

Teachers Network Policy Institute

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Question

Will sharing professional articles and resources increase the quality of the school climate and teacher empowerment in a large urban high school?

Problem

It is challenging for educators to discuss issues of concern as they strive to pursue school reform. That need often goes unmet, particularly in large urban high schools. The only opportunity for teachers to meet regularly at my school is a bi-monthly faculty meeting that does not allow for teacher input. When educating a population comprised of diverse learners, the ability to work collaboratively is critically important.

Plan of Action

Using my experience with the Coalition of Essential Schools, critical friends groups, learning communities, and collaborative coaching, I initiated the creation of a learning community in my school. This involved scheduling professional discussions, to take place during lunchtime, centered on educational research articles. My goals were to help colleagues become better informed about the latest educational research, to improve communication amongst staff, and to form a learning community with a shared knowledge base, respect for one another, and a commitment to collaboration in the school.

Methodology

Copies of five articles on a variety of educational subjects were distributed to the whole faculty. Topics included school reform, student achievement, teacher evaluation, and teacher leadership. Bi-weekly lunchtime meetings were held in the faculty lounge, and a different article was discussed each week. The final meeting included discussions on the efficacy of our work together and on continuing the community into the next school year. The “Humanistic Climate Scale” was used to determine if a change in the school climate had taken place.

Results

Five meetings were held, with increasingly greater attendance. The response to the final meeting's discussion echoed resounding support for continuing our work together. The results of both surveys were overwhelmingly positive and those teachers who attended the sessions felt they were productive and empowering experiences. Since there were more positive responses in surveys than participants in the sessions, it was clear that the effects reached beyond the original group. As a result, staff and administrators will be officially engaged in collaborative strategic planning for next year.

Policy Implications

My research confirmed that as teachers, we work better when we work collaboratively. A sense of community brings shared vision to our mission of educating children. Collegiality, permission to engage in experimentation, and high goals and expectations led to improved staff morale and enhanced teacher leadership. Structured opportunities to participate in learning communities should be made available in all school settings to improve the work environment, strengthen professional capability, and foster a sense of empowerment.