



“It’s much better to prevent problems than try to handle them on a moving bus.”



— Dusty Phelps, Pulaski County Schools’ director of districtwide positive behavioral interventions and supports

ment to our equation was the bus driver,” said Dusty Phelps, who heads the districtwide positive behavioral interventions and supports initiative.

Richard Edwards, the district bus driver trainer and safety instructor, said the challenges are different on a bus.

“Students feel like once they’re in the bus they’re out of school and can do what they want to,” he said.

Moving along

Northern’s personnel have received extensive training in the discipline system in their building, so bus drivers also had to learn about the approach. Drivers in the Northern Middle School area were invited last fall to a voluntary “bus drivers’ summit” where Northern’s system was presented and explained – including data showing the dramatic in-school results, in which office referrals dropped from 900-plus to about 300 from 2005-06 to 2008-09.

“That is more significant than a lot of people had realized. The drivers that were in attendance all seemed to be very much on board with it,” said Edwards, who also drives a route.

Following the summit, a committee of drivers met several times, getting input from other drivers, and developing a set of expectations for behavior on buses. “The process went real well,” said driver Glenn Olmstead, one of the committee members. “We got a lot of good input.”

The bus behavioral expectations are divided between those to be followed while loading and unloading and those in effect when the bus is moving. The overarching principles are to be safe, be respectful and be responsible. The overall key is student safety, Olmstead said.

Phelps noted, “It’s much better to prevent problems than try to handle them on a moving bus.”

All that information, along with a letter from each driver, was sent home with students in December. The expectations are reinforced with positive comment cards from bus drivers that are mailed to parents whose child’s behavior is exemplary or has improved, similar to those issued by teachers for classroom behavior.

Expansion

Pulaski County Schools’ overall positive behavioral interventions and supports efforts are being expanded beyond Northern to its other schools – and to the rest of its bus drivers. Phelps said bus drivers in the southern half of the county will be duplicating what their peers have done in the other end.

The administrators view the involvement of bus drivers in developing the behavior expectations as a key. Phelps said the initiative is presented to drivers as “something we want to help you with.”

Murphy’s administrative team and some Northern teachers further drove home the collaboration message by riding a bus

route to get a feel for what the drivers must deal with.


Superintendent Tim Eaton also identified another way in which the effort benefits all involved, noting that bus drivers can only refer students to school personnel for discipline and not carry it out.

“If the drivers, with their awesome task of driving the school bus and controlling behavior, can get some ideas on how to handle children in a different fashion, just think what they’re going to do for the principal and the teacher,” he said.

This summer, the mandated eight-hour refresher training for all the district’s bus drivers will include instruction on the positive behavior approach, thereby launching the program districtwide. The system has 175 or so drivers and 126 full-time routes, Edwards said.

There will be some skepticism, he said, but, “If we can just get the program instituted and some of the drivers that are not on board with it will see how it works for other drivers, they will eventually come around.” ☞

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