

## **Action Research Summary – McKinley Elementary (IPLI Cohort 11)**

“From Surviving to Thriving: Building A Culture of Celebration and Success”

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### **STEP ONE: BACKGROUND THAT LED TO YOUR INQUIRY**

At William McKinley Elementary, leadership identified a pressing need to improve staff morale, motivation, and engagement. Research consistently shows that a strong, positive school culture has a direct impact on student achievement and teacher retention. However, sustaining morale in a high-need school setting presented challenges. Staff turnover, burnout, and the emotional demands of the profession made it clear that a more intentional approach to appreciation and celebration was necessary.

The leadership team also recognized inconsistencies in how staff were being recognized for their contributions. While individual efforts to uplift morale existed, there was no structured or school-wide system to celebrate the everyday and extraordinary achievements of teachers and staff. These factors, combined with data reflecting the importance of workplace culture, set the stage for inquiry.

Therefore, the purpose of my action research was to explore how celebrating staff through structured recognition improves school culture.

### **STEP TWO: STATEMENT OF YOUR WONDERING**

With this purpose, we wondered:

- How does regular staff recognition impact school culture and staff morale?
- How can we track the effectiveness of a structured staff recognition system?

### **STEP THREE: METHODS/PROCEDURES**

To gain insights into our wonderings, we implemented a school-wide system of structured staff recognition. We began with daily and weekly shout-outs shared over the school intercom and in weekly bulletins. These recognitions highlighted both professional and personal milestones. We introduced themed luncheons and hallway “celebration walks” to honor major life events and staff achievements such as graduations and health milestones.

To monitor implementation and participation, we created a tracking system that recorded the number of shout-outs per month. Additionally, we collected quantitative data through staff surveys administered in Fall 2024 and again in January 2025 via Panorama. The survey measured indicators such as job satisfaction, morale, and sense of being valued.

The data analysis involved comparing shout-out frequency trends with Panorama survey results. For example, a noticeable dip in recognition occurred in November and December, which aligned with traditionally lower morale periods. We also analyzed qualitative feedback from staff regarding the perceived value of the recognition activities. Trends were documented monthly and discussed during leadership and School Culture Committee meetings.

This cyclical process of implementation, feedback collection, and revision allowed us to make real-time adjustments and continuously refine our recognition efforts.

#### **STEP FOUR: STATING YOUR LEARNING AND SUPPORTING IT WITH DATA**

##### **Findings**

As a result of analyzing my data, three important things our team learned include:

Learning Statement One: Recognition increases feelings of being valued.

Staff who were regularly celebrated reported increased job satisfaction. This was supported by a 24% increase in Panorama survey results in categories related to feeling appreciated and supported.

Learning Statement Two: Participation in recognition builds momentum.

The number of shout-outs grew month over month, with some months peaking at over 100 staff recognitions, indicating that both leadership and peer-to-peer acknowledgment were gaining traction.

Learning Statement Three: Intentional recognition supports retention.

In our annual Intent to Return survey, 95% of staff indicated they plan to return to McKinley—a significant increase when compared to prior years. This suggests that our focus on celebration and belonging positively influenced retention decisions.

#### **STEP FIVE: PROVIDING CONCLUDING THOUGHTS**

This action research journey has reinforced the critical role that intentional recognition plays in shaping school culture. As a leader and teacher leader team, we've learned that even small gestures of appreciation, when done consistently and strategically, can significantly uplift a school community. More importantly, staff feel seen, heard, and valued, which strengthens collaboration and trust.

The initiative also revealed the importance of shared leadership in sustaining school culture. By involving our School Culture Committee and encouraging peer-to-peer shout-outs, we created a model that wasn't dependent on administration alone. This increased buy-in and authenticity across the building.

Going forward, we plan to expand recognition practices by reintroducing peer-nominated awards and increasing the visibility of celebrations across classrooms. We also aim to link

our recognition practices more closely to student outcomes, examining how staff morale correlates with student engagement and growth.



This work aligns with broader research in educational leadership that emphasizes positive workplace culture as a catalyst for improvement (Harvard Division of Continuing Education, 2025; Blodget, 2022). As a principal, I now see culture-building not as a soft skill, but as a strategic leadership priority with measurable outcomes.

## **STEP SIX: REFERENCES**

Arencibia, D. (2023, December). Building a positive school culture. Principal Leadership. <https://www.nassp.org/publication/principal-leadership/volume-24-2023-2024/principal-leadership-december-2023/building-a-positive-school-culture/>

Blodget, A. (2022). When it comes to school culture, words aren't enough. ASCD. <https://www.ascd.org/el/articles/when-it-comes-to-school-culture-words-arent-enough>

Harvard Division of Continuing Education. (2025, November). Why culture matters. Harvard Division of Continuing Education Blog. <https://professional.dce.harvard.edu/blog/why-workplace-culture-matters/#What-is-Positive-Workplace-Culture>



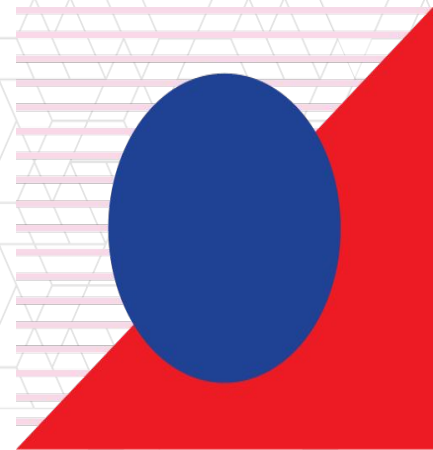
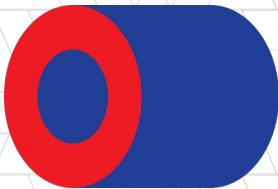
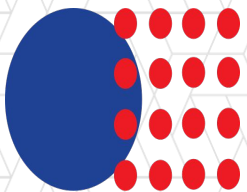
# From Surviving to Thriving: Building a Culture of Celebration and Success

**William McKinley Elementary**

**Dr. Rasheeda Green**

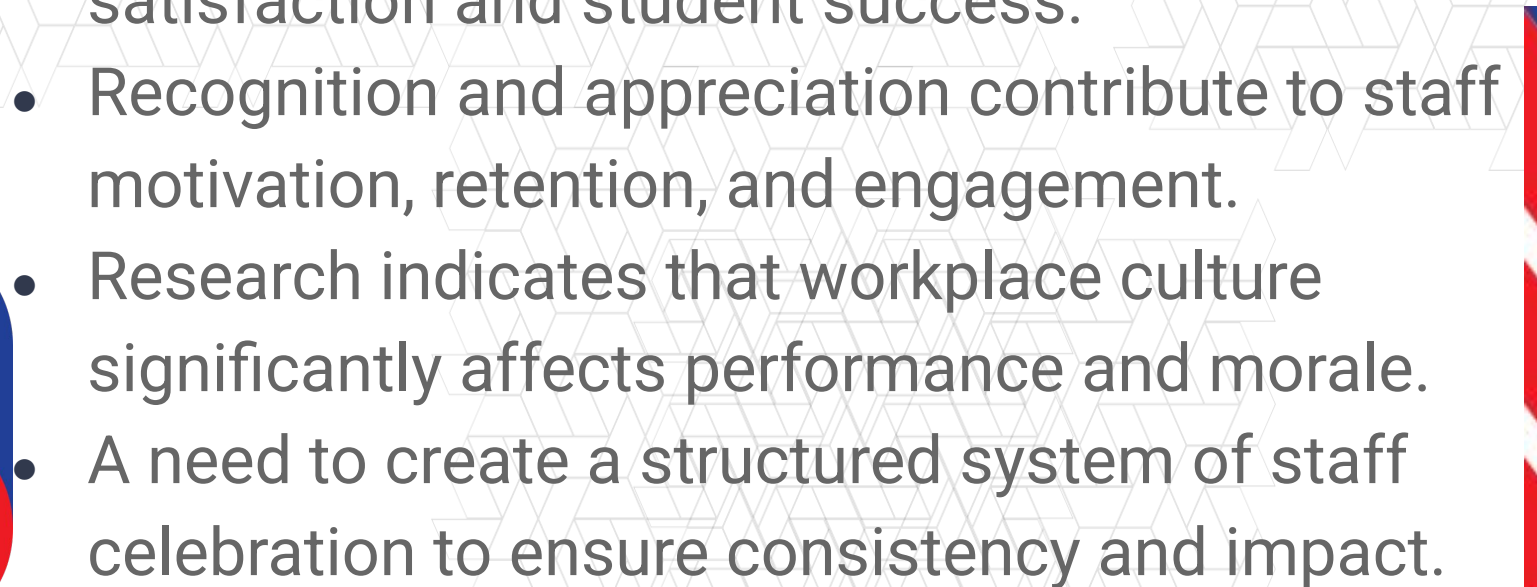
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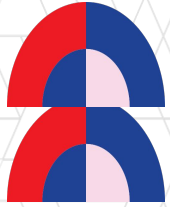
Victoria Aldridge and Rebecca Smith.



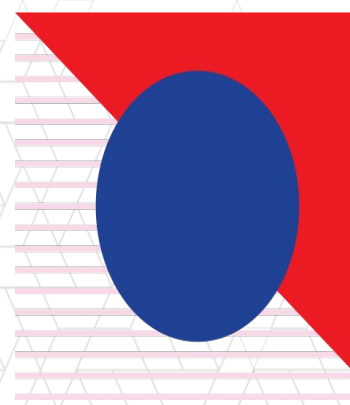


# Background Leading to this Inquiry

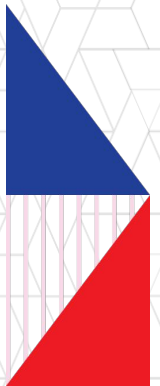
- A positive school culture leads to increased staff satisfaction and student success.
  - Recognition and appreciation contribute to staff motivation, retention, and engagement.
  - Research indicates that workplace culture significantly affects performance and morale.
  - A need to create a structured system of staff celebration to ensure consistency and impact.
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## Purpose of This Inquiry



- To explore how celebrating staff through structured recognition improves school culture.
- To assess the impact of intentional staff recognition on morale, collaboration, and retention.
- To develop a sustainable system for acknowledging staff contributions.

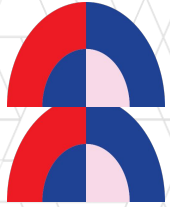




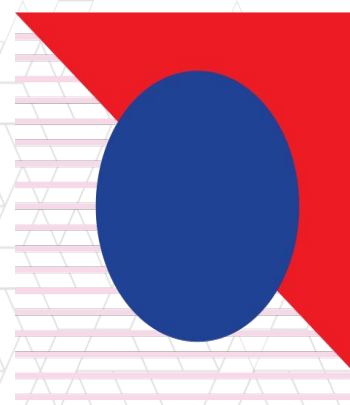
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## Our Wondering

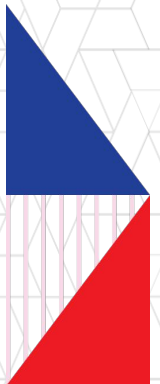
- How does regular staff recognition impact school culture and staff morale?
- How can we track the effectiveness of a structured staff recognition system?



# Our Actions





- Implemented Staff Recognition Initiatives:
  - a. Daily Staff Shout Outs via Building Announcements
  - b. Weekly staff shout-outs in school reminders.
  - c. Special luncheons/ hallway walks celebrating milestones and achievements.
  - d. Calendarized acknowledgments (e.g., birthdays, work anniversaries, National Appreciation Days).
  - e. Staff culture events to foster collaboration and appreciation.
- Collected Data:
  - a. Tracking shout-out frequency and participation.
  - b. Conducted staff surveys on morale and satisfaction.

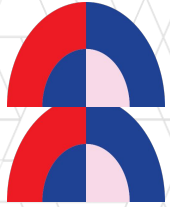




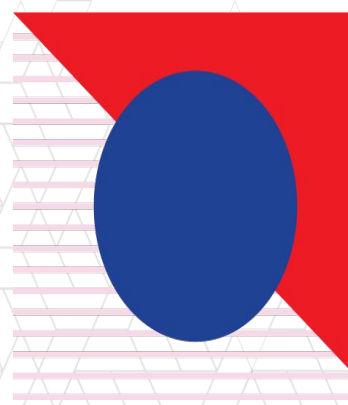


# Data Collection

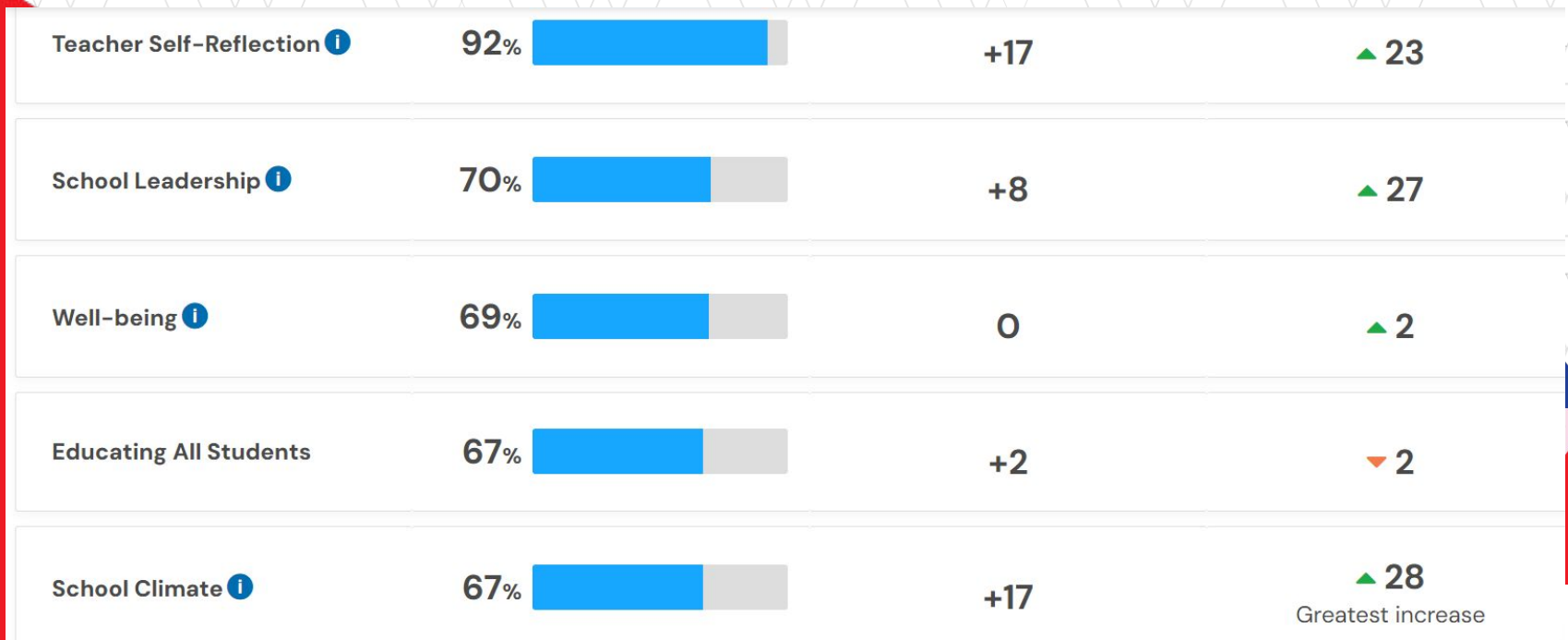
- Tracking shout-out frequency and participation.
  - Conducted staff surveys on morale and satisfaction.
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## Our Data



- Staff members were given a Staff Survey in Fall 2024 and January 2025 (Panorama).
- **Results:**





# Our Data



- A tracking system was developed to monitor shout outs, the number of shout outs given per month, and trends in staff participation

	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
# of shout outs	46	95	97	36	37	72	106	65







# Our Data



- Admin and School Culture Committee hosted special luncheons/ hallway walks celebrating milestones and achievements.



Rally to support a staff member battling cancer.



Grad walk to celebrate a staff member who graduated with 2 Masters Degrees.



Bellringer walk to celebrate the last cancer treatment of a staff member.

# Our Data

- Admin and School Culture Committee calendarized celebrations to recognize staff and improve school culture and climate.







# Our Discoveries

**Staff members reported feeling more valued and appreciated.**

- ❑ **We saw a increase in Staff Surveys (Panorama) by 24% (greatest increase)**

**Increased participation in shout-outs over time.**

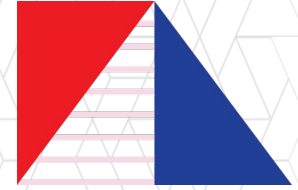
- ❑ **Through tracking shout-outs per month, we noticed increased participation over time with a decrease in the months of November and December**



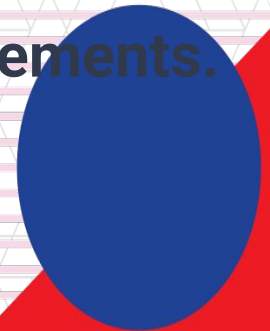
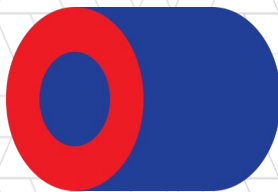
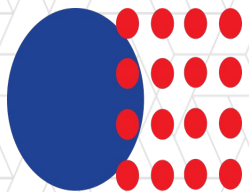
**Positive correlation between recognition initiatives and reported job satisfaction, staff engagement and retention.**

- ❑ **95% of staff have shared their intent to return to MCK (as reported in our yearly Intent to Return Survey)**
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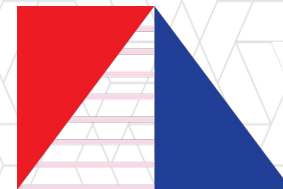
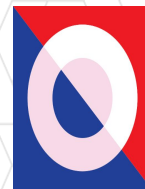
# Where We Are Heading Next



- **Refine and expand recognition initiatives based on staff feedback.**
- **Increase leadership participation in staff recognition.**
- **Re-Introduce peer-nominated awards for outstanding contributions.**
- **Monitor long-term impact on staff retention and student outcomes.**
- **Continue data collection to inform further improvements.**



# Bibliography



Harvard Division of Continuing Education. (2025, November). *Why culture matters*. Harvard Division of Continuing Education Blog.

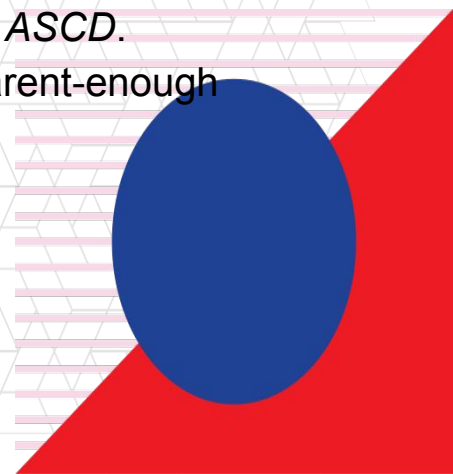
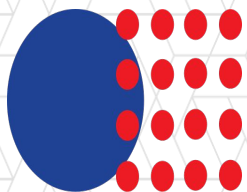
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