

TEAMWORK SUPPORTS RIGHT STUFF KIDS

Park Avenue School Danbury, Connecticut

Park Avenue School targeted improving student behavior and reducing suspensions as one of the school improvement goals on which to focus school, family, and community partnerships. The school established the Right Stuff Behavior Team to design and implement a character education program to support and celebrate the school's kindergarten through fifth grade students' positive behaviors. This team was one of five teams at the school that integrated school improvement plans and school, family, and community partnership practices.¹

The Behavior Team shared leadership and responsibilities between its nine representative members: three classroom teachers, one parent, one resource teacher, one nurse, one psychologist, one physical education teacher, and one speech specialist. The Behavior Team designed the behavior-focused Action Plan for Partnerships, delegated responsibilities for implementing the planned activities, and set a schedule of monthly Behavior Team meetings. The team took primary responsibility for the Right Stuff Kids Project.

The Right Stuff Kids Project focused on four character traits: friendship, patience, honesty, and determination. At the beginning of each quarter, fourth and fifth grade students or teachers introduced the quarter's designated character trait by performing skits at the whole school assembly. Each morning on the intercom, the students heard an example of the character trait for that particular quarter. At the end of the quarter, each teacher chose up to five students who exemplified the character trait. These students were rewarded as Right Stuff Kids with buttons and an ice cream party at the next whole school assembly. For each Right Stuff Kid, the teacher mailed a postcard and personal congratulatory note to the student's family.

The Behavior Team collaboratively implemented the Right Stuff Kids Project. One team member worked with the art teacher to make the buttons using students' artwork. The classroom teachers on the team organized skits for their students to perform at the whole school assemblies. Two other team members announced the Right Stuff students' names at the assemblies. Another team member bought the ice cream treats and served the treats after the awards assemblies. Another team member took pictures and posted the pictures at the school. Two team members selected character education quotations to be announced each morning.

¹ The other four teams were the Math Team, Reading Team, Writing Team, and Fun Connections Team.

They also included Park Avenue students in creating their own example of the character trait that students read over the intercom. Finally, the Behavior Team provided Park Avenue teachers with the Right Stuff postcards to send home to students' families.

Beyond collaborating as a team, the Right Stuff Behavior Team also communicated about the program with the school community. The Behavior Team informed the School Council about four times per year of the team's activities and progress. For families, they wrote summaries of the program and recognized Right Stuff students in the school newsletter, *Pathways to Partnerships*, which was also translated into Spanish and Portuguese. Recently, the program expanded into the community with "Lunch with the Principal" where three Right Stuff Kids are randomly selected each quarter to have lunch with the principal. A local restaurant, Chuck's Steakhouse, donated lunch for two adults and three children four times a year.

As a result of strong teamwork, the Right Stuff Kids Project at Park Avenue has decreased the number of suspensions and increased the positive, respectful school climate. The Right Stuff Kids feel good about themselves, thus motivating the other students. The Right Stuff Behavior Team demonstrates the potential of a goal-oriented action team approach.

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