



## ***RCD Case Study:*** **Oak Park High School Embraces Responsibility-Centered Discipline to Reduce Behavior Incidents by 79%**

*Chad Valadez, then Assistant Principal and currently Activities Director of Oak Park High School (OPHS), recognized the need for a new approach to classroom management. School climate was eroding, and discipline incidents were at an all-time high. His research led him to Responsibility-Centered Discipline™ (RCD), which incorporates a language and approach familiar to OPHS – and Valadez quickly realized this system could help his educators and students succeed. OPHS chose RCD in 2017 and couldn't be happier with the results. Behavior incidents declined by nearly 80 percent in just two years, coupled with significant transformations in teacher satisfaction and school climate.*

### **The Story of Oak Park High School**

Oak Park High School is part of the North Kansas City School District in Kansas City, Missouri. The student body is comprised of 9th through 12th grade students, with a 2017 enrollment of 1,549. In 2017, leaders at OPHS made it a priority to transform school culture and classroom management. Student misbehavior was at an all-time high with a staggering 2,537 behavior incidents, which included a mix of office discipline referrals, in-school-suspensions (ISS) and out-of-school suspensions (OSS). Assistant Principal Chad Valadez knew he and his staff were at a breaking point and needed a new direction.

### **The Challenge of Classroom Management**

“We had a high number of discipline referrals, and multiple days lost in ISS or OSS,” Valadez said. “Our teachers struggled to have the tools to address students when they didn't meet expectations.” With the burden of frustrated teachers and the onslaught of student behavior issues, Valadez turned to Responsibility-Centered Discipline (RCD) for answers.

RCD was created by Larry Thompson to help educators effectively manage challenging moments with students and to provide a supportive learning environment. By fostering self-responsibility, RCD helps students transform behavior and academic success – enabling educators to focus less on discipline and more on teaching.

“Part of why we felt RCD was a great fit at our school was due to some of the common language that had already been established,” Valadez said. “Based on this, our ability for teachers to build relationships and make that a priority in their classrooms, RCD seemed to make sense.”

OPHS began RCD implementation in the fall of 2017-2018. “The first year we started to introduce the concepts of RCD in small doses during professional development,” Valadez said. “Our plan was to grow it each year with the support of the RCD team until we were ready for school-wide implementation. We fully implemented RCD as our discipline practice after year two.”

## **Implementation: A Team Approach**

“We needed a process that gave teachers specific skills and a framework to reach students,” Valadez said. “Teachers and administrators are never trained to deal with trauma, emotional concerns or disruptive behavior. We have been informed about a lot of these important issues, but never told ‘how’ to best help our students experiencing these. We felt by bringing in the RCD system we were able to give them this training.”

“RCD gives teachers a set of tools – specifically Give ‘em Five™ – to utilize in challenging moments, creates opportunities for students to develop plans to change behavior and gives them voice. Our staff was ready to try something else. Our roll out included taking time to practice, learn and ask questions over an 18-month period before we went into full implementation.”

Give ‘em Five is a component of Responsibility-Centered Discipline that provides a five-step approach to guiding difficult conversations and effectively navigating through challenging moments of school discipline situations. When an educator senses conflict is on the way, Give ‘em Five offers a roadmap to resolution and puts the focus on why the student misbehaved to deal with the root of the conflict. The goal of Give ‘em Five is to help educators feel comfortable and natural while delivering a message of responsibility.

OPHS educators also recognize the advantages of RCD, including an English Language Arts teacher. “I think the RCD Model has helped to restore relationships between me and my students when we have a problem,” she said. “They aren’t just kicked out of the classroom. The process makes sure we have a face-to-face conversation and work through the problem instead of just having them sit in ISS or OSS and then come back to the classroom without addressing the issue. They might still act up, but they know that I will address it every time. In academics, they don’t miss as much class time. They can’t just say, ‘I was gone, you kicked me out’ as an excuse instead of being in charge of their own learning.”

While OPHS achieved incredible results, setting up the RCD structure for success was not always easy. Several existing discipline practices and processes had to be changed and the RCD system installed. OPHS made the decision to fully embrace RCD and is working toward RCD Model School Status.

One of the major shifts included creating RCD teams. “We added grade-level RCD teams,” Valadez said. “These teams have three to five adults including our recovery room teacher who is on all of them. They are focusing on the 10-12 most at-risk students in our building. The teams have been working with the students on setting short and long-term goals, behavior plans and anything else the student needs for support. We have already moved two or three kids from each team with their new plans. Without it starting on the RCD level with behavior, we would have never made it to this point with the RCD grade-level teams.”

As they continued to implement RCD with fidelity, OPHS saw dramatic drops in behavior incidents in the first semester of the 2019-2020 school year. The results encouraged Valadez, who has become an RCD advocate for other schools looking for a solution to student behavior issues.

“I would have the RCD team train your school to really gain the understanding,” Valadez said. “Students and teachers are coming to us with so many significant gaps in how to work together that having a system in place for everyone to follow creates opportunity for growth. This is what we have found with RCD. We have to be able to peel back the layers of the onion and find out what the real issue is with students when they are upset. Sitting them in a room alone for a time-based consequence does not work. Being able to trust an adult and talk about what you need as a student, and the adult being able to be empathetic and offer support can change the trajectory for both parties involved!”

## **The Result: 79% Behavior Incident Reduction**

Even without fully implementing the systemic structure of RCD in year one, OPHS saw significant gains in student behavior. Total incidents declined to 1,549 incidents – a 39% drop – in the 2017-2018 school year. This positive outcome prodded Valadez and his staff to dig deeper and commit to full RCD implementation the following year. The results of their efforts bore fruit in monumental fashion. Behavior incidents dropped a staggering 79% to 539 – almost a 2,000-incident drop in only two years. Valadez points to the success of RCD and its ability to address the social and emotional needs of students and those who are in trauma.

Vice Principal Jackie Gosney is now leading the RCD initiative and remains committed to strengthening the Responsibility-Centered Culture at OPHS. The leadership plans to conduct refresher training for the entire staff this summer to help ensure a smooth expansion of in-person school this fall. Keeping students engaged, accountable and in class will be critical to help address learning loss brought on by the pandemic.