

WISCNEWS.COM

[back to story](#)

Grand Avenue Elementary has new take on discipline

By Jeremiah Tucker, Sauk Prairie Eagle

When one of her students said something mean to a classmate, second grade teacher Katie Trachsler left the student's discipline up to him.

In the past, this type of infraction may have resulted in the student spending his recess indoors sitting glumly at his desk.

But under a new school-wide discipline program called "Above the Line" that Grand Avenue Elementary School implemented this year, Trachsler gave the student the opportunity to decide his own punishment or, as teachers and administrators word it, his "fix-it."

"He decided to write a joke to make the other boy laugh," Trachsler said.

He spent his recess time writing the joke, and Trachsler said the boy's plan worked.

"They made up and they were fine with it," she said.

Grand Avenue Principal Craig Trautsch said the goal of the Above the Line program is to make students responsible for their actions.

When a student misbehaves – or in the new parlance, exhibits behavior that is "below the line" – a teacher or administrator offers the student a choice.

"Do you want to fix this problem or do you want a consequence," Trautsch said.

Trautsch said the students almost always choose a "fix it," and are asked to decide what the "fix it" would be. The two most popular offers from students are to apologize and promise to never do it again, though neither pass muster for the program.

"Sorry" is a nice sentiment and a promise to never scream in the hallway again, for example, is a solution for the future, Trautsch said, but they don't solve the current behavior problem.

An acceptable "fix-it" normally involves losing a recess performing a task related to the offense. For instance, if a student screams in the hallway, Trautsch said a good fix-it would be to practice walking the hallways quietly while the rest of the class is outside playing.

"Now they may lose a recess, but they're doing so because they chose to fix the problem," Trautsch said.

The Above the Line program was designed by educational and behavioral consultant Corwin Kronenberg who helped other schools in Wisconsin and Minnesota adopt the program. Kronenberg met with Grand Avenue teachers at an in-service training session last month for an update on how the program was working.

Trachsler said Above the Line is working. When one of her students recently misbehaved in the bathroom, his fix-it involved pulling paper towels for each of his classmates.

"Whatever they do wrong, they try to do the opposite of it," Trachsler said.

In the past, Trautsch said teachers reprimanded students and the punishment was they'd spend their recess quietly sitting at their desks.

"They didn't even have to acknowledge there was a problem," Trautsch said.

Trautsch said discipline shouldn't necessarily mean making the students miserable, and involving the students in the management of their own behavior gives them more responsibility and makes them aware of what "good behavior" actually means.

With student input, Trautsch said teachers and administrators compiled a list of behaviors that were "above the line," "below the line" and "bottom line" – "bottom line," such as vandalism or theft, is an immediate trip to the principal's office.

Above the Line is helpful for the teachers, too, Trautsch said, because now everyone in the school is on the same page.

"In the past, every classroom would have its own rules," Trautsch said. "One teacher would be frustrated with another teacher because they had different ideas about what was proper."

During a recent recess, teacher's assistant Phyllis Berry said the program was useful when watching the kids while they play.

"It helps to be able to remind them if that's 'above the line' or 'below the line,'" she said.

The recess ended with three kids standing against the school wall because they shoved each other during a game of football.

Berry didn't ask them if they wanted a "fix-it." Fighting, considered bottom-line behavior, still calls for an old-fashioned trip to the principal's office.