

Principal's Overview From Then to Now

When I arrived here, I found a caring, intelligent, thoughtful, staff who valued one another and understood the most important mission of all, to help every child be successful. I also found a staff that had done a great deal of work in previous years defining what we need to do for kids and coming to agreement on many of the fundamentals. So, my job, as I see it, is to help us put systems into place which help us consistently and as an entire staff walk our talk with respect to initiatives we support on behalf of all the students. Once systems are in place and working, the systems act as a basis of support to ensure that our work has continuity from year to year. They also ensure that no administrator, teacher group, or parent group can sidetrack the effort that the entire staff has implemented without a total review of the system and a new agreement among all the participants. The fundamental difference between an average to good school and a great school is the effort put into developing and maintaining systems that all support. Use of a "care to confront" approach to maintain these systems once developed, and to hold one another accountable for our basic agreements, are also essential ingredients necessary to create a great school.

Developing those systems, learning to confront, and holding one another accountable does not come easy. It does not come without some pain through the process of learning and taking risks. Progress comes in incremental steps. Sometimes it may feel that no progress is being made or even that we are going backwards. The analogy I've used before, is that of an orchestra tuning up. Instruments may individually be glorious but collectively make an unpleasant noise. As we tune up, as each instrument gets closer to being in tune, and when each musician has his or her part to play, only then do we begin to make music. The music becomes beautiful when there has been practice, lots, and lots of practice. So, to stay with the analogy, we are in the process of tuning our instruments and beginning to determine what music we want to play together. I believe we can select that music together, and practice it together, and create a beautiful symphony. We have the heart, the brains, the courage, and the sense of home to get where we need to go together for the love of our kids, all of our kids. Together we're better!

CARE TO CONFRONT

Care to Confront Protocol

1. Identify the problem to the best of your ability.
2. Decide if you can solve the problem directly with the other individual or if a third party is necessary.
3. Go to the person and say, I have a “Care to Confront Issue”, and I would like to arrange a time that works for both of us to discuss it. Tell them at that time what the issue is.
4. Meet at the agreed upon time and use the following formula for discussion.
5. Formula for the discussion:
 - a. State the issue and state the rationale related to operating principles for your concern.
 - b. Use an “I statement” to show how this incident affected you or made you feel.
 - c. Tell them what your preference was for the situation or describe the behavior you would like to see changed.
 - d. State your expectation for the outcome of the “Care to Confront”
 - e. Provide an opportunity for the other person to respond.
 - f. Seek resolution through compromise or you state if you cannot follow the expected operating principles then I am going to request assistance from a counselor or administrator.

CARE TO CONFRONT PROTOCOL: EXAMPLE

1. Identify the problem from your point of view.

We have a common expectation that students will be released from lunch at 10:50 for lunch. On two occasions this week, I have noticed that the teacher next door has let his students out for lunch early.

2. Clarify the “What” (What is the issue?) and the “Why” (What do you want for yourself, the other person, and for your working relationship?)

The issue is that it breaks down consistency amongst teachers and students in our school. It affects my students and me because I teach next door and my students notice the other teacher’s students get to leave early for lunch. My students want to leave early, too. They complain that the kids in the next door class get to be in the lunch line before them. I don’t know how to respond to their complaints, and I think that they have a valid point.

3. Explore your assumptions and intentions.

4. Tell the person that you have a “Care to Confront Issue”, and I would like to arrange a time to discuss it. Tell them what the basic issue is so it is not a mystery to the other person that they need to worry about.

Factors that need to be present for a successful conversation:

- Private and confidential space
- Time and space that is free from interruption
- Time and space that is mutually agreed upon

“So, I have something I’d really like to discuss with you using the Care to Confront protocol. It’s important to me. It’s about our rule regarding the schedule for lunches. When would be a good time for us to talk about this? Where can we meet that would be good?”

5. Meet at the agreed upon time using the following guidelines for discussion.
6. During the discussion:
 - a. Begin with safety: establish mutual respect and purpose
 - b. State the issue and state the reason for your concern. An essential element of this is safety; remember your common purpose.

Thanks for meeting with me, I really appreciate it. I wanted to talk to you about a concern I have about letting your students out for lunch earlier than the scheduled release time. I wanted to talk to you about it because it’s bothering me; it’s disrupting my students. I also wanted to talk with you about it because I really respect you and your work. It’s my intention to try to work this out or come to a better understanding about this problem.

- c. Speak only for yourself; use your facts and feelings. Use “I statement” to show how this incident affected you or impacted your work.

I am bringing this to you because on at least two occasions this week, you’ve let your students go a few minutes early to lunch. My students are in class and want to know why they can’t leave early, too. They also have complained because they say it’s unfair that your students get in line for lunch first. I also end my class with an exit slip and it’s really important to me that it goes well, and students can concentrate.

- d. Tell them what your preference was for the situation or describe the behavior you would like to see instead.
 - e. State your expectation for the outcome of the “Care to Confront”

What I’m hoping is that I can understand better where you’re coming from and that we can come to some sort of resolution to this problem. It is a school schedule, but I definitely don’t want to presume that you don’t have really good intentions.

- f. Provide an opportunity for the other person to share their story or information.

Response: "Well, I have been having a lot of trouble with my 3rd period class being on task. They just want to talk and talk and talk. I thought that if I could provide them with the incentive of getting to go to lunch five minutes early it would really help with their in-class behavior. I know that we have a school schedule rule but I'm trying to get creative and give my students some incentive so that they can earn a reward for demonstrating appropriate behavior."

- g. Seek resolution through compromise or get help from a third party.

That really helps me understand better why you're doing this. One thing that I am concerned about is how this will continue to impact my students and me. I know that it's sometimes hard to come up with incentives students really love, but I'm concerned about the precedent this sets. Would you be open to brainstorming some other options? If so, when would be a good time to do that?

- 7. Confirm your plan and follow up by enacting the agreement and checking progress.
Check in as agreed.