

Building Strong Personal and Instructional Relationships

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Background That Led to Your Inquiry:

Since I became principal at Center Grove Middle School North in 2009, our enrollment has increase by nearly 250 students or 23%. Our staff size has also increased over 20%. During this period of time, our evaluation system has changed, along with a professional development focus on PLCs. With implementation of the new evaluations system and PLCs, there has been a purposeful emphasis on instruction and a guaranteed and viable curriculum.

The increase of North's population, change of professional focus, and less and less face-to-face communication has created a deficit in my personal and professional relationships with the staff. One of the greatest strengths of Middle School North is the staff relationships and family atmosphere. These changes that have occurred have lessened the opportunities for staff to interact as a whole. Relationships are strong within their PLCs, but not as an entire staff.

Therefore, the purpose of my action research was to schedule time to have personal and professional conversations with my staff members to build stronger relationships. I was interested in seeing if making these conversations a priority would increase my knowledge of the staff's strengths and needs personally and professionally. Based on this knowledge, make position change to bring the entire staff back together.

Statement of Your Wondering:

With this purpose, I wondered...How can I build stronger instructional and professional relationships with my staff members?

Methods/Procedures:

To gain insights into my wondering, I reviewed the data from our first IPLI survey to see if my wondering was supported by the data. It was clear that it was an issue that staff relayed. I decided to schedule optional meetings with staff focused on building personal and instructional relationships. I discussed my wondering and the meetings idea with our department heads and our building leadership team, Staff Council.

After attaining feedback from these leadership groups, I developed questions for the optional meetings. I then shared my wondering and meeting questions with the entire staff during team meetings. I blocked off time in my schedule for these meetings and shared dates and times with the staff and they began signing up for the meetings.

During the meetings I took notes as data on the discussion of these three questions...What areas of your teaching do you have the highest level of pride? What areas of your teaching would you like to improve upon? How can I support your growth as a professional? After each meeting I reviewed my notes and documented common themes and areas for follow up with each individual staff member.

After completing all of the meetings with staff, I did a post-survey during our Monday team meetings on the three questions from the IPLI survey that supported my wondering...Nurtures and sustains a culture of collaboration, trust, learning, and high expectations. Supervises instruction. Develops the instructional and leadership capacity of staff. I then accumulated the data and compared the numbers.

Stating Your Learning and Supporting it with Data:

As a result of analyzing my data, the important things I learned include: 1) Veteran teachers were feeling disconnected from staff members outside of their grade-level and team. 2) Teachers were building a strong growth mindset. 3) Teachers were feeling they needed more professional development on increasing performance of apathetic learners.

Our veteran teachers have experienced the increased population and the changes in the evaluation system and professional focus. In the past, we would meet together as an entire staff, do team building activities, and share celebrations. There is little opportunity for that now. Before our evaluation system change, I would observe and meet with each teacher multiple times. Now we split the evaluations between the administrators. With our increase in population, it is harder and harder to get to know more people. One area of focus of our professional development during our team meetings has been building a growth mindset with our staff and students. During my conversations with teachers during my meetings it was evident that this PD has made a significant impact. All of the teachers shared that they felt a strength was focusing on growth of themselves professionally and their students' learning.

Another area of focus of our professional development during our team meetings was working with students from poverty. As our population has increased, our socio-economic diversity has increased. Teachers has learned background and specific best practice strategies in increasing all students' levels of learning. Teachers are still struggling with apathetic learners. How do they increase their engagement and performance. As stated above, after my meetings with teachers I gave a post-survey on the three IPLI questions. The results were significant increases in the responses.

Nurtures and sustains a culture of collaboration, trust, learning, and high expectations began at 3.33 and increased to 4.02. Supervises instruction began at 3.22 and increased to 3.64. Develops the instructional and leadership capacity of staff began at 3.47 and increased to 3.96.

Providing Concluding Thoughts:

As I reflect on my action research journey, I learned that our staff also feels the impact on our population growth. They also feel disconnected from staff members outside of their department and team. I learned that spending time with teachers individually is greatly appreciated and well worth the time. I also learned that having these purposeful conversations with staff increased my instructional leadership.

For this growth in instructional leadership to continue and the disconnect between teachers to dissipate, there has to be time set aside focused on these areas. I must spend time individually with teachers learning about them and their needs. We must schedule more time for staff to be together as a whole and learn about and from each other. With all of the demands on our time, this will be difficult. As a leader, I do feel the benefits are well worth the time dedicated to accomplishing these outcomes.

In the future, I will schedule a one-on-one meeting with each staff member, expanding to include instructional assistants and other support staff, each school year. I will have questions that will guide our conversations

that will include building personal and instructional relationships. I will also purposefully plan opportunities throughout the school year for all staff to feel connected. We as leaders in education know the importance of staff knowing each other, learning from each other, and working together for common goals. We need to assure that these opportunities are provided for our staff.

References:

N/A