

# Positive behavior incentives going strong in Rome schools

Spencer Lahr Sep 24, 2017 Updated 14 hrs ago



West End Elementary School students enjoy a treat as part of their PBIS -- Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports -- PAWS celebration. (Photo contributed by Buffi Murphy)

In the second year of fully implementing the PBIS approach across the Rome school system, the number of disciplinary incidents in the district have been chopped in half when compared to the years before it was put in place, according to Robbie Vincent, the PBIS district coordinator.

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports focuses on the proactive teaching of school expectations and the positive reinforcement of good behavior, in the form of expressing praise and rewarding students with points — Wolf Bucks or Wolf Points — that can be used to earn special privileges.

The method is used in over 24,500 schools in the U.S., and it was established as the go-to framework for Rome City Schools last school year, a year after a training period to set up its implementation. Leadership teams were created, with assistant principals at each school acting as the PBIS coordinators.

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Each school, including the transitional academy, has its own PBIS theme and motto that lays out the basic behavior traits students should exhibit, Vincent said.

Each school has established their own system of rewards for good behavior — including extra recess time, a homework pass, ice cream socials or a field trip to the movies.

It's a change in mindset at its core, Vincent said.

Rather than pointing out the class disruption or misbehavior of one student in a class of 25, the aim is to commend the others, exemplifying how that one student can change his behavior, she added. And then, turn to working with that one student individually to reteach them how they need to act.

Shannon Holtzclaw, a senior at Rome High, said there seems to be more participation amongst students in the classroom, as well as more collaboration between them and more kids going out of their way to help others.

It's easier to convince kids, who are part of a materialistic generation, to do the right thing when they know they can get something out of it, whether it's helping another student pick up their fallen books or assisting someone with a question on classwork, she said.

With less class disruptions, there is more time to focus on academics. And when there are rewards for performing well on quizzes or answering questions the teacher asks, students are encouraged to take part in their own education, achieving a sense of ownership, said Tamayah Horton, a ninth-grader at Rome High.

Parke Wilkinson, the principal at Rome Middle School, which has adopted the "Be RMS" — respectful, motivated and safe — motto, said his school has set up a success center, where students can come and make up assignments they have zeroes on and have the behavior expectations established.

A major incentive this school year is the possibility of having a field day. Generally, schools past the elementary school level don't have field days.



Eighth-grader Nebrea Askew said this will definitely push kids to follow along with the expectations. Askew and fellow eighth-graders Lexington Jenkins and Jonathan Vigoa said it feels good to have their positive behavior acknowledged.

Jenkins added that this carries over to all students, because they want to attend the events. Askew said earning a good letter grade feels great, but the affirmation from teachers and administrators attached to a material reward secures the roots in students' minds for keeping it up.

Behavior traits like helping others and working hard get carried over into life outside of school, as well, where it becomes ingrained as the things to do, Vigoa said.

North Heights Elementary second-grader James Matheny along with kindergartner Ava Merritt and fourth-grader Heaven McHenry were recognized as Wolves of the Month for their behavior — a PBIS celebration was held at CiCi's Pizza recently and another event is planned for Friday.

Matheny said he was quiet in class, though he added he doesn't like to talk much. Merritt said she was good in gym, using her words instead of her feet and fists in response to an incident. And McHenry said she just likes helping others, as she assisted her peers in finishing their work.

There are a lot more smiles than frowns on teachers' faces nowadays, Matheny said.



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