

## Case Study

April 2002

This incident takes place at a fairly large, urban school. For the rest of this paper, the school will be referred to as Willow Creek Elementary School. This school is a magnet school with a student population of about 700 and a staff of about 100 teachers, assistants and interns. Willow Creek's population is about 80% African American and 1% other minorities. It has a free and reduced lunch rate of around 85% and one of the highest turn over rates in the county.

This particular incident occurred in the hallway outside of a 5th grade classroom during the second week of April around 10:00 in the morning while the children were involved in the standardized testing for the state. The people involved are a 5th grade girl, who is generally well behaved and polite, but does have a history of lying (we will call her Stephanie), and a special areas teacher with 11 years of experience at Willow Creek (we will call her Ms. Brown). Her job during testing is to sit in the 4th and 5th grade hallway and deal with any problems that might occur during testing. The participants have a good relationship with one another and have not had any confrontations in the past. Ms. Brown has a good relationship with most children, including Stephanie, and generally acts as an advocate for the children. She is aware of Stephanie's habit of lying about where she is supposed be and is also aware that Stephanie has skipped her class several times by telling her homeroom teacher that she has to go for counseling. Stephanie is receiving counseling from an outside agency, but not until an hour later than she is telling the staff.

Stephanie left her classroom during a break between tests with a proctor and her belongings. The proctor was not a school employee, and the test administrator, Ms. Fly, was not Stephanie's regular homeroom teacher. Ms. Brown, who was sitting in the hallway, asked the proctor where she was taking Stephanie. The proctor replied that Stephanie had to go for counseling. Ms. Brown was skeptical and informed the proctor of Stephanie's history of trying to avoid certain activities by claiming to have to go to counseling. Ms. Brown suggested to the proctor that she return Stephanie to the classroom and ask the homeroom teacher, Ms. Fly, about where she was supposed to be and who had informed her about Stephanie's counseling. Ms. Brown then addressed Stephanie and informed her that she knew about the lying to skip class and told her how disappointed she was. The proctor took Stephanie back to class to talk with Ms. Fly. Ms. Brown decided to go to Ms. Fly's classroom to explain why she had sent Stephanie back so that the proctor would not have to relay messages. When Ms. Brown entered the classroom, Ms. Fly said that Stephanie's note from the counseling agency did indeed say that she was to be picked up early on this particular day.

You are Ms. Brown. What will you do?

### QUESTIONS FOR USE WITH NOVICE TEACHERS:

Do you know what the building procedures are during testing?

Was Ms. Brown's questioning of the student appropriate?

How could this problem have been avoided?

What did this teacher do correctly?