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Since I have not really been a part of a school reform, I will focus on a reform that I would like to see implemented in our program. My ideal reform would be a bottom-up, shared power reform that focused on improving not only student academic achievement but also student behavior and social awareness.

Our program is mostly run as an Even Start which is a program to help young mothers return to school with the assistance of a school-provided daycare. Along with the mothers in the Even Start program, we also service a few alternative students as well. While this system works well most of the time, there are events that occur that exclude the non-Even Start students. Even though not all students are parents, I feel all of our students would benefit from a curriculum that included courses in behavior and life skills. Our students are notorious for their poor behavior (most dropping out of traditional school because of their inability to cooperate), so correcting that negative behavior would be top priority.

As I have mentioned our students generally have bad reputations where school is concerned. Being labeled the school for “drop-out moms” has created a very negative culture. As a staff we would need to address the culture issue. Currently, each staff member is “on-her-own” as far as how and what we teach. There is no set curriculum, no teacher meetings, and no staff meetings. I truly believe that the lack of communication and lack of structure in our building play a huge role in the negative culture that exists in our program. The students know how to “play the system” while at school because they know there is little communication among the staff. Students also know that because there is so little structure, there are very few consequences for poor or unacceptable behavior. That being said, staff

meetings, a unified mission, and a central curriculum would have to be the starting point of my reform. Once the staff had a specific goal in mind, and a plan to reach that goal, other issues could then be addressed.

I strongly feel that because our program has such a negative reputation (for outsiders as well as students) that it is hard for our kids to take pride in their education. While we teachers try very hard individually to create an atmosphere that stresses the importance of a quality education, the community attitude toward our school undermines our efforts. Creating a unified staff that works cooperatively rather than individually would help to repair that reputation. Because we teachers know our students on a level far different from that of the administration, it would be vital that teachers be central in forming the unified curriculum. The administration, now playing only the role of general office personnel (enrolling, dropping, and recruiting students), would become an active member in the team by adding informative professional development for teachers, visiting and being active in the classroom, and defending teachers in disciplinary issues. (This is an enormous problem in our program right now. There is no standard procedure for anything- discipline, attendance, etc.)

If our program were to implement these initial ideas, more ideas would follow and the program would fall into proper order. Focusing first on changing the basic structure of the program to include a "team" atmosphere among the staff would greatly improve teachers' attitudes toward their jobs and teaching in general. Knowing that their efforts are making a difference in students' lives will create a positive energy in the teachers that would "trickle down" to the students. Once the students started to see the change in the program as a whole, the culture and reputation would change to one that students want to be a part of. Rather than seeing our program as one that is a "last chance" at a diploma, future students would instead be proud to be given the opportunity to be a part of, and eventually graduate from, our school.

There are of course many other issues that would need to be addressed, but this is where I would like to see our program start. It might help to know that we are a program of around thirty students (on a good day), four teachers, one director, and one receptionist. Even my small suggestions could make large waves of change if they were just implemented into our daily routines.