

Creating a Safe and Collaborative Atmosphere

By: Krista Nelson, Center Grove Elementary School

Team Members Names: Amy Clancy, Kristi Watters

Contact: nelsonk1@centergrove.k12.in.us

Background That Led to Your Team's Inquiry:

As part of the Indiana Principal Leadership Institute through Indiana State University we had the opportunity to dig deeper into High Reliability Schools. In May of 2017, our students, parents, and staff participated in a survey based on the High Reliability Standard: Level 1 - Safe and Collaborative Atmosphere (Marzano, Simms, and Warrick, 2014). After reviewing our survey results, our lowest scoring area was Leading Indicator 1.6: Students, parents, and the community have formal ways to provide input regarding the optimal functioning of the school. Based on these results, we formed goals and actions to increase parent perception and their participation in school decisions.

On September 18, 2017, I placed all students onto one list using Google Sheets (<https://docs.google.com/a/centergrove.k12.in.us/spreadsheets/d/1oHHEcjqB6zR430UhSwLrCUbSpphABclmopg2seLAlgo/edit?usp=sharing>). Using random.org, I randomly selected 50 parents to take a survey, based on the following five questions:

1. I understand how my opinions affect school decisions.
2. The leaders of my child's school host virtual town hall meetings.
3. The leaders of my child's school conduct focus group meetings with students, parents, and the community.
4. The leaders and teachers at my child's school use social networking technologies (such as Twitter and Facebook) to involve students, parents, and the community.
5. My school's leaders ask for my opinion about how the school should function.

The survey can be found at: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/TW7R9HW>

The results of the random survey are below (M= Arithmetic mean):

1. I understand how my opinions affect school decisions. (M= 3.1)
2. The leaders of my child's school host virtual town hall meetings. (M= 2.12)
3. The leaders of my child's school conduct focus group meetings with students, parents, and the community. (2.97)
4. The leaders and teachers at my child's school use social networking technologies (such as Twitter and Facebook) to involve students, parents, and the community. (M=3.41)
5. My school's leaders ask for my opinion about how the school should function. (M=2.75)

Therefore, our action research was to provide more experiences for our parents to be involved in school decision makings. We did this through using social networking more as a way to communicate and conducting focus groups and virtual town hall meetings.

Statement of Your Team's Wondering:

With this purpose, we wondered if providing additional parent opportunities, and surveying them often, would increase parent perception that their opinions affect school decisions.

Methods/Procedures:

To gain insights into our wondering(s), we provided multiple ways for parents and community members to be involved in CGES learning. First, we came up with three goal actions:

Strategy #1 - Parent Outreach Nights will be held every other month for all parents to attend. The topics will be on academic and social topics for elementary age student. Our schedule is:

- October - NWEA/Aims Web/Kindergarten Report Card
- December - Hands-On Learning for my Child at Home and School
- January - ISTEP - What does this assessment look like for my child?
- March - Character Education/PBIS
- May - Digital Citizenship - Supporting Parents and Students using technology safely

Strategy #2 - Virtual Town Meetings - We would like to begin our own CGES Academy, similar to Khan Academy. We will tape important lessons and strategies for students and parents to review at home with their child, or if they need at night with homework or test prep.

Strategy #3 - Social Networking - We will continue to update our Facebook page on a daily basis and also do a Weekly Wrap-Up video for parents (information for the week).

We collected data from our initiatives through parent attendance, feedback and HRS surveys in September and March. We changed our plan along the way to meet the needs of our families and current data at that time. Our three strategies turned in to a goal for each survey question. Our new plan, as of October of 2017 was:

Question #1 - I understand how my opinions affect school decisions and Question #5 - My school's leaders ask for my opinion about how the school should function.

- Beginning of the Year Survey - August
- Curriculum Survey - November
- Safe and Collaborative Atmosphere Survey

Results listed in monthly newsletter and list changes that are made based on parent, staff, and student feedback.

Question #2 - The leaders of my child's school host virtual town hall meetings and

Question #3 - The leaders of my child's school conduct focus group meetings with students, parents, and the community.

- October - NWEA/Aims Web/Kindergarten Report Card - Parent Meeting and Video for the Report Card
- December - Hands-On Learning for my Child at Home and School - Family Art Knight
- January - ISTEP- What does this assessment look like for my child? Parent Meeting; I-READ 3 Parent Meeting
- February - STEM Knight
- March - Character Education/PBIS Safety - Newsletter Connections and District Website
- April - LearnCG Videos on Website, Facebook and YouTube; Parents Night Out - Student Literacy and Math Stations
- May - Digital Citizenship - Supporting Parents and Students using technology safely

Question #4 -The leaders and teachers at my child's school use social networking technologies (such as Twitter and Facebook) to involve students, parents, and the community.

- Facebook - Year of Learning
- Facebook - Announcements and Events
- Facebook - Open Staff Positions

Data Insight from December 2, 2017 - March 7, 2018 (13 weeks)

- 4,541 Page Views
- Reached 14,521 people
- 569 Facebook Friends
- 8,431 Likes on posts

We analyzed the data at multiple points in the school year from parent feedback. Our overall data was charted on three different occasions by a formal survey. The results are below:

Stating Your Team's Learning and Supporting it with Data:

As a result of analyzing our data, we learned quite a bit about our communication strategies and what we need to do for the future (Marzano, 2017).

Learning Statement #1 - There is never a such thing as over communicating. When we felt that we overcommunicated upcoming events or school news, there were still individuals or families that had not heard what we had communicated to them. We learned that people interpret news differently, and we need to be direct in answering questions and proactive when it comes to all school events or issues.

Learning Statement #2 - We need to continue to provide a variety of ways to communicate school news. Not everyone is connected to social media. News also needs to go out at least 2-3 weeks in advance. Anything before or after that, we have less attendance at events.

Learning Statement #3 - Community members will watch more videos attached to Facebook and YouTube, then clicking on a link to the same information on a different site.

Learning Statement #4 - Monthly focus group meetings were well attended, and parents commented they would like to have more based on RTI and curriculum. If we had topics that parents needed more information about, or it was connected to their child, then parents attended.

Providing Concluding Thoughts:

Our team was grateful to go through this journey, as it opened up some courageous conversations in our building and with our community members. Our CGES Guiding Coalition is going to continue looking at HRS: Level 1 – Safe and Collaborative Atmosphere, as we feel that there are still areas of need and concern. Our team has put together a plan for the 18-19 school year, that builds upon what we learned this year. Our focus and actions are:

- Continue to focus on the four domain questions
- Implement LearnCG videos
- Breakfast with the Principal for Parents - bi-monthly

- Continue 180 Days of Learning on Facebook; create events for school-wide activities; implement weekly Facebook video updates
- Focus Groups/Parent Outreach
 - July - New Student/Kindergarten Orientation
 - October - NWEA and Kindergarten Report Card - Parent Meeting
 - December - Hands-On Learning for my Child at Home and School - Family Art Knight
 - January - ILEARN and IREAD-3 - What does this assessment look like for my child? Parent Meeting
 - February - STEM Knight
 - April - Safety at CGES

We also know along the way that we will probably need to make changes to our action items, as new data is processed for parent and community needs. We plan on communicating our action items out to parents in July and every month in our newsletters. We also will place calendar reminders on our webpage and social media posts. Our team is excited about this next step in our Action Research journey.

References:

Marzano, R.J. (2017). *The New Art and Science of Teaching*. Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree.

Marzano, R.J., Simms, J., Warrick, P. (2014). *A Handbook for High Reliability Schools: The Next Step in School Reform*. Bloomington, IN: Marzano Research.