

**ACTION ON A CHARTER SCHOOL PROPOSAL FOR MILWAUKEE
EXCELLENCE CHARTER SCHOOL**



A proposed 5th – 12th grade charter school for Milwaukee, Wisconsin
Milwaukee Public Schools, Proposal – Addendum B

Respectfully Submitted by Lead Founder and proposed Executive Director Maurice Thomas

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1. School Discipline¹

Our Commitment to Milwaukee Public Schools: Milwaukee Excellence Charter School will comply with and adopt the Milwaukee Public Schools’ Parent/Student Handbook on Rights, Responsibilities, and Discipline. **Appendix H Milwaukee Excellence Discipline Plan**, will serve as a Code of Conduct for Milwaukee Excellence students. All changes will be made to the Code of Conduct to align fully with the Milwaukee Public Schools’ Parent/Student Handbook on Rights, Responsibilities, and Discipline.

Our Goal: Walking through the halls of Milwaukee Excellence during class time is a remarkable experience. In every classroom, teachers are presenting **rigorous lessons** and students are rising to the challenge. Milwaukee Excellence teachers hold students to high academic expectations, and are able to focus on effective instruction because consistent classroom management expectations are enforced by every teacher. Teachers deliver great lessons; students are engaged and on-task throughout the entire class period - there is a “buzz” of learning in class. Classes run fluidly with clear communication between students and teacher. Teachers **proactively plan** to avoid misbehavior. Consistency in application of consequences drives student actions away from negative behaviors. Positive incentives encourage students to succeed. Academic success and opportunity are our greatest motivators. Teachers use school-wide systems, individual techniques, strong student-teacher relationships, and strong teacher-family relationships to promote and reinforce behavioral excellence. Parents feel welcome at the school. Teachers know and feel that they are **well supported** by leadership. Staff, teachers, students, and families work together to achieve a college-preparatory environment.

Suspensions: Milwaukee Excellence Charter School recognizes the effort and commitment MPS has made to stabilize suspension rates in the district. Milwaukee Excellence will suspend students at a rate that is equal to or lower than comparable schools in MPS. At Milwaukee Excellence we believe in a strong culture, however, we believe that best way to educate our students is to keep them in class as often as possible. Milwaukee Excellence will comply with the tiered response to misbehavior outlined in Milwaukee Public Schools’ Parent/Student Handbook on Rights, Responsibilities, and Discipline.

Executing School Discipline: We recognize that the rules and consequences included in **Appendix H** are extensive and may be difficult to imagine in practice. Included below are detailed descriptions of how Milwaukee Excellence faculty and staff will create a positive, consistent, respectful, and joyful school culture. **Appendix H** represents how Milwaukee Excellence will execute the Milwaukee Public Schools’ Parent/Student Handbook on Rights, Responsibilities, and Discipline.

The Importance of Consistency:

- If misbehavior goes unchecked at any time for any reason it becomes acceptable and undermines the system; this leads to confusion and future misbehavior.
- Studies show that it is not the severity of the punishment that deters people from breaking rules, but the consistent application of consequences. It can’t be, “If I do this, I might get caught.” It must be, “If I do this, I know I will get consequence X.” Sometimes this approach will take a very long time as the students tries to figure out who will change first.
- Sometimes we will find ways to work with students outside of this system by implementing a different behavior modification plan. However, when this happens, it is not the consistency of application of rewards and consequences that changes, but rather the system itself.
- All staff members should issue demerits when students choose to break the rules regardless of when, where or how. It is our collective responsibility. Also, merits have more value if students know that teachers notice their good choices regardless of where and when.

¹ The systems and practices contained herein are influenced greatly by Excel Academy (Boston, MA), Democracy Prep (NY, NY), Liberty Collegiate Academy (Nashville, TN) and Nashville Preparatory Charter School (Nashville, TN. Lead Founder, Maurice Thomas, met with Founders and principals of these schools during his fellowship in Building Excellent Schools.

Delivering Consequences:

- It's all in the delivery. A demerit can be a punitive, insulting consequence. It can also be a pause, an acknowledgment of digression, a redirection and a starting point for positive choices.
- Consider the following: "Alex, guess what? Another demerit, how many times do I need to tell you not to get out of your seat?" As opposed to: "Alex, as you know in our class before you get out of your seat, you need to get permission from the teacher. You have not followed the procedure so you have earned a demerit. Please try and make sure that doesn't happen in the future. Now let's get back to work."
- Fundamental to delivering consequences effectively is trust and fairness. Students must trust that we are, in general, on their team, and that we are fair.

Best Practices for Delivering Consequences:

- Always avoid attacks on dignity, no matter how small.
- Deliver consequences so that no one "loses face."
- Use the word "Yet" to imply to the student that while they haven't yet learned to consistently do right thing in a given situation, that they believe that they will in the future.
- Give students control over the outcome. Make it clear that you feel every behavior is a choice.
- Allow students to choose to do it right if they don't want additional consequences.
- Students who feel powerless or trapped are not happy students.
- Deliver consequences consistently and respectfully.
- Identify the inappropriate behavior; don't assume the student knows what he/she did wrong.
- If you see a violation outside the classroom, act on it, don't ignore anything, even if you don't teach the student(s).
- Try to give out as many or more merits than demerits.
- There are never exceptions to student disrespect.

When addressing poor class-wide behavior: "We as a class don't do the right thing to avoid consequences. We as a class don't do the right thing to earn rewards. We as a class don't do the right thing to please our teachers, Mr. Smith, or Mr. Johnson. We as a class don't do the right thing because we follow rules. That's not who we are; that's not our code. We do the right thing because we know how important this school community is to our families and to ourselves. We do the right thing because it will help this school community grow, improve, and be the best it can be."

When a student displays great enthusiasm: "Brianna, I am so impressed by your tremendous enthusiasm. It is definitely worthy of a merit. But let's not focus on the merit. Let's instead focus on how your tremendous enthusiasm inspired your classmates. Did you see how Stacy's face lit up when you spoke so passionately? Keep on showing enthusiasm for the right reasons – because it will inspire your classmates to have just as much enthusiasm as you."

Talking during class:

- Teacher should issue a demerit and then check in with Alex (student) after class.
- Teacher should ask, "Why is it important to listen while a teacher is giving directions?"
- With questioning, help Alex come to the conclusion that it is important to listen while a teacher is giving directions because it is respectful of his teacher and peers (who are trying to listen and learn!) and also if he is speaking that he is missing the lesson and not furthering his education (which is his key to his future)
- Ask: Why do you think that this rule is in place? Talking in class is tearing down the community of the classroom because it is not considerate of your classmates who are trying to listen to my instructions. I know that you care more about your classmates than you are showing. This is a demerit and I expect that you will show your classmates how determined you are to help build a better community in the coming classes.

Student is crying/upset during private conversation:

- After helping the student calm down and addressing their concerns, transition to a reflective moment.
- Ask: Why are you crying? Follow up: Were you crying because you were in trouble? Because you made me (or other adult) upset? Because you broke the rule? Because you let yourself down? Because you let your community down?
- How can we learn from this experience?

Student disagrees with consequence:

“You are talking about the symptom, and I am talking to you about the cause”

Promoting Respectful Disagreement

- A lot of times a student will disagree with a consequence. It is important to give students an avenue through which they can disagree, but do so with respect for themselves and the adult. The acceptable response to a consequence is: “Mr. Smith, I respectfully disagree”
- If a student chooses this response, they have chosen respect. The staff member should welcome a conversation later. It is the responsibility of the student to take initiative to arrange a meeting.
- If the student chooses another, disrespectful responses (be it verbal or physical display) to the issuing of a consequence (either a demerit or detention), he or she will receive a detention for that disrespect.
- In order to prevent escalation, before the detention is issued, it is suggested that the staff member give the student an “out,” and suggest the later conversation. For example, “John, you know the policy for disagreeing. The way you chose to respond to the demerit was not respectful. This, as you know, warrants a detention. If you would like to talk about why I issued either the demerit or the detention, we can do this after class. Now, however, it’s time to get back to work.”
- Students who continue to argue should not receive yet another detention. The staff member should remind the student that a staff member will be contacting the family that night and that they can choose to show respect at this point to give the staff member something positive to report in the call tonight.
- Students whose response becomes egregious should be referred to the Dean of Students.
- It is very important that the consequence be delivered with respect if we are to expect a respectful response.
- These conversations are to happen before school or after school when both parties are mutually available. Students should not use Academic Support or detention time to respectfully disagree unless initiated by the teacher or requested by the Dean of Students.
- Teachers should not feel the need to arrange these meetings, give out appointment invitations or seek out students during the day.
- The onus to initiate the meeting falls on the student, as the teacher is consistently available before and after school.

How an Adult’s Actions Might Contribute to Student Misbehavior

- Issues that could be resolved with a look, a demerit, a redirection, or a smile can be escalated by the teacher who responds rashly rather than in a way aligned with his/her own behavior plan.
- Confusion is created when the adult is unable to/does not communicate expectations clearly.
- Adult-centered lessons leave kids sitting and inactive. Kids like to be active; they make their own action if not given the opportunity to be constructively active.
- If an adult has not set and reinforced procedures, students will not necessarily do things the way the adult wants. After this happens multiple times, the adult can become frustrated and express frustration with a student who was really trying to do follow directions. The teacher may also engage the consequence ladder, moving students quickly to higher consequences and running out of headroom, when the entire interaction should have been avoided with a good procedure.

Our Philosophy to School Discipline

- We have a powerful and clear system of consequences and rewards.
- While consistency is incredibly important and standards need to be the same across the school, there is a degree of sensitivity that needs to be exercised when using the system. We have many tools in addition to merits and demerits.
- We seek to understand our students. Get to know how they work and how they think. Certain things will set off certain students (at this stage in their development) no matter what the consequences or structures in place.
- We know that students who are making efforts to improve need to know that someone is noticing. However, desire to improve and real improvement are two very different things.
- With respectful disagreement, our standard is that students should not argue or converse about the consequence. Does it make sense to give a consequence to a student if you ask a rhetorical question to a student and they answer?
- Try to understand motive and intention when assigning consequences.
- We ask ourselves: Am I frustrated with this student? What else can I do to get at the root of the problem?
- We always remember to communicate the intrinsic consequences (or rewards) of a student's actions.