

Reinventing the Alternative School: From “last chance” juvenile detention to academic alternative http://test.ncdjjdp.org/cpsv/pdf_files/EntireAnobib.pdf p. 7-8

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The purpose of this report is to describe the transformation of a "last chance" alternative school, Lakeside School, located in southeastern North Carolina. During the 1995-96 school year, Lakeside changed its mission from a last-chance type detention center to an innovative academic alternative setting that serves socially and academically at-risk students. The reason for this change in focus at Lakeside was that the effectiveness of the detention center approach was minimal; instead, Lakeside was serving as a "dumping ground" for discipline problems and juvenile offenders.

The academic effectiveness of the school was as low as graduation and promotion rates, and the recidivism rate was high. The restructuring plan at Lakeside included: (a) limiting admission to secondary students and changing the name to Lakeside High School; (b) adopting a student admissions policy which prohibited assignment based primarily on behavioral factors; and (c) approving an academically focused program grounded in a philosophy of student assistance. The student assistance program includes a 4-day instructional week, 3x3 block scheduling, regular Friday staff meetings (which include interagency collaboration among social services agencies), and emphasis upon student learning styles to guide instructional planning.

Review of the 1995-96 school year indicates that Lakeside is emerging as a school with a clear mission, an early record of success, and a cohesive and committed faculty. The principal and dean of students handle student discipline, and students that are admitted to Lakeside have to sign a contract agreeing to meet academic and behavioral expectations for remaining at Lakeside. Students who violate this contract are informed once that they are in violation, and a second violation leads to removal from Lakeside. Police are present in the school to enforce these procedures, and the message to both students and faculty is clear that disruption will not be tolerated.

This approach to discipline as well as the consistency between organizational structure, implementation strategy and goal accomplishment that is explicitly enforced by the principal has caused a dramatic improvement in the climate of the school. Discipline problems have decreased and the dropout rate has declined. The results from the findings of the case study that was conducted at Lakeside during the 1995-96 school year are encouraging. At least one-third of the student population achieved district-wide honor roll status. Faculty found the students to be more focused on academics and the students were more likely to graduate at levels which exceeded the faculty's expectations. Average daily attendance increased from an average of 65 %-80%.

Students were shown more respect and given more responsibility by the school staff; students were allowed to go outside the building during lunch with the expectation that they would be back in class on time, and students were issued textbooks whereas in the past they were not allowed to remove textbooks from the class. Students were also allowed, to produce a yearbook and to have a senior prom. Students responded positively to the new leadership and the transformation of expectations at Lakeside. The Friday "staffing" also helped both teachers and students solve students' problems that impeded their social and academic development. The results of the case study discussed in this article suggest that Lakeside appears to be a school that other alternative schools may consider duplicating.