

Discipline and Motivation in the Classroom

I have been humbled over the past several weeks.

I have been a substitute teacher for Montgomery County Public Schools for the past five years. I love it immensely, however there are two issues that have greatly disturbed me over this time: the lack of discipline among many of the students that severely interrupts class time; and the painful lack of motivation I see, with students often having to be rewarded with play money, or other incentives, just to encourage them to do regular work.

Connected with these critical issues is the desperate need I see for more strict and consistent parental involvement, in both the areas of discipline and of active participation in their children's education. I was going to quote statistics from the 2006-2007 MCPS School Environment Survey that illustrated the strong perception by students of the disruptive behaviors in their classrooms and schools, and I was going to point out the desperate need for much more parental involvement. I was even going to only half-jokingly suggest the need for cameras in the classrooms, so that parents (and others) could see some of the ongoing disrespectful and apathetic behaviors occurring in them.

But it seems that you have seen and taken note of all of this, and ironically I have been confronted over the past two weeks with definite evidence of the fact that you are trying to improve the schools in the areas of discipline and parental involvement: posters in school hallways about the negative effects of bullying, peer mediation programs, school newsletters inviting parents to participate in school activities, and school outreach programs such as the monthly Spanish language meetings for Wheaton High School parents, and the many programs recently implemented that are inviting parents to become more active in their child's reading.

So now really I just want to emphasize: **you must continue with these efforts**. Discipline problems and disrespect among youth are becoming more the rule than the exception, and these negative attitudes and actions are **severely** impacting the motivation and willingness to learn and do quality work. They are also hurting those students who want to learn. I SEE IT FIRSTHAND IN THE CLASSROOMS! Students trying to listen or take notes through the disruptions of a growing handful of students. I asked one young lady last week how she did her work amidst all of the noise in the classroom (which she said was rather typical), and her response was that **"she had gotten used to it."** This is not something any student should have to get used to. Also, teachers are becoming tired, having to expend an extraordinary amount of energy on behavior management; energy that should rightfully be dedicated to exemplary classroom instruction. I believe we need much stricter and more consistent discipline policies in schools, and ones that are understood not just within schools, but across them as well; and perhaps even more highly publicized at the County level. And none of this will improve unless students can see from their parents in particular (as well as other role models) that self-discipline and education are important. So we must continue to teach parents, if needs be, about the necessity of strict (but loving) discipline for their child's well being, and actively recruit them to be caring overseers and active participants in their child's learning. **We must have a consistently strong and ongoing focus on these two things**, or else the educational "house" we are trying to build for students these days **will** collapse. Thank you.