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Hallway Challenges

The realities of student life are not found in classrooms and offices. It is in the hallways and on the playgrounds that kindergartners first get lost and scared only to later develop confidence as they find their way around. It is here that bigger kids try pushing others around until someone or something stops them. Smaller kids gain confidence by learning how to hold onto seats on the bus or places in line. Some children are blessed with invitations into a group and others are shunned. Threats, punishments, praise, and plans can all be parts of quick trips to the restroom. Tears over College Board exams and plans to get a car for the dance are played out in school parking lots and local hangouts.

The illusion of a sanitized academic life that we fabricate in our classrooms and counseling offices is stripped away in the hallways. What remains are the best and worst of real life. Our training and commitment as counselors and educators is sorely needed in this hallway world, but our training has not focused on how to make the greatest impact there.

A trip through the hallways is no simple excursion for professionals. Problems, confusion, sorrows, frustrations, and

anxieties are there for anyone who wants to help. Attend to them and you can make a difference. Duck out of the way, and you have done much less than is possible.

There are also a wealth of pleasures, excitement, fun, and accomplishments waiting to be recognized and enjoyed in the hallways. Your simple presence, a smile of recognition, a pat on the back, or an offer of support can do wonders for students and for yourself. But forget to congratulate someone on her newest source of pride or fail to recognize a meekly waved hello, and you can be seen as just another uncaring adult.

Rules are less clear once you get outside school offices and classrooms, which makes the risks higher, but also creates opportunities. Circumstances outside the classroom offer more freedom to act on life's realities and the chance for immediate impact that is not available in more formal environments.

What problems make hallways more challenging today? What can schools and communities do to strengthen the best that hallways have to offer and minimize their inherent problems? How can counselors and educators of all types make the most of these situations with the professional skills they already have and in the limited time available? Heaven knows you have more than enough to do already, and another book should not add to that burden. Instead, what is needed to deal with the daily challenges to be faced are interventions that take comparatively little time or planning and reap new rewards for everyone, including you.

CHANGING PRESSURES

A teacher once tried to summarize the changes she saw when she recently retired with 35 years of experience as a teacher and school counselor.

"It began as a relationship between a class of junior high students and me. I learned about them and they learned the material to different degrees that seemed to mostly match their abilities and interests. The

> *relationships were the most exciting parts of the teaching, which was the motivator to become a school counselor where, for a number of years, I mainly counseled individuals and groups while also teaching some guidance lessons. But things began changing with more concerns about school violence, learning problems, the No Child Left Behind legislation, and testing, testing, testing. There was more and more to do with little guidance as to how to get them all done.*
>
> *The ASCA Model at least provided a comprehensive focus and order to deal with the increasing tensions felt by students, teachers, administrators, and parents. The sad part of these last few years was how little emphasis relationships seemed to be given by outside forces in comparison to achievement. Those of us inside schools knew how important relationships were in the learning and growing process and we did all we could to develop them. But unlike my first years, it had become a continuing battle to find the time and new ways to promote relationships."*

It seems that everyone in education is being asked to do more with less even as the problems we deal with change. Professionals today have widely different challenges to deal with than they did in 1940 when teachers rated their top disciplinary problems as talking out of turn, chewing gum, making noise, running in the hall, cutting in line, and questioning dress code rules. Fifty years later, those problems might seem like the discipline concerns of a model school. Now we face responsibility for prevention, intervention, and remediation of people and situations that elicit greater concerns about violence and dangerous consequences. In the 1990s, teachers identified problems they face as assault, robbery, drug abuse, pregnancy, and suicide (Toch, 1993).

Academic issues made up the bulk of the National Education Goals 2000, which were reinforced by the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act. The U.S. Department of Education (2006) pointed to National Assessment of Educational Progress results showing improved student achievement in reading and math while also helping to close the achievement gap between minority and white students. Critics focused on issues of inadequate funding, narrow curriculum, and research being

too limited to specific forms of testing (McKenzie, 2003). These heavy reading- and math-focused initiatives have clearly produced some gains, but they have come at a cost of reduced emphasis and time spent on social and physical development through the arts, social understanding, and physical education.

Creating safe, disciplined, and drug-free schools was one of six key goals identified in the 1993 National Education Goals Panel. The panel's 1996 follow-up report did not bode well for reaching those goals any time in the near future. Drug use and drug sales on school grounds were up; alcohol use had stayed the same; 30% more teachers reported being threatened in school; and discipline problems were increasingly interfering with instruction.

The goals of making schools safe, disciplined, and drug-free environments where everyone is academically and socially successful are laudable for sure. Unfortunately, they often come as edicts that print up very nicely, but ignore the human requirement for connections and community with others to reach a person's full potential.

> *Interpersonal improvements come from emphasizing relationships among everyone involved, not edicts, goals, and demands to change.*

Pressures created by the disequilibrium, tension, and high emotional levels found in schools can create havoc among individuals and groups. The most basic reaction to such pressures is to create increasingly more rules, harsher rules, and more cumulative consequences to those who break the rules. This model has provided for little success and greater harm in communities as diverse as schools and dictator-ruled nations. In fact, more stringent rules demand more active enforcement, which creates a whole new set of pressures on those with the least influence and quietest voices. Diversity of culture, thinking, and new ideas are sacrificed for the consistency demanded by those who hold power. Minorities become the most likely to be ignored in favor of the loud and powerful. The result is antagonistic and subversive reactions rather than the calming

influence and cooperation that increased rule making was designed to promote.

The observations of several educational professionals on how rigid reactions to improving academic achievement and school safety highlight how the human need for relationship can get lost in the process:

> *"Teachers have a mandate to get those kids' scores up! All else is secondary. If you want relationships, then you have to find your own time for them."*
>
> *"Zero Tolerance is big here. Who cares whether the discipline citations were for carrying guns or dozing in class. The stricter we get, the more logic goes out the window."*
>
> *"Kids and adults are both stretched toward the limits of what they can handle. More paper and computer requirements with no more school time available, mean that more outside of school time is essential to satisfy the demands. Time in school may be no longer than it was, but hours needed to keep up with school requirements has stretched well beyond the normal school day."*

Other counselors at a recent conference expressed strong opinions on how various groups in the school were being affected by the increasing pressures:

> *"So many social concerns about race, gender, and social status have opened up for valuable discussion and growth for the whole community, but the demand for academic time-on-task seems to override what could be gained in these areas."*
>
> *"Students have so little time to thmselves that I see them having more trouble making good decisions. Requirements are more rigid in school, homework follows them away from school, and then so much of their play is even organized whether it is sports, dance, arts, or something else. Everything is training rather than play. Where is the fun and the time to explore life on your own?"*
>
> *(Continued)*

> (Continued)
>
> *"Too many parents don't feel that the school is a place where they will be respected. Particularly those that are not in the social, cultural, or economic majority tend to stay away. They've had enough of people telling them what they need to do and not listening to them when they have something to say."*
>
> *"The pressure to continually raise test scores has the teachers who care the most, frustrated at not being able to give them the full experience of what learning could be if they were freed from so many controls."*
>
> *"Administrators are paid more money to be in charge, but even they complain of feeling like there are too many things to do with too few resources."*

So who is benefiting from more tests, more rules, and stronger consequences? This is a good question without a solid answer for schools or society as a whole. Government is spending more on law enforcement, yet we feel less secure. We catch more people breaking an increasing number of laws, and then we put more of them behind bars for longer sentences. And still we feel less safe and have to pay more for police protection and prisons.

Reading and math scores appear to be rising with the increased emphasis given to them, although the jury is still out on the overall impact. Will better scores create more of the workers we need in the future? Perhaps, more important, will the added academic pressures create a better citizenry when the students become adults? Both questions arise out of the concern for how much social learning and personal development may be changed as more time is taken up by what adults require children to do and less time is available for making independent work, play, and relationship choices.

Research also tells us that simply creating more organization and making tougher rules is not the answer. Five-minute time-outs before children can get back to learning and making choices do as much good as 20-minute time-outs (McGuffin,

1991). Troubled families are another example where deterioration is generally accompanied by a pattern of creating more and harsher rules that have no positive effect. In fact, just the opposite occurs, as the increasing demands seem to pump up the pressures and speed up the decline (Miller & Prinz, 1990). It is clear that creating additional rules and increasing their level of enforcement alone will not create the students, schools, and society we desire.

Anger and frustration from developmental differences, unequal abilities, racial bias, sexual discrimination, socioeconomic prejudices, and power imbalances between groups and individuals cannot be legislated or punished away. Long-term hope for our schools and students lies in the quality of academic, professional, and personal relationships that caring professionals, students, and parents are willing to implement in real-world experiences.

MEETING CHALLENGES IN THE HALLWAYS

Getting the next generation of adults ready to be successful in an increasingly diverse and complex society is no easy task. The challenges are many, and we must take the best of what we know while also looking beyond traditional formal models to find new ways of making things work better. One key model found to be effective is diligent implementation of more personal involvement by professionals in shaping real-life relationships between everyone in a community. Taking time to demonstrate positive relationships in the hallways and streets where such relationships are not normally invited will produce beneficial changes and results we are all seeking. It is a proactive approach designed to improve the system, even when the focus is on one person or one group at a time.

Urban Success

Why does Browne Junior High in the middle of troubled Washington, D.C., have a history of academic success and an

attendance rate of 92%? Credit is given to a principal who knows every student by name, a staff whose words and actions show pride and belief in their students. It is a school in which people are demonstrative and energetic and the parents know the staff because of their involvement in the community. The curriculum and school hours remain fairly consistent while the results have changed dramatically. It is outside the offices and classrooms where these differences are being made and positive relationships with members of the school community are being formed.

From Unruly to Model School

How did another Washington, D.C., junior high transform itself from an unruly school with massive discipline problems and poor attendance into a model school? Hine Junior High continued to have poor plumbing and bad security problems, but the atmosphere and actions of the students and staff changed dramatically, and they now can hold their heads high. The greatest amount of credit for the turnaround was given to the staff's increasing involvement with the hallway and street lives of their students, in addition to attending more closely to only "a few basic rules" that are understood and accepted by almost everyone.

Unity, Pride, and Hope Can Thrive

A Catholic elementary school for the arts exists in a crime-ridden neighborhood of the Bronx, New York, where 75% of the students come from one-parent families, 20% have one or more parents with a substance abuse problem, and 30% live on public assistance. Why is this school thriving with unity, pride, hope, and success, even after fire destroyed two-thirds of their main building? One student summed up the feelings of many: "The teachers care about us. They want us to succeed, to go on in life." A mother put it another way: "It wouldn't matter if the classes were in the alley. It's the spirit of the place that counts for kids in this kind of community."

Tapping Positive Relationship Potential

What do these success stories have in common? It was not loads of money, the elimination of poverty, the eradication of prejudice, or continual development of newer and stricter rules that made the difference. The professionals in these schools are moving outside their offices and classrooms to tap the positive potential of more casual relationships within their schools and communities. School counselors and other dedicated professionals are right in the middle of initiating this growth and making it work.

These schools are places where kids like to be and where the professionals are feeling better about their work than they have in years. These schools and others were not always like this. It takes energy and a new way of looking at the educational experience to make the necessary system and individual changes. No matter how good change sounds, there is always a natural resistance to change under even the best of circumstances.

When people have figured out how to do a job with some degree of success, it is no easy step to move into uncharted waters. What overcomes the resistance, encourages and solidifies these risky steps are the benefits that come with the more personalized interactions and camaraderie. School becomes a place where you can both find support for yourself and give it as needed to face the challenges we all meet in life. These are schools where a few key people begin to consistently exemplify to everyone the hallway characteristics of joy, excitement, hope, support, and adventure. Others follow later, as they begin to see on a daily basis how the new approach can directly improve their lives.

These positive interpersonal relationships are directly reflected in the characteristics of safer and more effective schools that are generally smaller and/or actively promote cohort relationships. It is this greater access to quality relationships that allows people to meet each other, develop understanding, and increase their sources of support and new information. We expand our knowledge and understanding of people and the world through the additional diversity of cultures, beliefs, skills,

and worldviews. Classrooms become well disciplined when the positive aspects of relationships can be more fully explored. These are the schools where students, faculty, and parents all recognize and appreciate a connectedness between the classroom, the hallways, and the neighborhood.

Students in safer and more effective schools truly believe the staff encourages them to have a significant influence on the life of the school as opposed to feeling their lives are run by others. This research seems to suggest what real-life examples confirm:

> *Individual staff members who add most to a healthy school environment are those who persistently initiate opportunities for quality relationships outside their offices and classrooms.*

School counselors and other mental health professionals stand out as the individuals with the most direct training to initiate and support these efforts. They have the potential to be leaders in the movement, but the human potential is also there for other professionals and parents alike to create the improved relationships that can strengthen our schools and all those involved in them.

ASCA COLLABORATIVE MODEL

Collaborative effort is a key ingredient in all the positive effects on school performance. Professionals or parents working in isolation may benefit individual students, but that work doesn't directly impact others or the overall school. It takes a broader approach to the school and the diversity of human potential involved to produce the broader impact desired.

The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) has provided leadership for counselors and others on how to achieve such collaborative efforts and a broad focus on all students. The ASCA National Model (Bowers & Hatch, 2005) focuses on the work of the school counselor, but the directions

and messages apply to everyone desiring to influence learn-
ing and schools. They emphasize working with all the critical
aspects of students that will promote success during and after
formal schooling. It is a model that recognizes the importance
of working with everyone in the schools, parents, and com-
munity to acquire measurable success.

The ASCA Model gives particular importance to achieve-
ment in the three domains of Academic Development,
Career Development, and Personal/Social Development.
Emphasis is given to each area, recognizing that success in
any one area is influenced by the others. These are the same
student achievement components that can be found in suc-
cessful schools supported by the concepts, processes, and
techniques of hallway helping.

Hallway helping is a supportive aspect of the ASCA
Model's overall efforts needed to support the success of all
students in schools. Helping in the hallways touches all the
model areas, but is not the primary vehicle for providing ser-
vices. The model emphasizes formal guidance services, indi-
vidual student planning, responsive services, and systems
support, most of which take place in formal spaces such as
offices and classrooms. Hallway helping provides the infor-
mal follow-up actions designed to reinforce information,
attitudes, and skills. These actions take place in less formal
settings where everyday aspects of life can be integrated into
learning and experimentation on new information, attitudes,
and behaviors can take place.

MAKING THE HALLWAYS WORK FOR YOU

Those who want to improve school safety, morale, and
achievement through a hallways approach need to ask them-
selves some hard personal questions to judge their potential
for success. Professionals are already leading busy lives with
more than enough work to do. Money and awards will not
come flowing to you if you attend more to hallway interac-
tions. There are plenty of reasons why each of us would resist

changing the ways we work, and there is probably little official demand to fight that resistance. Before we look at all the things we might do differently, it is important to think about those factors that might make us hesitate, the factors that would move us to change, and the ways they interact to produce the choices we make. We have the mission and the skills to promote positive relationships among students, teachers, parents, administrators, and the community, but there are also natural pressures that force us to make some difficult choices on what roles to take and when to take them.

Speaking Up

The challenge is to recognize and use the informal power available to you in order to make use of all your potential influence. It is often easier to keep your mouth shut and back away than to speak out or act in difficult situations. The problem with keeping quiet is that you may wind up following someone else's bad directions. Your quality professional voice needs to be heard.

Taking Risks

Positive change and growth are available in the confusing, uncertain crowds outside the office and classroom, but they also force you to relinquish some security. Risk is firmly attached to the importance of what you do and the satisfaction you find. Some will take the safer, more stable routes by making limited choices, acting in more rigid ways, and minimizing change. But the stability this creates eventually turns into boredom and dull sameness as the many burned-out professionals who seek therapy or leave the profession can attest. Some degree of risk taking is essential to stimulate enthusiasm and excitement.

Stepping Out

What a joy it was as neophyte professionals to walk into new rooms, arrange pencils, store pads, put up thoughtful

decorations, and align the seats just right. We naively expected the most amazing things would happen on an hourly basis. It didn't take long before we realized how many critical relationships were going on outside these carefully ordered spaces and that people usually take their problems and needs to someone else. These are the times when you choose between shrinking back to deal with as few people and tasks as possible and stepping out to develop new personal and professional relationships in unfamiliar territory.

Diversity Immersion

Growth comes from new information and new experiences with people and cultures. All life maintains itself over time by diversification. Plants, animals, or human beings cannot survive with only one variety. Individual people have differences and cultures vary around race, gender, languages, and styles of living. The less diversity you open yourself to, the less you can learn and consequently the less help you can be to others. Helping in the hallways requires immersing oneself in the culture of those that are not in your traditional circle of friends, colleagues, and acquaintances. You need to meet those not like you on their grounds rather than your own.

Leading the Advance

Professional training, skills, and access to students and staff put you in a position to take a leadership role. The mantle of leadership cannot be avoided forever if you are to make the most of your talents. Sometimes leadership is desired, other times it is thrust on us, and occasionally we take it because there is no other acceptable alternative. The variable pressures to be follower, leader, and even hermit are what we must recognize as part of just being human. Facing the choices and making the most of our abilities is what brings us the most pride in ourselves and the work we do.

There are no ultimate right and wrong choices about how each of us becomes an initiator of better things for our

students and schools, but the location for vibrant, new, pos-
sible actions is clear:

> *Reality, opportunity for change, human variety, and chal-*
> *lenge are greatest in the hallways, playgrounds, parking*
> *lots, and streets where people are actively moving through*
> *their lives.*

Knowing Yourself

Just as a piano does not have a single best key or combi-
nation of keys, neither do you have one way that will always
work best. The secret is in knowing as many keys and combi-
nations as possible so that you can continually experiment
with developing better and more pleasing patterns of rela-
tionships. Even the people who are as different as the sharps
and flats on a piano can be arranged in the right combination
with the right timing to make a positive human symphony.

The remainder of this book provides new relationship
development strategies and shows you how to use some old
skills in new ways. Whether you use the whole model or sep-
arate pieces to create your own personal style of helping is up
to you. Either way can change the patterns of your work to
better encourage a healthier environment in and around the
hallways of your school.

The success someone finds in hallways techniques will
be a combination of his or her personal style, the other(s)
involved, the situation, and the techniques that combine them
best. The starting place is to know oneself, so the following are
good questions to begin thinking about yourself or someone
you want to encourage to take on more hallway interactions.
Follow the directions to help identify the changes that seem
most valuable to you and also those on which you are most
ready to try something new.

My Motivation for Hallways Change

Circle the answer that best fits you at this time.

1. How comfortable am I with the way things are with my current work?

   1 = Not at all   2 = Relatively comfortable   3 = I like it the way it is

2. How much would I like to improve the climate of the school?

   1 = It is fine   2 = Some change needed   3 = Lots of change needed

3. How willing am I to step into cultures with values very different from mine?

   1 = Not willing   2 = Somewhat willing   3 = Looking forward to it

4. Do I want more relationship connections with students or less?

   1 = Less   2 = Okay as is   3 = More

5. Do I want increased relationships with colleagues or less?

   1 = Less   2 = Okay as is   3 = More

6. Do I want closer connections to administrators or less?

   1 = Less   2 = Okay as is   3 = More

7. Do I want more connections with staff or less?

   1 = Less   2 = Okay as is   3 = More

8. Do I want more involvement with parents or less?

   1 = Less   2 = Okay as is   3 = More

9. Do I want more connections in the community or less?

   1 = Less   2 = Okay as is   3 = More

(Continued)

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10. How ready am I to speak up for what I want in productive ways?

1 = Not ready   2 = Somewhat ready   3 = Very ready

11. How much risk am I willing to take to make the changes I'd like to see?

1 = Very little   2 = Conservative risk   3 = A lot

12. How much anxiety do I have about stepping into less structured environments?

1 = A lot   2 = Some   3 = Little

13. How much am I willing to be a leader of change?

1 = None   2 = Significant change   3 = Lots of change

What are you willing to change?_____

_____

Total score for 13 items to assess general readiness for change

13–21 = Hesitant about making hallway changes in general

22–30 = Reasonably ready for hallway changes in general

31–39 = Very much ready to make hallway changes in general

What *specific changes do you feel are most valuable and you feel ready to change?*

1 _____   5 _____
2 _____   6 _____
3 _____   7 _____
4 _____   8 _____