

# Introduction

*The manager accepts the status quo; the leader challenges it.*

—Warren Bennis

**A**s an elementary principal, could you use a schoolwide discipline plan that lowers office referrals by 75 percent, decreases student suspensions more than 50 percent, and increases responsible student behavior that can be sustained at every grade level? Referred to as RCM or The RCMPlan™, responsible classroom management is a twofold program: (1) it teaches students to learn and internalize personal responsibility for their own behavior and (2) it serves as a well-tested, classroom-management plan for a schoolwide discipline model. For teachers, the book offers a complete instructional plan for teaching responsibility and a classroom management. For principals, the book offers a schoolwide discipline program that returns the control of nonviolent behavioral problems back to the classroom teachers for resolution as part of the learning process. The RCMPlan™ allows the principal to refocus on instructional leadership and prevents an onslaught of the inappropriate-behavior situations that should be handled in the classroom. In addition, the book, along with an author-designed and monitored Web site, prepares the principal and selected training-team members to lead the faculty and staff in developing The RCMPlan™.

## **RATIONALE FOR THE RCMPLAN™**

Student and/or classroom behavior encompasses the “biggest problem” facing our schools, as revealed in every one of the forty-one

Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup public attitude polls (Bushaw & McNee, 2009, p.10). Over the years, items such as discipline, lack of funding, drugs, and fighting/violence/gangs have topped the list. School administrators face daily and continuous challenges in efforts to establish and maintain safe and orderly classroom environments—where teachers can teach and students can learn.

One group or individual is not responsible for preventing and reducing behavior problems. Administrators need assistance identifying, implementing, and supporting effective interventions. Teachers need help teaching responsible and acceptable behavior along with academics. Students need to be taught appropriate social, behavioral, and academic norms, and then supervised in learning and demonstrating these norms. Parents need assistance participating as partners in making schools safer, more positive places to send their children. Preventing and reducing behavior problems, then, requires a schoolwide plan.

The RCMPlan™ provides a school-based model to work with all children and youth. It is truly an individualized classroom-management plan, with two major goals: (1) to teach students to be responsible for their actions and (2) to allow teachers and staff to use schoolwide discipline and a classroom-management plan that holds students responsible for all of their actions and behaviors. The RCMPlan™ also addresses the greater problem of student entitlement.

Students today often enter high school with a sense of entitlement that continues into college and adulthood. To explore this phenomenon, we conducted sessions with various groups of high school teachers, college professors, and employers. This “expected sense of entitlements,” as one major CEO stated during a highly spirited focus group, manifests in actions once graduates enter the work force, with expectations for taking long breaks; leaving work early or arriving late; receiving special considerations for tasks; and wanting rewards, recognition, and praise for almost every job or task completed. College professors have shared similar feelings about students, especially among freshmen.

Customarily, elementary teachers use bribes and rewards in the classroom to get students to behave appropriately and to complete assignments. The practice of bribery became prevalent in the 1970s when many parents were forced to develop a less demanding approach with their children as they experienced greater stress from working two jobs, returning to college, and other

economic factors—all resulting in less time with their children. Either from guilt or excessive stress, parents found it easier to do previously child-oriented chores themselves, or to bribe children to complete tasks and even homework. Parents used this “reward-addicting” practice with children of all ages through high school.

In addition, we all have heard of “helicopter parents” hovering or intervening on their child’s behalf at the college level. As former college administrators, it was not unusual for parents to confront us over a student’s grade or a complaint about a specific professor. Teachers compound the bribery and reward problem by mastering this approach in preschool through high school. Today, these reward-addicted, entitled high school graduates now suffer from withdrawal after being bribed for years and often rewarded for substandard results. It is likely that many of these young employees or college students never fully learned to be responsible for their actions, or to act responsibly without an external source of validation.

## **RESPONSIBLE STUDENTS**

Responsible students act with intended purpose based upon their own internal locus of control. Responsible students behave and act appropriately and complete academic assignments because it is expected in our culture. Responsible students have learned to treat teachers and other students with civility and respect. Many of these responsible students come to school from homes where bribes, treats, and rewards are *not* used as the major method of child control. Some students learn responsible behavior by playing sports or participating in extracurricular activities. In a few situations, children are fortunate enough to have a strong kindergarten teacher who works directly with children and willing parents to start reversing inappropriate habits, and teaching appropriate and responsible behavior.

Responsibility and civility cannot be ingrained until learned, practiced, and sustained. RCM provides the environment for children to learn and practice responsibility, while offering teachers and staff members tools for schoolwide use. These tools ensure sustainability and internalization of the newly learned behaviors. These are the goals of The RCMPlan™.

The belief that every child moves through several common developmental stages underlies RCM. These stages determine, to a high degree, the behaviors, attitudes, cognitive capabilities, and physical characteristics that a child will exhibit at any particular time. To assure that children prosper and develop into healthy and well-balanced adults, every child needs unconditional love, security, and the certainty of belonging.

The ability to discover workable solutions to all types of problems—academic, social, emotional, and personal—is fundamental to children’s success. RCM supports this learning and problem-solving ability, and in particular, focuses on social and academic contexts that mandate responsible and civil manners.

RCM assumes that most children, even so-called “problem children,” can be taught to behave responsibly in school—operating within an internalized set of values and beliefs. Responsible children have learned to self-correct inappropriate behavior by using an internal locus of control. These children learned from the consequences of their behavior, and subsequently adjusted to expected behaviors and school and classroom standards.

## **BASIC RESEARCH SUPPORTING RCM**

In our research on RCM, close analysis of almost any classroom reveals that approximately 88 percent of students never require major disciplinary actions. Although a teacher might have to restate expectations, most children generally behave appropriately. However, within the same classroom, approximately 12 percent of the students require varying degrees of the teacher’s attention. Most of these children, three out of four of the 12 percent, are attention seekers or extremely active, and therefore require some corrective measures. The remaining children, or about 3 percent of the school population, exhibit anger, aggression, and mistrust in their behavior and attitudes. Their noncompliant behavior can be highly disruptive and usually requires special treatment to make the classroom an appropriate learning environment. As every teacher knows, the undesirable behavior of a single child can rapidly ripple through a class with devastating effects. The RCMPlan™ offers support for teachers in avoiding this situation and provides the tools to handle the most difficult child in the classroom.

## **Implementation of The RCMPlan™**

Within the RCM classroom, students learn responsibility and are then expected to practice it. The RCMPlan™ defines a classroom-management system intended to teach students acceptable standards and guidelines with specific expected behaviors based upon their developmental levels. RCM allows teachers to monitor and guide students in nurturing, but accountable, ways. It also provides teachers with the independence to develop productive and stimulating classroom strategies that assist students in controlling their personal behavior. With The RCMPlan™, students willingly take an active role in developing and implementing classroom-learning experiences. As children take responsibility and develop accountability for their learning and self-discipline, they prepare for their future as mature and actively engaged adults.

## **ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK**

Principals and teachers begin their mastery of RCM after reading Chapter 1. Educators learn the three major principles used in The RCMPlan™ and how the discipline review committee (DRC) assists the principal and administrative team in preparing the faculty for personalizing the RCM model for their school. In Chapter 2, teachers learn more about the correlates from the researched schools and how to set up the instructional environment for teaching responsibility. Standards, guidelines, and expected behaviors are presented and discussed in detail in Chapter 3, with outcomes for schoolwide and classroom use. Chapter 4 supports these standards, guidelines, and behaviors with an array of RCM tools to maximize success of the program. Resource A and B offer guides for the principal and all teachers who will assist in the training for faculty and staff as they learn the basic principles and tools, and finalize the plan for the school.

## **LEADERSHIP AND DIRECTION FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RCMPLAN™**

The RCMPlan™ has been used with great success schoolwide at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. We have found

that the direct success of The RCMPlan™ directly relates to the leadership provided by the principal in developing, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating this new model within the entire school building.

## **THE PRINCIPAL'S GUIDE**

We provide the necessary steps and procedures for the principal to follow in preparing the faculty and staff for implementation of The RCMPlan.™ In table format, the guide is easy for the principal and other trainers to follow while leading faculty's staff-development activities for learning and using the model.

1. Steps and time factors
2. Staff-development activities
3. The RCMPlan™ book guide
4. The RCMPlan™ Toolbox
5. The RCMPlan™ Web site

### **THE RCMPLAN™ TOOLBOX**

The RCMPlan™ Toolbox, in Resource B, works in conjunction with The RCMPlan™ Web site. Both contain activities and training guides, media sources, sample models, templates, and forms for implementing and sustaining The RCMPlan™.

These tools can be used as is, modified, or expanded in a school's design to assist in any training or communication surrounding The RCMPlan™ Toolbox.

Principals and teachers can visit The RCMPlan™ Web site, [www.rcmplan.com](http://www.rcmplan.com), without an ID login or password. In addition to supplemental training materials available for download, additional features on the Web site include a space for teachers to share ideas, locations and times for RCM seminars, and information on RCM master-training certification.

Our hope is for everyone implementing this program to make it their own with the greatest success possible. When implemented correctly, RCM provides a life-changing experience for students, teachers, and principals. As one middle school principal from Wisconsin professed—holding back tears—at the last seminar of a year-long pilot study, RCM not only saved his career, but also his life. The stress from losing control of a school, and knowing the low probability of ever regaining control, has cost many principals their positions and perhaps their health. We can't promise improved health, but if implemented as designed, remaining firm in the RCM concept, major decreases in office referrals and school suspensions will occur. Faculty and staff will also witness more responsible behavior in students and a general improvement in the school climate, resulting in a better team overall.