

School Culture Survey

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 & Clark
April 2016

Our Local School



Elementary

Grades K-5

Ohio's third largest urban public district

Purpose of Project

To determine the culture within our school and how it affects the school's climate. We also want to see how the culture and climate affect student learning outcomes. We will present strengths and challenges within the school in regards to culture and climate. Then create a 3-year action plan using research-based solutions.

Culture of U.S. Education System

1. Commodification of education; education is a “commodity” which can be bought and sold, and someone can possess more or less than someone else (Fenwick, 2014)..
2. Over the past 30 years, education has fallen under the influence of neoliberalism, or the neoliberal agenda, in which privilege of those in power is perpetuated under a veil of efficiency, which limits equitable access to social services and social justice reform (Fenwick, 2014).
3. Standardization through managerialism which turns education and teaching into a packaged commodity instead of a mindset. This beliefs deconstructs education into constituent parts that are over-analyzed and begin to lose their innate meaning (Fenwick, 2014).

Dialogue with School Community Members

Team composed of 6 team members, including:

2 Students

2 Teachers

2 Specialists

School Culture Discussion with School Leader

How do we understand learning? Learning is the process of gaining knowledge or skills.

How are problems identified within the school community? Problems can be addressed through the PTA or the BLT within our building.

What role do personal experiences play in developing school policy? I think they play a role because the people who are involved in making school policy can not just ignore their own schema or background when it comes to schooling.

How do students feel about their work in this school? Students are often proud when they do good work. We offer a lot of opportunities for positive praise and acknowledgement.

School Culture Discussion with School Leader

To what extent does policy influence behavior? Policies can have a positive or negative influence on behavior. We hope that they have a positive influence on behavior and learning.

Who are the key actors in making school policy? Administrators and board members.

How to families describe the school? Small, an-everyone-knows-everyone type of school that values learning.

To what extent are families considered partners, or adversaries, in education? Parents are able to voice opinions and concerns through the PTA but other than that they may not feel like they are partners.

School Culture Discussion with School Leader

To what extent are teachers involved in decision-making? Teachers are able to be a part of many building level decisions through the BLT and voting.

To what extent do students feel their teachers and principal care about them? I think that most students do feel that the teachers and administrators care about them.

Assessment of School Culture with Community

Assessment tool utilized: Paper survey provided to team; responses typed to maintain anonymity of respondents.

School Community groups assessed: 2 Community Members (Students), 2 Teachers, 2 Specialists

These groups were used because they all bring different insights and views in regard to education.

Questions Asked of Community Members

How do you understand learning?

How do students feel about their work in school?

To what extent do students feel safe in school?

To what extent do students feel as though their teachers understand how they learn best?

To what extent do students feel their teachers care about them?

To what extent do students feel their principal cares about them?

Questions Asked of Community Members

How comfortable do families feel about understanding what their children are learning in school?

To what extent are students marginalized?

How do students/families describe school?

Who listens to students/families?

To what extent are families considered partners or adversaries in education?

Follow-Up Questions Asked to Community Members

1. Do you feel that structured procedures/programs such as PTA and BLT get in the way of authentic connections with community members (parents, teachers)?
2. In your opinion, what factors contribute to students feeling cared about?
3. In your opinion, what is holding back the parents from feeling connected to their child's learning?

Interviewing School Community Members

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Interviewing School Community Members

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

School Culture Strengths

1. All of the surveys stated that students do feel safe in school.
2. Majority of the surveys said that students do feel that their teachers care about them.
3. Majority of the surveys said that students do feel that their teachers understand how they learn best.
4. All of the surveys said that students do feel that the {interim} principal cares about them.

School Culture Challenges

1. Majority of the surveys stated that the students are marginalized.
2. Majority of the surveys said that families are not comfortable with understanding what their child is learning in school.

School Culture Challenge: Solutions and Action Plan

Problem: Students are marginalized.

Solution: Develop stronger relationships with students (peer-to-peer, teacher-to-student) while promoting each child's diverse talents (Doren, Murray & Gau, 2014; Pazey, Heilig, Cole & Sumbera, 2014).

Year 1: At the beginning of each school year, require teachers to issue an "I'm Really Good At..." survey to students to discover the student's own perceptions of their talents (Peers, 2011).

Year 2: Encourage teachers to permit varied evidence to support learning outcomes based upon special talents of students as reported in surveys (Peers, 2011).

Year 3: Host an academic and co-curricular exhibit open to the community to showcase projects created by students as evidence to support learning outcomes.

School Culture Challenge: Solutions and Action Plan

Problem: Families are not comfortable with understanding what their child is learning in school.

Solution: In conjunction with community, develop responsive programs using a dialogical process to increase family participation while keeping parental involvement at current high levels (Daniel, 2011).

Year 1: Send out survey to all parents using two methods (paper/pencil and online survey link) to uncover barriers to participation (Brandon & Brown, 2009). Host an informal free breakfast for family to attend and share their personal barriers to participation (Brandon & Brown, 2009).

Year 2: Send out survey to all parents using two methods (paper/pencil and online survey link) to uncover their preferred type of family participation (Brandon & Brown, 2009). Host an informal free breakfast for family to attend and share their ideas for participation (Brandon & Brown, 2009).

Year 3: Develop and host one or two (depending on complexity) family participation events with consideration given to break one barrier to participation (i.e. provide child care, create welcoming atmosphere, send home information in multiple formats).

Focus of Family Participation Survey Items

Brandon (2007) Nine Barriers to Participation:

1. Cultural/linguistic diversity
2. Economics
3. Family composition
4. Parent education level
5. School-home communication
6. Parent-teacher interaction
7. School-parent interaction
8. Success of child
9. Personal constraints

Epstein (1995) Six Types of Parental Involvement:

1. Parenting
2. Communicating
3. Volunteering
4. Learning at home
5. Decision-making
6. Collaboration with community

School Culture Presentation Plan & Rubrics

[Redacted text]

[Redacted text]

[Redacted text]

[Redacted text]

[Redacted text]

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Self-Reflection (Clark)

Due to difficulties getting [REDACTED] buy-in at my school, [REDACTED] I worked together to complete this project. As I am currently supervising the special education program in my school, I wanted to do this project through the lens of improving school culture for special education students and their families. Our research-based solutions focus on de-marginalizing special education students by cultivating their unique talents, breaking barriers for their families to participate in the educational process, developing meaningful relationships to prevent drop-out and eliminating hurdles to achievement. In doing this work, I have learned that all students will likely benefit from these activities, however, special education students and all marginalized students require these extra supports to make learning have more meaning and context within their lives. Logistically, I have further clarified that many school staff truly want to engage in these reflective practices to modify their teaching styles and promote social justice, however, all school staff are pushed their limits with time mandates in our under-performing schools. Additionally, within our local public school system, unions and the school board have dictated many of the policies that we operate under, which impedes our ability to creatively problem-solve in reaction to identified needs. Furthermore, my inquiries during this project have highlighted the crucial importance of thorough, quality training of teachers to ensure that our students and families have the opportunity to work with professionals that have strong experience in the communities in which they serve, skills to quickly build working relationships and resolve conflict with caregivers through communication and an understanding of the unique needs of children from marginalized populations. Some of the challenges in the present school, and in schools across the country, will require revised pre-service teacher training or in-service professional development to create common understanding among educators and families of “different” cultures in order to tune out the presently loud neo-liberal rhetoric of “it’s your fault” reliance on test scores as indicators of student worth and teacher value.

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