

Lead Like a Pirate: Fostering a Positive School Climate

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Background That Led to Your Team's Inquiry:

At the end of the 2017 school year, we gave our school staff a survey to take the temperature of the school climate. We were disheartened to learn that only 50% of our teachers enjoyed coming to school most days. Only 40% of our teachers felt we had a positive school culture. Therefore, the purpose of our action research was to find and implement strategies to improve our school climate and increase student engagement.

Statement of Your Team's Wondering:

With this purpose we wondered how increasing teacher support, positive language, and activities influence our building's climate, thus leading to better student engagement?

Methods/Procedures:

To gain insights into our wondering, we read the book "Lead Like a Pirate". We also read blogs and followed the #LeadLAP to discover what other schools are doing to bring fun and excitement to their staff.

To increase teacher support we scheduled and implemented a back to school training for our new staff members and scheduled ongoing support to be in place weekly throughout the school year. New teachers were provided with a mentor and had the opportunity to observe in other classrooms. To increase teacher voice and share decision making, we began a Leadership Team to meet each month.

We planned activities throughout the year to surprise and delight the staff. For example, we brought a "Woot Woot Wagon" around the school with healthy treats, water, and chocolate. We celebrated special days, such as National Breadstick Day and National Pretzel Day. Bi-monthly, we had a "Wellness Wednesday" which allowed staff to wear exercise clothes and walk or do yoga in the morning. We added glows to our Weekly Update with specific praise for the positives. We also increase positive visuals around the building with staff bulletin boards.

Throughout the school year, we received many thanks and positive emails and text from staff showing appreciation for the efforts. To gather our data, we gave the same climate survey in March of 2018 from the previous year in order to compare our results.

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

As a result of analyzing our data, two important things we learned include: 1) Staff notices when they are appreciated and it improves the school climate. 2) Teachers want to connect and grow.

Our teachers sense of camaraderie and their passion for working at Mayflower Mill grew this year. The teachers noticed when they were appreciated as evidenced by our survey data. At the end of the 2018 school year, 82% of our teachers reported that they enjoyed coming to school most days, which is an increase of 32% from the previous year. At the end of the 2018 school year, 76% of teachers reported they felt we had a positive school culture which is an increase of 36%. At the end of the 2018 school year, 80% of teachers (employed in 2017 at MME) reported they felt our school culture improved. 70% of teachers who are new to Mayflower reported they felt supported this year.

Teachers reported in the survey:

- “School culture is much better this year than in years past with having fun dress up days, showing appreciation throughout the year and making staff feel valued and important. Love it!! “
- “I have never, at any school, felt as appreciated and important as I do this year.”
- “I felt very supported as a new teacher!”
- “Our building staff has a definite ‘Family’ feel.”

We also learned that teachers want to connect and grow. In the survey, 14 teachers (almost 50%) commented that they would like opportunities to work with other grade levels. “More getting to know you / learning activities that require us to mix grade levels. There are so many new peeps that I would like to talk to more but often don't have the time or opportunity.”

Providing Concluding Thoughts:

We were inspired by the quote, "We want to create a school where students, staff, and parents are beating down the doors to get in, not out." (Beth Houf) We learned through focusing on positive/fun activities, teacher support, and shared leadership that staff feels valued and the school climate improves. In school, we often do things and do not measure them. This action research project forced us to look critically at our data and collect follow-up data to analyze our practices and determine next steps. As we move forward, our team will continue to be diligent in taking care of our adults. Additionally, we learned that our teachers want to feel connected and learn from each other. We plan on creating a new wondering for next year to incorporate cross grade-level planning, observation, and learning.

In conclusion, our action research project saved our school climate. We now know how to proceed and what our staff needs to enjoy their hard work of shaping children. We are also confident in using the action research process for school improvement in academic areas as we move forward.

References:

Burgess, S., & Houf, B. (2017). Lead like a pirate: Make school amazing for your students and staff. San Diego, CA: Dave Burgess Consulting.