

Building a Positive Culture Through Increased Classroom Visits

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Background That Led to Your Inquiry:

As the principal at Edgewood Intermediate School, I am required to observe teachers a minimum of twice a year - one formal observation (40 minutes) and one informal observation (20 minutes). Teachers with less than three years of experience are observed four times throughout the year - two formal observations and two informal observations. I share the responsibility of evaluating 35 teachers with my assistant principal. We both like to "get eyes" on every single teacher in the building so we can compare and share our observations and experiences in each classroom.

Obviously, being in a classroom twice a year is not enough to truly understand the impact a teacher is making on students. Teachers are hungry for constructive feedback, and we need to be in their classrooms to make this happen. I believe it is critical for the positive culture of the building for administrators to be present in all of the classrooms throughout the week.

Therefore, the purpose of my action research was to determine how the culture of the building would be impacted by ensuring we were in classrooms a minimum of five hours each week.

Statement of Your Wondering:

With this statement, I wondered, "Will the climate of the building be positively impacted by increasing our walk-throughs and observations in classrooms (minimum of five hours per week)?"

Methods/Procedures:

To gain insights into my wondering, I shared my action research plan with my PLC Leadership Team and gathered their input prior to the start of the second semester. I explained our goal of increasing our walk-throughs and observations in the third quarter. I meet with them every two weeks and have continued to gather their feedback concerning the increased time in classrooms. Also, I have been keeping track of comments and gestures throughout the building to determine if our administrative actions directly correlate to the positive culture in the building.

Methods of data collection:

- Recording dates each administrator has been in a classroom (formal, informal, walk-through, book read) - entire 2016-17 school year
- Running record with feedback from the PLC Leadership Team - entire 2016-17 school year
- Charting weekly observations of initiatives and changes throughout the building - second semester

Stating Your Learning and Supporting it with Data:

As a result of analyzing my data, three important things I learned include:

1. Teachers feel more empowered to be leaders when their leader is present in their classrooms on a regular basis.
2. The climate slump in January-February wasn't nearly as low because of a conscious effort made by all.
3. It is entirely possible to set aside a minimum of four hours each week to be present in classrooms.

Based upon feedback from teachers and the PLC Leadership Team, teachers felt more empowered than ever this year to make decisions that positively impacted their students. As one teacher wrote, "Thank you for giving us the confidence knowing you always have our backs and will support our decisions. You know who I am as a teacher because you see me in action with my students." I attribute this to an increase in the number of walk-throughs in the building on a weekly basis. I set a goal the first quarter to get into each classroom 4 times, and I increased that by one visit each quarter. I was able to meet that goal with 78% accuracy over the course of the year.

Providing Concluding Thoughts:

I have learned through my action research project that I need to be out with the kids and teachers during the day for my own mental health. I did not become a teacher to sit in an office working on tasks on a daily basis. I hold this school and myself to high standards, and I have to ensure that expectations are being held high in each classroom. I also learned that I feel more productive as a leader when I am out and seeing the awesome things happening in my building.

As a parent, I am more settled and at peace with being at home with my kids and do not beat myself up with guilt concerning school work. The daily logistical pieces can wait, but the time I spend in the classrooms is what sustains me and keeps me going as an educator, leader, mother, and friend.

In the future, I will continue to chart my daily walk-throughs and observations in the classrooms. I am determined to set aside time each and every week to ensure this is accomplished. I will also post my chart outside my office so others can help to hold me accountable to my commitments outside of the four walls of my office.

Being an administrator and balancing so many things on the plate is more difficult than I could have ever imagined. Sometimes things fall off the plate. Sometimes I let things slide off because I need to make room. But I keep piling and getting it all accomplished! At the end of the day, I am doing the very best I can, and I need to be at peace with that.

References:

N/A