

This is a transcript of the T/TAC William and Mary podcast “South Morrison Elementary School Cafeteria Program”.

[MUSIC: T/TAC William and Mary Podcast Intro]

Fritz GEISSLER: Well I like to welcome back Betsy Clary, Principle of South Morrison Elementary School and we had a wonderful opportunity to speak with you about your school and EDS and some of the wonderful things that you have done there. And in the last T/TAC Newsletter, which would have been one of the Spring issues 2009, we highlighted the cafeteria program at your school. And was hoping that you could talk with us a little about the cafeteria program - what it is, how you got started, and we can sort of go from there.

Betsy CLARY: I would be glad to. I think that for any principle listening that’s one of the dreadful places beside the bus. The cafeteria is one of the toughest places to work with because of the number of students that are in there. And we know as educators, all day long we are saying “Shh! Be quiet! Listen, raise your hand”, and the cafeteria is their time to socialize and their time to be able to talk with their friends ... but in a respectful way. And so the ESD team, I empowered them to make some decisions on that and to help us out with the cafeteria. I’ll tell you on a side note, when I got there seven years ago, the very first day I was a principle it was in November and I walked in the cafeteria and it was so loud and they were all but hanging off the lights. And I turned off the lights and they would continue to yell and scream and be disruptive and I thought: “Uh oh, what am I going to do now?” And I said, “Boys and girls the lights are off. Do you know what that means?” And I had a student suck his teeth at me and say, “Who are you, the new principle?” And I said “I am! Get your hips to the office!” And so back to that old punitive discipline. But I knew we had some work to do in the cafeteria. We have done different initiatives in the cafeteria, but one of the very best things that we have done is to talk to the cafeteria monitors. We have two monitors that work in our cafeteria during breakfast and during lunch, and we talked to them about our ESD and what it would look like. And we talked about tickets and trying to find students that were doing the right things and sharing the tickets with them. We did some training with our monitors. The other thing that we did was to have high visibility in the cafeteria. There is always an administrator or two administrators in the cafeteria, especially during those times with our upper grade students. My teacher assistants are great, walking around, helping out in the cafeteria. And at times our resource teachers will help out. We also are blessed to have a security guard at our school. He is awesome, and he very much has a great relationship, so he is in the cafeteria too. So, some manpower, but we started the cup system where you have the plastic cups you can get from the Dollar Tree, and we have red cups, yellow cups, and green cups. And at first that worked, and then the children went back to just... nothing disruptive like out of their seats because one of the stations was the cafeteria. They knew what the four B’s were. We put the four B’s up on the wall to remind them. But one of the things we did with the cups this year was actually to start it off on red. So that when they walk in the cafeteria they are on red they start off quietly and the first ten minutes they eat quietly. And then we change the cups to yellow so that they talk in – as we are modeling it to the students – they talk in a three-inch voice, and they are talking very quietly. And when they get to green and they talk in a six-inch voice and we show them that with the ruler with a yard stick. So, we talk about

when you go to a restaurant you have restaurant voices, we certainly use that. The other thing is that we have used with cups is if they are still on green by the time their teacher comes to pick them up then we put their names, their class names, into a drawing. And at the end of the week, in the morning announcements, we've bought some P.E. equipment like jump ropes or basketballs or soccer balls for the class. So, we'll award... we will do the drawing from the class names, and we will pick three classes of who will get a piece of P.E. equipment for that week or some incentive. And the children really really love that.

GEISLER: Reinforce that with something to go on and have fun with and to do. I had a couple questions. The cups that you talked a little bit about I guess and the red was for quiet.

CLARY: Yes.

GEISLER: And then yellow was a softer voice and the green was a little bit more.

CLARY: Yes.

GRAVOIS: And you talked about the stations. What sorts of things did you all teach them about the cafeteria behavior and what places and what was the process for that?

GEISLER: One of the things that you can never get away from is modeling. And I'll tell you every time assume something it always bites me. And so we cannot assume that kids know how to behave. That kids know how to take the tray up, so we model model model that when they come to the cafeteria we model how they get their tray, how to go through the line, how to be respectful and say "Thank you" to the cafeteria workers. We also model how to take the tray to the table. We have students that will model that and we will give them tickets as they model the behavior for the younger children. We model how to sit at the table, how to talk to their person to their right of them or the left of them. We also model that when it's time to clean up. Something really neat from this we have made leaders in the cafeteria that actually came from a custodian that very much supports ESD. But she will pick four or five students every week, older students that are in the cafeteria, and they're ones that will help dismiss a table, to take their trays up. She has students that are up where the tray are and where the trashcans are so when they go to dump their food the forks are not going in there because one student is collecting the forks and another student is watching the trashcans. We have a student that is by the window where they put the trays in. It's just is wonderful wonderful thing. My kids love it. They love being chosen, because they have shown good eagle (?) behavior in the cafeteria, and more students want to be chosen. Now the other thing that we did this year too is that you don't want to punish the whole class when you have one or two students that are loud or not following the cup system. So we actually have strips of red paper and if we have one or two students, that kid you know there is always one in the class sometimes is loud, and we'll red card them so to speak. And they know what that means, we've taught them what it means and they'll take their tray and they will go to a separate part of the cafeteria or actually we have a learning cottage, aka trailer, and we have a staff that member that is out there and they'll eat their lunch out during that day for lunch with no talking at all. Now that's very effective because kids want to be social and they want to be back so for that day they get the punishment, the next day as long as they are abiding by the four B's in the cafeteria they eat with the rest of the class. And that's really helped too so that you know the

sweet kids are always good, they are not punished for what one or two do as well. And it gets back to that consistency and high expectations. The other thing is I know sometimes schools that visit us will say, "Well once they are green can you turn the cups again?" Yes! The answer is yes. If they are on green and they start to get loud we, as we are walking around, will put them back on yellow or sometimes red. So they absolutely know what that means too. I do not have children that argue that, not at all, because I will say, "One of the B's says 'Be Responsible' it's your responsibility to sit here and eat quietly with your friends." And so we do not get into big dissertation about that.

GEISSLER: Sure, it is just a given expectation at this point and you've taught it and they understand how all of that works.

CLARY: And I'll tell you my teachers so appreciate it too because when they come to pick up their students they're ready to go back. And they don't have a lot of drama so to speak, "So and so got in trouble and our class was this and that" They can go back and get right down to business with instruction.

GEISSLER: Sure. Now I was reading also that this... you have the cups and you've taught the expectations but there is also some things you have done changing schedule and some things around that - in terms of the lunch room.

CLARY: We have, we actually have switched around our schedules so that our older kids can be models for younger kids. And so when our K-2 comes in our actually our 5th grade students are coming in too. And that has been a wonderful thing because, you know, younger kids really look up to the older kids. And I tell the older kids that quite a bit when we are in our town meetings, "You are the model. They look up to you. So when you go to the cafeteria we certainly want to model that great behavior." They also love seeing our older kids do it because they want to be like them. They want to be the one chosen to go into one of the clubs or to be a man of distinction or girls of excellence. And our kids love modeling that. It's very precious when I see my older kids that are the leaders for the weeks, we will give them tickets as well and they will go over to kids, younger kids, and give them tickets for demonstrating good behavior too. And that is huge when they get a ticket from an older student!

GEISSLER: Oh yeah. So you have older kids with the younger kids and just in terms of times when people are in there is it ... where there changes made so there weren't as many at given times or...?

CLARY: Well because I have 600 students, it is still a lot in the cafeteria. One time I had to get them through in two hours. So it's every 25 minutes were changing ... you know half-hour for lunch but about every 25 minutes were moving classes through. So it's not less kids in there so to speak but it's more productive with the kids that are in there.

GEISSLER: Alright. Great. Well thank you so much.

CLARY: You're welcome.

GEISSLER: We really appreciate your time and sharing the successes of South Morrison Elementary with us.

CLARY: Thank you.

[MUSIC: T/TAC William and Mary Podcast Outro]