

Mission to Mission Focus: Finding our Core Values

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Background That Led to Your Inquiry:

As I started my 4th year at Mayflower Mill Elementary School, I felt a constant struggle finding focus for professional development between competing initiative. We had experienced an increase in enrollment of over 100 students and had many new staff members. As the year progressed, it became clear that we needed to work together to find a common mission and core values to drive my time and daily efforts. Therefore, the purpose of my action research was to guide my staff to develop our Mayflower Mill Core Values.

Statement of Your Wondering:

With this purpose, I wondered what are our core values that drive our school, our decision making, our efforts?

Methods/Procedures:

To gain insights into my wondering, I collaborated with my instructional coach and came up with a plan that would give all teachers a voice in the process. We have a daily, thirty minute, Instructional Improvement Block for staff development. During this time, we were able to come together as a staff. I began by showing an old Tonight Show clip of a person spinning 20 plates on sticks. The man ran back and forth like crazy tending to each spinning plate, until eventually they crashed down. We discussed how we feel when we have so many things pulling at our time! We then looked at the core values from several companies, such as, Zappos and Google. The teachers left with one assignment. They had to make their own personal list of their ten core values for teaching and working at Mayflower Mill.

The next day, teachers were partnered randomly and were challenged to take their two lists of ten core values and create one joint list. Our initial list of 350 values was reduced to 175. The next day, teachers were placed into new groups of four. They were asked to take their list of forty core values and reduce and revise into a list of ten. This process continued each day with new groups. I was so impressed with the discussions the teachers had throughout the time. It was amazing how similar our values were with wording changes and adjustments.

When we arrived at our final thirty core values after three weeks, I put the narratives into a word cloud. I was pleased to find that the largest or most used word was "students". We are truly a student-centered school! I was then able to further narrow down our work into our ten Mayflower Mill Core Values.

Stating Your Learning and Supporting it with Data:

As a result of analyzing my data, two important things I learned include: 1) having common core values can and will drive your administrative initiatives; 2) the process of building consensus is powerful.

During my action research project, I learned the importance of having common core values. When we began, we had 350 variations of value statements. As the teachers repeatedly asked each other question like "but is that really the most important?" our list was reduced to 175. Different groups of teachers were then able to discuss in groups of 4/5 further reducing our list to 100. Soon, we had 4 groups of 8 teachers and 40 core values. By this time, many groups had matching values. I was then able to make the list of 10.

Mayflower Mill Core Values:

High Expectations: All students are supported and guided to reach their full potential, beyond just the classroom.

Consistency: We provide consistency and follow through with academics, behavior, and professional development.

Respect: We will show students respect and by doing so we are teaching them what it feels like to be valued as a human being; not defined by their deficits or strengths

Communication: Effectively communicate with staff, students, families, and the community
Stop. Collaborate and Listen: Staff is open to personal and professional growth; routine collaboration within and across grade levels to create and implement meaningful lessons and experiences.

Growth Mindset: Allow your curiosity to drive your lifelong learning by taking risks, being creative, challenging yourself, striving for excellence, and finding your passion.

Community: Build relationships and break down barriers.

Professional: Maintain personal and professional integrity. Be flexible, prepared, and a role model.

Self-Care: Take care of yourself. You cannot pour from an empty cup!

Have Fun! Celebrate small successes and make learning fun for staff and students!

During this process, I learned what my teachers need from me. In each of these core value statements, the teachers were also telling me that they need time to collaborate. They need time for fun and to build community. The need consistency and the freedom to grow. At the end of the school year, I gave a staff survey. 70% of classroom teachers named "Core Values" as their favorite professional development during our Instructional Improvement Block this school year. The process of building consensus and the rich discussions that occurred were powerful.

Providing Concluding Thoughts:

As an administrator, it is so important to reflect on our own practices, as well as the practices occurring in our school building. The Action Research Process has given me a vehicle for continuing my journey as a reflective practitioner, as well as a process for improving practices school-wide. Mission to Mission Focus: Finding our Core Values showed me what is important to my teachers. As they discussed all of the things they value, I participated, but also listened and reflected upon what the teachers really need to be and feel successful. The Core Values are not just words for the staff to live by, but also for me to own as a leader and make sure my

teachers experience high expectations, positive communication, consistency, collaboration opportunities...and FUN!

To align with the Core Value: Communication, I have created a new Leadership Team for the 2017-2018 school year to both gather and disseminate information, but also to collaborate and share in decision-making. I wonder how school climate would improve if teachers had more of a voice in decision making and better communication between teachers and the administration?

To align with the Core Value: Growth Mindset and Collaboration, I have planned to use one weekly Instructional Improvement Block per week to allow my staff to complete a school-related "Passion Project". I wonder what creative learning and collaboration would take place if teachers were given time to learn and explore an area they are interested in?

To align with the Core Value: Have Fun, I have planned staff birthday celebrations, success stories to begin meetings, and teacher scratch-off ticket prizes. I wonder if teachers were recognized for both their existence and their efforts with small celebrations if teacher morale would improve?

I have learned that what we do as an administrators must align with not only our values, but the things our staff and community values. Above all, we must reflect and continue to wonder.

References:

Core Values that Inspire in the School System. (2016, November 28). Retrieved June 16, 2017, from http://www.principalprinciples.net/2016/11/core-values-that-inspire-in-school.html?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Feed%3A%2Bblogspot%2FBwVTE%2B%28Principal%2BPrinciples%29