



## Cultivating Growth in School Climate

**Principal Name:** Jennifer Lawyer

**School Name:** Bradie Shrum Elementary

**Team Members' Names:** Miranda Bowling (4th Grade) & Noah Cobb (5th Grade)

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### **Background Leading to Our Inquiry (Slide 2)**

In the last eight years of Bradie Shrum Elementary, the school has experienced considerable turnover of administration teams (at both the building and corporation level). At the start of the 2020 school year, our current team took on the task of repairing a building that showed the effects of working in a chronically unstable environment.

### **The Purpose of Our Inquiry (Slide 3)**

While navigating through the pandemic, we recognized that our school climate needed to shift forward. We wanted to examine how our staff would be affected by our team's efforts with intentional actions.

### **Our Wondering (Slide 4)**

How can SEL during staff meetings, fellowship around food, morale boosters, and climate directed efforts shift our staff's attitude towards growth and a growth mindset?

### **Our Actions (Slide 5)**

As we approached the actions towards this project, we considered what could be felt by educators in a personal way, by group, and then as a professional in the field. At the start of the year, we asked staff to fill out a short survey with favorites and "about me" questions that would shape our birthday treats and games used for appreciation gifts at faculty meetings. We then added activities (largely food-centered, but also specific to holiday seasons), to build times to be together as a staff. The final piece of climate "boosting" was designed around content at faculty meetings to address stress/stress management and chronic trauma felt by educators.

### **Data Collection (Slide 6)**

Our team gathered information primarily in three ways: Informal discussions during common grade level and PLC timing, observations in daily actions/interactions, and a formalized survey to gather responses in the last quarter of the year.

### **Our Data (Slides 7-11)**

The series of charts and graphs on these slides illustrate the descriptors of positive impact that the climate efforts had on our building. We similarly saw meetings becoming a portion of the collective effort to gather and connect. One area of note was in daily interactions amongst staff, in which a shift could be felt by employees. Teachers were speaking more across grade levels and paying attention to needs for the building that might not affect them directly.

### **Our Discoveries (Slides 13-16)**

- Learning Statement One: Continue to “hold the positive” and stay focused on the improvements when negative feedback is seen in the minority.
- Learning Statement Two: Real change takes ample time to implement--recognize that what your team may feel is no change is actually gradual.
- Learning Statement Three: Communicate and over communicate your messages during each increment of a shift.

Learning Statement One: Continue to “hold the positive” and stay focused on the improvements when negative feedback is seen in the minority. Despite a team’s efforts, one will not always be able to please everyone, 100% of the time. (i.e. The Suitcase Theory is ‘you can give a person a case with a million dollars, and some will complain about the weight of the case’). In our data, 94% of the staff used positive words to describe the school climate. Hearing 6% felt differently than that majority placed a damper on our projects. When doing the math, however, this equated to only three people of a teaching staff of nearly 70.

Learning Statement Two: Real change takes ample time to implement--recognize that what your team may feel is no change is actually gradual. True differences in a school can take 3-5 years to see visible improvement. In the additional comments section of our survey, areas for improvement were noted with the idea that staff needed more time to become familiar with initiatives before other changes were made. We wanted to implement the good ideas we were seeing and hearing through IPLI, but should have stepped slower into the process.

Learning Statement Three: Communicate and over communicate your messages during each increment of a shift. Your team may feel like all has been described in detail, but clarity is a gift to teachers. Be concise and communicate clearly in more than just email. Additional indicators of this feedback were seen in our survey data.

### **Where We Are Headed Next (Slide 17)**

Through this project, our team has been able to see that progress can happen with building trust and intentional effort. We do recognize, however, that this is not sustainable as a three person team. Moving forward, we would like to see our climate efforts be led by a team or

committee of teachers and/or a functioning PTO. Our school's PTO disbanded during the former administration as outlined in the opening narrative of this project. As a majority, our building still has a long way to go to heal and move past old wounds. In each interaction that our team had, we worked to remind ourselves that we were either building or eroding trust with our words and actions. Similarly, we plan to now begin to keep climate efforts in our foundational work, while improving our culture. We will use our research in the emotional intelligence of leadership (and in teacher leaders) to help guide our staff to a more advanced level of emotional maturity; with hope perhaps, to see the effects on the eventual strongculture of Bradie Shrum Elementary.

### **Bibliography (Slide 18)**

Druskat, V. U., & Wolff, S. B. (2001). Building the emotional intelligence of groups. *Harvard*

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# Cultivating Growth in School Climate

Bradie Shrum Elementary

Jennifer Lawyer, Principal  
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Teacher Leaders:  
Miranda Bowling & Noah Cobb

# Background:

In the last eight years of Bradie Shrum Elementary, the school has experienced considerable turnover of administration teams (at both the building and corporation level). At the start of the 2020 school year, our current team took on the task of repairing a building that showed the effects of working in a chronically unstable environment.

# Purpose:

While navigating through the pandemic, we recognized that our school climate needed to shift forward. We wanted to examine how our staff would be affected by our team's efforts with intentional actions.

# Our wondering:

How can SEL during staff meetings, fellowship around food, morale boosters, and climate directed efforts shift our staff's attitude towards growth and a growth mindset?

- Which activities provide the highest return on staff morale?
- How did we support our staff when morale is waning?
- How are we measuring “success?”

# Actions:

- **Redesigned/intentional shifts in faculty meeting content--focused on trauma, managing stress, active listening, validation**
- **Staff provided lunches (periodically provided by leadership team)**
- **"Surprise" teacher treats; Birthday Celebrations**
- **Building wide games focused on seasonal holidays with prizes**
- **Personal notes to instructors**
- **Common planning times**
- **PLCs initiation to build conversation**

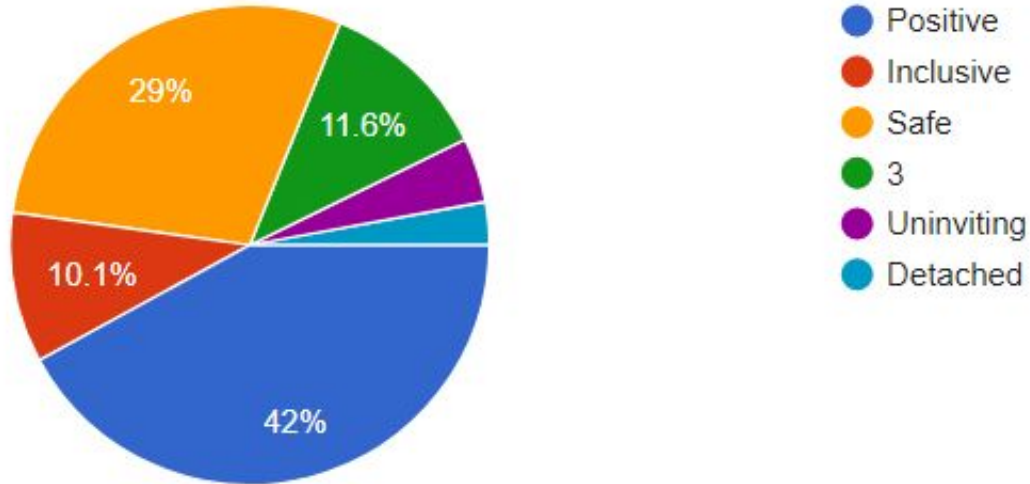


# Data Collection:

- **Informal discussions during common grade level and PLC timing**
- **Observations in daily actions/interactions**
- **Formalized survey responses in the last quarter of the year.**

## What word best describes the current climate at BSE?

69 responses



**94% Felt positive, safe, inclusive or All three descriptors; 6% Uninviting or Detached (3 people)**

Please check the climate boosters that positively impacted your work at BSE.



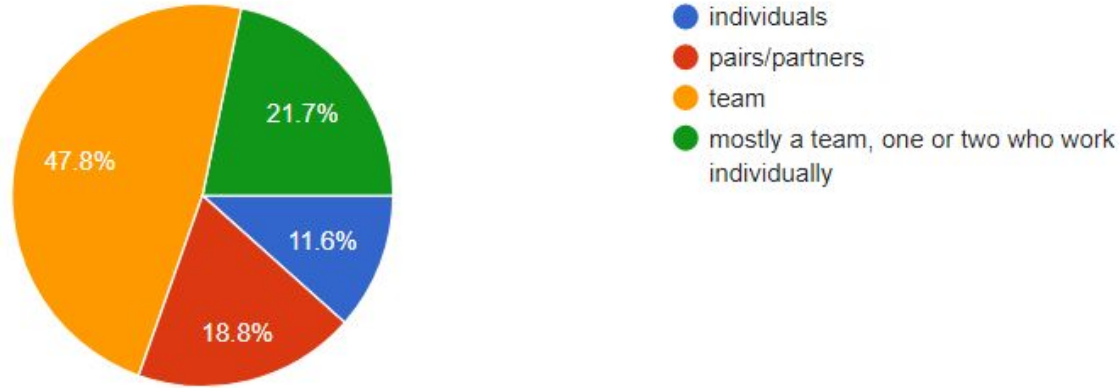
69 responses



What best describes the cohesiveness of your grade level team?



69 responses



**70% Feel cohesive or mostly a team as a grade level; 30% partner individual (21 people)**

# Meetings: (And Impact on Climate)

**Faculty:** 53% Agree; 15% Disagree; 32% Neutral

**PLCs:** 39% Agree, 21% Disagree; 40% Neutral

**Common Planning:** 56% Agree; 15% Disagree;  
29% Neutral

# Indicators of connections across buildings:

- ★ Seeing colleagues ask each other if help is needed.
- ★ Small gestures (umbrellas, filling in, etc.)
- ★ Team Collaboration

# Our Discoveries



# “The Suitcase Theory”



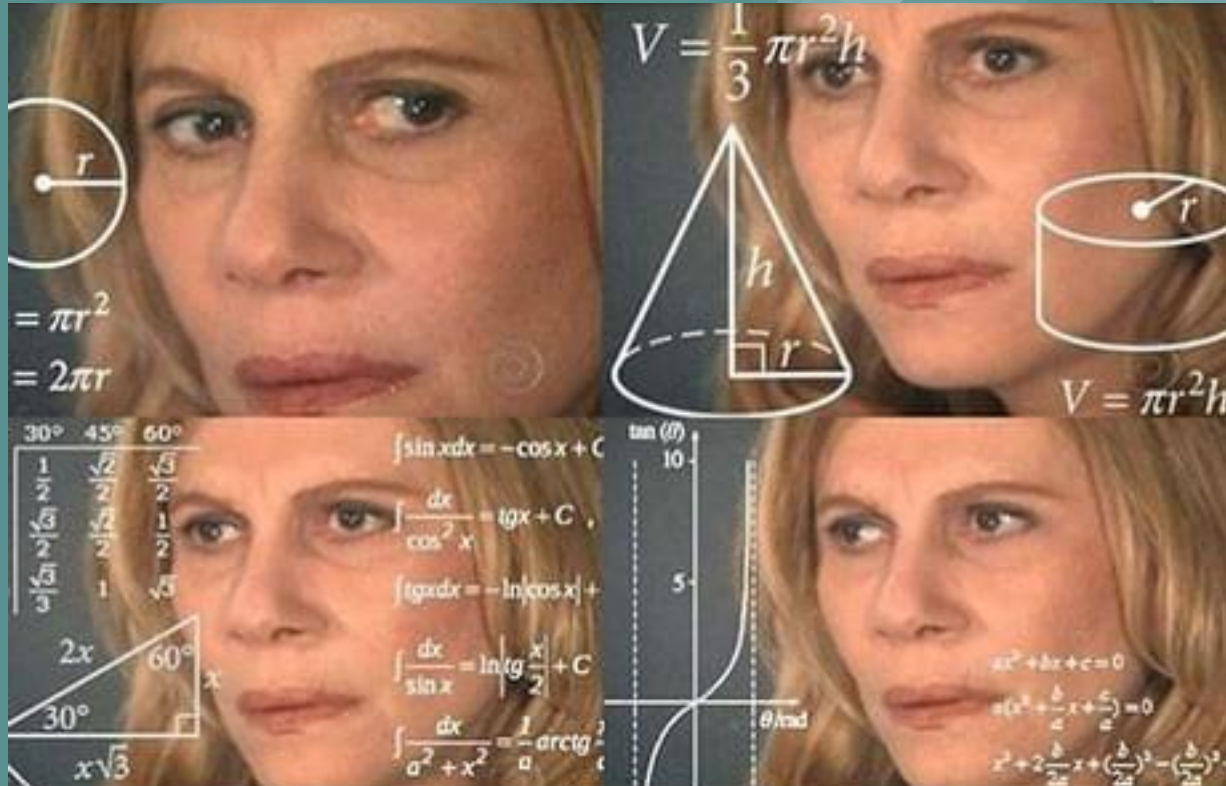




# SLOW MOVING OBJECTS



# Email ≠ Fully Communicated



# Reasons to Hold Positive Space



# Where Are We Headed Next?

- ★ Spread out the responsibilities to a group of employees that enjoy planning.
- ★ Continue to keep dialogue open about ideas for climate (reaching out to those that may not have shared before).
- ★ Start moving deeper into culture (not just climate) with practices that are geared towards leadership visibility, academic rigor, and **KEEP COMMUNICATING** with transparency!

# Bibliography:

Druskat, V. U., & Wolff, S. B. (2001). Building the emotional intelligence of groups. *Harvard Business Review*. Retrieved January 30, 2022 from

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