

LINCOLN'S "TIGER PRIDE" GIVES STUDENTS AN OUTLET

A room with a view allows students to talk out their problems--and it's working



Lincoln Middle School Vice Principal Emily Wren and Tiger Pride room supervisor Pat Ware head the program along with principal Jeremy Smith. Since its introduction, the room has drastically decreased the number of referrals received by students.

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The Tiger Pride room at Lincoln Middle School was introduced a year ago after consulting experts and experimenting with what worked for Lincoln kids. Since its inception, referrals have nosedived, student attendance is up and behavior that would often lead to detention has decreased. The change has schools both inside and outside of the district ask-

ing how educators at Lincoln have managed such a feat. The answer? Pat Ware.

Ware was initially hired to manage the school's detention program but when the Tiger Pride room came about, her job description shifted and the school started seeing results. The formula for approaching a student's behavior is simple, really. Principal Jeremy Smith and vice principal Emily Wren talk to the parents. Ware talks to the kids.

"A lot of these kids don't

know the words to say," Ware said. That's where she comes in.

Lincoln has instituted a behavioral flow chart to help guide teachers, students, administrators and parents through the school's disciplinary process. It's a method administrators say, keeps everyone accountable.

"When we call home now we can say, these are the different steps we've taken," said Wren. "It protects the parent as well because there could be an instance where they say, 'Well this is the first I'm hearing about this

and according to the chart the teacher was supposed to contact me.' It really does keep everyone accountable."

Infractions vary from being off task, not following direction to inappropriate language and horseplay. Students engaging in any of the behaviors on the list are subject to being spoken to by a teacher but sometimes a resolution is out of reach.

"Kids would be sent to Emily or I but we may not be available and so that kid is sitting there, out of class sometimes for an hour waiting for us," Jeremy said of the traditional "to-the-principals'-office" solution. Now, students visit the Tiger Pride room and Ware or as the kids know her, "Ms. Pat."

"The referrals have gone down but that wasn't our goal," Emily said, "It was to keep kids in the classroom and not take them out of instructional time."

The process is based on restorative justice. Students learn how to express their frustrations clearly and walk through the events that led them to Ware. A sign-in sheet helps students write-out their version of the incident while Ware is greeted by a separate sheet that details the student's behavior.

"Sometimes the student and teacher don't see eye-to-eye about what happened," Ware said. "And I don't always side with the teacher. That's not to say that I'm standing up for the student but I'm standing there with them."

According to the data, it's working. In the 2010-2011 school year, referrals numbered more than 1,000. While the data is incomplete for the current school year, as of March, Lincoln Middle School has seen under 300 referrals.

The Tiger Pride room has had a hand in lowering those numbers but it hasn't been a fix-it for every troubled student. Lincoln has had to expel three students this year for what Wren describes as serious offenses.

"It's heartbreaking," she said. "But the Tiger Pride room isn't

going to work for every student and when we have some of those bigger offenses, we still have to expel students."

The Tiger Pride procedure, however, makes those decisions more clear. During expulsion hearings, administrators, teachers and parents can evaluate the student's behavior and the steps that were taken to correct it through the behavioral flow chart.

"It does make it a little easier to know that everything was done and every step was taken before we reached that point," Wren said.

Even for students who find solace in the room, the road to success often varies from child to child. Some children can be guided easily through the conversation while others need a bit more coaching. And according to Ware, that's not only the case with students.

"Sometimes, the teacher is not ready to have that child back in the classroom," she said, recalling a particular incident involving a strong-willed student and equally strong-willed teacher. "I am not going to subject that student to more anger because the teacher is not ready to hear those words yet," she said.

That sense of being prepared to receive and clarity concerning the incident are key to the Tiger Pride room process. Ware notes that if a student is not sincere in their apology or explanation and the teacher has not cleared themselves of the frustration and is ready to hear the student, the process will not work.

But the Tiger Pride room isn't just for students and teachers to walk through disagreements. The process covers student-to-student communication as well. In the age of social media, Wren says staff's job has become a bit harder.

Lincoln does not allow students to use cell phones other than for a 30 minute period during a choice activity known as Flex. But that doesn't always stop students from reaching for

their devices.

"I was going into a classroom to award a student a good news referral and came up behind him and he's on his phone. So I had to say, 'here's your good news referral and I'm going to need your phone,'" Wren said.

Ware has also noticed the effect of social media on the kids she sees in the Tiger Pride room.

"You'll see kids come in and they're upset because they don't have friends. They don't have a cell phone and the entire group over here is on their phones and they don't have that ability," she said, noting that she also makes sure students understand that cyber bullies are not their friends but the sting of social media rejection still has a profound effect on students.

"They'll come in and ask me if they can be on the phone for their Flex time and I say no. I tell them I follow the rules and there's no phones," she said.

The Tiger Pride room doesn't work for everyone but for the ones who succeed through the restorative process, Ms. Pat becomes an anchor for the remainder of their time at Lincoln. And while other schools in the district are working on similar programs, the Tigers continue to see results.

Wren asked several students how the room and Ware impacted them, sharing the results with the South Lane School District board on Monday, March 10. With a tear-strained voice she read the words of an eighth grader:

"The Tiger Pride Room is where you go to learn a lesson, what you've done wrong and how you can change it. It helps LMS because it keeps kids out of drama and helps the problems you have with other teachers and students. Ms. Pat helped me because last year I was failing all of my classes and getting into a lot of trouble. This year I've improved all of my grades and have stayed out of drama. Pat cares. Now I go to Tiger Pride just to say, 'Hi.'"

Ballet fundraiser

The South Lane Ballet Academy will be holding a fundraiser on Thursday, April 20 to raise money for scholarships. The Cottage Grove McDonald's will be giving 40 percent of the profits garnered between 4:30 p.m. and 7 p.m. to the academy and students ages three to 17 will be costume, dancing throughout the restaurant. To take part in the fundraiser, residents can eat at the local McDonald's between 4:30 and 7 p.m. or donate directly by contacting the South Lane Ballet Academy by calling (541) 767-0022.

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