

Sweeping Away Disorder

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Background That Led to Your Team's Inquiry:

Southwestern Middle School is located in rural Tippecanoe County surrounding Lafayette, Indiana. Teachers, parents, and students are proud to be a part of our school of sixth through eighth graders. Our motto is "Once a wildcat, always a wildcat!" In our school, we are family. As with all families, we had the need to feel safe and togetherness because our school was in the first year back together after being displaced by a tornado that damaged our school in November 2013.

Our teachers, students, parents, and staff completed the High Reliability Schools (HRS) Survey from the Marzano Institute in the Fall of 2015. After our building leadership team reviewed our Domain 1 data from the survey, a leading indicator revealed the need to focus on creating a more safe, collaborative, and orderly environment. Our teachers and staff needed a formal way to provide feedback on the optimal functioning of our school to create a safe and orderly environment. Many of the staff expressed the concern of improving the hall passing times. Teachers felt they could not start their class on time for bell-to-bell instruction because they needed to be in the hallway to address student(s) issues. Some students experienced tardiness, locker issues, and needed motivated to get to class. Therefore, the purpose of our action research was to provide a universal expectation of teachers to monitor the hall for six minutes once a day to address student issues.

Statement of Your Team's Wondering:

With this purpose, we wondered if we introduced "Hallway Sweeps" if student tardiness would reduce, if timeliness on correcting maintenance issues would improve, and if "formal togetherness" between staff-to-staff and student-to-staff would improve the overall function our school family?

Methods/Procedures:

To gain insights into our wondering, we developed a "Sweep Chart" for teachers to complete daily and turn-in weekly to our building principal. Teachers will use the first two-to-three minutes of their daily prep period to walk through the building to document the orderliness of the building, assist students if needed, and provide feedback to administration. Administration will review each week to provide weekly feedback to necessary individuals and monthly/quarterly presentation of results to the teachers and staff.

To build the "formal togetherness" the master scheduled was designed so that content area teachers had the same prep period: Specials (Art, FACS, IT) conducted their sweep after first hour bell, office personnel second hour, Science teachers third hour, Special Education teachers and Physical Education teachers fourth hour, Music teachers fifth hour, Social Studies sixth hour, and English teachers seventh hour. The "formal togetherness" was to integrate intentional time together which may lead to purposeful collaboration within a content area.

During our first day back to school, our leadership team presented the sweep chart to the staff. We designed the chart to collect data and to drive our implementation. Our vision and mission to our staff was for content

area teachers to use the chart to record student issues, building issues, and talk with each other for the first three minutes of their prep period. Teachers were empowered to only give up three minutes a day to increase the orderliness and safety of our building and provided time to be in their classroom (instead of monitoring halls) at the beginning of all other periods when students are in their rooms.

Each day teachers recorded which students were tardy to class. The daily sheets provided hourly data which told which students were chronically tardy throughout a day or week. This data allowed for quicker intervention to these students to address issues that were preventing them from getting to class on time. We discovered many times lockers did not open, students didn't know their combinations, some classes were not setting students up for class to be prepared to leave at the bell, some students were intentionally late, and some students needed longer time to use the restroom during certain times of the day. With this "real time" data the administration was able to "fix" many of these student issues promptly and with a high success rate because the issues were not seen written on subsequent sweep charts for that week, month or quarter.

Each day for the whole school year, teachers were given time to be out of their classroom walking with their colleagues, helping students, improving the building, and having conversations that lead to deeper conversations and potentially the scheduling of purposeful meetings. We discovered teachers having conversations of curriculum, instruction, student needs, and personal venting which actually lead to less venting during scheduled meetings. Many teachers were seen walking their whole prep period because of the good conversation and the desire to integrate some fitness into their day.

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

As a result of analyzing our data from the sweep charts for the school year, we learned that providing formal togetherness lead to intentional meetings of content area teachers. We learned students have needs that can be addressed promptly to create quick resolve and a establish a sense of caring instead of a need for consequence because of unwanted behaviors. We learned teachers would provide students with tools and resources to solve simple struggles because the teachers connected with the students during a time of need which reduced student issues. We learned that teachers empowered to help with the safety and orderliness of building lead to less complaining to administration and less complaining during scheduled meetings.

Formal informal togetherness created opportunities for teachers to plan formal togetherness beyond expectations set forth by administration. In prior years, the master scheduled provided content area common prep times with the thought that teachers of the same content would plan time to meet weekly. During the two years prior the only content area that met regularly was the English department. In talking with the English teachers, they shared "because it was the last period of the day and didn't feel like getting started on grading at that time so they would meet because it was a text book adoption year". Once a month the math teachers would meet to work on "vertical alignment because the state standards had been revised but this many times was only two of the three teachers". Jill Pinkerton, special education teacher commented that "haphazard conversations led to her following a fellow teacher into their classroom and continuing a content conversation or student need discussion." In the past co-teaching was discussed but teachers would not give up planning time to meet with a special education teacher. Heather Brown, eighth grade social studies teacher, had never met with the other social studies teachers in her building mostly "because their content was so different" but now "we have impromptu meetings about digital resources because of the use of chromebooks." She found herself seeking them out for more resources.

Becoming a high reliability school meant we need to "explore specific strategies for shared decision making and developing collaborative processes that clarify the work of teacher teams" (Marzano, 2017) . We explored

"designs that create a safe physical environment which decrease opportunities for inappropriate behaviors, and are maximized by well-supervised, cadre-monitored areas" (Kadel, 1999). Sweeps provided well-supervised areas and decreased inappropriate behaviors. Data collected from sweep charts shows an overall decrease in Tardiness of forty percent. In 2015-2016, Twenty-eight kids with more than 9 tardies a quarter. In 2016-2017, Seventeen kids with more than nine tardies with six of these students being provided an alternative passing period to meet their needs. Administration had to deal with less chronic tardiness reducing the need for harsh consequences because students did not engage in the behavior because of the active supervision and the solution based engagement with teachers. Researchers Dufour (1998) & Lewis (1998) agree that strategic planning, team building, and management strategies are characterized by well-established routines, constructive time-on-task, behavioral feedback, and successful intervention procedures. Sweeps provided this to our students and staff resulting in a sense of safety, collaboration, and comfort.

Providing Concluding Thoughts:

Southwestern is indeed "Sweeping Away Disorder!" We have noticed the obvious result of tardies having a marked decrease. There are some secondary bonuses which are the immediate feedback on the condition of the building has staff and students taking pride in our facilities and responsibility to each other, teachers are providing more assistance to students in the hall, and new students are acclimating to our building faster. Active supervision of hallways has increased at the same time classrooms have bell-to-bell instruction. This active walking during supervision has improved the fitness of teachers which in turn has created healthy fitness. The collaboration between content areas has developed more cohesion of content areas and created partnerships with co-teachers. One of the most rewarding unplanned consequences of sweeps is that there is a decrease in complaints to each other and to administration.

Southwestern Middle School will be continuing to implement Sweeps each school year. This will provide yearly data to staff to make the school move the focus on domain 1 of a high reliability schools to hopefully domain four and five. Marzano establish the safe and orderly schools as domain 1 because it is the foundation to all the other domains of a high reliability school (Marzano, 2017).

Some topics for discussion by our building leadership team is potentially adding student sweepers to each passing period. This is to make students part of the cadre to monitor those areas. We also hope to provide more rewards to staff for completing sweeps. The rewards are positive and have become intrinsic for teachers but it is always important to reward teachers too.

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