

October Checklist

Things are on a roll now! Kids are plugged in, teachers are hitting their stride, and they're also beginning to identify challenges for the year. Possibilities:

- _____ Could someone create a checklist to be distributed to teachers asking them to identify any specific needs they're recognizing in their new crop of students? That would help the building counselor organize some group activities for specific needs (such as a grief group, kids struggling with a current divorce, etc.). Having that data early in the year will save time.
- _____ October is fire prevention month. When you consider how to do fire drills, think about integrating some twists that help everyone – students and teachers – discover the unexpected steps they may have to take. Make a huge board that says, "Fire is here. Go a different way" and prop it up in a different hallway each month when you do the drill. Have someone tap a student out of their line and secret them away to see how long it is before the teacher discovers that s/he is missing someone.
- _____ September was Suicide Prevention Month. We didn't include that last month, so let's look at that now. We know that up to 25% of our fourth grade students are having passing thoughts about suicide, and that this is the beginning of a very lethal journey over time. Create a small group of staff members who have an interest in suicide prevention to look at what your building is doing to prevent suicide. It starts at the kindergarten level by teaching children how to negotiate with peers and adults rather than clamming up and going toward thoughts of suicide.
- _____ October is usually a time for inservicing. Feel free to use our free evaluations on prevention and response. You are free to make copies and distribute to all staff.
<<http://www.cmionline.com/evaluate-your-teams-and-crisis-training/>>
- _____ One of the greatest opportunities for prevention of school violence and shootings is being sure that all students feel connected to the school and to people in it. Put the name of each student on a 3 X 5 card and punch a hole in the corner. String them up in the staff lounge, with several hand-held hole punches close by. Ask teachers to take a few minutes each day to go through the list for the whole school and to punch a hole in the card of each student that they can call by name. Then remind them the importance of using students' names when we pass them in the hall. Look for the cards that have the fewest holes and find staff members who are willing to take time to connect with those students.
- _____ Suggest that each teacher give students a 3 X 5 card upon which they write the other students in the room that they would enjoy sitting near. "We might rearrange seating every now and again, and this will help me know who you'd like to sit near." Look through the cards to see which students' names don't appear very often, and create some intentional ways of engaging that student with others.
- _____ It is awkward to bring up "big" news in classrooms where conversations of that sort are unusual. For all grades, now is the time to integrate a routine time for addressing students' fears or concerns, or to talk about what is in the news. Whether this becomes a part of rug time for little ones or is a weekly class-wide discussion for older grades, put in place a time for open-ended questions and discussion. "What concerns you these days?" "How is life different for kids today than when you were [younger]?" "What kinds of advice would you give the students who are two grades behind you?" "What do you wish your parents understood about what it is like for kids today?" Having these kinds of discussions routinely will make it much easier to introduce discussions of difficult topics later. It builds trust and provides an opportunity for youth to find common ground, too.