

Professional Development Plan

for Improving School Climate

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This proposal is addressed to the stakeholders any school district. It is a plan for a 3 day professional development component. It complies with the FDOE Professional Development Protocols and Formats. It was formulated using several accepted methods of curriculum and instructional design (Wiggins, McTigue, Ornstein, Hunkins). It was formulated using the Backward Design strategy. The content is based on numerous research studies (Gruenert, Hoy, Daugherty, Peske, etc.) and documents obtained from our district. This PDD component is for the staff of a school excluding the administration that will have a separate component. Research indicates that staff members are more willing to open up in times of discussion or sharing when administrative personnel are not present (Nelson, McCarthy).

Rationale

According to Webster's Dictionary of the English Language (1987), climate can be defined as, "the trend of opinions and attitudes pervading a community, nation or period." There is mounting evidence founded on numerous studies conducted by Balf, R., Dutro, E., & Kazemi, E. (2006); Barber, C., Homana, G. & Torney-Purta, J. (2006); Calvo, N., Marion, S. F, & Picus, Lawrence, O. (2005); Daugherty, R., Kelley, R. & Thornton, B. (2005) and others, that the "climate" of a school affects student and teacher achievement.

This curriculum is intended to work in concert with all of the stakeholders seeking to affect positive change in schools desiring to improve their climate. The curriculum will rely on proven instructional design techniques and will utilize the information and insights gained from many of the published research studies of the subject.

Big Ideas and Enduring Understanding:

- The participants will understand that the climate of their school has an effect on the achievement of everyone on the campus.

- The participants will understand that they can affect change for the better through a well planned and implemented set of activities, behaviors and strategies.

- A plan conceived by the stakeholders has greater meaning and impact than one mandated by outside forces.

Philosophical Foundation

A safe, nurturing environment or school climate is an essential element to teacher and student achievement.

Goals of Program

The goals of this program are to improve the climate or working school environment and in turn, heighten student and teacher achievement.

Specific Objectives

Within the duration of the component, participants will:

1. be able to identify the attributes of positive school climate
2. be able to identify the attributes of negative school climate
3. understand the impact of climate on student achievement
4. understand the impact of climate on teacher achievement and attrition rate
5. collaboratively create a list of positive climate characteristics of their school
6. collaboratively create a list of climate characteristics that would be desirable to them
7. work cooperatively to develop a plan to foster the desired climate characteristics as identified in goal #6
8. work cooperatively to develop a plan to monitor progress
9. implement the plan
10. review the evaluation of the plan
11. redesign the plan where needed
12. implement changes in the plan

Content of Curriculum

- Definitions of Climate
- Attributes of Climate
- Research on School Climate
- Benefits of Positive Climate
- Evaluating Your School's Climate
- Developing a Plan to Improve
Weaknesses and Build on Strengths
- Developing a Tool for Evaluation
- Implementing Plan
- Evaluating Program
- Re-design

Objectives or Expected Outcomes

- The participants will have a clear understanding of the attributes of a positive school climate.

- The participants will formulate and prepare a plan to improve and/or build upon the characteristics that currently exist at their school setting.
- The participants will successfully implement their plan using their measurement tool as an indicator of an improved climate.

Prerequisite Skills Required For This Course:

- Observation Skills
- Critical Thinking Skills
- Cooperative Group Working Skills
- Listening Skills
- Objectivity
- Problem Solving Skills

School Climate:

Building A Place We Want to Work

(3 full-day sessions)

The participants will include all staff members except administrative personnel. They will be given a separate professional development workshop.

Session #1

Goals to be met during Session #1: The participants will:

1. be able to identify the attributes of positive school climate
2. be able to identify the attributes of negative school climate
3. understand the impact of climate on student achievement
4. understand the impact of climate on teacher achievement and attrition rate
5. collaboratively create a list of positive climate characteristics of their school
6. collaboratively create a list of climate characteristics that are important to them

Component Introduction Video.

This video addresses the issues of school climate in a humorous way. I (host of the video) take a tour of school A and school Z. I start by going to the teachers lounge. School A has people sitting in a circle enjoying some tranquil music (harp music) with blissful looks on their faces. Then cut to school Z where the teachers are wailing, wrestling with sirens blasting.

Cut to the cafeteria of School A with quiet classical music. All of the kids are using great manners. Cut to school Z with cafeteria chaos (metal music playing). Cut to school A classrooms where there is quiet super attentive students, cut to school Z with students out of control and a teacher looking as if he/she is going to melt down.

The video host speaks. He says, “Does any of this look familiar?” He goes on to say, “The truth is actually somewhere in the middle.”

The questions we need to answer include:

- where does your school fall in this spectrum?

- where do you want it to fall in this spectrum? *and*
- how do you get your school where you want it to be?

The host cites some of the stats and research about:

- school climate
- the perception of teachers that they do not have a “voice” in decision-making, working conditions, teacher attrition, teacher effectiveness on student achievement, etc.

The host makes a case for the importance and benefits of a positive school climate.

Activity/discussion

Protocols for this discussion:

No making judgments or comments about the current condition of the school

No personal anecdotes or names of others used

No “venting” at this time

Each of the following attributes will be introduced individually with a brief discussion.

Teachers will be asked to expand on their meaning.

Attributes of a School With a Positive Climate or Work Environment

- Teachers are given support in matters of discipline.
- Teachers are given adequate training for their required tasks.
- Teachers perceive that they can influence school decisions.
- Teachers and administrators function as a team.
- Disciplinary procedures are implemented in a fair and consistent manner.
- Parents are involved in and support school discipline practices.

- The physical plant is clean and well maintained.
- An atmosphere of respect and trust exists.
- Social and cultural differences are respected.
- Students and teachers have a positive attitude toward school.
- Students and teachers are recognized for their accomplishments.
- Expectations are high, appropriate, and achievable.

Working in small groups, the teachers will be asked to write one example that would exemplify a positive sample of each characteristic of school climate that was on the list. (For the sake of time, we may jigsaw and divide the characteristics in to sets of 2 or 3 per small group).

After reconvening as a whole group, 2 or 3 examples of each characteristic will be shared with the group

Meeting goal #2 (identifying negative school attributes)

Working in small groups, the teachers will be asked to write one example that would exemplify a negative sample of each characteristic of school climate. (For the sake of time, we may jigsaw and divide the characteristics in to sets of 2 or 3 per small group).

After reconvening as a whole group 2-3 examples of each characteristic will be shared with the group.

Meeting goal #3 (understand the impact of climate on student achievement)

The following facts will be shared with the component participants.

Research conducted by Heck (2000) and Goddard et al. found links between climate and student achievement. "School climate may be one of the most important ingredients of a successful instructional program. Without a climate that creates a harmonious and well functioning school, a high degree of academic achievement is difficult, if not downright impossible to obtain" (Hoyle, J., English, F., & Steffy, B. (1985).

There is mounting evidence contained in research studies that a school's "climate" has a profound effect on student achievement (Caroline, H., Dallas, F., Horn, S., Strahan, D. & Ware, A., 2003).

Meeting goal #4 (understand the impact of climate on teacher achievement and attrition rate)

The following facts will be shared with the component participants.

School climate affects teacher attrition as well as teachers' performance which also directly affects student academic achievement (National Conference of State Legislatures, Izumi, L. T. & Williamson M. E. (2002), Economic Policy Institute, Haycock, K. & Peske, H. (2006).

30% to 50% of teachers entering the profession leave within the first 5 years, with a tendency for the "best and brightest" to be most likely to leave (Darling- Hammond, Nat. Conf. of State Legislatures).

According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, the WORKING ENVIRONMENT is the biggest factor in whether teachers stay in the profession.

Factors include:

- Administrative support
- Student behavior
- School atmosphere or climate

Protocols for the following part of the session:

In one sentence, state a positive characteristic of your school

No making judgments or comments about the current condition of the school

No personal anecdotes or names of others used

No “venting” at this time

Meeting goal #5 (collaboratively create a list of positive climate characteristics of their school)

As a whole group, create a list of the positive characteristics as named by the participants

Meeting goal #6 (collaboratively create a list of climate characteristics that are important to them)

As a whole group, create a list of characteristics that are important to them (can use examples from the previous list).

By a show of hands (voting only once) which of the desired characteristics would you (participants) determine as the most important characteristic? Vote for the 2nd most important? The 3rd most important? Note the top 3 desired characteristics.

Session #2

Goals to be met during session #2:

7. work cooperatively to develop a plan to foster the desired climate characteristics as identified in goal #6
8. work cooperatively to develop a plan to monitor progress

As a whole group:

- Review the top 3 climate characteristics that the teachers decided were important to them in session #1.
- Reconsider their priority order.
- Decide on precise wording.

In small groups (4-5 persons):

- Brainstorm behaviors, methods, activities, plans, etc., that will best bring the 3 climate characteristics to life on the campus.

Goal #7 (continued)

As a whole group:

- Each group will share with the whole group their ideas for bringing each of the 3 climate characteristics to life on the campus.

- The group will vote on which of the ideas should be included in the plan. Multiple ideas for each characteristic may be included.
- Formalize the list of 3 climate characteristics with the strategies, behaviors, plans or activities to accompany each characteristic.
- As a whole group, decide on a time table for implementing the plan.

Meeting goal #8

Present the following example to the whole group as a possible way to monitor the progress of the plan:

- Periodically (every 2 weeks for example), fill out a brief survey that seeks to gather the following data:

Scale of 1 to 5. 1 = strongly disagree 5 = strongly agree

1. Most staff members are making an effort to follow the plan. 1 2 3 4 5
2. The climate at our school is improving. 1 2 3 4 5
3. The components of the plan seem to be effective. 1 2 3 4 5

After 8 weeks, all of the surveys will be tabulated, quantified and presented to the grade-level representatives in a graphic form. The teachers' perceptions of the progress will be reviewed.

The same procedure will be followed for an additional 8 weeks. The surveys will be tabulated, quantified and presented to the entire faculty at a faculty meeting.

Meeting goal#8 (continued)

This example will be offered as a possibility for monitoring progress.

As small groups, the staff will brainstorm ideas for monitoring the progress of the plan.

The small group will share with the whole group the ideas they have for monitoring the progress of the plan. A list of ideas will be made. A vote will be taken to decide on one or more ways to monitor progress.

Meeting goal #9

The staff will implement the plan in the time frame designated. The agreed upon monitoring process will be followed.

Session #3

Goals to be met during Session #3:

10.review the evaluation of the plan

11.redesign the plan where needed

Meeting goal #10

Prior to session #3, the component facilitator will gather all of the evaluation data and organize it in to a presentation to be given to the staff during session #3.

The data will be presented, analyzed and discussed.

Meeting goal #11

As small groups, the staff will list any changes that should be made to better the plan's goals, actions or implementation.

The small groups will share their thoughts and ideas with the whole group. As a group, the ideas will be voted on and then documented.

The changes, if any will be reproduced and distributed to the staff as soon as possible after the conclusion of the meeting

Meeting goal #12

Implement changes in the plan