

Open and closed campuses

There has been an evolution in the adoption of open and closed campuses and now the trend is going back to closed campuses once again. There is a 71% high public priority for closing school campuses according to *Public agenda, First Things First*. Closed campuses are those that require students to stay in school during the entire school day while open campuses permit their students to leave campus during the school period. Generally closed school campus report less behavior problems than do open campuses. In closed campuses students may only leave the school building if there is a written consent from the parent or guardian or for the participation in specialized activities. Schools legally are in *loco parentis* during the entire school period, should anything happen to the student, schools are held accountable and liable.

Schools resort to open campuses primarily because many schools simply do not have the facilities to accommodate all students during the lunch hour. The sad development is that when students go out for lunch, some never make it back to the school campuses. Tragic accidents have been experienced during lunch hours. Society regards schools as a safe haven and a place to nurture youth. Therefore acts of violence on youth that threaten the security of schools attack the core value of the social system (Furlong & Morrison, 2000). Some students have resorted to indecorous behavior such as alcohol and drug consumption, violence, truancy, gang activity, and absconding lessons. This is not to suggest that closed campuses do not experience behavior problems. If students cannot leave school to go and smoke off campus they inevitably smoke on campus. There are also the general student conflicts that are associated with any school setting.

Both open and closed climates place schools in a quagmire, and of course there is no clear solution to who owns the problem of school violence. The potential of risk is too high in open climates and this certainly pushes the liability insurance up in open school campuses. Closed climates are associated with high costs of supervision and security. In addition there is congestion in lunchrooms. The level of supervision can be decreased gradually after students adapt to the closed campus. Therefore the funding needs of closed campuses go down with time. Schools solicit the help of retired community persons, and from community-based organizations that are willing to assist with school supervision.

Because of the high risk factor associated with open climates and the general costs of litigation, many schools are going back to the closed campus system. Suggested here are some steps schools can adopt to cushion themselves from the risks when they adopt closed climates:

- Staggered lunch periods
- Serving food that is appealing, nutritious, and accessible. Should compliment vendor's offerings.
- Invite outside food vendors, but coordinate it with the school food service program
- Increase the number of service areas to reduce congestion in lunch halls. If possible scatter them around the school.
- Invite students to taste the food products before marketing them.
- Develop an array of lunchtime activities. These can include: movies, dance contest, athletic activities, tournaments and other competitions. Basically provide a plethora of activities that provide students with alternatives and choices (Hansen & Childs, 1998).

- Developing behavior management programs

The suggested steps may be successful if students are involved in the planning and implementation process. There might be the need to hire a full time director of student affairs to avoid placing additional responsibilities on the teachers. Programs that increase student-teacher interaction should be encouraged. Another way would be form business school partnerships. A commercial store, staffed by students can be operated on campus. The proceeds can go into the Associated Student Body (ASB) for future student activities. The local universities and colleges could also be consulted for assistance in planning and coordinating lunchtime programs.

The whole debate of closed and open climate is complex and there is no clear answer. For instance bringing weapons to school has nothing to do with whether a school campus is open or closed. There is a host of factors associated with school violence such as: (a) individual, (b) family, (c) school or peer, (d) societal, and (e) situational. Brown, Higgins and Paulsen (2003) add adolescent alienation as another possible cause to violent behavior. Students become estranged and separated from the school system for various reasons. Research done by Malecki and Kilpatrick Demaray (2003) suggested that children resort to violence at school due to perceived social support. These students suffer from a “caring disability” as asserted by Hansen and Childs, (1998, p. 16). Students who perceived themselves as getting little support from family, adult friends, clergy, school counselors and teachers exhibited violent behaviors and are likely to carry weapons to school. Several studies, cited by Malecki and Kilpatrick (2003), pointed out that boys are likely to carry weapons than girls, older adolescence are likely to carry weapons than early adolescents, and Hispanic and African American students are more likely to carry guns into schools campuses than Caucasian children. Schools therefore, need to be actively involved in developing programs that are appealing to students and that increase social cohesion.

Summary of perceptions of closed and open campuses debate.

Proponents for open campuses	Critics
Open campuses are cost effective. No need to spend money on supervision buying two way radio devices, cellular phones, portable video cameras, renovation of lunch rooms to ease congestion, erecting fences, etc., during the lunch hour while increased supervision in closed campuses is an additional cost.	Closed school campuses reduce the temptation of leaving school building to indulge in delinquent behavior e.g. violence, gang activity, smoking, drinking and other drug use outside of school.
Closed campuses deter family and community involvement. There is need for parents, peers and community to establish accountability.	Some areas have to be off limits during lunch hour to ensure safety of students
A way of teaching responsibility to students	Accidents involving school children happen most between 10:00 am and 2:00 pm
Open campuses a solution to crowded lunchrooms.	Problems can be reduced if there is enough adult supervision during the entire school period.
Less litter and less potential for vandalism	Safety of school children is compromised in open climates. Pupils and staff need the security of knowing that the campus is safe.
No need to regulate child some aspects of students lives such as driving	Students spend more money on lunch
Requires a long term action	Schools loose business

Senior high school students are mature	
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Finally, It is also prudent to check with the school district's insurance carrier to determine what their viewpoint is on the issue of closed vs. open campuses.

In summary, school district superintendents and boards will find a variety of vocal stakeholders willing to step forward with their particular opinion on this subject. Prudent Boards should take their time in evaluating this issue from as many different sides that represented in their districts. Parents, law enforcement, businesses, students, insurance, school administration, and teachers are but a few of the possible groups or individuals having opinions on closed vs. open campuses.

References

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