

## NEWS

# Educator Sharon Rogan aids Worcester students with behavior disorders in 36 year-career

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WORCESTER — When Sharon Rogan was hired as a full-time teacher in the Worcester Public Schools district in 1986, she attended a new teachers meeting where she was handed a piece of paper with the letters "IBD" written on it. She had no idea what it meant.

After bouncing around the room and asking people about it, she said she quickly learned that it stood for "Intermediate Behavior Disorders" and that it was the job she was assigned at Clark Street Community School.

"I'm like, 'OK, behavior. Not what I signed up for, but this is what I'm going to do,' " Rogan said. "I worked with children grades four, five, and six who had behavioral challenges, and then my second year I stayed at Clark Street and I did the same thing but with younger children. Primary grades one, two and three and I haven't looked back since."

Now 36 years later, Rogan will retire at the end of the school year after making a career of working with students experiencing behavior issues in the district.

"I've always been fascinated now with behavior," Rogan said. "I thank Worcester Public schools for giving me that experience to work with kids with behavioral challenges because I really don't think that I would have ever gotten into that if I wasn't placed there."

By her third year, Rogan was asked to develop what was called a Diagnostic Behavior Disorder Classroom at the now-defunct Gage Street School.

"When you're in special education, especially kids with behavior disorders, not everybody is really welcoming of that because there are challenges to it," Rogan said. "You really had to find the right building, so this was at Gage Street School."

She said that the program was designed for students who were experiencing "difficulty in their regular education classroom" but that the schools weren't sure where they should be placed.

## How best to support students

Since there are different reasons for students acting out, it was Rogan's responsibility to figure out what a student might be going through and how best to support them while enrolled in the eight-week program.

"I would decide if they need a small classroom setting because of their behaviors," Rogan said. "Or do they need a ... resource room? Was it because they just needed to learn some strategies while they were with me and they were able to go back to the general education classroom?"

She said she was working with students from kindergarten through sixth grade in the same classroom at the time and that it was "challenging but I loved it."

Rogan was given the top floor of the school, where she not only got to develop the program but also collaborate with other teachers on the floor to form a team.

"We had the Diagnostic Behavior classroom, which was myself, and across the hall was a kindergarten-first-grade classroom for children with behavior challenges," Rogan said. "Down the hall a little bit there was an Intermediate Behavior Disorder classroom, and then down the hall a little bit more, there was a primary classroom for a second-third grade for behavior challenges."

She said there was also an Emotional Behavior Disorders classroom that, she said, served kids whose behaviors were unique and "quirky."

## **Comradery with other teachers**

It was on the top floor of this school that Rogan found comradery with other teachers in the district, where shared ideas flowed regularly and colleagues were able to learn from one another, she said.

She was learning on the job, she said, since she only had one class in her undergraduate education on the topic of behavior and behavior disorders.

Rogan continued her work at the now-defunct Adams Street School after the program was transferred there from Gage Street.

She said that she was proud of the program and credited past assistants she had with helping her develop it.

However, Rogan said, by year 12, she was beginning to feel burned out being in a self-contained classroom and was looking to make a change.

"I wasn't certified to teach in the general education classroom because my degrees were in special ed, but I wanted something different," she said. "Another friend of mine, who did the kindergarten-first grade behavior, we both interviewed at two separate schools for a new position called Behavior Specialists."

Rogan said she interviewed at Elm Park Community School, while her friend interviewed at Goddard School of Science and Technology. These schools were targeted for these positions, she said, because they had "higher numbers of kids that were being referred out for behavioral issues."

## **20 years at Elm Park Community School**

She landed the position at Elm Park, where she would teach for the next 20 years.

"I ran what we called the Delta Room and it was a place for kids to go to if they were struggling in the classroom and their behaviors were becoming a problem for themselves and for other kids," Rogan said. "If they needed to go to a quiet place, they would come to the Delta Room with me."

It was at Elm Park where Rogan found substantial success working with students, building a relationship with students through trust and giving them an adult they can feel confident will keep them safe, she said.

She said she was able to accomplish this through developing different behavior management techniques, such as behavior contracts where students would earn points for good behavior and be able to shop with her for prizes at the end of the day.

Rogan said she redeveloped the Delta Room into the Lion's Den — named after the school's mascot — when she was suddenly moved to help revamp another behavior program.

"I had the room painted a light blue ... and we had planned on having yoga for one part of the day, we were doing mindfulness another part of the day, we were gonna build with Legos, we had all these options that we would have loved to explore," Rogan said. "I had it all set up and ready to go, and they moved me."

She and her friend who had been hired as the Behavior Specialist at Goddard were brought in to revamp the Temporary Learning Collaborative, which, she said, was like the diagnostic room that she had originally started.

## **Move to Goddard School**

The program, which was renamed to the Assessment and Stabilization Program, required Rogan to leave Elm Park and join her colleague at Goddard.

"I was not able to teach in the classroom, because I had hip replacements and shoulder replacements, so if any physicality had come into play where I would have to restrain or anything I couldn't do that," she said. "My role was to help transition kids in and out of ASP."

She said the goal was to either help the student return to their general education classroom, or recommend them to other behavior programs that would help them ultimately return to their home classrooms.

Rogan said that her experiences, particularly in the Delta Room, allowed her to be able to start traveling around the district and provide training to others, as well as eventually start teaching at the college level.

Rogan began working at Vernon Hill, teaching special education math and reading, after her role at Goddard was eliminated, a move that she was not happy about at first, she said.

"I didn't have a lot of experience teaching academics ... I had been so far away from that in all my years of being able to really focus on behavior," Rogan said. "I didn't feel like I was going to be able to give the kids what they really needed and I was very worried about that."

However, she soon learned that her experience with student behavior was still helpful when teaching special education students math and reading, as students still need individual attention when it comes to how their behavior impacts their academics.

She said that she has also had the opportunity to pass along her behavior expertise to her colleagues while also getting tips on teaching in the classroom from them in return.

## **Love and Logic Classroom**

Hanging on the whiteboard behind her desk in the last classroom she will work with students in, is a poster that says "How I Run My Love and Logic Classroom" at the top. Beneath it are six statements that break down the different aspects of love and logic.

"It's a way of teachers communicating with kids, and how to stay out of arguments, how to stay out of power struggles, how to stay positive and not get upset when a student is acting up in their classroom," Rogan said. "That has a lot to do with stating things positively."

Rogan said that the curriculum Love and Logic is broken down into nine essential skills for teachers, as well as a parent component.

"All the teachers and the parents are all on the same page with language, and what to do," Rogan said. "If kids want to argue, one of the Love and Logic one-liners is 'I respect you too much to argue.' "

Although, she said, sometimes students will repeat the one-liners back to her.

"We have a classic arguer in sixth grade. He just wants to argue about every little thing. If I say the sky is blue, 'No, it's black,' " she said. "I'm like, 'I respect you too much to argue' and then when he gets all heated, he'll say it back to me."

She said that she will also offer students the opportunity to argue with her at specific times, such as lunchtime or during dismissal.

"Guess what? They don't argue because they don't want to come in after that," Rogan said.

She said that Love and Logic gives teachers and parents to think through a situation and that there does not need to be an immediate consequence to a negative behavior.

Instead, they can focus on how to work with the student through the problem to not only correct the behavior but also ensure that the consequences that student may have to face make sense.

## **Bittersweet parting**

Retiring is bittersweet, she said, but she is ready as the changes in technology have become challenging for her.

"I'm not as effective as these younger people are, with what you're learning in college," Rogan said. "I had a typewriter when I was in college, computers weren't around yet. And you guys will be so much more effective than I would be."

After retirement, Rogan said she plans to travel and provide trainings, as well as teach Love and Logic not only in the district but also throughout New England since she is "one of the only trainers in New England that has all the curriculum."

She said she also plans to spend more time with her family, as well as begin looking into a trip.

"I'd love to go to Ireland and England someday. That could be something I would do but in short spurts. I'm a homebody," Rogan said. "Maybe someday get a small house on a lake and have the kids out."

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