

School Culture Is Key: Promoting A Culture of Positivity and Teamwork

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Background That Led to Your Inquiry:

With the development in state and district mandated changes such as assessments and technology, I was seeing an unhappy workplace for staff. It was not an atmosphere where staff wanted to be. Therefore, students would eventually suffer the effects of this culture. Observations led me to believe I needed to collect data, take action and make changes. Various educational data and background information led to my wondering in hopes that I can foster a more positive staff culture in the building. This data included information collected on surveys from IPLI and AdvancED, teacher dialogue, observations and recognition of negative staff attitudes, drama amongst staff members, low staff morale, and information gathered during a climate audit from an outside person.

From this data, it was evident that I needed to take action to change the culture. Therefore, the purpose of my action research was to use this data to develop a plan to change the culture in the building to a more positive and team-oriented culture. My action research purpose would specifically focus on:

- creating opportunities for staff to work as a team
- implementing activities that promote positive attitudes
- changing the staff morale and culture of the school to one where staff members work together in a positive manner

Statement of Your Wondering:

With this purpose, I wondered how can I as an instructional leader develop a staff culture of teamwork and positivity? Specifically asking myself the following questions: As an effective instructional leader, what activities can I implement that help support a positive environment? In addition, what types of opportunities can I give to foster teamwork? Finally, how can I get staff members to be more positive about the workplace?

Methods/Procedures:

To gain insights into my wondering, I developed actions, collected data to analyze the data, and interpreted and evaluated the results. As the instructional leader I made some changes and introduced some new practices for the staff. First, I planned and helped lead a staff retreat before the start of school. Next, I led conversations and collaboration on the creation of the schedule within grade levels and departments including common planning time. In addition, I planned and led a book study, "What Great Teachers Do Differently" (Whitaker 2012). I incorporated team building activities into each staff meeting. I praised and encouraged staff to do the same for good things/ideas that were happening. This included a shout out board and birthday wishes. I provided and continue to provide daily encouragement on positivity and/or teamwork on the daily staff announcements. Teachers were encouraged to work together at outside events to bond and build positive relations. In addition, the staff did some triller videos and had special dress up days to build positive relations and raise staff morale. Furthermore, I provided opportunities for teachers to lead the staff as an expert in various areas. I acted as mediator between staff members to work out concerns. Currently, I am

leading an opportunity for the staff to work together to create a School of Communications. All these actions contributed to the shift in the culture of the building.

In order to determine the effects of these actions, data had to be collected. Several pictures were taken throughout the school year to document the positivity and teamwork that was happening due to these actions. Feedback was gathered from teachers through a staff survey that was given in March focusing on the culture and specifically, positivity and teamwork in the workplace. Quotes about the culture of the building from teachers, superintendents, and a director were compiled from the year.

I analyzed the data by examining the results of the staff survey. I looked at how the teachers rated the actions put in place and which ones had the biggest impact on a more positive and team oriented approach to the school year. I found that the retreat, working together towards a school of communications, and providing common planning time were the three biggest areas that teachers felt had the largest impact on positivity and teamwork. I also looked at teacher ratings for each activity implemented to give an overall summary of how teachers felt impacted by each action. The pictures taken and compiled displayed teamwork and happiness. The quotes given by others throughout this process showed that a change was evident and that certain actions made a difference.

Stating Your Learning and Supporting it with Data:

As a result of analyzing my data, the three important things I learned include:

As a leader, I have found that implementing many activities and leading various plans can positively change the culture.

As a leader, I have found that activities and plans impact staff members in different ways. Therefore, it is important to try and implement a variety of plans or actions.

As a leader, I have found that it is worth the extra effort to implement these activities/plans to continue to build a culture of teamwork and positivity.

First, a variety of actions were implemented and had a positive effect on the staff and the building atmosphere. This is supported by statements made about South Elementary. For example, Dr. Moore, Superintendent, stated, "Thank you so much also for all of your hard work over the last year! South Elementary has changed so much in twelve months!" A staff member said, "I think the culture of the school has improved and there is less negativity." Dr. Terhune, Assistant Superintendent commented, "There is a definite climate change with your teachers."

Secondly, implementing a variety of activities affected the staff in different ways. Different staff members felt stronger impacts by different activities. Therefore, it is key to implement a variety of actions. Below is data that supports the impact of the various activities. The information was gathered from the staff survey given in March after activities had been implemented throughout the year.

Rating by Staff for Promoting Teamwork

Activity	Score of 5	Score of 4	Score of 3	Score of 2	Score of 1
Common Grade Level Planning Time	69%	23%	8%	0%	0%
Retreat	58%	25%	17%	0%	0%
Team Building Activities	46%	39%	15%	0%	0%
Transforming South into a School of Communications	46%	38%	8%	8%	0%
Book Study	38%	62%	0%	0%	0%
Participating in After School Activities Together	23%	23%	54%	0%	0%
Pow Wow Wednesdays	15%	46%	31%	8%	0%

Rating by Staff for Promoting Positivity

Activity	Score of 5	Score of 4	Score of 3	Score of 2	Score of 1
Daily Announcement Quote	46%	38%	8%	8%	0%
Open Communication	46%	39%	15%	0%	0%
Shout Out Board	39%	45%	8%	8%	0%

Rating by Staff for Promoting Positivity & Teamwork

Activity	Score of 5	Score of 4	Score of 3	Score of 2	Score of 1
Special Dress Up Days	54%	38%	8%	0%	0%
Triller Videos	20%	60%	20%	0%	0%

Finally, it is worth it as an instructional leader to build an atmosphere of teamwork and positivity. Therefore, it is important to find and lead actions that impact staff in promoting teamwork and positivity. The pictures below show the impact of the actions. The smiles on the staff faces and the display of collaboration and teamwork make it worth executing actions that promote teamwork and positivity.



Providing Concluding Thoughts:

To be an effective administrator and instructional leader, one must be aware of the climate and culture of the building. In order for our students to be successful, we must provide an atmosphere where teachers want to be there, they want to work together, and they are spreading positivity, not negative attitudes. Students pick up on these feelings and it affects their behavior and overall learning. This action research project has helped me as a leader to build a more positive and team oriented culture in my building. It has inspired me to keep integrating activities and providing opportunities that will help staff members to work together in a positive manner. I owe this to my staff and my students.

As I reflect on this process and project, I have learned that I can make a difference and impact with my staff. It does take work and action to make sure that teachers are working together in a positive manner. I have learned that my staff can work together and be positive but they need those concepts to be modeled and activities implemented to remind them of these aspects.

As I reflect on the future, I need to think about what can I do to sustain and continue to improve on the teamwork and positivity? I plan to continue with the activities implemented that had the biggest impact such as the retreat, common planning time, daily quotes, and the book study. I plan to look for additional activities to implement to foster a culture of positivity and teamwork. Again, as leaders we want to make a difference and leave a positive impact on our staff and students. We must work daily to strive to do this and provide the staff with the opportunities and activities needed for them to grow as educators.

References:

- Dana, N. F. (2009). *Leading with passion and knowledge: The principal as action researcher*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.
- Whitaker, T. (2012). *What great principals do differently: 18 things that matter most*. New York: Routledge.