

# Eliminate Ping-Pong Behavior

3 classroom management strategies that will inspire confidence in your teachers.

By Stephen E. Boyd

**A**s an avid, lifelong Ping-Pong player, I am now starting to see the similarities between the game I love and teachers' responses to problem classroom behavior. In these matches, the teacher seeks to serve quality instruction in an effort to gain students' attention, motivation, and commitment to an academic task. Unfortunately, many students respond with countermoves—calling out, power struggles, lack of motivation, or attention-seeking behavior—that significantly disrupts the instructional momentum of the classroom.

During classroom management trainings I have facilitated, administrators have shared frustrations about their staff's inability to handle minor instances of bad behavior. A lack of strategies—both proactive and reactive—leads to unwarranted escalations in behavior, loss of instruction time, and requests for administrative assistance.

To address classroom management, I frequently provide trainings from the Time to Teach discipline curriculum (published by the Center for Teacher Effectiveness). Administrators, teachers, and staff, alike, have told me that these strategies have tremendously transformed classroom environments by increasing instructional time and teachers' confidence, as well as decreasing off-task behavior. Here are three of the most effective self-control strategies.

## 1 Exercise the Power of Silence

When students challenge, have your teachers consider silence as a reactive strategy. As administrators, we've all been called to a classroom to address a discipline issue, only to observe the teacher arguing with the student (verbal Ping-Pong). In the end, neither the student's nor the teacher's dignity is maintained, and most important, other students end up witnessing how to divert the teacher from instruction. If a student issues a non-threatening challenge, encourage your teachers to respond with the often under-utilized tool of silence. During my trainings, I tell staff, "Don't engage; stand and think."

## 2 Keep Responses Clear and Concise

If a response to problem behavior is necessary, remind staff that it need not be a long, laborious dissertation, full of pontification, laced with head-shaking, finger-pointing, hands-on-hips delibera-





dignity and the dignity of their students.

### **3** Diffuse the Challenge and Move On

The final reactive strategy I encourage staff to employ is the use of diffusers—short, one-to-three word phrases that acknowledge the student, but not the distraction. For example, if a student says, “I hate your class. Your class is so boring,” respond with: “I understand,” and resume instruction. If the student says, “I like Mr. Harris’ class better than yours. His class is totally fun,” respond with: “I’m sorry,” and resume instruction. The explicit message this technique sends to students is, “I hear you, but so what.”

After a training on using diffusers, a teacher reported back to me that when she employed the technique, the student gave her a puzzled look, and then almost immediately presented another challenge. She then responded with another diffuser, after which the student’s eyes widened and mouth dropped in complete amazement. Finally, the student picked up his

tions. Instead, encourage short, succinct statements, spoken matter-of-factly.

For example, instead of saying, “Stephen, you need to stop talking and get to work right now. How many times have we talked about this?” instruct teachers to respond with, “Stephen, we need quiet voices please. Thank you.” Instead of “Stephen, please stop beating and banging on the table; you’re making too much noise. This is math class, not band,” respond with: “Stephen, we need the room quiet please. Thank you.” Teachers who employ clear and concise statements keep students on task, while maintaining their

pencil and resumed his work. Diffusing works.

We all wish students would stop challenging. However, every master teacher knows that learning to manage challenging behavior is an essential part of the maturation process. From now on, remind your teachers to refrain from engaging in verbal Ping-Pong. Instead, encourage them to provide calm, collected, and confident responses that will help them stand and deliver instruction like never before. **■**

---

**Stephen E. Boyd** is an assistant principal for Worcester (Maryland) County Public Schools.