Improving Staff Morale Through Teacher Efficacy

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Background That Led to Your Inquiry:

During the 2016-2017 school year, I became the principal of a high achieving school, Charles Elementary. One would think that this was an easy task, but I learned differently very quickly. The climate was toxic as far as collegial relationships. Yes, learning was happening but there was minimal collaboration. Teachers were not sharing or trusting each other. They were not used to having a voice in decision making and when asked for input, they were disrespectful and demanding. It looked good on the outside and to stakeholders, but I was leading in a very hostile environment.

The shifts of the climate came not only from a new leader and expectations but also the change in demographics of our students. Our teachers were used to serving a very affluent student body that had seen recent shifts in poverty. They were not prepared to deal with students from poverty/trauma at the classroom level. The teachers struggled in dealing with not only the behaviors our students were presenting but also the consequences that were given; or not given in their perspective. I was struggling to make any change happen when teachers didn't trust my decisions on dealing with student behaviors.

After giving a baseline climate survey in January 2017, I knew I needed to build strong relationships with a group that could make shifts in our building. Therefore, the purpose of my action research was to develop a leadership team to help make shifts in teacher morale through their own self-efficacy.

Statement of Your Wondering:

With this purpose, I wondered if my own empathy for social justice was getting in the way of behavior consequences. What systems could I put in place to build teacher efficacy in dealing with student behaviors? As I worked through my wondering, I refined it to; how do I build relationships with my "Dream Team" in order for them to influence others to decrease student behaviors.

Methods/Procedures:

To gain insights into my wonderings, I began my 2017-2018 school year with a new leadership team. I created what Sanfelippo and Sinanis call the "Dream Team" (Hacking Leadership, 2016). I used our district 8-step team guidelines to solicit one teacher from each grade-level, one creative arts teacher, one exceptional ed teacher and our instructional coach. I knew I needed to build capacity in a group and give them efficacy to lead the shifts our building needed.

Our Dream Team met twice a month to review school improvement goals and discuss growth and achievement towards these goals. As grade levels, we met once a month to look at CFA data and to share strengths and weaknesses. We had new members to our building that quickly saw the same trend I felt in my first year as a building-level leader; minimal collaboration and trust issues with colleagues.

I introduced a book study, Poverty with Engagement in Mind, (Jensen, 2013) to pair with our professional development we started with Dr. Lori Desautels. As a group, we not only watched academic data, we also looked at behavior trends; consequences served, repeat offenders, and positive outcomes. The group decided the staff needed instructional practices to help them see that behavior is a form of communication and not something being done to them. They created a professional development of best practices and empathy training. We designed an amygdala reset station for each classroom that included different fidgets and yoga practices that Journey Studios had taught us. Yes, the entire staff participated in restorative yoga to build a sense of community.

I feel the next piece had just as much impact as looking at data; my Dream Team was intentional. They put anonymous positive notes recognizing teachers, created social events to build relationships, and monitored the "feel" of the building. They brought back specific concerns to the team and we discussed to stay on top of the morale of the building.

Two months after our PD, sharing of practices, and two social events, we decided to send out a mid-year survey. My objective was to build efficacy in this group so they could lead positive change in our building. The results were more than I could have asked for in such a short time. 86% of our teachers now felt supported for targeted classroom behaviors. That was in increase of 54% from our baseline data. What my team was accomplishing with the shifts in how we see student behavior had a positive impact on how they viewed my support.

Stating Your Learning and Supporting it with Data:

As a result of analyzing my data, two important things I learned included:

A leadership team, that is empowered to make change, can shift the morale in a building.

Teacher efficacy impacts student behavior.

A true reflection of my leadership capacity is the leadership I build in others (Fullan, 2001). I learned that if I can empower and support a small group of teachers, they can be the force that drives change. I spent professional development dollars and created learning opportunities in order for this group to really bond and develop leadership capacity. We met after school for a total of 12 hours this year. They were able to be the voice in team meetings and bring back obstacles to our group for further discussion. The graph demonstrates the growth from the baseline data to the mid-year survey that was completed after 2 months of Dream Team intervention.

Baseline	Mid-Year Survey

Baseline column:

How well do you feel supported with student behavior? (Principal)

1-no support		0 %	✓
3-inconsistent support	15 respondents	68 %	
5-consistent support	7 respondents	32 %	

How does student behavior impact your morale?

1-makes me never want to come to work	6 respondents	27 %	✓
3-somewhat impacts	13 respondents	59 %	
5-does not impact my morale	3 respondents	14 %	

How would you rate morale (teacher/staff)?

1-low	5 respondents	23 %	✓
3-okay	17 respondents	77 %	
5-very high		0 %	
Other:		0 %	
		0 %	

Referrals by Problem Behavior - Multi-Year
All, 2015-16 - 2016-17

PBISApps

Legend: 2015-16, 2016-17

(Bar chart: Number of Referrals (y-axis 0-300) vs Problem Behavior (x-axis: Defiance, PAgg, Disruption, Disrespect, Inapp Lan, Harass, Bullying, Fight, Out Bounds, Theft, Tech, Prop dam, Lying, Dress, Weapons, Other))
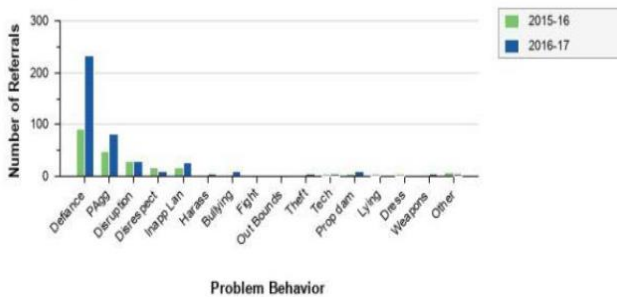
Mid-Year Survey column:

Do you feel supported with classroom behaviors?
22 responses

(Pie chart: Yes 86.4% (blue), No 13.6% (red))
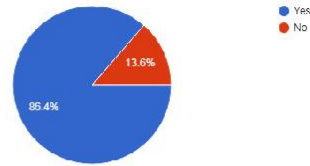
How satisfied are you with our school climate?
22 responses

(Pie chart: 77.3% (red), 18.2% (blue), orange, green)

Legend:
- Highly satisfied: we all work together and treat each other with respect.
- Satisfied: most of us work together and treat each other with respect.
- Somewhat satisfied: some still do not engage in team meetings or respect other's opinions.
- We Need Help!
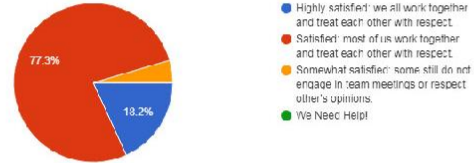
Second Semester data (Jan-March)

16-17 = 145 Office Referrals

17-18 = 88 Office Referrals

Decrease of 57 ODR's (39% decrease)

Year to date data (Aug-March)

16-17 Defiance = 181

17-18 Defiance = 77

Decrease of 104 ODR's (58% decrease)

Our team truly made an impact on the mindset of our teachers. They were able to offer on the spot suggestions to targeted behaviors that came from their own learning. The entire staff morale shifted and behavior referrals dropped dramatically in the area of disrespect. Our teachers were listening to the story of each child and really trying to help the students and provide resources instead of asking for a punitive consequences.

John Hattie has stated that Collective Teacher Efficacy, the collective belief of teachers in their ability to positively affect students, is strongly correlated with student achievement (John Hattie, 2008). Before teachers can believe they can make a change, they must begin to trust. Our teachers now have a toolbox of ideas and strategies to use with students demonstrating difficult behaviors. From participating in several PD opportunities with the Dream Team and Dr. Desautels, our staff is more confident in their ability to handle these situations. Their efficacy of dealing with difficult behaviors, in the classroom, has improved.   Our small group, the Dream Team, felt efficacy with their ability to shift their colleagues mindsets. They felt their ability to lead change has now shifted to instructional practices.

My Dream Team continued to meet after school for 12 hours with the support of professional development monies. The team broke themselves into two smaller teams to target consistent vocabulary and learning targets for our students. They realized that to bring the staff together, they needed to offer suggestions and resources to support the staff. Their objective for the end of the year was to put in place common vocabulary, sequential order of skills in both math and reading, and consistent visual resources for our teachers. Next year will begin with professional development in team building and in targeted academic areas, from the Dream Team.

Providing Concluding Thoughts:

As a second year building-level leader, I have grown in my capacity in trusting others. I would like to say my first year was a team building year, but until I fully empowered and believed in my leadership team, my Dream Team, I didn't know what it meant to allow others to lead. It's difficult to lead change, and my staff had many challenges ahead of them as I walked into this position. They were not only finding my leadership style very different, but also my empathy for social justice was a challenge. I knew every student had a story, I just needed my staff to see it too. I needed them to look beyond the behavior and really target the child; lead with love as I call it.

I am fully aware that I am at the beginning of this culture shift with my staff. Year two was much more about follow through and proving my trust with my teachers. I felt a breathe this year, like they do believe in me and will follow my direction. The creation of the Dream Team helped me focus on a smaller group of teachers to really get to know and earn trust. This group in turn pushed me to do better, to look for different ways to empower them, and to challenge my thinking of how I lead.

I will continue to keep the best in their practice on the Dream Team. I will continue to work alongside them to look at data, behavior, culture, maps, curriculum, and everything else it takes to successfully run a building. While I strongly believe students don't want to misbehave, I do understand that teachers need just as much support through the process as the student. Moving forward, I feel it will be critical to maintain consistency in my disciplining of students and being very transparent with teachers. I am walking away from year two much more confident in my own decisions because of the changes I have seen in mindsets and referral data.

As my team continues to grow in their own capacity of leading change, I am hopeful we will make a greater impact on student achievement. Will the work this team has done over the summer put structures in place to improve our overall school grade? Will we see an improvement in growth scores from the interventions we put in place this year? As my staff changes, how do I continue to build capacity in those not on the Dream Team? How do I identify something, for everyone, to build leadership capacity ? These are a few of my wonderings I will tackle as I move into year three.

References:

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