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Ways to change our school (summary)

The best way to change our schools is to improve school climate and culture.

When asked to describe the components of schooling, we often begin with physical building or start to describe the roles and responsibilities of the teachers and staff. But it is important to provide language to describe how the school impacts instruction and relationships in the building which inform the culture of the school.

Schools must create a positive climate and culture to improve learning opportunities for pupils. The benefits of positive school culture include highly engaged students and staff, improved attendance and increase in levels of pupils' achievements.

When improving school culture, we have to be clear about the values and traditions that are central to the school school community. If these are positive elements, then these elements should not be lost but included in the vision of the school. Long-term change should include policy opportunities, developing new and existing relationships and clearly identifying actionable next steps.

Here are some of our ideas of how to change and improve our schools which we, the partners in this project, discussed during our meetings:

1. Use school data to set a goal

Effective leadership practices are driven by data that informs policies and practices within the school. The more a leadership team knows about the pupils' needs and current performance, the better they can create structures and implement plans that build the desired school climate.

To plan for school culture change, leaders can analyze data on school attendance, discipline, academic performance and perception of the school community. This information can help determine areas where leadership could use different tactics to address students. School

leaders and teachers can use these data points to provide additional supports that could ensure high engagement for pupils and their families.

2. Engage teachers and administrators

Involving teachers is critical for school culture change. Teachers have to input school decisions more actively. This is a way for teachers to increase their leadership capacity as well as inform their instruction. They are innovative in their practices and invigorate excitement among the pupils. The relationship between teacher and administrator is important for communicating within the school.

3. Involve parents

Parents are essential for the learning process. Recognizing that not every pupil will have a traditional parent or family structure, it is important to welcome guardians and other pupil advocates to be a valued part of the school community. Leadership can leverage parental ideas that could help inform school culture. Parental involvement speaks volumes about the relationship between the school and the community. It is an inclusive way to show pupils how much they are valued.

4. Involve pupils

Pupils are very important stakeholders in the school community. Their voice is critical to the decisions and plans of the school. There are a number of ways to involve pupils in shaping the school culture. Pupils have ideas about community norms, incentives for positive behaviours, expectations about their learning and ways to advance their their learning experiences. Leadership teams must be willing to listen and actively respond to the ideas and concerns that pupils contribute. Not only is this a way to to build relationships, but allows for students to have agency over their learning.

5. Clear expectations

Leadership should identify clear expectations about the school environment. Being able to articulate policies and procedures to ensure high quality learning is important in developing a positive culture. Expectations should be clear for students and staff. This holds each person responsible for making progress and learning possible. Policies, instruction and additional expectations are important for pupils and their families. These clear expectations keep everyone aligned to the overall mission and vision of the school.

