Distributing Leadership For Today And The Future

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Background That Led to Your Inquiry:

Van Buren Elementary School is an "A" school who has experienced a lot of personnel changes over the course of the past four years. In these past four years, we have managed to keep our expectations high and maintain success, but the bulk of the leadership has been placed upon the principal and four instructional coaches. The leadership control by these five members limited new staff members from to decision making and the development of their own leadership capacity. In the day to day management of a school, it became easier to maintain control of all leadership with just 5 members and dismiss or overlook the opportunities to expand upon the leadership capabilities of all staff members.

The data packet from our initial staff survey demonstrated that distributive leadership was an area for growth that was noted by myself and the staff. This action research opportunity helped me look beyond what the four coaches and I were doing and recognize opportunities to develop and build upon the leadership capacity of the whole staff.

Therefore, the purpose of my research was to gain knowledge about how successful leaders distribute leadership, as well as, recognizing, mentoring, and empowering others to take on leadership roles. This ultimately will grow the overall leadership capacity of our school.

Statement of Your Wondering:

With this purpose, I wondered how the culture and climate within my school would change if I was intentional about empowering staff to seek out and identify leadership opportunities? More specifically, I wanted to know these three things.
- What would change about my effectiveness as a leader if I empowered others to lead?
- Would I accomplish more if leadership was distributed across my building?
- Would I be more intentional about my daily schedule if I planned for distributed leadership?

Methods/Procedures:

To gain insights into my wondering, I used two data collection strategies. First, I read literature and watched educational videos about leadership, what it means to be a great leader, and how to build the capacity for distributed leadership. I kept a log of all the literature and videos in a google sheet with hyperlinks that would allow me to go back to the archives at any time. I noted the dates in which I reviewed these documents or videos and then jotted down a feeling or statement about each one. As I came across wonderful information, I also shared it with my teachers and colleagues.

The next strategy I used was a journal of the dates, times, opportunities, staff involved, and feeling I had after distributing leadership. I also noted the times when I noticed that someone took a leadership role, asked for a leadership opportunity, or noticed that leadership skills were growing.

Finally, I analyzed my data by reviewing the number of entries I had in the log and journal to see if I had sufficient data over time to justify the results I was seeing. My log and journal entries demonstrated my research had been adequately spread over 5 months and included multiple resources.

Stating Your Learning and Supporting it with Data:

As a result of analyzing my data, I learned some important knowledge and skills about what it means to be a great leader and how leadership can be distributed. I learned that leadership comes in many forms. My idea about who can be a leader has changed. I've found that my custodian, secretary and part time paraprofessionals are all leaders. Leadership does not, and should not, fall upon the four instructional coaches within our school. This type of leadership is limiting to those who have skills and strengths in other areas outside of teaching and academics. Leadership is demonstrated by many team members on a daily basis. A leader can be anyone who feels empowered to make a decision, oversee a project, promote an idea, encourage a teammate, etc. Leadership cannot be assigned. It is developed and encouraged. My journal entries included the names of those who accepted leadership opportunities and initiated leadership. These names were not exclusively the four coaches within the building, and they were not limited to the certified staff.

My journal also demonstrated that activities, events, and decisions could be made and were made by someone other than the principal. I was able to release some of the control to individuals who were absolutely prepared to lead. One example of this is the awards program that I had always led. My journal entry after the first semester awards program demonstrated that my first grade teacher was more than qualified and capable of leading and managing the awards program without me. My entry stated "she organized the program without my involvement."

The comments below are just a few excerpts from other journal entries that show the shift in control and leadership.

- I didn't have to ask certified staff. They solved this!
- Very preventative! I wasn't even in the building
- She just shared what she was going to do & I gave the ok!
- She just takes care of the details. I love it.
- They take responsibility for their kids not matter their location
- She took care of everything!
- She was steps ahead of me and I don't have to worry about a thing for this event.
- They take responsibility for their kids no matter their location.
- Totally trust her ability to make this run smoothly.
- We were able to potentially de-escalate a parent and possible bully scenario.
- They are all focused on getting these 5 students to pass in June.
- No assistance needed from me. Good turn out.

Providing Concluding Thoughts:

Through this action research, my staff and I learned a bit about trust. We're making progress in understanding that we all have an influence on culture within our school by virtue of the leadership that is shown. In addition, my leadership has changed as a result of this process. I find myself looking for opportunities to

allow others to lead. I notice when others are leading or influencing a new leader. I'm able to let others take responsibility and lead, which has allowed me more time to focus on other improvement efforts. I'm intentionally planning my days, which encourages others to take the lead on efforts that used to be solely in my control.

I see our culture shifting from a principal led model to a more collaborative model. More importantly, I believe staff feel trusted and more valued. This shift over time will continue to positively influence our culture and climate. I am more intentional about recognizing when leadership can be distributed and when my leadership can positively help grow the next leader.   I'm more motivated to find ways to thank those that lead so that they in turn will pass along the leadership and thanks to the next staff member.   I'm pleased to know that our leadership now includes the following groups who are working collaboratively across the school. As we enter the 2017-2018 school year, I expect these committees to grow and expand.

Coaches Meetings, 4 Committee Chairs, 4 Paraprofessional Meetings, 2 Custodial Group Meetings, PBIS Committee, Lead Teacher, Corporation Committee Representation

References:

N/A