



SUCCESS STORIES: LANGLEY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Conscious Discipline implementation leads to reduced suspensions, increased test scores and student satisfaction at Washington D.C. elementary school

CHALLENGE

Many children at Langley Elementary School have experienced trauma and face high stress in their daily lives. As a result, the school had many behavioral challenges and did not feel safe. There was no curriculum or philosophy on helping students develop social and emotional skills, and there was no cohesive school culture. Student satisfaction rates were well below the D.C. average.

SOLUTION

Principal Vanessa Drumm-Canepa decided to implement Conscious Discipline, enlisting the help of Conscious Discipline Certified Instructor Nicole Mercer. Faculty and staff learned about Conscious Discipline through ongoing training, coaching and book studies and began implementing the program's powers and skills.

MILESTONES

110

Percent enrollment, a departure from under enrollment in previous years

45

Percent decrease in suspensions assigned to students with special education services

23

Suspensions per 100 students, down from 66 suspensions per 100 students

24

Percent increase in student satisfaction, far surpassing Langley's initial goal

SIGNIFICANT OUTCOMES

- **Decreased Suspensions** - Suspensions per 100 students dropped from 65.87 to 23.86.
- **Increased Student Satisfaction** - Student satisfaction increased from 70% to 94%.
- **Improved Outcomes for Students with Special Education Services** - Percent of suspensions assigned to students with special education services decreased from 56% to 11%.
- **Increased Test Scores** - During the second year of implementation, Langley exceeded all of their goals related to PARCC testing.

KEY PLAYERS



Dr. Becky Bailey,
Author, Educator, Child-Development Expert and Founder of Conscious Discipline.



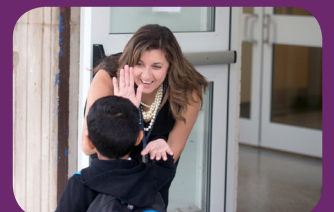
Vanessa Drumm-Canepa,
Principal of Langley Elementary



Monique Robinson,
Dean of Students at Langley Elementary



Nicole Mercer,
Conscious Discipline Certified Instructor



Administrators personally greet every student in the morning with the student's choice of a **handshake, fist bump, high five or butterfly greeting.**

Students also invent their own greetings. This ritual **starts the day with connection** and allows administrators to gauge whether students are arriving with big emotions from home.

"Conscious Discipline has helped create a safer, more loving and joyous School Family environment at Langley Elementary. It empowers students with the knowledge, skills and language to express their wants and needs and solve problems in a healthy and helpful way. The difference is noticeable. Conscious Discipline has truly transformed our school."

-MONIQUE ROBINSON



Conscious Discipline®

Conscious Discipline is a trauma-informed, brain-based self-regulation program combining discipline, social-emotional learning and school climate into one integrated process. It helps adults create an environment of safety and connectedness that fosters learning and problem-solving. Adults and children learn to manage their thoughts, feelings and behaviors, empowering them to reach their goals.

Less than three years ago, Langley Elementary School in Washington, D.C. felt unsafe. Although many students have experienced trauma and live in high-stress environments, the school had no plan for teaching social skills and emotional regulation.

As a result, Langley faced major behavioral challenges from students in the general education setting and in the special education self-contained programs. Aggressive behaviors, emotional outbursts and fights were common.

Teachers were frustrated and overwhelmed. Student satisfaction was well below the D.C. average, and the school was under enrolled and struggling to fill seats.

At a point of desperation, administrators understood that they needed a new mindset and new skills to effectively help their student population. As Dean of Students Monique Robinson said, “We knew a radical change was needed.”



Monique Robinson

Langley Selects Conscious Discipline

For Langley Elementary School, that radical change was Conscious Discipline. Administrators sought a program that was research-based and had a track record of success.

After determining that Conscious Discipline was the right fit, Langley administrators fully committed. In the first year of implementation, Langley’s faculty and staff attended two days of training in August, a day in October, and another day in January. They completed a Conscious Discipline book study and the Conscious Discipline e-Course.

Key administrators and the most enthusiastic teachers formed the school’s Conscious Discipline Action Team (CDAT), which continues to meet weekly and lead bi-weekly professional development collaborations for all teachers. During the summer following Year One, Langley sent five CDAT members to the seven-day Conscious Discipline Summer Institute.



Nicole Mercer

During the second year of implementation, Conscious Discipline Certified Instructor Nicole Mercer led additional trainings in August and October. Teachers completed a second book study, and three more teachers and an administrator attended the Conscious Discipline Summer Institute. Currently in the third year of implementation, Langley continues to invest in professional development and training.

At staff meetings, teachers and administrators are living the same strategies they want to see in the classroom. Teachers sit at Table Families, and teachers who have attended the Summer Institute serve as Table Leaders. Meetings feature Brain Smart Starts¹, Celebrations, Wishing Well² and recognizing staff kindness. Teachers practice social and emotional skills schoolwide, not just with children.

According to Principal Vanessa Drumm-Canepa, teachers are living Conscious Discipline at home too. “A lot of teachers, particularly those with young children, are using the skills with their own children at home. They have Safe Places³ and are using the language. When they practice Conscious Discipline at home, it makes them even better at implementing it with their students.”

Certified Instructor Nicole Mercer said, “The most incredible thing to me is where Langley started and where they are in such a short time. I attribute that to the fact that they were all in from the beginning. From the get-go, this group of teachers understood that they needed a new mindset to really help their population. They’ve been internally working as much as they’ve been externally supported by me. They’re moving toward less external support, indicating transformation and internal sustainability.”



Vanessa
Drumm-Canepa

Conscious Discipline in Action at Langley

With help from Conscious Discipline, Langley Elementary School has placed a schoolwide focus on safety and connection. The school has adopted three commitments: Being safe, being helpful and being kind. Robinson said, “This is the foundation of how we approach learning at Langley, and it aligns with the language of Conscious Discipline.”

In addition to creating a School Family based on a healthy family model, every class is a Class Family with Class Family Names selected by the students. Class Families engage in structured routines and rituals designed to build connection and make children feel safe, creating an optimal learning environment.

Visuals throughout the school indicate clear expectations. Each common area has three rules: two positive rules (“you may”) and one negative rule (“you may not”). Other visuals showcase and celebrate student work and student acts of kindness.

Students consistently practice recognizing and managing their emotions in healthy ways. They learn breathing techniques designed to shut off the brain’s “fight or flight” system. When students experience upset, they visit a classroom Safe Place to self-soothe and regain their composure so they are ready to learn. Students with bigger emotions, like rage, receive support in developing plans to help them manage these emotions safely.

Mercer said, “It’s the most challenging student body I have ever worked with in a school. Those kids face a lot of stressors in their life that make it hard to learn. To be able to help them shift that environment to where the kids can relax a little and learn helpful skills...it’s amazing to see.”

Faculty and staff also teach students vital social skills like assertiveness. Robinson said, “When we provide students with the knowledge, skills and language to express their wants and needs, we empower them. Giving students that level of empowerment leads to amazing results, like a decrease in tattling because they know how to advocate for themselves now.



A child makes use of the Safe Place, a place to breathe and calm down before returning to class ready to learn. Each Safe Place has a set of Feeling Buddies and some have pinwheels, which help teach mindful breathing.

¹The Conscious Discipline Brain Smart Start promotes an optimal learning state and consists of four activities: an activity to unite, an activity to connect, an activity to disengage stress and an activity to commit.

²Wishing Well offers children and adults a way to support one another and calm themselves.

³The Safe Place is a center where children can go to change their inner state from upset to composed in order to optimize learning. It is designed to guide children through the five steps of self-regulation.

As the Dean of Students, I see that students are coming to me able to communicate their needs and wants. This is a great foundation for acknowledging wrongdoing and making improvement plans that relate to accountability.”

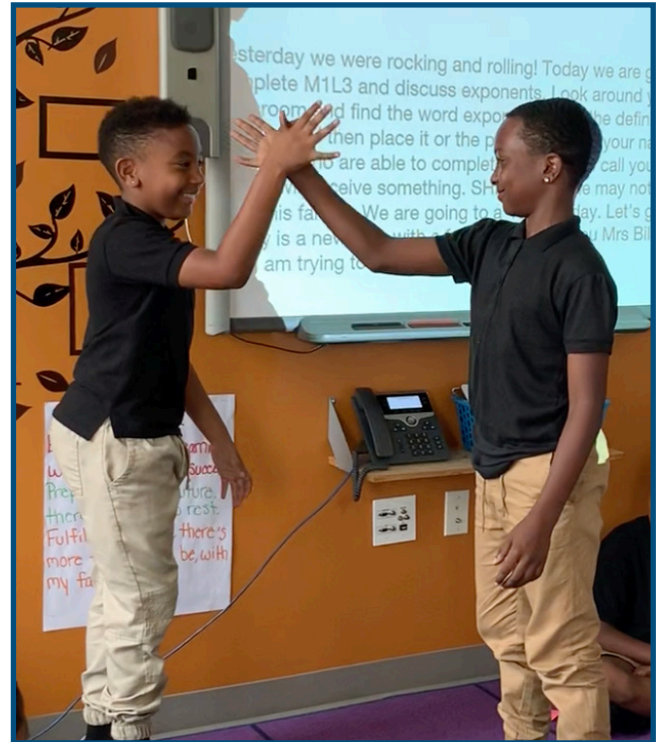
A Typical Day at Langley Elementary School

Every morning at Langley Elementary starts with a greeting from administrators such as Drumm-Canepa and Robinson. As administrators greet students with the student’s choice of a handshake, fist bump, high five or butterfly, they make eye contact for a moment of true connection.

They also use the moment as an opportunity to assess which students may be arriving at school with big emotions from home. Administrators communicate this information to teachers as needed.

After being greeted, students eat breakfast in their classrooms or in the cafeteria, where they are encouraged to engage with one another and with staff. Students are picked up by their teachers and greeted again. Some older classes have student greeters.

The school day begins with a Brain Smart Start, which consists of an activity to unite, an activity to connect, an activity to disengage stress and an activity to commit. Students also participate in purposeful brain breaks throughout the day.



Langley students start the day by connecting with their classmates.

Administrators circulate through classrooms monitoring success, creating plans to continue improving, and reading Shubert books⁴ with the students.

When students do have negative interactions with peers, Langley uses Conscious Discipline’s Conflict Resolution Time Machine. The Time Machine walks students through a step-by-step process for solving problems in a healthy and helpful way. Tools like the Time Machine have prompted a culture shift that allows Langley to function on a foundation of helpful behaviors rather than hurtful behaviors.

Monthly School Family Assemblies introduce students to Conscious Discipline concepts like breathing strategies for self-regulation, Feeling Buddies⁵ and the Safe Place. Teachers then put these concepts into practice in the classroom. At the end of each month, celebrations highlight students for honoring commitments and agreements.

Parent Engagement

To engage parents and foster continuity and connection between school and home, Langley introduced Conscious Discipline parent nights led by Nicole Mercer.



Children and their parents practice I Love You Rituals at Langley’s second parent night, A Night of Consciousness.

⁴ Conscious Discipline’s Shubert book series is designed to build character through conflict for both children and adults. Shubert, a lightning bug, demonstrates using Conscious Discipline skills to solve problems. His teacher, Mrs. Bookbinder, models Conscious Discipline for adults. Each book ends with tips for teachers and parents.

⁵ Feeling Buddies help children learn the five step self-regulation process, equipping them with healthy, confident responses to emotional upset.

Drumm-Canepa explained, “Parents are very excited. They really want to learn more about Conscious Discipline and use the strategies at home too.”

Robinson added, “Parents are very curious about how they can promote the continuity of what goes on at school at home. The first parent night was a more intimate setting. By the second one, the house was packed. The word was already spreading.”

Meetings have included an overview of Conscious Discipline, practice with I Love You Rituals⁶, and lessons on how to create and use a Safe Place at home. The response has been positive, and Langley plans to continue offering the parent nights.

Results

Langley has yet to complete its third year of Conscious Discipline implementation, but the results are already apparent. Suspensions have decreased while student satisfaction, test scores and enrollment have increased.

After one year, suspensions per 100 students decreased from 65.87 to 23.86. The following year, suspensions decreased to 22.84 per 100 students. The percent of suspensions assigned to students with special education services went from 56% to 11%.

Robinson explained that Conscious Discipline practices have helped students with special needs feel an increased sense of belonging at school, which reduces challenging behaviors. “When all students are coming from the lens of being part of a School Family, it really helps with inclusion,” she said.

After the first year of implementation, student satisfaction soared from 70% to 86%. By the end of the second year, satisfaction had increased to 94%, above the D.C. average. Administrators also noted an increase in in-seat attendance/ and a decline in chronic absences and truancy.

Before implementing Conscious Discipline, Langley had a poor reputation and was under-enrolled. After the first year, enrollment was up to 110%, and the school had to create additional classrooms.

With decreased discipline issues and increased satisfaction and attendance, Langley naturally saw academic improvement as well. During the second year, Langley exceeded all of its goals related to PARCC testing. PARCC reports results according to five performance levels, with Level 1 being the lowest and Level 5 indicating the highest level of achievement. Among 3-5 grade students, there was an 11% increase in Level 4 and Level 5 scores on the PARCC English Language Arts exam, as well as an 8% decrease in Level 1 scores. In addition, Langley saw a 13% increase in Level 4 and 5 scores on the PARCC Math exam and a 13% decrease in Level 1 scores.

A Better Way at Langley Elementary School

Asked to share a favorite anecdote or success story, those associated with Langley’s ongoing transformation struggled to narrow it down. “There are just so many!” said Robinson before settling on a story she finds especially profound.



Vanessa Drumm, Monique Robinson, and Special Education teacher Baxter O'Brien take a break in a model Safe Place at the Conscious Discipline Summer Institute. O'Brien recently received the prestigious Rubenstein Award for Highly Effective Teaching.

Robinson recalled that a student with a difficult home life was once very aggressive at school. He had extreme behaviors, fighting nearly every day. Crises with the student would last for over an hour.

After Langley staff offered the student connection, opportunities to be of service, and tools like breathing strategies, said Robinson, he is now one of Langley’s Conscious Discipline

⁶ I Love You Rituals are one-on-one connecting activities that incorporate eye contact, touch, presence and playfulness. They promote optimal brain development, increase attention span, build self-esteem and amplify cooperation.



Preschool students learn self-regulation by practicing calming breathing techniques.

Ambassadors. “He goes around and helps students manage big emotions and initiate breathing strategies without being prompted. We empowered him, and now he’s being of service and helping other students like him find helpful ways to problem-solve,” she said.

Drumm-Canepa thought of another child with a challenging home life who would once get frustrated with schoolwork and have a meltdown, sometimes even throwing chairs. Last year, she went into a classroom and saw the student struggling with a math assignment. “He put his arms out and put his head back, and he just started breathing,” she said. “He calmed himself so he could focus instead of panicking over how difficult the math task was.”

Mercer has seen notable changes in teachers as well as students. A teacher who had been teaching for many years was initially opposed to Conscious Discipline implementation and didn’t want to participate.

“After using some of the skills and having powerful interactions with kids, that really flipped her. Now on staff, she’s one of the main advocates for Conscious Discipline. That’s the coolest part of this journey... watching adults change themselves so they can show up differently for the kids,” Mercer shared.

As other schools in the district are becoming aware of Langley’s success, social-emotional learning and Conscious Discipline are starting to gain traction within the district. For Robinson, this is great news. What worked at Langley, Robinson said, can work at other schools too. “We’re an urban school district with a unique population. It’s amazing to see how we have stayed the course and seen tremendous success. Conscious Discipline has truly transformed our school.”

For more information about Conscious Discipline coaching, training and resources, contact:
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