10 met their goal for this week. This was a significant drop from last week, but I felt their behavior had not drastically changed. As for the 8th period honors class, I had 15 of 20 students turn in worksheets, and 13 of them had the required points to get their treat. The honors students seemed to be doing much better this week. I still did not expect any major changes in students behavior because we were both new to the project; however it seemed to be going well and we were quickly overcoming any obstacle that the goal sheets presented.

February 11th, 2019 – February 14th, 2019

Students did not complete the goal sheets this week because it was a 4-day week. In addition to the shortened week, many students had OST testing make-ups; therefore, I only saw my 7th period class one day this week. Although I saw 8th period every day, the goal of this research is to compare the two classes, which I was not able to do with the changed bell scheduled. We will resume a normal schedule next week.

February 19th, 2019 – February 22nd, 2019

To begin this week, I placed the goal sheets on the back counter again and waited for students to pick up the worksheets as they made their way to their assigned seats. All students in the honors class picked up the worksheets off the back counter and took them to their desks. About 15 of the general education students remember to pick up the goal sheet from the back counter. However, when I went to the back of the room to remove them from the counter I did hear a few frustrated students mention they were upset they forgot for a second week in a row. This is not the overall goal of the project, but I was happy to hear the students wanting to participate and learning how to be a little more responsible. While the main responsibility of teachers is to teach their content area, it never hurts to incorporate some life skills into the classroom learning environment.

At the start of class I mentioned that we would be upping the goal number to 18 this week. Although it was a shortened week due to a holiday, I told students that these behavior checklist goals are things they should already be doing, and therefore it should not be hard to tack on an additional three completed goals. In addition to the added number, I reminded students that that also needed to have two ‘yes’ circled in terms of phone use, so they would really only need to up their behavior by one goal. Again, I was met with groans and sighs about the phones not being that big of a deal. Every twenty or so minutes of class I would remind students in both classes to put their cell phones away, as many of them do not even notice when they have their phone out. Or the student may think they only have their phone out for a second when in reality they have it out for ten or more minutes.

In addition to the changes I presented to students this week, Mrs. Sommers and I decided against bell work because we were transitioning from the poetry unit to *The Great Gatsby*. I

wanted students to focus as much on the novel as possible and felt bell work would take up class time. Because of this change, this meant that students could not earn a point for having their bell work completed within the first ten minutes of class. After spending a few weeks grading bell work, I discovered that many students weren't doing the bell work to begin with so I did not feel this would greatly hinder their goal of 18 points. I did notice that students struggled to stay off their phones for the entire period, as many of them would pull out their cell phones after bell work when they finished early. This genuinely made me think about the last time these students were asked to put their phone away for a full fifty minutes. It was also strange that these students, only six years younger than me, were now so reliant on their cell phones.

Students worked extremely well this week. Out of the 15 students I had grab a goal sheet on Tuesday, 14 of them met the goal requirement. I also felt the class was more focused, completed more work, and kept the cell phones away more than usual. I was very please with how this week went and felt that students were beginning to catch on to the idea of the goal sheets. The 7th period general education class seemed more excited about the goal sheets than the honors students, but their behavior was far worse than the honors students. They often had to work twice as hard each week because they were breaking old habits.

As for the 8th period honors class, I had 18 students collect a goal sheet at the beginning of the week and I collected 9 goal sheets at the end of the week. All 9 students had met the goal requirement for the week. The trend I was seeing with the honors class was that students would stay on task, remain focused, have their phones away, etc., but they would lose their goal sheet before the end of the week. Student asked me to allow them to keep their goal sheets somewhere safe in the classroom, but I reminded them part of the goal sheets was to teach students responsibility. They were not happy with my response by complied.

February 25th, 2019 – March 1st, 2019

For this week, I decided to once again up the goal to 20 points by the end of the week. This meant students now needed to meet at least four of the seven goals each day. I felt that students quickly grasped the idea of the goal sheets and understood that I was not asking much of them to meet 15 a week. I also felt that the goal sheets would be more of a challenge for the general education students because they genuinely seemed to struggle with behavior. However, I felt the goal sheets for the honors students was more of a wake-up call. The honors students knew what behavior was expected of them in the classroom, but they often blew it off or wanted to do other things in class because it was the end of the day.

I found by this week majority of students were remembering to grab the goal sheets off the back counter. While this was an improvement, it was still difficult for students to keep track of the goal sheet and turn it in on Friday. I noticed that organization was a problem across all of the classes I was teaching, not just the two used for my project. While this project was not teaching students how to organize, I believe it acted as a wake-up call for some students. Unless it is a project, most students are given a worksheet at the start of class and either turn it in at the end of the period or are assigned the worksheet for homework and bring it in the following day. I did not realize how much students would have to re-evaluate besides their behavior when I started the goal sheets a little over a month ago.

This week I found the general education students really struggled with their cell phones. The last two weeks were shorter due to holidays or school events, which I think makes it a little easier to make it through the week. I had to stop and remind students every ten minutes to put their phones away or to turn down their music. I decided to do more research on the cell phone policy and found that while I could not take cell phones away, there was no rule about

headphones. I decided this week to make an announcement to students that if I saw headphones out when I had not given permission, they would be taken away until the end of the period. This was to start immediately at the start of next week. If I had to confiscate the headphones three or more times, I would be contacting a parent. Again, students seemed to take this more of a joke rather than a serious classroom rule change.

The 8th period honors class did extremely well this week. They worked really hard in class all week, completed all assignments, stayed seated, and remained focused the entire week. I was very surprised and pleased. However, there are about six students who are repeat phone offenders. I constantly have to ask them to put their phones away and they often return with an excuse as to why it is out. I remind them of the classroom rules that state cellphones needs to be put away at the start of class, and they simply shrug it off or act like they've never heard this before. I decided that I would also implement the headphone rule in this class as well, because at least four of the six cellphone offenders in this class also listen to music all period. They did not seem phased by the new rule that I had put in place.

This week I only had 14 of my general education students consistently show up to class. Of these 14 students, only 5 of them had met their point goals for the week. In this case many students lost a lot of points for having their cell phones out. Additionally, students were full of excuses as to why they could not complete their bell work for the week. This meant that students were not able to meet the goal of having completed their bell work and any other assignments made due at the end of the period. Many students were upset but they were beginning to realize it was no one's fault but their own.

I had 13 honors students turn in their goal sheets this week, all of which had met their point requirement for the week. I was now starting to see consistency in the students who either

did not want to participate in the goal sheets, or students that consistently lost their sheets. Some of them thought the goal sheets were childish and saw no wrong behavior in themselves. I spoke with Mrs. Sommers and we decided to give these students the option to customize their goal sheets next week in hopes this would grab their attention. I liked this idea and thought it would be interesting to see how student's interest level would possibly change. We decided that I would pull these students aside at the start or end of class and ask them what they thought they needed to work on in order to be more successful in the classroom. Together, the student and I would come to an agreement on their personal goal. They still needed to meet the point requirement for the week, but they could use their personalized goals as well.

March 4th, 2019 – March 8th, 2019

This week started off rough compared to prior weeks. This week, because many students were preparing to take their midterms, I decided to give students pencils and erasers for the goal sheet prize from last week. Students in both classes were extremely upset and even complained to Mrs. Sommers that this was not a fair prize for all the work they had put in. Mrs. Sommers redirected students to me and told them this was my project and if they felt there was a problem it needed to be brought to my attention. I took into consideration what students said, and decided to not reward them with pencils again, but they were mostly upset they did not get a food reward or candy this week. At the end of 7th period I even found some of the pencils rolling around on the floor that students had thrown on the ground in frustration. This was upsetting to me because my students did not realize that I was going out every weekend and buying their weekly prizes. Students did not know what their prize was each week because I wanted them to work towards a goal, not a certain prize. I felt that if I told students each week what they were working towards, some would decide they did not like the reward and refuse to participate. However, I did learn they were extremely motivated by food.

The pencils seemed to great the tone for the rest of the week in terms of the goal sheets. Students in both classes were rude, constantly on their phones, extremely off task, and constantly wandered around the room, asked to leave for random reasons, or were overall irritable. I felt part of this was due to the stress of midterms, but I believe students still felt robbed of their prize which was partially responsible for this behavior.

On Friday of this week, only 3 students turned in goal sheets for the general education class. I once again upped the goal to 25. This was decided before the pencil fiasco took plae. These 3 students were consistently turning theirs in, so this did not come as much of a surprise.

As for the honors class, I only had five students turn in their goals sheets from that class. Again, this was the consistent five that did not have many behavioral issues in the beginning of the school year. I did not attempt to pull aside the students this week to create personal goals because the whole week was sort of a disaster. I decided I would gauge the attitude of students next Monday and go from there. Mrs. Sommers assured me that for whatever reasons, some weeks are more difficult than others and that was completely normal. I did feel a little defeated after this week but I would not let this week ruin everything that I, along with my students, had been working on all semester.

March 11th, 2019 – March 15th, 2019

For this week I decided to keep the same goal of 25 because I felt students struggled a lot last week with everything that was taking place. I felt that because last week went so poorly, I wanted to get the student's opinion on how we could move forward. At the start of both 7th and 8th period I asked students how they felt the goal sheets were going. A handful of students in 7th period participated, but they said they felt they did not know how to reach some of the goals or that some of the goals were very hard for them to complete. One of the goals students said they struggled with was their cell phone use. They said they felt like every time their phone vibrated, they immediately needed to check it. Mrs. Sommers suggested letting students charge their cell phones in the back of the rooms. If the phones were in the back of the room, they were away from students, and they were charging. The students and I really liked this idea because it took the phones away from them without them being too far away in case something went wrong. I felt like we had all come to a solid agreement on how to combat the phone situation.

I tried the same approach with the honors students because they were equally as stressed last week. Some of the students said their behavior was poor last week because this was their last class of the day and they wanted to go home. I explained there was not anything I could do about that, but asked if there was anything I could do to make class more enjoyable for them. The students suggested that while they work in groups or individually, they would like to be able to listen to music quietly. I said that I was okay with this, only if they followed directions and it did not become an argument every time I asked them to put their headphones away. All of us agreed this would be difficult but we were willing to work on it together.

I was finally able to pull the handful of students aside during 8th period and talk to them about setting personal goals for the week instead of following the goals I had already created. A male student said that one of the goals he would like to add is remembering to turn in his bell

work at the end of each week. This student often completed all of his bell work, but often forgot to hit the submit button, causing him to lose points. I agreed this would be an excellent goal for him to work on, even if it was not necessarily related to behavior. Another male student that I have in class suggested that he work on his cell phone behavior. He and I agreed that if he were to have his cell phone out in class, and I asked him to put it away more than once, his phone was to go in a locked desk drawer to be retrieved at the end of the period. The student agreed that his cell phone was very distracting and was not only disrespectful to others, but was also causing his grades to drop. Lastly, I had a female student who apologized to me for her sudden outbursts and often mean attitude. She explained that she had been experiencing some changes in her friend group and she often felt upset and confused at the end of the day because of everything that was taking place. She suggested that she have her seat relocated so that she was more isolated and could not pick fights with other students and could be alone. I agreed to this, as long as the seat change seemed to be working. I was very happy she came to me and talked to me about her problem even if it was not in great detail.

In the general education class, I had 15 students turn in their goal sheet at the end of the week, with 12 of them having enough points for their treat at the start of next week. At this point in the semester I found that many of the same students were meeting the goals and turning them in, while the same ones were not turning it in or even participating. However, I did find that although some students had checked out of the checklists, they were quieter and less disruptive towards their peers. I believe this is because some of the students who had picked up on the goal sheets acted as instigators and fired up the other students. When the instigators seemed to be more focused and on track, the students who acted as followers no longer had a person to follow. I did not anticipate the goal sheets to have an indirect effect like this but it is very exciting.

I was also starting to see the same trend with the honors students but was hoping the students with new personalized goals would participate more in the coming weeks. I had 11 students turn in goal sheets this week, all of them having enough points to get their reward next week. I realized by this point that the honors students were very hit or miss. They either all turned in goal sheets or very few did. They also ran very hot and cold with their behavior, while the general education class seemed to improve slowly each week. I believe this is because the honors students know what is expected of them, but they do not always make the correct choices when it comes to their behavior.

March 18th, 2019 – March 22nd, 2019

This week I bumped the points up 27 because we were entering the last bit of the project. Plus, OST testing for English Language Arts was next week and I thought it would be beneficial for students to be focused and ready to go when taking their graduation tests. I told students that in order to prepare for their test next week, I would be very strict on students being in their seat by the tardy bell, along with making sure students were prepared for class with their Chromebooks, notebooks, and writing utensil. I told students we would be doing this this week because if students show up to OST testing late or without their Chromebook, they will have to take it another day or not be able to take it at all. Plus, students need to learn to be prepared when important events are coming up. If a student shows up to work without their uniform they will quickly find out the consequences.

The general education class really struggled with this because many of them lost or damaged their Chromebook in the beginning of the year. The general education class also has a lot of students come and go. Some of the students that came in the middle of the school year were not issued new ones because the school had run out, or because they failed to turn in their Chromebook to their last school. One student even admitted to selling his Chromebook so he could buy a new Xbox. I explained to the student he will need to pay for his Chromebook before graduation and he just laughed. I was more worried about the general education students being prepared for the OST than I was about the honors students. The honors students are usually prepared for class, while the general education students still struggle to remember to bring their Chromebooks to class.

This week I had 14 general education students turn in their goal sheets, with only 9 having enough points to get their reward next week. Students in the general education class

struggled with bringing in their Chromebooks to class. However, I did find that at least half of the students went and visited Mr. Taylor, the school's computer technician, to report their Chromebook as stolen or to take it for repairs. I thought it was great that the students were taking care of these issues now rather than waiting until the morning of their OST test. If students returned with a slip stating they visited Mr. Taylor I gave them a point for at least trying to resolve the situation before OST week.

For the honors students, I had a surprising 17 students turn in their goal sheets, 16 of them having enough points to get their reward. The three students who I spoke to last week all agreed that creating their own goals helped them work towards meeting the point goal. They also said they felt more responsibility for their own actions. The students said they liked this method, but suggested they be allowed to change their goals throughout the semester if needed. I also had two students in the honors class take a visit to see Mr. Taylor about small issues their Chromebooks were having. I am glad that I was able to get students on the right track and prepared for OST testing next week. These last few weeks have showed me that while managing behavior is important, I am also teaching these students how to be successful young adults through the choices they make.

March 26th, 2019 – March 29th, 2019

This week we did not do the goal sheets because I would only see each class once this week due to OST Testing. I wanted students to focus on their testing and use class time as a study hall to work on assignments or a mental break. Students seemed appreciative of this option, many of which choosing to work on things from other classes. Despite there being no goal sheets, students remained respectful, on task, and prepared for class. I was delighted to see the goal sheets were working even without being present.

April 1st, 2019 – April 5th, 2019

This week I brought the point goal up to 30 because we would soon be done with the goal sheets. This means that students will need to meet at least six goals a day in order to reach the point value necessary at the end of the week. Until this point I felt that I had been slowly increasing the points needed so students did not feel pressured or did not notice any sudden change. Because we were getting close to the point where students would need to meet at goals for the week, I told students in both classes that if they were able to reach all 35 goals for the week I would include a homework pass on top of the food reward they typically received. The homework pass would allow students to be excused from bell work for a week or excused from a homework assignment, as long as the assignment did not have to do with the research paper that students are currently working on.

In the general education class students continued reading *Macbeth* and completing journal prompts that match the themes in the play. This week students really needed to stay on task in order to understand the events that were taking place in the play. Additionally, with all the journaling that students were asked to do, they needed to have their OST notebooks and something to write with. Many students said they would journal in a Google Doc in their Chromebook, but part of the reason I have students journal is so they can practice physically writing. Students spend a lot of time on their Chromebooks and this allows them to work on fine motor skills, even if they claim to hate it. I have found that every week some goals appear to be more present in certain lessons, like being prepared and attentive are this week. This also goes to show that these goals are things that students should be doing daily, and I am not asking them to do anything crazy.

This week I had 12 students turn in goal sheets, only 6 of them being able to collect their reward. In addition to these 6, I also had 2 students who were able to collect a homework pass for next week. The only restriction for the homework pass is that students needed to use the homework pass before my student teaching experience was over. I was extremely happy for the students that were able to meet every single goal on the goal sheet because it showed the hard work and growth these students have made throughout the semester.

In the honors class, students were given this week to do their peer reviews and polish their rough drafts for their research papers. Students selected a topic that I approved at the end of February and have been given at least one day a week in class to work on their papers. Although they are given this time, students are expected to spend the majority of their time working on the paper outside of class. Students also needed to stay on task and complete the end of the day worksheets that tracked student progress on their papers. This means that it is especially important for students to bring their Chromebooks to school each day, along with completing all necessary work by the end of the period. The honors students are usually good about bringing their Chromebooks but they tend to lose focus towards the end of the period as it gets closer to the time where they get to go home.

This week I had 16 students turn in their goal sheets, all meeting the point requirements necessary. I also had 7 students who were able to get a homework pass to use the following week. I predicted the honors students would receive more homework passes than the general education, but I did not expect this many. This goes to show that both of my classes have been working extremely hard and exceeding my expectations. I have realized that when I do offer extra rewards like this the honors students take it harder when they do not meet the requirements

necessary. Mrs. Sommers said this was normal, as the honors students are used to going above and beyond and meeting their goals.

April 8th, 2019 – April 12th, 2019

This was the last week that we did the goal sheets for a few reasons. First, I wanted to give myself plenty of time to organize all information and make adjustments as needed. Second, students would be going through OST make-up testing next week and I was not sure how many of my students I would see. Lastly, I wanted to end the project on a good note because Mrs. Sommers said that students can act a little crazy the week before spring break. While I did decide to use this as the last week, I would not be as harsh on students just because they were displaying some cabin fever. However, Mrs. Sommers and I did decide that if students were well behaved the next week, we would reward them by showing the film version of *Macbeth* when they return from spring break. Students surprisingly seemed to like this idea.

I decided to keep the goal at 30 points because students had been doing so well. I could also tell the stress of the school year and the need for spring break were starting to get to the students. Like last week, I did make a deal with both classes again that if they were able to get a 35 out of 35 on their goal sheets that I would award them five extra credit points on their next *Macbeth* quiz. Both classes are finishing *Macbeth* this week and will be quizzed on Acts IV and V next week. Students have been doing extremely well with the play so far, so I do not believe the bonus points will be completely necessary in this case, but I know students see them as a large reward. I also felt it best to test students before spring break because many students would return from break and not recall anything we had read in the last five weeks. At times I even found myself getting confused with all the characters whose names begin with ‘M,’ which also pushed me to quiz students before I said goodbye to them for a week.

In the general education class I found that students seemed to have a hard time sitting still this week and staying in their assigned seat the entire period. I three students who would

repeatedly ask to go to the bathroom, then to the nurse, then to go see their guidance counselor. I was not sure if the students were up to something, but I reminded them they are only allowed one pass per class period. Many of the students in 7th period would also get up to sharpen their pencil multiple times, purposely drop things on the floor so they could get up and grab them, and find excuses to walk past their friend's desk. I am assuming this behavior is because spring break is so close and students are becoming jittery, but it was very strange because I had not seen the class like this since the beginning of the school year.

I had 9 students turn in their goal sheets in the general education class, all of them being able to receive their prize at the start of next week. I only had one student who managed to get a completely full goal sheet, so he is able to collect five bonus points on his quiz next week. The students, who are typically very excited when I announce who gets a prize next week, shrugged it off. Even the students who were getting a prize did not seem as interested as they usually are. I did not dwell too much on their reaction because the general education students seem to run hot and cold at times.

As for the honors students, they were great all week except for the cell phone use. Students were polite, worked well with their peers, and managed to complete all their work. However, their work was not up to standard with their previous work because they were completely engrossed in their cell phones. The phone use was so out of hand this week that I ended up emailing a few parents asking them to speak to their child about their phone use in class. It was upsetting to see students take steps back instead of forward, but I have to keep in mind that not all students are not perfect and we all have bad days or weeks.

In the honors class, I had 13 student turn in goal sheets, all of which meeting the required 30 points. Out of those 13, four of them will be receiving bonus points on their *Macbeth* quiz

next week. Surprisingly, the honors students did not have much of a reaction towards their accomplishments either. Mrs. Sommers said that students were probably tired of school at this point and not to take their response personally. This week was very strange in terms of the prizes, as students are usually excited and think of it as a game. The only ones that seemed truly excited about their reward were the ones receiving the bonus points, even though these students were the ones who had the highest grades in the class. While the reactions of students seemed a bit off this week, I am extremely pleased that I was able to end the project on a good note with my students.

Conclusion

Overall, I believe this project went extremely well and I had a lot of support from Mrs. Sommers and the other teachers I worked with daily. I found that the last month I worked with students I no longer had to give reminders about goal sheets. The goal sheets eventually weaved their way into the daily classroom activities. If I did not immediately have the goal sheets out on the back counter, students would excitedly ask where they were. The project was well received by students.

The general education class had a smaller number of consistent participants, ending with an average of 13 goals sheets a week. However, we had so many students with inconsistent attendance, students that transferred schools and then came, and students who I met once and never saw again. While this is not a great number, I do feel that it was majority of students who I saw at least four times a week.

The honors class had an average of 14 students a week turning in goal sheets weekly. Mrs. Sommers and I agreed that this was a great number considering we had two students who did not show up consistently. Neither of us thought we would be able to get every single student on board with the goal sheets, although that would have been great.

As for incentives, I mostly stuck to food rewards with the occasional homework pass. Many of the students in honors were preparing for the IB program, therefore they did not have a lunch. They really appreciated getting the snacks. I also discovered that majority of students in the general education class were on free or reduced lunch, so many of them were thankful for the extra snacks. When I asked the students who did not regularly participate what incentives they would like to see, they replied they wanted a cash reward. While I'm sure most students would prefer that, I cannot pay the students to behave.

Throughout the semester I felt I had more and more students trying to participate in the goal sheets, some not always making the required number of points. I believe changing the incentives weekly helped because it kept students on their toes; they never knew what they were going to get, but they knew it would be something they wanted. When I was having a particularly challenging week I would ask students what kind of reward they wanted to grab their attention and have them focus in again. This seemed to work with students because they felt they had a choice in the rewards for their positive behavior.

I also noticed that the overall class average increased in both classes once we implemented the goal sheets completely. At the end of the 3rd quarter, the general education class ended with a 65.7% (D) average. The honors students ended the 3rd quarter with an average of 71.2% (C-). One of my goals for this project was to see an increase in class grades because students were going to be more focused and engaged. I am happy to report this change did take place. The 4th quarter has not yet ended, but students in the general education class, as of April 25th, have a class average of 68.9% (D+). Students have almost moved up an entire letter grade. Unfortunately, I leave on May 9th, but I will be checking in to see the final results for this semester. As for the honors class, as of April 25th, their class average is 78.6% (C+). I was extremely proud to see the grades of my students improving.

Lastly, I have noticed that my students are more engaged. Instead of the same 2-3 students asking questions in class, I now have at least half the class asking questions and participating in class discussions. I have also noticed that students are less dependent on cellphones, are more respectful of teachers and peers, and seem to be improving slightly on their work. While I would like to say it was my project that did this, the students need to be commended for putting in the hard work to alter their behavior in a positive way. This project

has taught students time management skills, responsibility, respect for themselves and others, and how to be a team player. While this project has taught me a lot about managing behavior and how we can change it for the better, I think the students are the ones that received the most valuable take-aways from the project. I am extremely pleased with how my students have grown, how the project ended, and I hope to continue to see improvement until I graduate in May.

WEEKLY GOAL SHEET

Name: _____

Week of: _____

Circle yes or no for each question listed. Total the number of *yes* circles you have each day and then add the total number for the week. *My total points this week: - - - - -*

**** You must have the required number of yes circles in order to earn the weekly reward.**

Absences do not "excuse" you from the weekly points you need.

**** You are responsible for your paper. Only ONE paper will be issued weekly so don't lose it!**

MONDAY

- YES NO Prepared for class: Chromebook, notebook, and writing utensil
- YES NO In assigned seat by the tardy bell
- YES NO Bell work is completed in 10 minutes
- YES NO Did not get out of seat without permission
- YES NO Stayed focused all class period without talking, singing, rapping or tapping on desk
- YES NO Cell phone/headphones are put away out of sight unless TEACHER gives permission to use
- YES NO Completed all of the assigned class work AND turned it in

Total pts. =

Teacher Initials:

TUESDAY

- YES NO Prepared for class: Chromebook, notebook, and writing utensil
- YES NO In assigned seat by the tardy bell
- YES NO Bell work is completed in 10 minutes
- YES NO Did not get out of seat without permission
- YES NO Stayed focused all class period without talking, singing, rapping or tapping on desk
- YES NO Cell phone/headphones are put away out of sight unless TEACHER gives permission to use
- YES NO Completed all of the assigned class work AND turned it in

Total pts. =

Teacher Initials:

WEDNESDAY

- YES NO Prepared for class: Chromebook, notebook, and writing utensil
- YES NO In assigned seat by the tardy bell
- YES NO Bell work is completed in 10 minutes
- YES NO Did not get out of seat without permission
- YES NO Stayed focused all class period without talking, singing, rapping or tapping on desk
- YES NO Cell phone/headphones are put away out of sight unless TEACHER gives permission to use
- YES NO Completed all of the assigned class work AND turned it in

Total pts. =

Teacher Initials:

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