JUDICIOUS DISCIPLINE:
A CONSTITUTIONAL APPROACH
FOR PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the democratic practices of Judicious Discipline in
a grade 8-12 public high school. Findings from this study suggest that
implementing Judicious Discipline on a school-wide basis prepares
teachers and administrators to more effectively deal with discipline
issues. It also suggests that students who are exposed to Judicious
Discipline learn to take responsibility for their actions and, therefore,
become more autonomous. The analysis of the quantitative data sug-
gests that a considerable number of students felt that they possessed a
high level of respect and responsibility in the classroom and throughout
the school as a result their school utilizing Judicious Discipline.

DEMOCRATIC DISCIPLINE

Public schools are located within a democratic society and ought to
reflect and support the democratic way of life. However, democratic
discipline approaches have not received the same amount of attention
as behaviorist approaches. The democratic discipline approach refers
to an approach that includes students in making rules and decisions,
that recognizes student rights as well as responsibilities, and that has
teachers shape consequences in collaboration with students to reflect
the basic principles of empowerment and student responsibility. In a society where significant value is placed on democratic principles, it is relevant and important to investigate democratic discipline approaches.

Judicious Discipline was developed by Forest Gathercoal, attorney and educational psychologist. It is a comprehensive approach to democratic classroom management that provides educators with a foundation for teaching citizenship each day and through every student-teacher interaction (Gathercoal, 1993). Judicious Discipline is democratic in the sense that constitutional language and democratic citizenship education are introduced into the decision-making processes of the classroom. It allows students who are affected by a decision to have some say in the decision-making process.

The effectiveness of the democratic practices of Judicious Discipline has also been supported by the research of Paul Gathercoal and Virginia Nimmo in a study conducted in 1996. The results of the study suggest that there are many benefits for teachers and students when teachers take the time to teach students about their individual rights and responsibilities. Teachers who used Judicious Discipline tended to manage classrooms where students were more likely to respond at the autonomous stage of social development. These teachers were less likely to feel frustrated and/or experience high levels of work-related stress.

Gathercoal and Nimmo (1996) also found that, in teaching about Judicious Discipline and providing students with a “language of civility,” educators created common ground for discussing, mediating, and reconciling social problems that developed as a result of living and learning in a democratic classroom. Also, the students who learned about Judicious Discipline were able to use the “language of civility” to advocate for themselves and to solve their own social problems. According to Gathercoal (1997), Judicious Discipline emphasizes the concept that an educator’s professional responsibility is to create an equitable environment that affords every student the opportunity to be successful. It is a philosophy of educating students that encourages self-control by teaching students their rights and responsibilities in a democratic society. Thus, Judicious Discipline serves as a real-life model for the same system of rules and responsibilities under which students will live when they leave school.
Gathercoal believes that the key to Judicious Discipline is the balance between individual rights as guaranteed by the Constitution, and “compelling state interests” that serve our society’s need for a safe, healthy, and undisrupted environment. Teachers using Judicious Discipline in their classrooms begin by introducing students to the rights they are guaranteed in the First, Fourth, and Fourteenth Amendments. This is followed by an explanation of when those rights can and should be limited. If a teacher, administrator, or staff member is able to demonstrate that the actions of students are a threat to the health and safety, property, and/or educational purpose of the school, then students’ rights can be restricted. As educators balance rights and responsibilities during school interactions, they are teaching students what it means to be citizens in our democratic society.

Students are taught that their First Amendment rights protect the basic nature of who they are, what they say, write, and believe (McEwan, 1996). The First Amendment is designed to ensure certain personal freedoms for all citizens, including students in American public schools. The Fourth Amendment protects students from unreasonable searches and seizure of their property. It requires all educators who conduct searches of lockers, purses, pockets, or student vehicles in the parking lot, or who take property from students use somewhat similar guidelines to those used by law enforcement officers. The Fourteenth Amendment guarantees a student’s right to “due process” as well as the right to “equal protection” under the law. Due process provides the legal basis for developing reasonable rules and a fair process for balancing student rights. Equal protection serves as the constitutional foundation for prohibiting all forms of discrimination.

Remembering “all the rules” is much more difficult than accepting and abiding by a moral and ethical code of relatively few principles from which all interactions would flow. Rules based on compelling state interests (a legal concept that implies situations exist where the welfare and interests of the majority are more compelling than those of the individual) are rational and sensible, as opposed to rules based on nothing more than the whim, bias, or caprice of a teacher. This welfare principle gives educators all the legal authority they need to create and carry out fair school rules.
Rules developed with student input and based upon the four compelling state interests provide a good outline to follow. Gathercoal identifies the four compelling state interests as: (1) property loss or damage, (2) legitimate educational purpose, (3) threat to health and safety, and (4) serious disruption of the educational process. A democratic school has a judicious “mind-set” or organizational culture. Rules equate to guidelines, not restrictions. Examples of school rules based on Judicious Discipline may include:

1. Act in a safe and healthy way. Topics based on this rule may cover: the necessity for wearing protective gear on the playing fields and in technology shop, appropriate ways to move in hallways and classrooms, the need for vaccination and inoculations before attending school, and standards for conduct on the playground.

2. Treat all property with respect. Topics based on this rule may cover: the need for wearing proper footwear on the gym floor, and the responsibility to protect personal belongings and school equipment that occupy school rooms, desks, lockers, and backpacks.

3. Respect the rights and needs of others. Topics based on this rule may cover: the need for the teacher to select what material will be taught on any day, the necessity for establishing guidelines for working individually or in groups, the importance of behaving in various educational settings throughout the school, and the use of appropriate language and dress.

4. Take responsibility for learning. Topics based on this rule may cover: the necessity for bringing supplies and books to class, the importance of coming to class on time, and giving maximum effort on all work.

**Methodology**

This investigation was conducted in 2000 as part of a study that involved the examination of students enrolled at a grade 8-12 public high school. To protect the anonymity of the institution involved, pseudonyms for the school are used throughout the report. Highland High School is located in a city of 12,000 people in South Central Minnesota. The community serves as a retail center and a medical service area for many surrounding communities.
The student body at Highland High is approximately 960 and is predominantly White, with only about a 6 percent minority population. Approximately 12 percent of the students receive special education services. Most students at Highland High would be considered middle to upper middle class. The high school offers a broad and strong curriculum for college bound students. The vocational department offers diverse programs of excellence to meet the needs of students attending vocational/business schools or planning to work after graduation.

A staff of over 60 professional educators serves the needs of the students. The school experiences maladapted behavior patterns that are linked directly to problematic chemical use. According to the licensed alcohol and drug counselor at the school, approximately 5 percent of the students are in need of intense intervention for chemical use and another 20 percent are significantly impaired by alcohol abuse.

Judicious Discipline has been in use for five years at Highland High School. The assistant principal, who is responsible for discipline, uses the democratic model on a school-wide basis. The planning resource room coordinator, who deals with the majority of discipline issues, also uses Judicious Discipline on a school-wide basis. In addition, Judicious Discipline is used in all elementary schools in the district as well as at the junior high. Consequently most of the high school students are familiar with the model and its language of respect and responsibility before they enter Highland High.

Criterion sampling was the technique used to determine that Highland High School was an appropriate site for gathering the most relevant information relative to the use of Judicious Discipline. Criterion sampling involves the selection of cases that satisfy an important criterion and is particularly useful in studying educational programs. In April of 2000, I contacted a prominent researcher/presenter of Judicious Discipline seeking a school that met the following criteria: it had to be a public high school, use a democratic approach to discipline on a school-wide basis, have experience for that practice for at least three academic years, and indicate a willingness to be involved in this study.

This study was triangulated by using five sources of data: personal interviews, focus group interviews, direct observation, documents,
and a student attitude survey. By exploring each area from several different vantage points, the data gathered were substantial and thorough. By comparing the findings from each source of data, any conclusions drawn or suggestions made were well-documented and substantiated. The primary sources of data were acquired by semi-structured interviews (personal and focus groups) to allow for a range of responses.

Personal interviews were conducted with administrators, counselors, and support staff. Focused main questions were prepared as a guide for the personal interviews. The purpose of the main questions was to encourage the interviewees to describe their experiences with the Judicious Discipline approach. Each personal interview was approximately 45 minutes in length. Data from personal interviews were audio taped and later transcribed. A large portion of the information from teachers was acquired by interviewing them in focus groups consisting of ten volunteers. The focus groups were used to generalize data since group discussion validated the comments made by individuals. Teachers were told that participation in the group was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the group at any time. The purpose of the study and topic of discussion for the focus group was clarified. Serving as moderator, I was deliberately neutral regarding the content of the data and attempted to create a comfortable atmosphere in order to generate full participation.

Another source of evidence used for this case study was direct observation. A field visit was made to Highland High School to create the opportunity for direct observation. Direct observation consisted of the following: (a) observing while sitting in the office, (b) observing while roaming the halls, (c) observing while passing through the cafeteria, and (d) observing in the library/media center.

Two days were spent at the school in order to observe relevant behaviors and environmental conditions as they related to Judicious Discipline. Field notes were kept and later reviewed to measure the incidence of certain types of behaviors during certain periods of time in the field. Several times during direct observation my role changed to that of observer-participant as I interacted with students in the office and carried on casual conversations with staff and students.

The fourth source of data consisted of documents that were collected and analyzed, including school handbooks, discipline codes,
school brochures, action plans, letters, memoranda, and other admin-
istrative documents relative to Judicious Discipline. In addition, a stu-
dent attitude survey was administered by a teacher to 23 students to
gain insight into their attitudes toward Judicious Discipline.
The survey instrument began with a statement of its purpose and then
asked students’ gender and grade level status. Then students were
asked ten close-ended questions that focused on their attitudes toward
the level of respect and responsibility they possessed in the class room
and throughout the school as a result of the school’s use of the
Judicious Discipline approach. Student responses to the survey instru-
ment were scored using frequency distribution tables.

FINDINGS: JUDICIOUS DISCIPLINE AT HIGHLAND HIGH SCHOOL
The data collected at Highland High School provides a case study
describing the reasons for instituting the Judicious Discipline program,
some of the difficulties encountered in implementing that program,
and the benefits that students and staff perceive to result from the
program.

WHY HIGHLAND HIGH SCHOOL ADOPTED JUDICIOUS DISCIPLINE
In the summer of 1995, the administrative team in the central office
received information about a democratic approach to discipline called
Judicious Discipline. They became interested in the program and
offered the training to all administrators and teachers in the district
that summer. The author/founder of the program was invited to the
community to present a week-long seminar. The principal, assistant
principal, and a number of staff members from Highland High School
attended the workshop because there was interest in finding a better
way of dealing with discipline issues.

After the training, the principal and assistant principal were excit-
ed about the program. They felt it was an easy fit for Highland High
because it was ethically sound. The administration liked the idea that
the program was based on “compelling state interests.” The assistant
principal, who was responsible for discipline, stated that she needed
something that worked because student discipline at the high school
level was a real challenge. Being convinced that the democratic
approach would be an improvement, and with the support of the
superintendent, Judicious Discipline was adopted at Highland High in the fall of 1995. It was also adopted by the entire school district at the same time.

**How Highland High Implemented Judicious Discipline**

During the summer of 1995, a small group of teachers attended a week-long training workshop at a nearby college while another group of teachers and administrators from Highland High attended a seminar at a conference center in town. Both training experiences were approximately 30 hours long, and were presented by the founder/author of the program. The training for administrators and staff was funded by violence prevention money that the district received in the form of a grant. The workshops were not made mandatory for staff; therefore, not all teachers received the initial training.

When school started in the fall, most of the high school teachers who had participated in the training were excited about using Judicious Discipline. However, not all faculty members embraced the program. According to the assistant principal, there were rumblings from certain staff members who were opposed to trying a democratic approach. The teachers who did not support the model felt that Judicious Discipline was too permissive. They made comments such as, “It’s another one of those programs that is going to come and go,” and “This program is really not going to help the students, but it is going to make life awful.”

The high school principal was committed to the model and asked the assistant principal to facilitate the implementation of the program. The assistant principal formed a group with those teachers who supported the program. They started calling themselves the “respect group,” and began meeting on a monthly basis. The goal of the group was to implement a democratic approach in their classrooms as well as encourage the implementation of the program in classrooms of their colleagues.

Ongoing training was made available to the staff, and the administration encouraged all teachers to participate in it. Optional “support sessions” were scheduled during the first year of the implementation. One of the district’s counselors became a trainer and offered workshops and demonstrations for faculty. In spite of the efforts of the
administration, every staff member did not get trained. The faculty at Highland High consisted of over 60 educators, and there was a substantial turnover of teachers each year. However, the assistant principal and the planning resource coordinator continued to utilize the principles of Judicious Discipline on a school-wide basis.

Certain behaviors practiced by administrators, teachers, and students contributed to a well-functioning Judicious Discipline model. The most important behavior practiced by Ms. Kathy Brown, the assistant principal at Highland High School, (a pseudonym) was the way that she treated each student. She tried to give students their due process by giving them a voice in the democratic discipline procedure. She said, “I truly believe that when kids feel that they’ve been treated fairly and that they’ve been listened to, they can admit their mistakes and work through them.”

According to Ms. Brown, one of the things the students hated most was when adults were not hearing what the students had to say. She admitted that sometimes she was not a patient listener. She said, “When I’ve seen about 50 students in one day, I sometimes just hand out the detentions, and say to the student ‘You’re out the door.’” When that happened, she thought about it later and became frustrated. She stated that the democratic approach was something she had to think about all the time. She felt it was good that she took a refresher course over the summer because it revived her enthusiasm for the model.

The behavior practiced by teachers in the focus group that contributed to a well-functioning democratic discipline model was treating students the same way the teachers wanted to be treated. Teachers mentioned that they used a logical approach to discipline and other matters in the classroom by giving students choices on just about everything. With behavior issues, students had choices about what the next step in the discipline process would be. If a test was due to be given, the class would vote whether to have the test on Friday or wait until the following Monday. Students were allowed to take part in the decision-making process on practically everything that affected them in the classroom. In essence, the principles of a democratic society were being practiced with the students.

The behavior that Ms. Brown thought the students practiced that contributed to a well-functioning Judicious Discipline model at
Highland High School was respect. There were a majority of students who were very respectful to one another and to their teachers. Many students were also sensitive to how things were said and done at school. One example given by Ms. Brown was the students’ awareness of using inappropriate language. The students’ use of profanity was a big concern. The administration and staff worked hard to try to correct this problem. As a result of better understanding their responsibilities within the democratic model, the students were very good about accepting corrections from their peers, as well as from teachers, when they used profanity.

**Difficulties Encountered in the Implementation of Judicious Discipline**

One difficulty encountered by teachers when implementing Judicious Discipline was developing classroom rules with student input. Some sections of students did a fine job, but others (especially ones with a number of difficult students) couldn’t handle the rule-making process very well. These students came up with two pages of rules written in negative terms that stated what the students could not do. Some of the rules had nothing to do with discipline. For example, one student said that it should be a class rule that there be no more than 20 problems on a homework assignment. Allowing students to help create the rules was, at times, frustrating for staff.

Another problem was getting the students to understand that, with the rights they received with Judicious Discipline, came serious responsibilities. Once again, this was particularly true with difficult students. Even after teachers took the time to explain the program and its components, some students had a hard time understanding that infringing on someone else’s rights was not acceptable.

According to Ms. Brown, finding time to confer with students who misbehaved was difficult. There were over 900 students in the high school, and she was responsible for about 95% of all the discipline issues. Ms. Brown said that she knew arranging and holding conferences with students who acted inappropriately was an important piece of the democratic process. However, with everything else going on at a large high school, it was not always possible to hold a meeting. She stated, “This was kind of hard, but I really worked overtime to start to build relationships with the students.”
Another problem mentioned was convincing teachers to confer with students before sending them to the assistant principal’s office for disciplinary action. Teachers were shown some democratic interventions to use when dealing with the students in order to build positive relationships in the classroom. It was difficult for staff to sit down and talk with students about a problem because teachers were accustomed to sending students to the office. Faculty members also had a hard time adjusting to the logical consequences meted out by the assistant principal. Some teachers were frustrated because they felt that she was not strict enough. For the most part, teachers still wanted students to receive several periods of detention or a suspension for their inappropriate actions.

Another difficulty was the outright defiance that some teachers demonstrated toward the program during the first year of adoption. Some faculty members chose not to receive the training, and as a result did not see the value in the democratic approach.

**Perceived Drawbacks to the Program**

One drawback that the teachers mentioned was that it took time to establish a democratic approach. Staff members built their program over time based on respect. They spent a significant amount of time developing relationships with the students. One example of building respect was when teachers took time to explain to the students that staff would not speak to students with disrespect. In return, the teachers would not tolerate being spoken to with disrespect by the students. Several faculty members stated that the democratic approach was a mind-set. It took a lot of ability to learn how to properly utilize the model. This was a drawback because new staff coming in could not be expected to immediately understand how to use it.

A second drawback was finding the time to deal with democratic consequences. Teachers were forced to become problem solvers and come up with appropriate consequences that were fair and respectful and that fell within the framework of the school’s democratic model. Faculty members felt that they did not always have time to select logical consequences and, therefore, reverted to filling out discipline referral forms that sometimes undermined the democratic process.

A third drawback mentioned by the staff in the focus group was that Judicious Discipline was not effective with some really defiant
students. No matter how much patience a teacher had or how much time was spent on discussing an issue with a student, it sometimes just did not make any evident difference. According to the staff, some students were not able to make the distinction between what was right and responsible and what they had been brought up to believe.

Ms. Brown reported that Judicious Discipline worked well for most students at Highland High, but not for children who were using chemicals or who had severe mental health or correctional kinds of issues. With these students, it was difficult to make inroads because Judicious Discipline was a teaching model. When dealing with students who were using chemicals, she felt that an alternative intervention was needed.

The last drawback was the inconsistency with which some faculty members used the program. It was difficult to bring everybody on board at the beginning and to keep them motivated to utilize the model on an ongoing basis. Consequently, students were exposed to the democratic approach to various degrees because not all teachers adopted it in the same way.

**Benefits of Judicious Discipline**

There were a number of benefits in using Judicious Discipline. Teachers in the focus group agreed that using a democratic discipline approach took the weight off of their shoulders. They were no longer rule makers or the behavior police at the school. One teacher said, “I know for me personally, it reduced my stress level because, in my mind, it wasn’t my rules, it was society’s rules. So when a kid broke the rules, it wasn’t an affront to me, but it was against society as a whole.” Consequently, the students saw the teachers as advocates and were more willing to work with them. With the democratic model in place, the staff did not feel that they had to constantly remind the students about this rule or that rule. Teachers saw their job as being different when it came to discipline because they were trying to come together with the students to make things work. One teacher in the group stated, “It’s a whole different job. You don’t go home at the end of the day feeling like a police officer or a probation officer.” As a result, teachers said that they were calmer.
Another benefit cited by the teachers was that the students felt calmer because they knew they were respected. There was less arguing because students felt that everything was not necessarily either just black or white. Students felt that things at Highland High were fair. They understood that fair did not stand for equal or that every situation would be handled exactly the same, but rather that everybody usually got their needs met. Therefore, the students’ and teachers’ level of stress was lessened.

A third benefit mentioned by the teachers was that students could generally cope better within certain classrooms due to the strategies they learned as part of Judicious Discipline. Students were given strategies to help them solve problems rather than just a punishment. As a result, they knew what to do the next time a problem occurred. The number of students who asked to leave their classrooms to visit the health center was substantially decreased over the years. The health center was no longer being used as an escape for students who were fed up with what was taking place in their classrooms. Teachers credited the use of Judicious Discipline for this change because the students had much more of a say in the classroom and, therefore, felt like staying.

According to Ms. Brown, the most important benefit for her of using Judicious Discipline was that it gave her longevity in her position. She stated that she did not think it would have been possible to last so long in her position without using a democratic discipline approach. The program gave her hope because she believed it was the right thing to do. Judicious Discipline energized her because it allowed her to develop good relationships with the students and with the other people with whom she worked.

Another benefit Ms. Brown cited was that using a democratic discipline approach eventually improved the morale of the staff. During the respect groups, staff members discussed the importance of respecting one another along with the students. Although it was a delicate topic to discuss, teachers had the courage to talk about respect for each other because of their training in Judicious Discipline. Ms. Brown indicated that as a result of the respect groups, teachers used the language of civility when addressing each other. Thus, the teachers were better able to respect one another despite their differences.
THE IMPACT OF JUDICIOUS DISCIPLINE ON HIGHLAND SCHOOL

Highland High staff stated that they saw a change for the better after adopting Judicious Discipline. Before adopting the program, the students used to come back into the classroom after a disciplinary action and play little games to see how they could manipulate the situation or “pull the teacher’s strings.” After the adoption, teachers and students had the opportunity to talk about conflicts with a mediator present. The mediator was either the assistant principal or the planning resource room coordinator. This practice allowed students to nicely transition back into the classroom so they could get back to work. Teachers mentioned that they liked having the opportunity to speak with students on a personal level. One teacher said, “It’s a good process because the students know where you’re coming from, and you know where they’re coming from.”

Ms. Brown reported that prior to adopting Judicious Discipline there was fighting, and a number of popular, influential students were involved with the use and distribution of chemical substances. She said that Highland High was not a very safe community. Judicious Discipline gave her some tools to work more effectively with these difficult students and to avoid getting into power struggles with them. As a result, she was able to prevent many potential problems from escalating. She stated, “I learned very quickly as an administrator that the power struggle thing wasn’t going to work for me. The democratic approach was a really good fit for me. I knew that it was going to work for me, and it really proved that way.”

Faculty members in the focus group stated that there had been an overall change at Highland High School, and things had gotten better over the years since the adoption. One teacher said, “It seems like the kids have gotten better, more mature at times, more respectful towards school property and each other.” An important point made by the teachers was that the students coming to Highland High who had attended school in the district for several years had a better attitude about discipline. These students were more respectful and less defiant in their actions. Teachers attributed this improvement to the fact that the entire school district was using a democratic approach to discipline and, therefore, students were exposed to the program for a number of years before entering high school.
Another salient point made by staff members was that the entire community had adopted the same standards of respect and responsibility (with only one minor revision) that the faculty was teaching to the students in the district. The responsibilities were: (1) act in a safe and healthy way, (2) treat all property with respect, (3) respect rights and needs of others, and (4) take responsibility for your actions. These four ethical standards were posted at one church in the community and at all town parks. Several of the area churches highlighted the four ethics of Judicious Discipline in their brochures. The Community Crusade Council had moved to adopt the four ethical standards as well. Even the local juvenile court judge was using the terminology associated with Judicious Discipline from the bench when he dealt with youngsters from the community. According to the teachers in the focus group, when the judge learned about the community’s adoption of the four ethical standards, he stated at a community meeting, “It makes so much more sense for me to talk to a juvenile from the bench about respecting property rather than citing a Minnesota statute.” Because the standards were now adopted by the community, teachers felt that a positive change in classroom management had been carried over to Highland High.

Additionally, teachers reported that the frequency of misbehavior decreased during the use of Judicious Discipline. The number of students being referred for detention was drastically reduced. Staff members mentioned that each of them had to supervise the after school detention room for one hour per week. Before adopting the democratic approach at Highland High, the list of after school detentions included approximately 80 students each day. After the adoption, the number went down to approximately 45. Teachers were managing student behavior through techniques learned in the training on Judicious Discipline that they attended. Teachers also indicated that the detention room itself had become less punitive. Faculty members supervising detention were assisting students with various resources. The students who were reporting to detention were receiving social and academic support from the teachers on duty.

According to Ms. Brown, the parents at Highland High School were big allies of Judicious Discipline. Using a democratic approach to discipline allowed her to develop stronger relationships with the
parents because it promoted better listening techniques. It gave her the ability to work the human relationship side when dealing with discipline issues. Parents eventually understood that they were going to problem solve together with the assistant principal, and that the high school administration was not the enemy or the bad guy. Ms. Brown said, “It really comes down to building appropriate relationships with the parents, and Judicious Discipline helps a great deal in this area.”

Teachers stated that parents did not initiate any feedback to them concerning the use of Judicious Discipline. However, when faculty members contacted parents about matters of discipline, teachers generally felt supported. Teachers attributed the support they received from parents to the fact that discipline situations were explained using judicious language and the four ethical standards. Students were given the choice to make restitution for their inappropriate actions before a referral to the office was made. For example, culpable students would be asked to clean up a vandalized wall instead of being suspended. For the most part, parents appreciated that choice. One teacher commented, “I really haven’t had any parent disagree with me or argue with me. We have a nice conversation and they do, generally, agree that a logical consequence is probably the best course of action.”

Although the sample size was small, some intriguing patterns and encouraging data surfaced from the survey that was administered to 23 students in grade 10. The survey instrument used a Likert scale to measure student attitudes. If seventy percent or more of the students indicated “All of the time,” “Most of the time,” or “Some of the time” on a question, the results were interpreted to mean that a considerable number of students agreed with that question. Results of the survey indicated that 78 percent of the participants felt they were respected at Highland High, and 74 percent felt that they could count on their teachers and the principal to listen to their side of the story. When asked if they felt their ideas were listened to by their teachers and the principal, 73 percent of the participants indicated that they did, and 91 believed that they were treated fairly by their teachers and the principal if they broke a rule. Finally, 74 percent of the participants indicated that they felt friendly to their teachers at Highland High.
SUMMARY

In this study, it was observed that Highland High School promoted the concept that an educator’s professional responsibility is to create an equitable environment that affords every student the opportunity to be successful. The Judicious Discipline philosophy being emphasized by the administration at Highland High encourages self-control by teaching students their rights and responsibilities in a democratic society. Judicious Discipline has been in use on a school-wide basis for five years by the administration. However, in spite of the ongoing training that is made available to staff, not every teacher has been trained. The large number of teachers and the substantial turnover rate each year make it difficult to train everyone. Nevertheless, most students at Highland High are familiar with the Judicious Discipline model and its language of respect and responsibility because it is used at the junior high, all elementary schools in the district, and throughout the community.

At Highland High School, the democratic practices of Judicious Discipline were being used as a tool for teaching the values of respect and responsibility. Discipline and order were established by achieving a balance between freedom and responsibility. The Judicious Discipline approach being employed was based upon the concept of “equal worth.” Each individual was responsible to self and to others. Highland High School was led by responsive administrators who treated the students as citizens and active participants in the learning process.

DISCUSSION

This study found that implementing the democratic approach of Judicious Discipline on a school-wide basis improves student behavior, encourages young learners to become more autonomous, and prepares teachers and administrators to more effectively deal with discipline issues that, in turn, helps reduce their level of stress. The analysis of the quantitative data suggests that a considerable number of students felt they possessed a high level of respect and responsibility in the classroom and throughout the school as a result of Highland High’s use of Judicious Discipline. Results support the implementation of Judicious Discipline as an effective approach to classroom management.
Highland High School adopted Judicious Discipline because other approaches had been unsuccessful. School administrators agreed that the primary reason for adopting Judicious Discipline was Highland High’s continuous problems with student discipline. Administrators were dissatisfied with the hodgepodge of behaviorist models in place prior to the implementation of Judicious Discipline because these authoritarian methods (methods that rely on and promote unquestioning obedience of the teacher with little or no student input in the decision-making process) had proven ineffective. Many young learners were exhibiting a lack of self-control, and issues of discipline persisted. As a result, administrators and many teachers became frustrated. Consequently, the administration, after investigating different options, adopted Judicious Discipline, a cohesive democratic discipline model. For the most part, they did so with the support of the majority of their faculty members.

There are a number of benefits that result from using Judicious Discipline. Teachers at Highland High reported that it made handling discipline easier because they were seen as advocates who were willing to assist the students with disciplinary problems when needed. Therefore, staff members felt more relaxed, stayed calmer, and experienced a lower level of job-related stress. The administration believed Judicious Discipline was a much more humane way to handle discipline because it was more logical and ethically sound. The assistant principal credited it for giving her peace of mind and for lessening the amount of stress at work. According to teachers, another benefit was that democratic discipline practices reassured students that they would be treated fairly, and provided them with strategies to help prevent potential discipline problems from escalating. As a result, students remained calmer during disciplinary encounters with staff or with other students. The administration at Highland High concurred with the teachers and stated that Judicious Discipline created a safer learning environment for students.

A third benefit cited by staff members was that Judicious Discipline taught students how to truly respect others in the classroom and throughout the school. Teachers believed that students were becoming better citizens because they were practicing effective citizenship at school. They also believed that the value of respect stu-
dents learned at school also transferred over to home, and this benefits society in general. Administrative sentiment supports this belief. The administration indicated that the Judicious Discipline approach helped students see themselves as rule followers in a community of life-long learners.

There are, however, some drawbacks associated with using Judicious Discipline. Administrators and teachers agreed that Judicious Discipline did not work for all students. Although the democratic model was recognized as a much better overall approach to discipline, participants in the study stated that it was ineffective for approximately five percent of the students. Behavior disordered students who are defiant, students who use chemicals, and students who have severe mental or correctional kinds of issues are the ones for which the democratic program did not work. Some students could not comprehend the idea that along with their rights, they had responsibilities. For students with behavior disorders, teachers believed that administering an immediate consequence is more effective.

A second drawback reported by teachers and administrators was the amount of time it took to establish a democratic approach to discipline. Teachers had to spend a significant amount of time developing relationships with the students. Administrators reported that more time was devoted to conferencing students, and it took longer to help students work through discipline situations in a calmer way. Teachers and administrators agreed that Judicious Discipline was a process and not a quick fix approach, and building their programs on respect was time consuming.

Successful implementation of Judicious Discipline requires that staff be provided with ample opportunities for training. In order to learn all of the principles and nuances of Judicious Discipline, approximately 20 to 30 hours of training are necessary. Administrators must be committed to the model, and be willing to provide funding for the training. Once the initial training is completed, it is important for the administration to demonstrate ongoing support for the program by offering additional opportunities for training. Mini-workshops that concentrate on certain practices of democratic discipline are important for staff. Setting aside several days of staff development during the first year of implementation in order to
review the components of Judicious Discipline is also beneficial. It is critical for the administration to provide extended opportunities for training and to strongly encourage all teachers to attend.

A number of difficulties arise during the implementation process. Teachers reported that one difficulty was mentally making the paradigm shift from using a behaviorist approach to using a democratic one. Giving up some of their power and authority, and learning the respectful terminology necessary to speak with students about their rights and responsibilities took effort and patience. Taking time to step back and evaluate discipline situations instead of immediately administering a consequence for an inappropriate action presented teachers with a difficult adjustment.

A serious difficulty indicated by administrators was the hesitation on the part of some teachers to implement the democratic approach. Due to past practices, some faculty members were so ingrained in the behaviorist model that it was difficult for them to adapt their approach. Some veteran teachers were reluctant to implement the program because they did not see the need for change. In some cases, teachers were outright defiant toward the program during the first year of implementation and chose to forgo the training.

Another important finding in this study is that the modeling techniques that teachers and administrators practice contribute to a well-functioning democratic discipline model. Administrators tried to be compassionate with staff and students, to be good listeners, to be patient, and to treat others with respect and dignity. Faculty members treated students as citizens with rights and responsibilities. Students were allowed to have some part in the decision making process on practically everything that affected them in the classroom. In addition, the respectful language teachers used when they spoke to students and with each other was as important as the behavior they modeled.

The level of respect that students demonstrate toward each other contributes to the successful implementation of Judicious Discipline. The program taught youngsters to see that most discipline problems occurred when one or more of them failed to respect something that belonged to someone else. Students also respected faculty members more because the democratic approach used by staff gave students a
feeling of self-worth. As a result, they demonstrated more patience and tolerance for one another.

Another finding is that significant improvement in student behavior occurs after adopting Judicious Discipline. Teachers and the administration agreed that Highland High School became a safer place for the students. According to the teachers, the students were more polite and exhibited more empathy. The students’ problem-solving skills improved, and they were better able to resolve many of their own discipline problems. Students were using judicious language to settle their differences. The frequency and severity of misbehavior decreased. The number of students referred for detention was reduced significantly. Teachers were managing student behavior through techniques learned in Judicious Discipline workshops, and students were responding in a positive manner.

CONCLUSIONS
This study provides evidence that implementing Judicious Discipline practices on a school-wide basis significantly improves student behavior. It also suggests that students who are exposed to Judicious Discipline learn to take responsibility for their actions and become informed and involved members of the school community, and that a democratic approach to discipline could benefit the culture of any high school that does not already have such an approach in place.

REFERENCES