



Ellington Public Schools

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To: Dr. Scott Nicol, Superintendent of Schools
From: Oliver Barton, Asst. Superintendent, Dr. Jonathan Swan, Consultant and Mr. Michael Nash, Co-Principal Ellington Middle School
Re: Transparent Culture of Feedback–Climate Survey Process
Date: March 25, 2022

Corresponding Agenda Item(s): Special Reports, item 1.: Transparent Culture of Feedback

Presentation Type: FULL Q & A FYI

1. Rationale

A strong culture of feedback provides a foundation for continuous improvement across the district. Input from students, parents, and staff, is critical to assess the experience of these stakeholders and to inform strategies to improve engagement and educational outcomes. Soliciting feedback should be done with transparency because transparency builds trust in the process and in the structures for district planning and decision-making.

2. Project for Assessing Culture of Feedback and Use of Climate Survey

After four years of work building a culture of feedback—designing climate surveys, annually collecting data, reflecting on results, and planning for improvements—the district decided to step back and engage an external consultant to assess the survey process and plan enhancements. Dr. Swan was engaged to objectively assess the survey implementation and solicit input to improve its value informing school teams’ planning. While overseeing a network of forty principals in Hartford he operationalized systems for transparency and building stakeholder engagement through surveys and responsive planning. He is currently the Director of Student Services for a network of schools in the greater Springfield area.

3. Findings of the Project

a. School and District Implementation of the Survey and Planning Process

- Administrators understand the purpose of the survey and use the survey to inform school improvement planning at the school and district level.
- There is variation in how schools engage stakeholders before and after the surveys.

- Data is shared with staff, but having survey data in late-spring does not afford time for staff to provide input for school improvement planning.
- Some data is shared with families.
- Data is not generally shared with students.

b. Recommendations of School Leaders for Improving the Survey Process

- District-wide administrative teams should debrief on district results and collaborate to interpret and plan related school improvement strategies.
- District responsibility for the survey process.
- “Think tank” approach to reflecting on survey results.
- Reconsider timing of the survey to align with planning and adjusting mid-year.
- District to provide more comprehensive guidance on how building leadership teams engage stakeholders, share and reflect on results, and communicate plans that result from the feedback.

c. Recommendations of School Leaders for Improving the Survey Content

- Admin. team to review the questions and adjust.
- Update questions related to current needs of students, staff, and families.
- Strengths-based approach—what are teachers, students, and staff proud of, what is working well.
- Ask multiple questions in the same area when possible to avoid over-focus on a specific issue and increase reliability of the data.
- Additional recommendations of specific topics for student, staff, and family input were also identified.

d. Key Take-aways

- Additional guidance on administering the climate survey, the process for analyzing survey data, and the process for engaging staff, students, and families in reviewing survey data to improve transparency and collaboration.
- Opportunities to collaborate with other school leaders in creating survey questions.
- Opportunities to collaborate with other school leaders around best practices related to administering the survey, analyzing survey data, engaging stakeholders, and action planning.
- Identify ways to code surveys to help monitor and increase participation rates for students.
- Revisit the timing of the survey.
- Consider separate surveys for certified and non-certified staff or ask staff roles to provide data on the specific perspectives of each group.

4. Actions taken and next steps:

- A protocol has been developed to guide schools in planning for the survey, engaging stakeholders, implementing the survey, and sharing results with stakeholder groups.

- The surveys were revised with school input and will be administered in November and April/May of each year (Draft of May 2022 questions are included in the board packet).
- The district website will list the student and parent questions.
- Survey questions and pertinent results as tracked in the SIP and DIP will be shared with the Board after each survey administration in December/January and May/June, and reported through the district website.

5. Additional Background and Context (from January 21 memo)

Background

- The district has sought to promote a culture of feedback by seeking stakeholder input on topics of concern and by setting up systems to reflect on the feedback, build on strengths that are articulated, and plan improvements to address areas of concern.
- A climate survey was developed and launched in 2018-19, soliciting feedback from students, parents, and staff on their experiences in our schools. Data was collected each year to inform improvement plans and strategies and targets were set for sustaining positive results and improving on key indicators.
- Simple protocols are being developed to seek on-going feedback on programs, activities, professional learning, and team meetings. During the Winter and Spring of the current school year we are completing a deeper review of the climate survey questions, results, and process to increase the impact on school and district improvement.

Purpose of the project

1. To assess the use of climate survey data and its impact on improvement planning.
2. To provide recommendations for improved surveys, improved reflection on results and integration into all levels of school and district planning.

Project Process

The consultant was engaged to provide an objective review of the climate survey process and guidance on adjusting the process to improve impact. The following tasks are the main components of the project:

- a. Review school survey questions and results.
- b. Interview building leaders on familiarity with the data and assess how the data is reviewed, shared, and used.
- c. Draft recommendations for next steps on surveying and use of findings in planning.
- d. Review recommendations with the Administrative Council (team of all district administrators) and adjust.
- e. Report to the Superintendent and the Board and receive Board input.
- f. Revise plans and recommendations to inform end of year survey content, communication with stakeholders, and structures to ensure sustained use of the data in planning and program improvement.

Consultant Bio

Jonathan Swan is a graduate of Lesley University's PhD in Educational Studies program. Jonathan was a high school and middle school teacher, and a middle school assistant principal and principal in western Massachusetts. As a principal, Jonathan led a design team of teachers, community members, and outside partners in the process of revisioning, planning and improving a district school. The work of the school's turnaround efforts were documented by the UMass Donahue Institute in An Evaluation of the Commonwealth Pilot Schools Initiative - Policy Brief: Key Findings Following Three Years of Study – September 2010. Jonathan worked as a central office administrator in Connecticut from 2010 to 2018 where he worked to redesign and improve the district's schools, managed a team of principal supervisors, and oversaw the professional development and coaching systems for 45 school principals. Jonathan is currently the Director of School Supports for Veritas Prep Schools in Springfield and Holyoke Massachusetts where he coaches and manages school principals and oversees special education and intervention programming. Guiding school leaders in improving the experience of parents and students in schools has been a focus of his work across multiple decades and district settings.