

Q&A with Stefan Kohler, CEO of Kickboard providing a Culture Implementation System for K-12 Schools and Districts that improves Student Behavior, Attendance, Learning and Classroom Management



Stefan Kohler
Chief Executive Officer

Kickboard
www.kickboardforschools.com

Interview conducted by:
Lynn Fosse, Senior Editor
CEO CFO Magazine

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- Stefan Kohler

CEO CFO: *Mr. Kohler, would you give us some background on Kickboard™?*

Mr. Kohler: Kickboard was founded seven years ago by Jen Medbery who continues to lead our product development and strategy. Kickboard partners with hundreds of K-12 schools and districts to facilitate their climate and culture initiatives and positively impact student achievement, attendance, discipline, and more. Kickboard is a unique combination of technology and services. Our school culture system helps educators simplify behavior management. Kickboard's technology collects real-time behavioral events throughout the student's day.

CEO CFO: *Are there certain types of schools, locations and sizes that pay more attention to their culture and are likely to engage with you? Who is the typical customer?*

Mr. Kohler: Kickboard supports public school districts including charter schools. Over ninety five percent of the districts and schools we partner with are Title 1 schools. Of those schools, the majority are over seventy five percent free or reduced-price lunch and seventy five percent minority. These schools are in mostly urban areas in which students are coming from difficult socio-economic situations. Under these conditions, many of Kickboard's schools that focus on culture result in significant non-academic and academic gains. These important gains are why many Title I schools pay particular attention to school culture.

CEO CFO: *What goes into determining what a school culture should be, what the focus should be? How do you help schools perhaps identify that before you can even start to help them with a solution?*

Mr. Kohler: We first help the school and its leaders define a vision for excellent school culture. Kickboard's Advisory Board Member, Dr. Kent Peterson, would define school culture as the set of norms, values and beliefs, systems and ceremonies that make up the persona' of the school. Kickboard then advises the school on which specific systems to put in place to support their school's' mission and vision of culture. While each school is different, we recommend that schools promote the following elements: consistent expectations for student behavior school wide, that recognize and celebrate students' positive choices, that support teachers in fostering positive relationships with students, and a focus on equity to eliminate disparities in disciplinary action.

CEO CFO: *How do you implement your program?*

Mr. Kohler: In partnering with a school or district, Kickboard first supports the leadership in the definition and implementation of a school-wide culture plan that includes the development of a mission and vision focused on culture. We then help in the selection of school-based culture teams that are responsible for the implementation plan. Part of the team's responsibility is to determine the behaviors they want to focus on, setting up behavior matrices for consistent student expectations and data collection, and then the professional learning of teachers and administrators on how to input, collect, and analyze the real-time behavior data in order to take effective action toward improvement. We support and train leadership on how to utilize the information in their Professional Learning Communities to ensure sustainability.

CEOFCO: *Would you walk us through how you engage with a school?*

Mr. Kohler: When Kickboard first connects with schools, we usually perform an audit of school culture so we have an agreed upon starting point and understanding. We share the recent research surrounding the impact of school-wide culture. There are extensive studies linking the connection of improvement school-wide culture to decreasing referrals and suspensions, decreasing chronic absenteeism, improving academic achievement, and increasing teacher retention. We show Kickboard's case studies that outline typical challenges, describe specific implementation steps taken and demonstrate the impressive gains obtained. Working with the school, we create a vision, mission and culture. Finally, we work with the school to implement Kickboard's culture system in putting together a full school-wide culture plan of action that meets their specific needs.

CEOFCO: *Would the teacher in charge of recess be inputting information into your system. Is it based on the teacher or the administrator, whatever they see they would then be recording at the end of the day? Might they do it at the time? How does this information get into the system and then what happens with it on a day to day basis?*

Mr. Kohler: Teachers and administrators, based on the behavioral events the school has decided to focus on, typically input the data real-time into Kickboard's software app platform. The data input can be done in real time on their smartphone, tablet device, or desktops. The information goes immediately into the platform that allows for real time analysis. This allows teachers to know if a student had some issue on the playground and needs some special attention once that student has entered the classroom. Administrators can receive real-time alerts that show how a student is doing and if action is needed to support a teacher. Teacher meetings held at the end of the day or week can analyze that day's information on how a certain student is progressing in an individualized behavior intervention plans.

CEOFCO: *Does the enthusiasm with the staff, be it teacher, nurse or administrator participation reflect what the school's culture is? Do you find that some schools have a better plan or a better presentation and so the staff buys into it more or once a school has decided to engage with Kickboard is there consensus?*

Mr. Kohler: Usually a school that is enthusiastic in its usage of Kickboard's culture system reflects the school's desire to have a strong, positive culture. We have seen in numerous case studies that the increase in positivity in the school's culture results in strong academic gains. A school's strong implementation plan with Kickboard also results in increased administrator and teacher buy-in. Buy-in is improved by a shared culture vision, defined behavior expectations, real-time behavior data, effective data analysis presented through dashboards and evidence based professional development. Furthermore, there is increased enthusiasm due to improved classroom management because of increased positivity and consistent student expectations, effective student intervention due to real-time behavior data and improved administrator support with the software's proactive behavior triggers.

CEOFCO: *Are you typically working with school districts, with individual schools? What is the business model?*

Mr. Kohler: Kickboard partners with both districts and schools. The uniqueness of Kickboard is the platform's ability to analyze and display behavior data in real-time at the student, teacher, classroom, and school level. The business model for Kickboard is working with both district level administrators and principals to implement an effective climate and culture initiative both district- and school-wide. Given the importance of getting buy-in from leadership at the district and school level, Kickboard works with both groups through the platform's ability to report on all facets of culture and the professional development that is personalized to both.

CEOFCO: *What is the competitive landscape? Are there many companies focusing school culture?*

Mr. Kohler: There are companies that have software applications that collect data on disciplinary events but Kickboard is presently the only company that integrates both an education software platform with evidence based professional development in a complete culture implementation system.

CEOFCO: *Would you give us a concrete example of what Kickboard helped a school find, what they changed and how it had an effect overall?*

Mr. Kohler: Kickboard is partnered with St. Louis Public Schools and is used in over 15 schools there. Kickboard supported the schools' goals by helping teachers and administrators establish consistent behavior expectations; collect, analyze and act on real-time behavior data; address behavior issues; conduct responsive interventions; and create a more proactive, positive learning environment. In the majority of schools that used Kickboard, there were dramatic decreases in referrals and suspensions, in some cases from hundreds to below ten. The data also showed a significant increase in staff-student positive interactions in the schools compared to schools that did not use Kickboard. There is significant research that shows the increase in positivity results in improved academic performance.