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- Jobs
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- Shopping

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- Quick Links
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- Sports
- Business
- Entertainment
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- Food & Drink
- Opinion
- Obituaries
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- Photos
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## OK class, it's time for a lesson in etiquette

### Schools say teaching students manners helps in class, at home

**Jennifer Larson**  
The Desert Sun  
September 11, 2005

If your child comes home and starts correcting your manners, don't be too surprised.

Several valley schools are implementing an etiquette-and-manners program called PoliteChild this year.

And that's just fine with Indio mom Beatriz Contreras, whose three sons attend Van Buren Elementary, one of those schools.

"I think that's a great program," she said. "I think every school should have that."

Over the summer, Corinne Gregory, founder of the PoliteChild program, trained a number of local teachers how to implement the program in their classrooms with the goal of teaching children manners and courtesy.

The program has already been in existence in a couple of private schools and public schools, including Dr. Carreon Academy in Indio, but now several more public schools are adding it, including Julius Corsini Elementary in Desert Hot Springs and Carrillo Ranch Elementary in Indio.

Educators say they're enthusiastic about the program - that it will help them maintain order in the classroom, which will lead to more efficient use of teaching time.

Eileen Nurani, principal of Van Buren Elementary, said that she wants to build up her students academically, then give them the social skills necessary to improve their chances of future success.

Pam Michotte, a first-grade teacher at Van Buren, said she expects etiquette training to save valuable time in her classroom by reducing the number of distractions caused by children doing things like talking out of turn or perhaps jumping out of their seats at the wrong time.

That will, in turn, result in more instructional time - and hopefully more learning on the part of the children.

"You save minutes every day," said Amber Granik, a third-grade teacher.

Contreras said she completely understands that point.

"A lot of the other kids get distracted when one of them is talking too much or doing silliness just to get attention," she said.



Luis Ochoa, The Desert Sun

Corinne Gregory, president and founder of PoliteChild, an educational program dedicated to developing social skills by using proper behavior, developing good moral character, manners and etiquette, shares her knowledge with the teachers of Van Buren Elementary School in Indio on Aug. 27.

#### REINFORCE AT HOME

Here are some tips on teaching and reinforcing good manners at home with your children:

- ✦ **Be a good role model.** Kids love to imitate adults, so let your kids see you being polite and hear you saying things like "please" and "thank you."
  - ✦ **Teach your children to respect themselves.** Children will be more likely to respect others when they have self-respect and feel respected by others.
  - ✦ **Find teaching moments.** Point out when another person has done something polite - and recognize your own child's polite actions, too. This reinforces and encourages the good behavior.
  - ✦ **Correct mistakes with kindness.** You want to build self-esteem and self-confidence, so don't accuse or berate your child if he makes an etiquette error. Gently correct him and praise him for the right behavior.
- Sources:  
PartnershipForLearning.com;  
Etiquette for Dummies.
- #### MORE EDUCATION
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Carrillo Ranch Elementary is a new school this year, and some teachers, like Kim Grady, like the idea of setting high standards for children from the outset.

"I think it sets the groundwork for the behavior you're going to expect from kids," said Grady, a third-grade teacher.

Gregory thinks the training will eventually translate into higher test scores for schools, too.

Although this is only the school's third year in existence, Carreon Academy's test scores have improved.

The school's Academic Performance Index score, which is a statewide measurement of student performance on standardized tests, rose by 58 points from 2004 to 2005.

Of course, the effect of PoliteChild is only one part of that success, said Principal Kathy Felci.

"It's not a silver bullet, in and of itself," she said.

But coupled with strong academics and a dedicated staff, the program does seem to be contributing to the school's improvement.

However, it's worthwhile to teach manners and etiquette for their own sake, Felci added. The students have learned to be respectful of themselves and of others.

"It's a good thing, it really is," she said.

And parents say that they've really noticed changes in children who have participated in the program. They advise parents in the schools adding the program that they've got pleasant changes to look forward to.

"My son came home wanting to practice being polite," said Janelle Marks, whose son, Mason, is a fourth-grader at Carreon Academy. "I was kind of taken aback at first but happy to oblige him."

She was pleased to see him trying out his new manners at the dinner table, too.

"And I do notice it at assemblies and things" at school, Marks said. "The kids are really well behaved in the auditorium."

Blanca Kabeary's son also came home from school talking about what he learned about etiquette and social skills - and was eager to show what he had learned.

"I remember my son telling me about the dead fish handshake," she said with a laugh. "If he was able to hold that in his brain and bring it home to me, it made an impact."

Contreras said she already works on good manners with her three sons at home. For example, she makes sure they address adults by titles like "Mr." and "Mrs.", and she encourages the use of "please" and "thank you."

"There are little things like that that make a big difference," she said.

And she likes the idea of the school teaching etiquette and manners because it can only help reinforce those lessons.

"Why not?" she said. "It wouldn't hurt anybody."

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