

# Part V

# Classroom Management



## Objective

By the end of the section, readers will be able to (RWBAT):

- Design and implement a positive learning environment
- Establish and maintain effective procedures
- Respond productively to student behavior

**The Breakthrough Challenge:** Your challenge is to treat all students with respect while investing the entire class in maintaining a productive learning environment.

## Classroom Management

Classroom management is often misinterpreted as discipline, but it actually spans a much broader spectrum. Because respect is the lynchpin of a highly functional classroom, teachers must employ a wide variety of tools to create an atmosphere of trust, including creative lesson planning, community building, procedures, and appropriate responses to student misbehavior. An effective classroom manager must create a vision, goals, and a curriculum, in addition to fostering student buy-in and maintaining a productive work environment. All classrooms will not look the same; the teacher's personality and philosophy, as well as the class make-up and the tone of the school or program all significantly affect the choices teachers make to assure students stay engaged and respectful while learning. Despite differences, teachers will need to plan to prepare for and respond to similar situations.

Each teacher must envision the learning environment, including how students should act, plan how to achieve this, then plan what to do when students do not act in the desired way. Although the outcomes may be different, there are processes all teachers can use to create their ideal classrooms. First of all, teachers must set standards of behavior and interaction. Second, teachers must create and communicate procedures, which provide the means to achieve the standards. Lastly, teachers must provide guidance in self-discipline and work habits in order to enable students to consistently achieve and exceed the standards.

In order to establish and teach the above conventions, teachers must spend time considering what to expect from students. From day one, preparations must also be made to interact with students in ways that support desirable attitudes and behavior. For better or worse, teachers do not have to start from scratch; legal obligations, program rules, and personal beliefs will shape planning. Careful forethought on how to best support all students will help teachers make the necessary split-second decisions, allowing what is best for the student and program to drive their actions rather than personal feelings. Teachers must act as a judge in tough situations: fair and impartial.

A systematic management plan addresses the following components:

1. Positive Classroom Culture
2. Classroom Efficiency
3. Behavior Management
4. The Breakthrough Spirit

Investing time in designing and teaching your management plan pays off in the long run for both teachers and students. The class will run more efficiently, students will spend more time on work and less on distractions, and they will be excited to attend and participate in class. Without a well-developed plan, chaos and crisis management will rein; the teacher and students will leave class exhausted and frustrated rather than exhilarated and invested. Once your plan is established you will have to introduce it to your students. Although teaching and reinforcing the plan will occur throughout your six weeks, an introductory letter is the first opportunity you have to clearly outline the components of your plan. A sample letter is included in the toolkit. 

## Positive Classroom Culture

Developing a positive classroom culture is a creative and personal challenge. Some students may not have had access to supportive classroom environments, and while some will come from very supportive families and neighborhoods, others will come from stressful home environments. Creating a positive environment where all students feel they belong and can thrive is essential to the success of the Breakthrough program.

Resiliency is the ability to survive and move forward positively, despite times of great stress and hardship. Certain protective factors foster resiliency, including positive relationships with teachers and schools. To engage in a positive relationship, however, students must believe they receive fair treatment. Additionally, schools, or other educational programs like Breakthrough, that hold positive expectations, teach goal setting, provide equal opportunities for participation, and actively involve each student in learning are more likely to foster resiliency. In order to build this environment, you must carefully consider how to organize your classroom and how to interact with your class and each student.

The two modes of operation in classroom management are proactive and reactive. Proactive classroom managers thoughtfully and purposefully design and develop the environment to which they believe students will respond best. They create and teach their management plan. They anticipate and address possible problems before they develop into crises. They build management strategies into each lesson plan. Reactive classroom managers, on the other hand, respond without a consistent plan, and do little to prevent negative situations from arising. Students feel the teacher's reactions are baseless, unfair, and inconsistent. The teacher constantly struggles against the students and vice versa. Everyone senses the teacher has little to no control. Although the proactive classroom manager spends more time on management at the beginning of the year, in the long run the class will function smoothly, while the reactive classroom manager deals with constant disruptions and misbehavior. Hold yourself to the standards of the proactive manager; be prepared to teach your students how you want them to act and continue to reinforce those expectations throughout the program.

## High Expectations

Our students come from under-resourced schools where they may not always be held to high standards. At Breakthrough we work to break the cycle of low expectations by expecting the best from our students and clearly communicating our belief that all students are capable of high achievement. We do this by teaching students how to be the best, modeling the best, and giving them our best, not just in academics, but in our personal interactions with them too. For this reason, teachers who start the year with strict adherence to their expectations tend to inspire their class to meet the expectations. Teachers who treat the expectations casually will train their students to treat them casually as well, resulting in a chaotic classroom environment. If you start strict, you can always loosen up, but if you start the year in a relaxed manner, you can never go back to being strict. We are all role models and must remember the students are always watching us. They watch to see the choices we make, and they also watch to see what we think of them.

Whether you hold high or low expectations for your students, they will respond to what they perceive. Maintaining constantly high expectations for them will encourage students to hold high expectations for themselves and will increase their output. You

must be aware of what attitudes you bring to class. To encourage your students to believe in themselves, you must also believe in your students. If you find your class is having a bad day, examine your own role and attitude. You must expect the best of yourself, as a role model.

As part of high expectations, you must maintain the belief that each student has the will and the means to overcome whatever obstacles life places in his or her path. Making excuses for students who have a tough home life or a substandard education will not provide them with tools to change their behavior or to achieve personal goals. Excuses will only reinforce negative behavior patterns, which will entrench them in the same patterns. Sympathy should not take the form of lower expectations, but of methods to motivate and tools to learn. When students do not meet standards, it is because they either choose not to or don't know how. They need someone to guide them and to expect them to reach for and achieve excellence. Consequently, your role as teacher is to problem-solve for individual students. You must determine how to help them reach the same goals as others, even without the same support system and experiences.

To teach your students excellence, you must explicitly verbalize your expectations, how students should work to achieve them, and frequently praise attempts (successful or not) to meet them. Students should not have to guess what you want from them. They deserve, and need, frequent feedback delivered with a positive attitude in order to direct their efforts to achieve the high expectations you have set.

The first opportunity you have to impress your students with your expectations is the first class. When they walk through your door for the first time, it should be clear to them what type of environment they have entered. Although they will test you in the first few days, you can prove yourself by sticking to your expectations and maintaining high standards of behavior and work. You set the tone through your body language, tone of voice, facial expressions, and level of enthusiasm. When you work with children, you have to be “on” every day, otherwise they will turn “off” or they will take control; they constantly watch to see when you begin to lag or stop enforcing rules. Being “on” means staying positive, firm, consistent, equitable, and giving your full attention and energy to your class. Using your energy in this way--day in and day out--is exhausting, so you will need to do a good job of taking care of yourself. Hold yourself to high

expectations, but make sure you, like your students, can meet them and stay healthy. A teacher who nods off in the middle of a lesson or who snaps at students because he or she is exhausted cannot sustain an effective learning environment.

No matter how unprepared and overwhelmed – or prepared and confident – you may feel at any point, your students must sense that you have control. Your roadmaps – curriculum and management – will provide guidance. Your curriculum roadmap, or long-term plan, is an integral component to management. Students who are bored and frustrated will have negative attitudes and disrupt, for understandable reasons. Well-designed lessons with clear instructions and appropriate pacing, however, keep the class on track and invested in learning. Since children can tell when their teacher is organized, it is paramount that you arrive prepared to facilitate the day's lesson.

Developing your management roadmap will clarify your philosophy on the learning environment and help you determine how to foster the attitudes and interactions you hope to see in your students. It will also prepare you for how to respond when students exhibit inappropriate actions and attitudes. Your expectations must be built on a plan for communicating them, reinforcing them, and measuring success. Thus, students will know what to do and how to do it.

## **Student Self-Efficacy**

Self-efficacy is a personal sense of effectiveness or self-worth. To improve student achievement and self-confidence, students must learn how to evaluate and increase their own self-efficacy. These skills cross over between personal and academic aspects of life, and can lead to great personal growth. In the middle school classroom, goal setting, time management, and materials management contribute to a student's efficacy.

### ***Goal Setting***

Goal setting helps students achieve improvement and inherently includes problem-solving skills. This process can be used with a whole class or on an individual basis. It is especially powerful in parent-student-teacher conferences when used for contracts because it goes beyond the punitive to develop a long-term solution. A sample goal-setting handout is included in the toolkit,  and the general process is outlined below.

- *Identify the problem:* Students may need assistance determining the real issue. Teachers can provide a list of areas in which students should evaluate themselves. Many students, however, have a very clear idea of the obstacles they need to overcome. While goal setting can help to overcome obstacles or correct negative habits, students can also set goals to reach for the stars.
- *Brainstorm solutions:* Students should list all possible means to reach the goal. Sometimes working in partners or small groups to brainstorm can increase the number of options a student lists.
- *Identify possible results:* Students may list counterproductive solutions, therefore, listing the results of each solution helps them to consider possible negative or unintended consequences and eliminate them.
- *Select best measure(s):* Students choose solution(s) they feel they can implement to achieve the goal.
- *Delineate steps:* In this step they must list all necessary actions to implement the strategy. They should also list people from whom they need support.
- *Set date:* Students can set dates for different stages of the process or choose an end date. This depends on how complex a process and how much support is available to help them achieve the goal.
- *Self-Evaluation:* On the dates set above, students evaluate their progress. If they are struggling with their plan, they should determine the ineffective portions and rewrite the plan to incorporate these obstacles.

Once students have begun this process of self-evaluation and goal setting, the teacher monitors student progress. Monitoring consists of giving praise, encouraging positive self-talk, and helping students recognize their successes. Effective goal setting will help students meet high expectations throughout their lives. Setting a class goal, like improving clean up or increasing on-task time, can function as a community building activity. Along with other organizational strategies, like time-management and materials management, goal setting will help students maximize their learning in a diverse array of academic environments.

### ***Time Management***

Even adults struggle with time management in their jobs and personal lives. Many of us feel there is never enough time to do what needs to be done. Building time management skills in middle school will help prepare Breakthrough students for demanding academic environments, as well as work and family later in life.

Firstly, you must help students analyze how they use their time; the *Time Management Schedule* in the toolkit  will help with this. Students track how much time they spend on activities throughout the day, enabling them to draw conclusions about how they currently prioritize activities. Next, students must reprioritize their activities; paired with goal setting, this can be a powerful tool to change how they use their time. For instance, you may want to lead students in planning their day, then tracking whether or not they stick to their calendar.

### ***Materials Management***

Many middle school students arrive at class with a binder full of crumpled paper sticking out of the corners. Some may not have pens or paper or the textbook. While this is not unusual, it is your responsibility to put a stop to the ineffective organization habits and to teach effective organization and maintenance of materials.

Before the first day, you must decide what “infrastructure” you require of your students: Will they use a binder, a notebook, a folder? Will they write in pen or pencil? How do you expect them to keep track of homework assignments and long-term projects? This information should be included in your introductory letter, and you should have a plan for how students will organize materials until they get the items on your list. Once students have the materials, a daily materials check at the beginning of class is a good way to reinforce the expectation that they arrive prepared. Of course, if you’re going to check, there should be a consequence for not having materials, as well as a plan for what students will do if they don’t have their pen or project materials.

You also need a plan for how students should use the infrastructure. It is not enough to say, “keep everything for this class in your binder”; this will quickly lead to the crumpled papers mentioned above. You can set the expectation by showing them a sample binder organized appropriately: in sections or chronologically, with a table of contents, and every paper with a proper heading punched in to the rings. Finally, you must establish methods to monitor their organization, for instance binder checks or notebook grades. Middle school students are still learning effective organizational methods, so providing them with the systems allows them to practice. Eventually they will be able to select and maintain the best systems independently.

## Community Building

Teaching is never easy, but it gets easier when your students trust and respect each other and their teacher. Community building is essential to building that trust and creating a productive and positive classroom environment. While much community building will likely go on program-wide at Breakthrough, you will still need to build your smaller classroom community. You will need to help your students learn how to interact with each other, even while you learn to interact with them; each group dynamic is different. Strong community building creates a safe environment where students become invested in supporting each other, resulting in stronger trust, self-confidence, and willingness to take risks for higher achievement. Mistakes or misunderstandings can become educational experiences rather than mortal embarrassments.

Defining the classroom environment is an essential component of community building. To do this effectively, you may have to distinguish Breakthrough as different from the home environment or the school environment. For instance, to maintain a positive atmosphere, you may decide students telling each other to “shut up” is unacceptable in your classroom. Students may be puzzled and resistant because they may use it with family and friends, and some of their teachers at school may even use it in the classroom. As long as the classroom expectations are in best interest of all students, it is fair to say, “You may do that at home, but in this community you need to meet these expectations.”

The beginning of the program offers an opportunity to start off on the right foot. Planning activities, or “icebreakers,” so students can get acquainted with each other, their teacher, and the classroom expectations over the first few days are important to building trust. Below are several strategies to consider in the first week and throughout the program. Specific activities are detailed in the toolkit. 

**Class Expectations:** Involve the class in brainstorming a list of expectations of each other. For effective results, the teacher must be able to facilitate and lead students towards a comprehensive and productive set of expectations without seeming to dominate the discussion. Additionally, the teacher must constantly express high

expectations for the entire community and praise students and the class when they meet them.

**Community Meetings:** Community meetings address student concerns or negative class trends. If a significant problem arises, the entire class can work together to develop solutions to enable everyone to meet the class expectations. See *Implementing Community Meetings* in the toolkit. 

**Respectful Language:** Respectful language includes tone and actual wording. To help your students practice using polite and respectful language you might ask them to pretend they are at a fancy restaurant. This aspect of community building takes a lot of repetition and modeling on the part of the teacher. Evaluate your own language. How are you speaking to the students? How do you speak when you are frustrated? A sample lesson on I-messages is included in the toolkit. 

**Active Listening:** Active listening strategies show the listener is attentive to the speaker and foster awareness of other class members. It also places a priority on listening in the classroom, an important social and academic skill. Active listening increases time-on-task and mutual respect. For a sample lesson, see *Active Listening Lesson Plan* in the toolkit. 

**Introduce Yourself:** Your students will want to know about you, especially because you are closer to them in age than their usual teachers. While it is important that students get to know you well enough to form a bond of trust, it is equally important that you practice appropriate self-disclosure. So, if you share about your life, know the limits of what you should share. Be prepared with a statement to make the boundary clear, for instance, “that’s personal information that I will not share with the class.” Some of those boundaries will be set by the program, but you should also determine what you feel is appropriate to share with the class.

**Student Introductions:** Especially in the first week, students need many opportunities to introduce themselves to the teacher and their classmates. Valuing the individual is one of the keys to community building; sample icebreakers are included in the toolkit. 

**One-on-One Time:** Structuring one-on-one time to get to know students better makes students more comfortable with you. It also allows you to begin differentiating your lessons and tailoring them to student needs and interests. Consider a variety of methods to get to know your students through writing and talking in the first several days.

**Class Traditions:** Establishing class traditions that differentiate your class from the one next door will foster the development of a group identity, which can be a very positive experience for individual students. These traditions will vary depending on teacher style and personality.

**Family Connection:** In the broader sense, community building extends outside the classroom walls. Implementing methods of parent involvement to reach out and gain support from the larger community is a valuable technique to help students see a connection between academics and home. Parent involvement strategies are listed in the toolkit. 

**Affirmations:** Regardless of individual abilities, all students need praise and affirmation. Constantly search out reasons to give positive feedback. Above all other community building measures, this is perhaps the most important; praise and recognition will transform your students' attitudes and your classroom.

Teachers can implement specific strategies and activities to build community, but they must practice maintaining a strong positive community daily. This hinges on valuing each individual and incorporating them into the class. Equity must drive all teacher interactions. All students should have an equal voice in participation, as described in Learning and Teaching, to assure student representation and inclusion in the community. Individual help must also be doled out equally. Although some students may struggle more with a concept, the other students deserve individual help to further challenge them. Conversely, not only the students who master concepts easily should have the opportunity to answer high-level questions. Uneven individualized attention can quickly disintegrate a community. Because it is difficult to self-monitor trends in your own interactions, observers can assist in this process. Observation forms to track the distribution of teacher attention are available in the toolkit. 

## Conflict Management

Respect and active listening are the most important tenets of conflict management. Without either one, attempts to help students resolve problems will crumble. While we will not detail a cohesive conflict management plan here, you should include the general strategies described below in your management plan to promote effective problem-solving between students.

Teaching active listening provides a basis for conflict management because the key to working out problems is not only listening, but *hearing* each other.

1. Let each student tell his or her version of what happened without interruption.
2. Let each student explain how she or he feels.
3. Let each student state what he or she thinks should happen next, considering class expectations, rules, and consequences.
4. If possible, students arrive at a consensus of what must happen next to make amends for the incident and move forward productively and peacefully.

The above process is best utilized when both students are calm enough to speak with each other. The tenets also hold when a conflict arises between a teacher and student. The teacher must listen to the student and encourage him or her to explain the situation and feelings, and vice versa.

High expectations, self-efficacy, respect and interdependence can be infused throughout every lesson, every day to create a positive classroom culture. Through modeling and repetition, as well as corrective feedback and praise, positive methods of interaction and individual work will become habit. With conscious planning, overarching goals can and will influence all aspects of the classroom.

## The Efficient Classroom

Most of us have been in classrooms that were less than efficient. We know that, while those classrooms sometimes provided us with more time to talk to our friends or catch up on last night's homework, they were not the best learning environments. Regardless of factors outside the teacher's control, or perhaps because of factors outside the teacher's control, the teacher must act as the conscious architect of the classroom. Explicit expectations for how students will act in situations that arise regularly must be taught. Additionally, teachers must accept responsibility for their own role in

inefficiency. The more teacher planning, the more efficiently the classroom will run; teachers must be organized. While the piles of papers and other random objects strewn across a desk may appear a signal of creativity to some, if you can't find your lesson plan or your handouts, your lesson will crack and fall apart along with your class. So, get yourself and your students organized and your task, to teach, will become much easier.

### ***Procedures***

Whether you have three students or thirty-three, each student has a specific idea about how to perform seemingly simple tasks, such as entering the classroom. One may enter jubilant and whooping; one may want to flirt shamelessly; one may take revenge for yesterday's embarrassment by tripping someone; or one may have a juicy tidbit of gossip to share with the rest of the class. All of a sudden you have four situations on your hands, unless you have taught procedures for different behavior. And even with established expectations, the desire to whoop, flirt, avenge, or gossip may overwhelm their desire to follow instructions; the teacher will have to reinforce expectations. Students have many social and emotional pressures on them that will sometimes override their awareness of proper behavior. Establishing and reinforcing procedures and classroom norms, even for activities you think should be second nature, will both assure smooth functioning of your class and provide a sense of safety for your students. They need an environment where they know what to expect and what is expected of them. With some forethought and practice your classroom can meet that standard. Procedures are essential to proactive classroom management.

Procedures are systems that present organized steps for how to perform an activity or appropriate behavior for a certain period of time in class. It is important to develop procedures for processes repeated daily or with some degree of frequency. They clarify teacher expectations of students by drawing a roadmap for classroom success. The roadmap allows teachers and students to minimize wasted time, increase on-task time and reduce discipline problems.

Even with smaller groups of students consistency is important, especially for middle school students and students who may have less stable home lives. They need an environment where they can trust the teacher to react consistently and, therefore, can act confidently. Procedures also serve to eliminate unnecessary questions or behavior.

A class where students' needs control classroom interactions prevents effective learning. Designing procedures and lessons with those needs in mind serves their needs without undue focus on them. Therefore, discipline problems, which often arise out of unmet student needs, are reduced.

To create effective procedures, you must first isolate areas of the class schedule or the physical classroom that might create confusion. Suggestions of procedures to develop can be found in the toolkit,  but the list is not comprehensive. Most procedures should be introduced the first time you ask your students to do the activity, and therefore planned out before your students arrive in class. If a need for a new procedure arises in the middle of the program, however, you should go ahead and create one. One way to determine necessary procedures is to figure out what bugs you and teach your students not to do it; alternately, figure out what you like and teach your students to do it. Your classroom is yours to play with, but you must teach and support your students to act in appropriate ways.

Of course, your students may not master the procedure the first time around, therefore you must work to move them from idea to practice using the steps outlined below. Furthermore, visual reminders around the room (i.e. posters stating what to do) will help students remember when and how to act.

1. *Explain:* Clearly explain and model each part of the procedure. Use specific directions so no confusion exists about what students should do.
2. *Rehearse:* The students should practice the procedure with teacher guidance. Hold dress rehearsals and ask students to self-critique. Then run through the procedure again until the students can do it well. Praise them and cultivate excitement to perform well in the future. Negative criticism will only breed resentment of the procedure.
3. *Reinforce:* Students will not repeat the procedure perfectly every time, therefore, you will need to practice and reinforce the classroom procedure until it becomes routine. Provide corrective feedback, specific positive instructions, rather than criticism, and praise students when they act appropriately.

### ***Classroom Distractions***

While strong procedures will eliminate many classroom distractions, you must take a proactive stance towards those that persist, even to those outside your control.

For instance, the classroom environment may not be the ideal temperature or noise level. In order to minimize temperature disturbances consider using shades in afternoon and advise students to wear layers and comfortable clothes that adhere to any dress codes. Think about how the classroom is organized. Keep seats away from the windows if afternoon sun streams in there. Otherwise students will complain about their seats and ask to move them, creating needless distraction in the middle of class.

Another important consideration is organizing the classroom for students' viewing pleasure. All seats should have a clear line of sight to the board, overhead projector screen, or whatever areas of the classroom you use for visual demonstrations. You should also be able to see all students from wherever you are most often in the classroom; keeping them in your visual line of sight will help students stay on task. Anything on the walls should be neatly displayed. A cluttered classroom, whether on the walls, the teachers' desk or in the corner, will distract rather than invigorate students.

At Breakthrough you have the opportunity to create an environment that works for all students. You should, of course, have a classroom setup prior to students' arrival, but if you discover that some students need more space or some students work more productively in partners, you can change your classroom setup. Some students may try to structure their environment for social interactions; sitting too close to other students or facing other students can result in more distraction than productivity. Remember class time is for learning, not rearranging the room; any setup changes should be made after class.

Additionally, with small classes you may want to allow students to work in places other than their seats for greater comfort. Sometimes students read better when stretched out on the floor. Use of a clipboard allows students to move away from their seats when working with pen and paper. If you develop a menu of choices, however, it helps to coach students on positive decision-making for academic reasons, not social reasons.



**Breaking it Down:**

## Classroom Distractions

At Breakthrough, you will probably teach in a classroom at a host school, and dealing with another teacher's classroom can be tough. At some sites you may be able to move things, while at some you may have to teach around other teachers' clutter. Consider creative ways to shield students from it. Tape big pieces of colored paper up over the host teacher's materials and tape posters to that paper so you don't damage the teacher's materials. Cover clutter you can't move with sheets or tapestries.

Additionally, you will teach in the heat of summer, and many schools do not have air conditioning. Think of ways to buffer your students from the heat. Lead a visual meditation where students visit Antarctica, find a (quiet) fan to borrow from a friend, drop the shades in the afternoon. Above all, teach your students that complaining really doesn't change anything, in fact, it releases more heat into the air while positive attitudes keep you cooler! Likewise, if there is air conditioning, remind students they will want to dress in layers because it may actually be COLD inside!

## Teacher Organization

During a lesson the teacher's mind must keep track of a million different things:

- know the lesson plan and execute it.
- be aware of student behavior and correct it.
- deal with any interruptions from outside the classroom.
- monitor student learning and coach them towards improvement.

While your mind is covering these countless issues, all it takes to lose student attention is a long pause or a misplaced piece of chalk. Teachers must be highly organized, and those not organized by nature must develop systems to keep themselves organized. Enlist others in helping you to create systems, but keep in mind they have to be systems you will use, otherwise they are a waste of your time.

During the flow of the lesson, you must know where to go to find important items like the lesson plan, the handouts, the chalk or white board marker, and the attendance. Writing your lesson plan in a readable format that will be easy to follow during the class will help immeasurably. You don't want to have to puzzle out what you meant by "*dr. fig. w/ B. chars in 2 tris*"; it easier to invest the time during planning to draw two triangles and list Billy's relevant characteristics in each triangle. Trying to remember

that great way of organizing information you had at midnight the previous day will be tough. Write it down so you have a guide in the classroom.

Additionally, invest time at the beginning of each day to set out your materials. If you teach different classes back-to-back with no time to clean up or set out new materials for the next class, then you will need to prepare materials for all classes in the morning. Be aware that if you are collecting student materials you do not want them to confuse your own set up. Therefore, designate a place to collect and store student work away from your desk. Do not let it interfere with your own materials.

Lastly, disorganized teachers lack efficient student records, a great source of frustration for parents and teachers. You must be able to refer quickly to a log, grade book, or spreadsheet to know that if Charlotte does not have her homework today, it is either an anomaly or a growing problem. Likewise, you want to be able to back up anything you say about students with written records. Well-organized and consistent records will also help you assist students in goal setting. Maintaining records with both grades and anecdotal notes will help you write complete and thoughtful student evaluations at the end of the week or end of the program. Ultimately, however, good records build student trust. Do not keep records secret from students; in fact, sharing them is a powerful way of coaching students in realistic perceptions of self. When they see fair assessment of their work, they can adjust their efforts to increase or improve their output, as stated in *Assessment*.

## Student Behavior Management

In middle school, you must plan for the unexpected in student behavior. While you should always expect the best of students in academics and behavior, no matter how great your students and classroom are, students will occasionally have a bad day. Remember, however, there are many different causes of student misbehavior and reacting to the behavior is less effective than addressing the root cause of the problem. Your classroom, should have a set of rules, or expectations, and clear consequences that are consistently reinforced, but you must also keep in mind the most effective way to help each child is to treat them as an individual. The best classroom managers respond fairly and consistently to each child, while simultaneously working to help each child develop positive means of interacting and coping. Remember middle-schoolers verging

on adulthood seek ways to handle themselves that will cement themselves into habits. Teachers must accept responsibility for cultivating mature and positive habits.

Behavior management is only one component of classroom management; those that view it as synonymous with classroom management shortchange themselves and the children. It is, however, an essential part of classroom management in the same way that emergency procedures are essential preparation for successful functioning of a school or program. Those who do not prepare for the potential behavior scenarios will be caught off guard and can jeopardize their community building by dealing with a single event ineffectively. Therefore, proactive teachers must plan for students who choose not to follow rules or meet expectations.

A positive classroom culture and clear, concise classroom procedures and expectations send clear messages to students about how they should act. Fostering an environment where respect for all is the rule, rather than a rarity is equally important. Finally, although student voice is important to an equitable and respectful classroom, teachers must establish and maintain their own authority, which can be tricky for beginning teachers.

## **Boundary Setting**

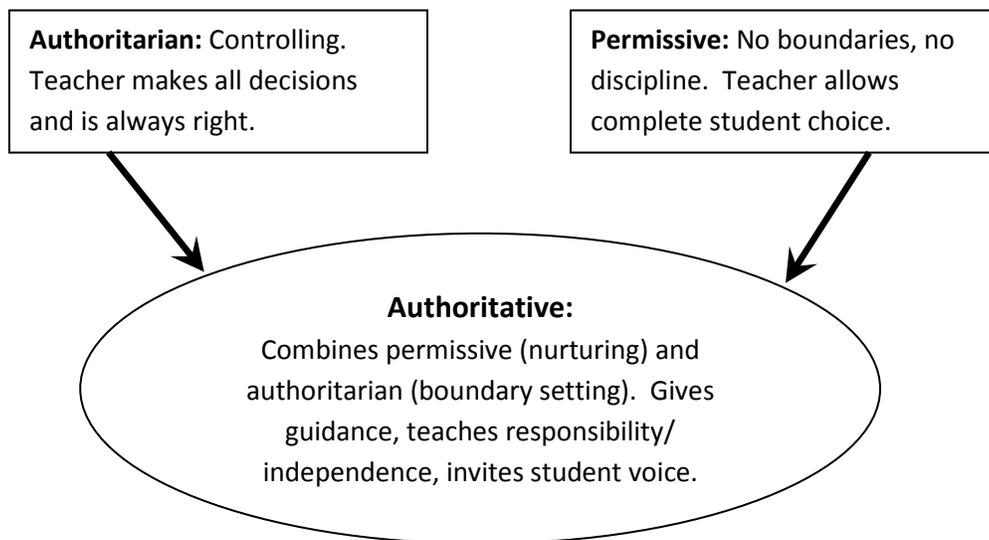
At Breakthrough, where teachers are close to students in age, boundary setting is extremely important. While the supportive relationship between the teacher and student is an essential part of Breakthrough, teachers must draw lines to communicate where that relationship begins and ends. You have to be clear about acceptable and unacceptable behavior and interactions. Once a student crosses the line, an uncomfortable and counterproductive relationship can harm student achievement. Consider the different management styles described below and their effects on classroom culture.

*Authoritarian Management:* The teacher sets stringent boundaries, holds all the authority and is always right. No student voice is permitted. The predominant teacher attitude is: “do it because I told you to.” Students may resent the teacher for the control exerted.

*Permissive Management:* The teacher attempts to create a nurturing and accepting environment by encouraging independence and setting no boundaries. The teacher does not discipline the students; therefore students take advantage of the lack of structure.

Both of the above styles, while derived from good intentions, have harmful effects on individual students and the class as a whole. The final style combines elements from the previous two to create a more effective and positive class environment balancing teacher leadership and student voice.

*Authoritative Management:* The teacher combines the nurturing aspect of the permissive style and boundary setting from the authoritarian style. The teacher gives guidance, teaches responsibility and independence, and invites student voice in appropriate ways by moderating and facilitating the process.



While it will be tempting to act as a friend to the students, this leads to the permissive style of management. If students feel the teacher has no control, they step into the vacuum to prove that point. Likewise, if students feel like they have no control, they will rebel. You have to work for student buy-in by recognizing inappropriate behavior and implementing stated consequences. Furthermore, the teacher must act rationally at all times. If the teacher shows anger or extreme emotion, students may continue to test the boundary; remaining neutral and implementing consequences models self-control

for the students. Of course, you can still show you care about your students and even that inappropriate behavior saddens you, but responding personally to misbehavior damages your authority.

## Sources of Inappropriate Behavior

In order to prevent and address misbehavior, teachers must have a clear idea of why students make certain choices, both positive and negative. Considering their reasons will provide a framework for your management plan, as well as daily lesson plans.

### *Teacher-Centered Sources*

Much of student misbehavior is actually rooted in the teacher's choices or lack of experience. Strong planning and able execution of lesson plans is one of the best ways to circumvent many of these problems. Additionally, creating and teaching procedures, as discussed above will eliminate a great number of behavior problems and inspire confidence in your teaching skills. Below are the two major categories of teacher-centered sources of student misbehavior: instructional and motivational problems.

**Instructional Problems:** The faulty lesson plan is a common source of student misbehavior. Pitfalls for beginning teachers include

- Unclear objectives
- Unvaried instructional strategies
- Under- or over-estimation of the class skill level or students' prior knowledge
- Poor pacing

First, stating the objectives at the beginning of class and briefly explaining overarching goals prevents resistance to learning. Sharing objectives informs students of what will be expected of them during class. Second, teaching in the same way bores students; engage students by varying your approach. Third, activities that require skills above or below students' ability level result in frustration. Use diagnostic assessments to design appropriate lessons. Lastly, look for confused faces and disengagement as signs that your students have checked out because they were ready to move on or because the lesson has moved on without them.

Other instructional problems result from misunderstandings. For instance, if students do not understand how their work was evaluated, they become frustrated and disengaged. Similarly, if students do not fully understand the directions for an assignment, attitude and productivity quickly go downhill. Teachers, therefore, must give clear, simple directions, monitor student comprehension, and correct any misconceptions as soon as possible to maintain productivity and enthusiasm.

**Motivation Problems:** Students often misbehave or make bad choices because they lack the motivation to meet the teacher's expectations or participate in the lesson. While lack of motivation has many causes, the teacher can affect motivation in the following ways:

- Teacher attitude
- Interesting lessons
- Lesson extensions
- Build student self-confidence

Firstly, teacher attitude defines the class attitude. A cranky teacher leads to a cranky class; alternately, an ebullient teacher often results in an ebullient class. You are a primary determinant of the emotional atmosphere in your classroom. For instance, threatening students demonstrates a lack of teacher self-control. Once a student knows how to rattle the teacher, they will work to manipulate the teacher. Showing respect for all students is a much greater motivator than threatening, even in situations where you must act to correct student behavior. A respectful, positive teacher will more often have respectful, positive students; you model much more than just academic skills in your classroom.

Secondly, boring lessons result in apathy and distraction. There are many ways for teachers to spice up mundane lessons from attitude to student interaction to manipulatives (objects used for instructional purposes). Additionally, if students do not have enough to do, they are more likely to disrupt class. Often teachers brand quick learners as problem students because they master skills or finish work more quickly than the rest of the class, and find inappropriate ways to occupy themselves. Establish interesting and challenging options for students that finish work early ahead of time so

students know what their options are upon finishing an assignment. Alternately, create extensions, so students who master the basic lesson quickly can move on to more challenging work. Lastly, students will misbehave when they feel unsuccessful. Look for ways to build student confidence by breaking activities into stages to master sequentially before more challenging tasks are introduced. Teachers must also constantly survey student progress in order to step in to provide coaching for students when they get stuck. Increasing student motivation via these means will increase the productivity of your class and prevent disruptive behavior.

### ***Student-Centered Sources***

No matter how well the teacher promotes a positive classroom environment, there will be factors outside of the teacher's control. Some students will be under a great amount of stress, which can result from academic expectations, social pressures, romantic troubles, racial tension, and pressure at home. Reactions to stress vary based on the individual. They include:

1. Aggression, which releases stress, but does not solve the problem,
2. Withdrawal, which slows down the reaction to stress and relieves the student of discomfort, but does not solve the problem, and
3. Adaptation, during which students can:
  - a.) take action to eliminate the source of the stress, which solves the problem,
  - b.) redefine the situation, which establishes a new outlook on the situation, and can sometimes solve the problem,
  - c.) temporarily withdraw, engage in physical activity, or use a creative release, all of which provide a way to process stress that cannot be eliminated in other ways.

You will need to work with students to bring them into alignment with the culture you are trying to create. You can fulfill their needs in productive ways so that they do not express their needs in negative, disruptive behavior. Below are some of the reasons students choose to misbehave and what you can do to address them.

**Attention:** Often students need special attention, which they receive when they cause others to do things. They use manipulative methods to gain attention, negative or positive. Providing students with positive attention for good choices

and involving students in useful, productive activities shows you care about them. Doting on needy students or solely giving negative attention or criticism thwarts the creation of an equitable and respectful classroom environment.

**Power:** Some students need to exert control. They may create problems by bullying other students and refusing to follow directions. Provide productive ways for these students to help, but do not force them to help. You may provide them with choices, but offer limited options. Remain firm and kind. Rely on established classroom procedures and consequences.

**Revenge:** Students may exhibit a desire to get even with others even for small or accidental affronts. Deal with the source of that student's hurt by offering to listen and allowing the student to share feelings. Help the student develop a plan for productive responses to certain situations.

**Lack of Self-Confidence:** Occasionally students will simply retract into the chair, appearing to give up and asking to be left alone. Acceding to their requests will only build on low self-esteem. You must show that student you believe in them. To do this, structure smaller steps on academic assignments for the child, try to create assignments tailored to her or his interests, and provide a lot of encouragement.

Awareness of student needs can help both teachers to moderate the influence of these needs on the class environment and students to process different types of stress. Getting to know students will also help teachers anticipate student needs in order to create an environment where teachers build self-confidence and provide attention and empowerment.

### ***Responding to Inappropriate Behavior***

The entirety of this section and, really, the whole guidebook address methods to prevent inappropriate behavior by creating a positive and effective classroom. Setting and communicating high expectations for your students, building a community with your students, creating clear procedures and systems, planning interesting lessons, and addressing student needs will assist you in creating a focused productive environment where your students want to be each day. Sometimes a child will act inappropriately.

You must learn to recognize warning signs and halt the behavior as soon as possible. Responding immediately will help to control the situation and prevent more serious outcomes. The essentials of responding to student behavior are:

1. Immediacy
2. Consistency
3. Fairness
4. Calm

### ***Rules...***

The overarching goal of rules and consequences should be to help the students play a positive role in society. Limit the number of rules to five at the most. Overkill will make them hard to remember and send an overbearing message to the students. You must also establish useable rules that you are comfortable implementing. You should devote part of your first day, and several days thereafter, to reviewing the rules and discussing their meaning. Lastly, you may choose to include the class in the process by asking them to describe what they need to be successful students. You must, however, know what type of outcomes you want and be able to direct them if they go astray. Some sample rules are included in the introductory letters in the toolkit. 

### ***...and Consequences***

Once the rules have been established, you should outline and enforce explicit consequences for breaking the rules. Consider different levels of consequences for breaking a rule more than once or for more severe behavior. Build consequences you are willing to implement, knowing that if one fails to stop the behavior, you will have to move on to the next level.

Consequences usually fall into two categories: loss of privilege and corrective action. Limiting your consequences to these categories will assure that you create logical consequences rather than random punitive measures. Students must understand why you dole out a given consequence, otherwise they will feel they were treated unfairly and will continue the behavior. For instance, kicking students out of class for coming in late will only encourage students to be late, whereas keeping students after school for the amount of time they were late to class will teach them to better utilize their time.

Ultimately, you want the consequences to motivate your students to act appropriately, instead of challenging them to defy you.

Another important element of consequences is consistency; dole out the same consequence for the same behavior with all students. The class is likely to revolt when they see unfair or selective implementation of consequences. Furthermore, a calm response shows students the teacher has control and helps to diffuse the situation. Responding with personal emotions, which may seem natural, will lead the student to personalize his or her behavior. The teacher must keep the focus on student behavior and the choices she or he needs to make to participate positively in the classroom community. Making a scene, calling a student out in front of the entire class, or using sarcasm can create a tense, embarrassing situation for the student instead of allowing them to maintain their dignity and correct their behavior.

Once engaged in a lesson, student misbehavior can catch a teacher off guard. Therefore, it is important to have an array of general tools to stop misbehavior in addition to specific consequences. By utilizing these strategies you may be able to stop misbehavior before it gets rolling or diffuse a situation before emotions get involved. These tools are called “desist strategies.”

**The “Teacher Look”:** Practice it in the mirror. Get the stare down. You should be able to communicate the word “stop” silently.

**Hand Signal:** Like the teacher look, you can send the signal that a student needs to get back on task by tapping a paper, a book, or even by making a halt signal with your hand.

**Voice Tone:** Like the teacher look, you can communicate a student is not meeting your expectations just by saying his or her name.

**Verbal Reminder:** Sometimes a student needs a reminder of the appropriate behavior for that moment. Framing this statement positively by telling the student what he or she needs to do, rather than simply telling that student to stop, results more often in student compliance. Attaching the positive statement to a goal or a time limit can also help to focus the student.

*Ineffective Examples:*

- Stop statement: “You need to stop talking to your neighbor.”
- Question: “Should you be talking to your neighbor?”

*Best Example:*

- Positive statement: “Continue working on the math problems silently. You have five minutes to finish.”

**Isolate:** If the situation becomes one that cannot be addressed in these ways, the student should be removed from class. If the class hears or sees negativity, they will jump on the bandwagon because they more often identify with the student. Since you do not want to lose buy-in from the rest of class, you must minimize their involvement with disciplinary issues. Once you have the student isolated follow the recommendations below for student conferences.

**Non-response:** Once you know your students, you may determine that not engaging with the student, or ignoring their behavior is the best course of action. This can only be successful when accompanied by long-term measures to halt whatever behavior you ignore.

**Support System:** Finally, knowing who to go to for support on disciplinary issues will help you get immediate support when a difficult situation arises.

### ***Student Conferences***

With repetitive or severe infractions, you need to implement a more substantial intervention. A student conference can sometimes occur quickly during class while the rest of the class works independently. Otherwise, conferences should take place outside of class. During a conference, the teacher should invite conversation with the student, eliciting student feelings and needs. Once the student has been heard, the teacher provides options with clear consequences and discusses them with the student. Teaching students to use I messages and teacher use of these statements prevents accusatory communications. A sample lesson plan and explanation of I messages can be found in the toolkit.  The goal of any conference, or any corrective feedback, should be to help students determine their own patterns of behavior and develop personal prevention strategies. One way to organize the conference is around a student contract.

Student contracts are agreements between relevant parties, the student, the teacher, family members, and a principal or program director, which state goals and strategies to improve academic performance or behavior. They are often developed at a conference with student and family input. The contracts (see examples in toolkit ) also outline consequences if the student continues to make certain choices. This intervention, however, allows the teacher and student to develop a separate set of warnings, reminders, and supportive comments (from the rest of the class/students) to keep the child on track. The success of the contract depends on continual communication between parties, adherence to the measures, and motivation to follow through with the contract.

In the toolkit,  you will find a list of potentially disruptive behaviors. Spend some time thinking about the most efficient and effective ways to stop these behaviors and get students back on track to learning.

## Breaking it Down:

### Responding to Misbehavior

New teachers benefit most from asking for support from mentor teachers, directors, and other Breakthrough teachers on how to handle misbehavior. Consider observing your students in other classes with other teachers. Talk to teachers who had your students last summer. Collaborate to create environments where students can succeed in all classes because their needs are met in a way that allows them to focus on their academics.

Remember, they are just kids. Most often they misbehave because they are responding to the environment they are in – either in the class or in the broader sense. Focus on helping them find a way out of any negative cycles they have created for themselves. Breakthrough is about empowering students to solve their problems in a positive, productive way that will allow them to hold their heads high and move forward positively.

## Breakthrough Spirit!

The element of spirit represents a significant aspect of the unique environment of Breakthrough. Spirit is infused throughout the classes and the daily program. We use it to celebrate the hard work and team effort that goes into academic achievement, as

well as to motivate, encourage, and build confidence in our students. This essential aspect of management allows us to capture an excitement not all students feel about school. Below are a variety of ways different sites choose to build spirit at their program. Think about ways you can also bring this concept into your classroom.

**All School Meeting (ASM):** A time when all of the Breakthrough community members gather to hear the daily announcements, skits about upcoming activities, daily winners of contests, spirit cheers, spirit stick awards, and tales of what others do in their classes.

**Career Day:** An offsite event where eighth grade students spend a day at local businesses to see what life is like once school is over. Breakthrough tries to place students in businesses that closely relate to what they would like to do when they grow up; sometimes, though, the most unexpected business is the most fun!

**Celebration:** Whether celebrating the end of your first or last summer, Celebration is a time to reflect on achievements and set new goals for the school year. Celebration is open to all community members, family, and staff, and takes place at the end of the summer. It usually includes exhibits of summer projects, a potluck dinner, and classroom visits.

**Families/ Clubs/ Towns/ Colleges/ Tribes:** Each Breakthrough student is broken up into groups, the name of which varies depending on your site. The group has anywhere between 12-15 students of the same grade level who share the same Literacy and Numeracy teachers. The group represents teams for the Olympics, Spirit Day, and other contests throughout the summer.

**The Handshake:** The special handshake signifies membership in the Breakthrough Community.

**Name Challenge:** Students and teachers challenge themselves to know the names of every single member of the Breakthrough summer community in the first week, helping to create a feeling of community and identity.

**Olympics:** Unlike any other event, Olympics is a time to take on challenges of the mind and body. It is a highly competitive event where each family squares off to see who is the best of the best in a number of categories. Sportsmanship is high on the list in *every* category. *Olympics is not just a field day.* It is important that every event is deliberately chosen to highlight the various strengths of your students. Don't let the jocks rule the day!

**Spirit Day:** A competition like no other, Spirit Day happens in the first week and is a vital part of Breakthrough. Everyone in Breakthrough competes to prove they are the most spirited. Chants, songs, club names, and other presentations provide everyone the opportunity to find out what the Breakthrough spirit truly is.

**Spirit Sticks:** Once per day in All School Meeting, a special student is recognized for going above and beyond the expectations of his or her teacher.

## Conclusion

Remember that classroom management must combine curriculum, community building, and behavior management. Without a well-planned approach to the lesson, no matter how good you are at management, students will not stay engaged, focused, or behaved – and who could expect them to? If students feel they do not receive respectful treatment from their teachers or their classmates, they will shut down. The many pitfalls of management may catch you off guard, but through extensive planning and maintaining your composure in the classroom, you will lead your class effectively.