

Leadership: Finding Your Voice

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Background That Led to Your Team's Inquiry:

Teacher leadership is critically important to developing and harnessing potential for a school to move forward. School improvement and change practices should rely on those in the classroom to lead the way to add meaning to the process as well as give it the hands-on knowledge base for the most informed decisions. Outside demands on teachers and new evaluation practices have put pressures on them which have driven their focus back to a "my classroom" mentality often leaving them overwhelmed and picky about their time spent looking at the bigger picture for the sake of the school.

Our school, over time, has drifted from distribution of leadership. A "teachers teach while the principal leads" mentality has worked but does not build sustainability for the future. Four years ago the primary leadership team had asked for a shared leadership approach in the building as they felt they were carrying the burdens that others left aside. Through conversations we developed new committees where all staff had a stake in some aspect of the school. The IPLI Year 1 Action Research Project then focused on the principal and his capacity to promote and develop shared leadership. This research led to further Investigation of the Leader in Me process. Now, our school has adopted this philosophy and through it aims to be more intentional in developed shared teacher leadership. Without adding more, how can we be more effective?

The purpose then was to research and determine ways to revitalize and support teacher leadership within the building. Therefore, the purpose of our action research was to build practices that support our ongoing learning and more importantly the healthy growth for our school.

Statement of Your Team's Wondering:

With this purpose we wondered several things.

- Can an intentional focus on developing teacher leaders change the current leadership paradigm?
- What "Dos" and "Gets" should be implemented to support teacher's finding their leadership voice?
- What can we do consistently to make our new paradigm successful?
- What, if done, would make our new paradigm not successful?

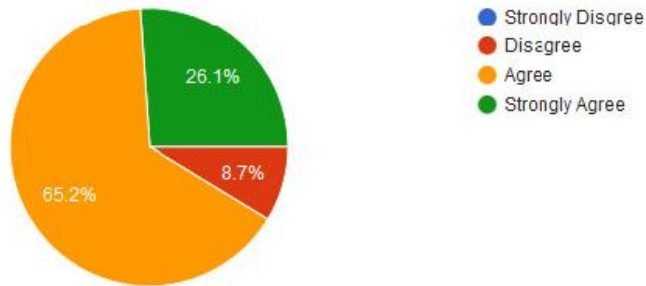
Methods/Procedures:

To gain insights into our wonderings, we began with a survey. This survey was conducted in Spring 2016 and aligned with The Leader in Me habits based on Stephen Covey's book the 7 Habits of Highly Effective People. This survey was used for IPLI Year 1 and we felt it would be important to revisit it as part of this process as well.

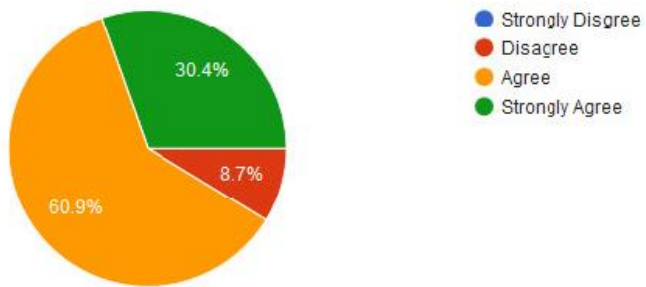
SURVEY ON TEAM NORMS

Bailly 2016

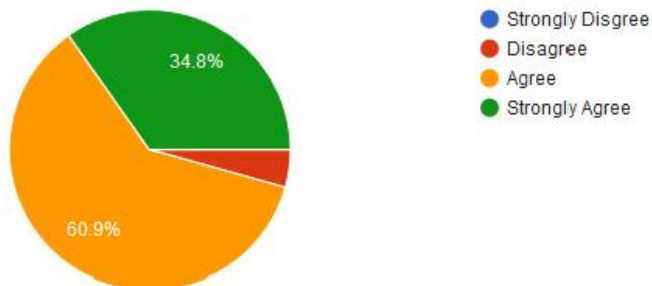
I know the norms and protocols established by my team. (23 responses)



Members of my team are living up to the established norms and protocols. (23 responses)

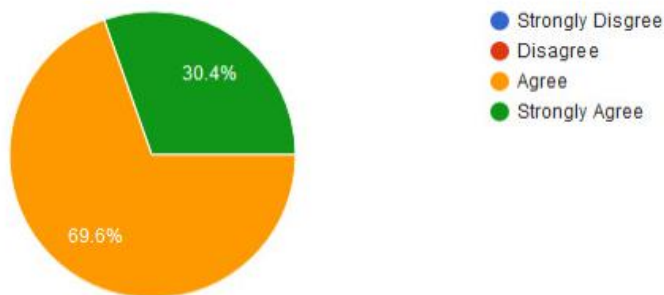


Our team maintains focus on the established team goal(s). (23 responses)

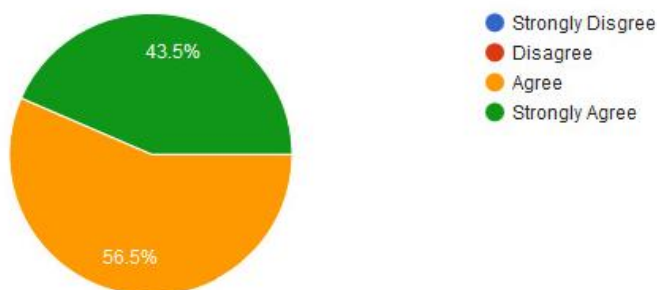


Our team is making progress toward the achievement of our goal(s).

(23 responses)



The team is having a positive impact on my classroom practice. (23 responses)



Staff then participated in training. Two days of training were strictly on the 7 Habits providing each person with leadership training for themselves. This training focuses on the habits but also drives the self-leadership principal. The third day of training was then given on how to teach the leadership paradigms to the students. All of this training was done before the school year started.

A leadership team then worked on creating meaningful leadership roles for the building. Committees were restructured and aligned. Goals were set for each committee. In a very tangible way folders were also created for each committee member with the committee goal on the front. As part of our AR mini-cycle we surveyed staff to review adequate team norms. Since no issues appeared there we moved past reviewing or re-establishing norms to development of committees.

A new Lighthouse Team was also established with more long term goals. This team had a focus of supporting and promoting teacher leadership, but also teaching these principals to students and parents. The feeling was that creating a culture of leadership was paramount to developing leaders of all types.

Near the end of the year we again conducted the survey given in Spring 2017. Results of this survey were reviewed with IPLI team members and our leadership team.

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

As a result of analyzing our data we learned several important things that include:

- 1) Intentional focus on teacher leadership can change the leadership paradigm.
- 2) The culture of intentionality must focus on proactive and reactive approaches to changing cultural paradigms.
- 3) Not everyone is ready to jump into leadership

We first began to notice that setting the vision of leadership had an impact from the start. We were pleased to find that 100% of the staff attended the summer training outside of the school year. This included not only teachers but support staff as well. This was a huge boost to not only our new Leader in Me process but also the buy in to leadership. We were also pleased to find that we had originally had only 21 leadership roles in the school. Many of these were paid positions, and some people held several of them. Over the course of the year the number of roles doubled to 42. This means that more people were serving and working in a leadership capacity and many were trying new things that they had never attempted before.

The focus on leadership needed to include steps to help it be successful but also work towards obstacles and have ongoing support. Training was critical to not only set the vision but provide people with the tools for leadership. Our training focused on it being a process and evidence of it being a process and not a program still exists. Celebrations became key, but the staff still preferred those to be more private. Private praise, notes or comments to a classroom where a teacher is taking a role helped to motivate and support leaders. It also became clear that people needed time to plan and develop their leadership. So early on we began to set aside time on a monthly basis. In each instance there was immediately a boost of energy towards leadership.

Everyone has a different leadership voice and the differences in leadership styles and successes became apparent early on. It became important then to support new leaders and help to create barriers between them and "naysayers" to the process. The paradigm pushed people out of their comfort zone as well. Our survey data shows a decline in one area as well. This area focused on priorities and allowing crises to interrupt the process. When pushed outside their comfort zone some allowed any distraction, including classroom issues and parent issues, to curb their growth.

Providing Concluding Thoughts:

Generally, we have learned a lot about ourselves. We have learned our strengths and some of our current limits. We already knew that we were a staff willing to step up to a challenge and to try new things. The positive support for this change indicates that. Many thought that the process would solely focus on the kids and when it focused more on them it was a shock. The staff embraced working and teaching the habits to the kids, but some are still reluctant to live them. This changed over the year as the leadership paradigm took hold, but it is still a work in progress.

We've learned a slower is better. Allowing the process to take roots and grow organically and naturally works best. In this growth we have learned that some people lead in different ways. Not everyone needs to be up in front. Allowing people to learn these skills and still feel valued is important. Getting everyone to understand those differences is truly a next step for us.

We've also learned that we need to continue on the path of intentionality. We need to stay focused on the things that will help us succeed and avoid the things that will kill the process. Moving forward we also feel we

should include some sort of self-evaluation or reflective piece to allow people time to see their growth and develop reflective leadership. We also have considered offering a leadership styles inventory. Information of this could be used personally, but could also be used to help form teams for projects or determine best approaches when working with a group.

References:

Covey, S. Covey, S. (2014) The leader in me: How schools around the world are inspiring greatness, one child at a time. New York: Simon & Shuster Paperbacks