

STOP the Insanity! Prioritizing the Principalship

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Background That Led to Your Inquiry:

As a rural elementary school principal with over 350 students, I felt the overwhelming urge to spend ample time in the classrooms with students. Year after year I felt that I failed at this more than I succeeded, due to the managerial tasks associated with the job and uncontrollable discipline issues and parent meetings.

What led me to this pondering was the desire to be with my students. I realized very quickly, when talking to other administrators, that this was a common issue, but that others had found ways around it. Being in classrooms more and the office less, WAS POSSIBLE, I just needed to set up some ground rules to ensure that it happened. Therefore, the purpose of my action research was to schedule myself in classrooms and prioritize those time periods so that I could have daily interaction with each of my students within the classroom setting.

Statement of Your Wondering:

With this purpose, I wondered "How can I prioritize managerial tasks to observe in each classroom 3 or more times each week to improve my instructional leadership capacity?"

Methods/Procedures:

To gain insights into my wondering, I began collecting data in a log and recording my reflections each day. I also collected data through an app that provided insight into where my time was actually being spent each day. I also collected data through my administrative assistant as she recorded the allotted time spent in meetings and conferences in relationship to the actual time spent completing these tasks.

I'd originally planned to collect data for 2 months; however, I quickly realized that I should continue collecting data to determine patterns or changes that occur over time and to keep on top of the time spent with students. First, I reviewed the data and scheduled my time with each teacher, based on when they would like to have me in their classroom. Secondly, I realized that these visits need not be evaluative in any way. Through my observations, I realized some teachers were apprehensive about inviting me into the classroom. I ensure all of my staff that I would not be evaluating during this time and I was there to help in any way they needed me. After that, things began to change. At first, it was only with a few teachers. They began to "plan" for me to come and have an activity or project they wanted me to do during the time with their class. Those classes proved to be the most beneficial for myself, as well as the students and the teachers involved. The data collection and analysis portion of this project are ongoing at this time. I plan to implement this the same next year and begin when school starts.

Stating Your Learning and Supporting it with Data:

As a result of analyzing my data, I learned that 1) I am a much happier and more content administrator when I am spending the bulk of my time with children, 2) my staff sees me as an academic leader and has more buy-in when I am in classrooms more often, and 3) the activities that I cancelled/rescheduled/missed due to these classroom visits really had no impact on the school environment, climate, or overall success of the building.

Providing Concluding Thoughts:

Through this action research project, I've learned some very important details about both my role as an administrator and myself, personally. I had originally thought that the phone calls, meetings, paperwork, and other monotonous, office tasks that I was doing each day were necessary to the job. Many are not and can be eliminated or delegated to others. Many can be rescheduled or scheduled around my classroom visits. My biggest fear was that I would not be able to accomplish everything or that I would fall behind. The opposite happened, in fact. By prioritizing classroom visits, many of those other tasks were either taken on by others, or simply ceased to be an issue. I was much happier and more energetic to complete those tasks in a smaller time frame than before. Even a task as simple as checking my email proved to be taking a lot of my daily time when I analyzed the data.

In conclusion, I would urge anyone who is feeling the stress related to the business related job tasks or who is seeking more time with their students to also complete this action research project. By prioritizing tasks and making my students a priority, I've gained the love of the job again! You can too!

References: