

Becoming Exemplary with Kagan

MICHAEL WINTERS, PRINCIPAL

To cite this article: Winters, M. Principal *Becoming Exemplary with Kagan* San Clemente, CA: Kagan Publishing. *Kagan Online Magazine*, Fall/Winter 2013.

“One of the main reasons for my school’s and my personal successes is the use of Kagan Cooperative Learning Structures.”

I became principal of Cheatham Elementary School in Laveen Arizona in 2008. The school is a Title I school with 72% free and reduced lunch, a 25% ELL population, and a 10% special education population. It is also an incredibly diverse campus with 40% Hispanic, 35% black, 18% white 5% Asian, and 2% Native American. There is also a great deal of socioeconomic diversity. During the four years I was principal, the students displayed huge growth on their Arizona standardized test (AIMS) scores, improved behaviour, improved social skills, and improved critical thinking skills. As a result of these positive changes, I was named a Rodel Exemplary Principal in March of 2011 through the Rodel Charitable Foundation of Arizona. The Rodel Exemplary Principal Initiative recognizes the success of Arizona’s most exceptional principals. In the search for Exemplary Principals, Rodel looked for evidence of high expectations for staff and students, as well as a focus on effective teaching and student management strategies. Selected principals are those who inspire their staffs to contribute to school-wide success and the development of a campus that is high achieving, safe, orderly and welcoming. Additionally, individuals are identified who have demonstrated a history of leadership that has earned them the respect of colleagues, students, staff, parents and community members. In turn, as an Exemplary Principal, over the next two years I will mentor three Rodel Aspiring Principals.

One of the main reasons for my school’s and my personal successes is the use of Kagan Cooperative Learning Structures. Throughout each lesson and each day, the students were highly engaged in learning through the use of structures.

Increased Achievement

The State assessment results, shown in the graphs, highlight the growth in AIMS (Arizona’s Instrument to Measure Standards) scores.

Educators’ Insights on Kagan

Hear what Cheatham teachers and administrators say about their Kagan experience.

“The Kagan experiences you provided not only helped me build a passion for my profession, but to further my knowledge in my subject area and help my students reach higher levels of success.”

MARTHA DANIELS, 7TH & 8TH GRADE MATH TEACHER

“Using Kagan structures in our classrooms increased student engagement which increased our test scores. Structures allowed teachers to make sure each child “got it.” Structures provided support for those who didn’t get it, and for those who did, the opportunity to teach others. Each student was accountable for knowing the information and for helping each other. They became a family.”

NICOLE SCALES, INSTRUCTIONAL COACH (NOW ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY STUDENT TEACHING SUPERVISOR AND INSTRUCTOR)

“Kagan structures transformed my classroom completely when I started using them! My students became fully engaged in whole lessons instead of certain parts. They were able to retain more information than lessons where I did not use any Kagan structures. Kagan changed the way I taught students and now has changed the way I teach professionals in the learning community!”

CORY WOODARD, 1ST GRADE TEACHER (NOW INSTRUCTIONAL COACH)

“Kagan is a powerful tool that helps to increase student engagement. Students enjoy the structures and some

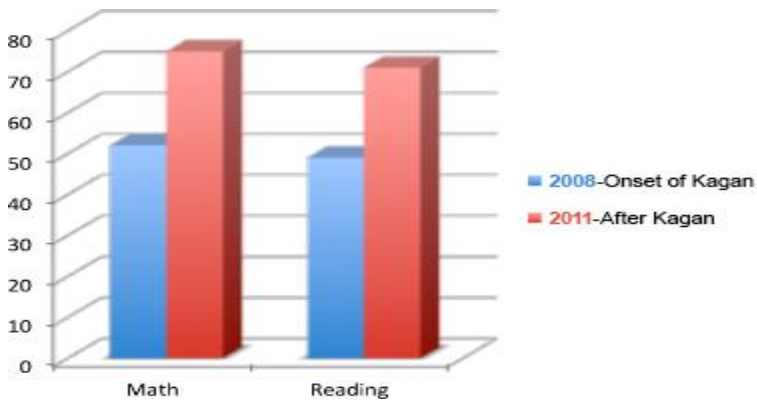
even believe they are “playing games” while they are learning. Increased student engagement leads to an increase in student achievement.”

ELLEN HELLER, ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL (NOW PRINCIPAL)

“When I began using Kagan Cooperative Learning in my classroom with fidelity, the engagement I saw in my students was an awesome sight. While using and engaging in structures during my lessons, the students were excited to learn. They loved getting out of their seats and sharing their knowledge with others in the classroom. They learned to speak using academic language and to explain their responses to their peers. The growth was both academic and social. They learned how to appropriately take turns and listen to their classmates, while validating and praising their responses. Kagan Cooperative learning changed my classroom environment, and I can’t imagine my classroom without it.”

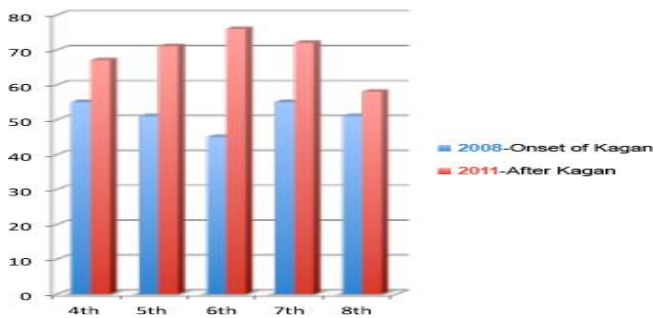
ALISON GROSS, 4TH GRADE TEACHER

3rd Grade AIMS Scores



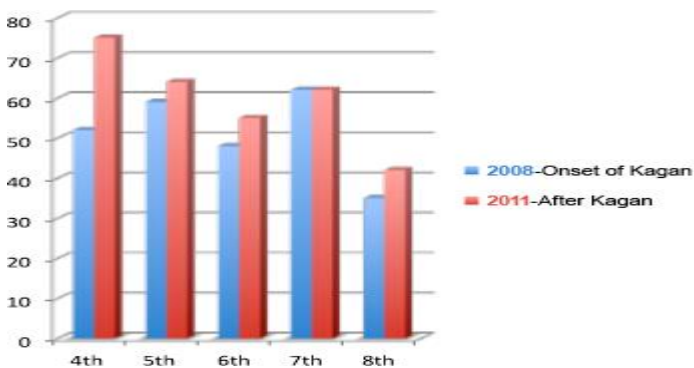
Both Math and Reading scores increased dramatically through the use of Kagan. Before Kagan, only 52% and 49% of student received passing Math and Reading AIMS scores respectively. After Kagan, 75% and 71% of student received passing Math and Reading AIMS respectively.

4th–8th Grade AIMS Reading Scores



The positive gains were achieved at every grade level in reading.

4th–8th Grade AIMS Math Scores



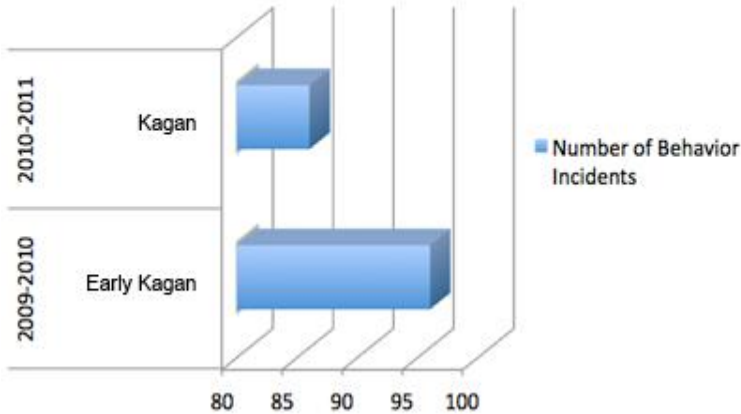
The positive gains were achieved at every grade level in mathematics, with the exception of 7th grade which remained unchanged.

Improved Student Behaviour

The implementation of Kagan had a dramatically positive impact on student behaviour. Negative behaviours decreased while positive referrals skyrocketed with full Kagan implementation.

Az SAFE Reportable Discipline Incidents

Number of Behavior Incidents



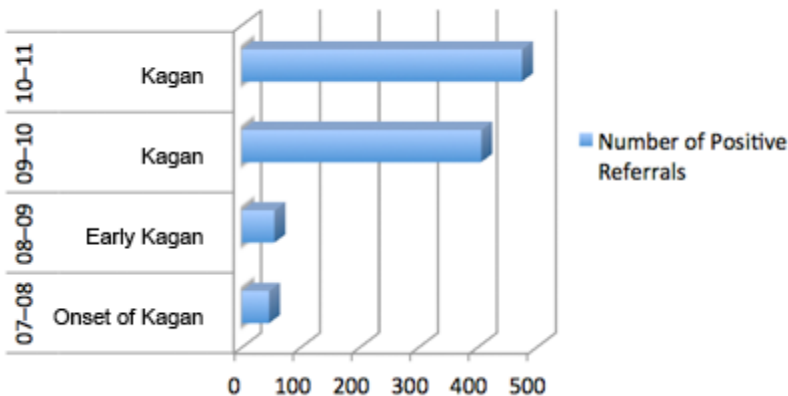
The discipline incidents are reported to Az SAFE, Arizona Safety Accountability For Education. Violations include aggression, drugs, alcohol, harassment, threats, theft, vandalism, weapons and other offenses. Notice as experience progressed with Kagan, discipline referrals decreased.

Positive Behaviour Referrals

Positive referrals skyrocketed. Here are some behaviours for which students typically earned a positive referral:

- Finding money/jewellery/mobile phone on campus and turning it in
- Helping a friend who had dropped his/her books
- Holding a door open for a teacher carrying a bunch of materials
- Picking up trash on the playground without being asked to do so
- Preventing an altercation by stepping in between two students and mediating the problem
- Helping a struggling student in class
- Drastic behavioural or academic turn-arounds in class

Number of Positive Referrals



There was more than a 10 times increase in positive behaviour referrals from 46 positive referrals in 2007–2008 to 475 positive referrals in 2010–2011.

We would also hear a great deal of praise from outside visitors. Literally every outside visitor, including district office staff, would comment on how polite and well-mannered our students were. At first this surprised me because dealing with the behaviour issues on a day-to-day basis I didn't always see that, but they did. The positive behaviour became the expectation and the norm.

After two years as principal, the focus of our time as teachers and administrators shifted from behavioural to academic. The students just simply got along better with one another. I mandated at least weekly Classbuilding and scheduled times for me to observe the Classbuilding. The teachers had to sign up for when their Classbuilding for the week would be. I'd go and observe. They also had to conduct Teambuilding at least twice a week. The teachers also had to explicitly teach social skills during each lesson. The teachers were required to use a minimum of one Kagan Structure per lesson. (Usually more were used.) During at least one of the structures, the teachers had to pick one of the social skills embedded in the structure and explicitly teach it. Each teacher made a t-chart poster that had "looks like" and "sounds like" on it. The students then generated what the social skill should look and sound like. The teacher then monitored, redirected, and reinforced that social skill during the structure. This happened several times a day. I tell people that it is "a lot harder for a kid to harass another kid on the playground when that kid is helping the other with math and reading in the classroom."

Creating a Kagan School

How did the use of Kagan Structures become so ingrained in the school's instructional culture? Here's how.

Kagan Certification. I attended **Kagan Trainer Training** and became a Certified Kagan Trainer. The training allowed me to provide my teachers with training as well as increase the engagement at all professional development and staff meetings. Two years later, my instructional coach also became a certified trainer.

High Expectations of Implementation. I stated the instructional expectation that each teacher would use a minimum of one Kagan Structure per lesson. I monitored this expectation through the collecting of lesson plans and through extensive informal classroom observations by myself, the assistant principal, and the instructional coach.

Mandated Kagan Training. I mandated that every teacher on campus become Kagan trained. Teachers had two options to obtain training. They could either attend the district provided five-day Kagan course or attend a two-day weekend course I taught as a certified Kagan trainer. When hiring new staff members I asked them, "*Can you commit to attending either a five or two day Kagan class?*"

Cooperative Staff Meetings. I modelled my instructional expectation. One of the biggest steps to implementing structures in a school is to model the use of structures during every staff meeting and professional development session. The teachers saw how easily structures could be used, they became excited about the structures we were using, and most importantly, they were able to feel what it feels like to be completely engaged during instruction. They wanted their students to feel the same way during their instruction as they did during training. I lost track of how many times my staff and I would be in training and someone would lean over and say, "*We could really use a classbuilder right about now.*"

Coaching and Feedback. I provided feedback. Another big step in implementing structures was feedback, feedback, and more feedback. If a teacher was observed using a structure, we could provide them with tips to improve the structure. More importantly, we could explain when to use a structure, how to use it, and which structure would be appropriate for the activity the teacher was doing. Once the teachers knew how and when to use a structure, the use of one structure per lesson grew to at least three structures per lesson.



Extensive Kagan Support Resources. I provided teachers with the materials needed to implement the structures. Every teacher on campus had a full set of Kagan posters, individual student white boards, markers, erasers, and software including spinners, timers, and Numbered Heads Together. I took away all the excuses for not using structures. There was no reason a teacher could not use structures.

Creating a Culture of Success. I created a culture of success. Success bred an infectious excitement about Kagan structures; once the teachers saw success, they wanted more. They realized that using structures greatly enhanced the active engagement in their classroom. The enhanced active engagement greatly increased test scores.

A New Opportunity to Become Exemplary

In addition to taking on the responsibilities of a principal mentor, I have taken on the challenge of taking over the principalship at another school. Madison Camelview, a K-4 campus in the Madison School District in Phoenix, is another Title I school. It has 72% free and reduced lunch and a diverse student population with 3% Asian, 10% black, 56% Hispanic, 11% Native American, and 20% white. Arizona has recently legislated Move on When Reading, mandating students pass the State testing (AIMS) in order to be promoted to fourth grade. By following the same steps as at my previous school, I will ingrain Kagan Structures into the instructional culture and help students and teachers be more successful as we meet the changing demands of relevance and rigor in education.