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THABEET GOES OFF

BIG GUY'S TRIPLE-DOUBLE SPURS HUSKIES TO 94-61 WIN OVER FRIARS, PAGE 1C



ML SHOWDOWN

TELEERS, ARDINALS FAR UP FOR ONIGHTS BIG GAME IN TAMPA, PAGE 1C



School accentuates positive

New behavior policy more rewarding for students, staff

BY MICHAEL PUFFER
REPUBLICAN-AMERICAN

WATERBURY — North End Middle School has its share of troublemakers.

Last year, there were 30 arrests and 1,145 suspensions among North End's roughly 1,200 students. A two-page list on a wall in the main office lists injuries to staff, several of

which were caused by punches or shoves from children. Staff say these problems are mostly the work of a few dozen students.

This year, the school climate has improved dramatically, thanks in large part to a new behavior system that, unlike many previous policies, focuses on rewarding those who follow the rules rather than simply pun-

ishing the worst offenders. It's called "positive behavior supports" and it is growing in popularity across the country.

Jacquelyn Gilmore, one of three house principals at North End, keeps a small wooden chest filled with pencils, little rolls of tart Smarties candy and erasers emblazoned with a smi-

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STEVE VALENTI REPUBLICAN-AMERICAN Prizes await those who behave well at North End Middle School in Waterbury.

DOES BARBER LAW SPLIT HAIRS?



Many Latinos cut without license; most cite language barrier



Referral For Positive Action forms fill a bulletin board at North End Middle School in Waterbury on Friday. The form is given to students who act positively during school hours. Below, Principal Jacquelyn Gilmore displays an assortment of prizes students can earn with a positive referral.

STEVEN VALENTI, REPUBLICAN-AMERICAN

"THEY ARE VERY PROUD FOR THE LITTLE THINGS THEY DO, AND THAT FLOWS INTO EVERY CLASS. AT FIRST A LOT OF TEACHERS SAID, 'IT'S NEVER GOING TO WORK' ... BUT THEY SEE IF YOU STICK WITH IT, IT DOES GET BETTER."

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POSITIVE: Policy has Obama's support



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BEHAVIOR MODIFICATION

ley face. These prizes go to children who receive "super student slips" from teachers who catch them doing good — things like helping a classmate with homework, carrying an injured teacher's books or picking up trash in the hallway.

After five referrals, a student can pick a larger prize, ranging from notebooks to portable compact disc players.

Even small tokens mean a great deal to the children, Gilmore said. She enjoys the chance to pat students on the back, rather than simply doling out punishment. And she gets to meet children who otherwise would never get sent to her office.

Gilmore has no illusions about converting the most troubled students with pencils and erasers, but believes educators can blunt their influence on other students, and maybe even tempt a few borderline cases to follow the rules.

"PBS really focuses on the 80 percent of kids who follow the rules most of the time, but maybe need some help to make good decisions," Gilmore said. "You hope to move that to 85 percent or 90 percent."

There are other rewards. Positive referral slips are posted on bulletin boards. Last week, teachers passed out 325 plastic bracelets to consistently well-behaved students. They're a mark of pride and a ticket to the head of the lunch-line.

PBS also calls for clear rules and expectations. At North End, every student has been taught a behavior mantra that plays on the school's "Rams" mascot — Respect, Attitude, Motivation and Success. If the jingle slips

Positive Behavior Supports is one of several new or expanded efforts to improve behavior in Waterbury schools.

Police "resource" officers have been added to the middle schools.

The schools have added truancy counselors, conflict mediators and more guidance counselors. Schools hold regular "prevention meetings" to head off problems. In the past two years, the middle and high schools have launched in-school suspensions — which have drastically reduced the number of out-of-school suspensions.

In the past three years, the number of in-school and out-of-school suspensions combined dropped by 13 percent, to 15,659 last year in Waterbury schools. North End Middle School experienced a 32 percent drop in suspensions.

students' minds, there are reminders on posters around the building, along with little signs reminding them not to talk in the hallways and to clean up after lunch.

The philosophy of positive reinforcement has been gaining ground since the 1960s, becoming ever more refined. Since 2000, the state-funded State Educational Resource Center has trained teachers from more than 27 Connecticut school districts, including educators in Waterbury and Region 1. Nationally, it's in thousands of schools.

In 2007, Barack Obama, then a U.S. senator from Illinois, introduced legislation that would allow states to use federal anti-poverty funding on PBS. There is some expectation the president will throw his new clout behind the system.

"President Obama's support for Positive Behavior Support in the Senate suggests that PBS will be an important part of his administration's education agenda as well," notes a draft report on PBS from the State Educational Resource Center. White House staff did not return a telephone call Friday.

Positive Behavior Support hasn't completely transformed North End. The most-troubled students are still getting into hot water. There have been 19 arrests so far this year.

But educators say they have quieter hallways and lunch periods. Teachers talk of students who light up when handed a small slip of paper congratulating them for good behavior.

"They are very proud for the little things they do, and that flows into every class," said Patty Betancourt, a science teacher who admits she was skeptical of PBS initially.

"At first a lot of teachers said 'it's never going to work, it's never going to work, it's never going to work,' but they see if you stick with it, it does get better," Betancourt said.

North End seventh graders Kimberly Hernandez and Marjorie Inga said they have noticed a big difference. Students are more helpful to teachers and kinder to each other, they said. And they've definitely noticed a change in focus from the adults.

"They are paying more attention to good kids instead of bad kids," Inga said.