

## Harmony Hills Elementary School

13407 Lydia Street  
Silver Spring, MD 20906  
Principal: Robin Weaver

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The motto of Harmony Hills Elementary School is, “There is Harmony in Diversity.” The student population represents more than 25 different countries and 18 different languages. The school adapts school behavior programs and communication with families to their specific needs. For example, all communication about local school programs is provided to families in English and Spanish. At the beginning of the school year, teachers provide information to parents about the school philosophy and behavior expectations. In addition, the behavior programs highlight communication skills and common vocabulary for describing emotions to enable positive communication among all students at school.

- ◆ Elementary (Pre-K-5)
- ◆ 62% Hispanic
- ◆ 25% Black
- ◆ 7% White
- ◆ 7% Asian
- ◆ 80% Free or Reduced-Price Lunch
- ◆ 47% English Language Learners
- ◆ 8% Special Education

Robin Weaver, the principal of Harmony Hills Elementary, has been working with teachers to facilitate the inclusion of all students with disabilities in regular education classrooms. One of the steps taken for that purpose is ensuring effective classroom management techniques and individualized support to students with persistent behavior problems.

### Strategies and Programs

The school guidance counselor designed a De-Bugging System and each year she conducts group guidance sessions throughout September for that purpose. During a “De-Bugging” session, the guidance counselor reviews and practices the system with students. The De-Bugging System focuses on non-aggressive responses to peer provocations: ignoring, moving away, speaking in a friendly tone, speaking firmly, and telling an adult.

Teachers work to instill character values and reinforce positive behavior using Character Trait Honors and Awards. Each month a different character trait (e.g., caring, fairness, respect, responsibility, trustworthiness) is featured in a variety of settings. Each morning, at the close of the schoolwide announcement, the character trait for the month is discussed with examples of what that trait “looks like” and “sounds like.” The classroom teachers then base a daily 5–15 minute mini-lesson called “Classroom Meeting” on the character trait of the month. Students who consistently show behavior that exemplifies the character trait are given a “Character Block” on a dedicated wall in the main school hall. The teacher posts the student’s photo and the Character Block for the entire school year. At the end of the school year, a special celebration is conducted honoring award winners.

Another system for reinforcing good behavior is the Blue Slip System. The Blue Slip is a form for “catching a student being good.” Any staff member, substitute, or volunteer can give a student or group of students a Blue Slip. The Blue Slips are given to students who demonstrate their ability to “live our School Pledge.” The pledge is: “My school, my family, and I expect me to do my best today so today I pledge to be respectful, responsible and helpful, follow school rules and classroom procedures, and to make good choices.” Typically, 5–6 students each day receive Blue Slips and are included in the daily announcements. The teacher sends a copy of the Blue Slip home for the parent to see and sign. The school’s Discipline Committee monitors the system. The Committee also makes sure that every child in the building receives at least one Blue Slip each semester.

### **Teacher Collaboration**

Grade-level teams at Harmony Hills work together to improve both academic and behavior outcomes of students. They select a team member who is designated as the Collaborative Action Process (CAP) coach. The coach receives specialized training and is tasked with facilitating grade-level team meetings around regular education and special education students with persistent behavior problems.

Each grade-level team meets twice a month. Every meeting is dedicated to discussing one or two students. When a teacher recommends that the grade-level team discuss the case of an individual student, he or she should have first tried behavior intervention strategies on her/his own, reviewed the student files including health, academic, and other information, and contacted the parents to discuss the issue and get the parents’ perspective.

During grade-level meetings, as a first step, the team examines student information, identifies areas of concern, and sets goals for the student. The team then puts together a behavior intervention plan for the teacher to use in the classroom during the following weeks (timeline may range from 4 to 10 weeks, depending on the areas of concern). A member of the grade-level team may monitor implementation and provide further support to the teacher. After the teacher has tried the intervention for the planned period of time, the team meets again to review progress and revise goals and the implementation plan as needed. If those attempts are not successful, the student case is brought to the attention of the building-level team, which includes teachers, the school psychologist, social worker, and nurse.

The CAP coach receives ongoing training to promote knowledge about behavior data collection, types of behavior problems, and types of interventions. In addition, the coach receives training in leadership and meeting management skills to effectively use the time allocated for team meetings. The training is provided in monthly 60-minute meetings during CAP business meetings. In attendance at these meetings are all CAP coaches in the school, the reading specialist, counselor, school psychologist, school social worker, nurse, special education resource teacher, staff development teacher, and school administrators.

## Summary

Teachers at the school work collaboratively to a) promote cultural awareness and pride in the cultural diversity of the school, b) facilitate positive and effective communication among students and caring relationships, and c) help students self-manage and self-monitor their behavior.

Because the school has a system in place to review, in a comprehensive and consistent manner, cases of individual students with behavior problems and tailor support to their individual needs, the principal noted that students who might otherwise become classified as in need of special education services, maintained a regular education status. Many students have improved their behavior and consequently their academic outcomes, because teachers they know and trust have helped them set goals, monitor these goals, and revise them as needed.