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McJaisonbettinneywiczc Consulting Company: The Action Plan on Paper

You don't need to be an award-winning particle physicist to know Albert Einstein's famous equation $E = mc^2$. It's likely the most well known equation in the world. Energy equals mass times the speed of light, squared. Everyone can recite it from memory, but at the McJaisonbettinneywiczc Consulting Company, we're about to give " mc^2 " a whole new meaning. Soon, faster than the *speed of light* in fact, your staff will feel the positive "energy" that our consultants will bring as we help you to transform the way that your staff is developed professionally. That's right! We're about to drop the PD "bomb"!

At MC2, we like to begin with the end in mind. After all, according to the work of Wiggins and McTighe (as cited in Graff 2011), "Backwards design" frameworks have always helped teachers to plan for what can be daunting curriculum planning and instruction. Similarly, we use the following essential questions to guide our course of action while our firm is helping you: How can we improve student achievement for all? We believe that the answer lies in the four pillars of our company's approach. First, we'll help you to properly structure the implementation of a teacher-mentoring program. Second, we'll help your middle management administrators, such as building principals and assistant principals understand the best way to use your currently existing framework for teacher evaluation. And finally, we'll make it clear how to get started in the right direction for beginning your building and district-wide professional development plans. If you follow the research of Bolman and Deal, you'll know that they fully support the notion that investing in people offers greater returns than investing in machinery or other infrastructure. One sure route to long-term student success is investing in your employees and responding to their needs (Bolman & Deal 2013), and a defined four-prong approach to tackling this issue should be

priority number one. New teachers and at-risk teachers are two groups of staff who will most fully benefit from our approach, but even your rock-star veterans will have a key role to play in the 2.0 version of your district. The best is yet to come!

Teacher Mentoring

According to Rick DuFour, author of *Professional Learning Communities at Work*, the focus of traditional schools is teaching; the focus of professional learning communities is student learning. He states, “The difference is much more than semantics. It represents a fundamental shift in the teacher-student relationship.” (DuFour 1998). Getting teachers to shift their focus from the question of “how am I doing?” to “how are my students doing?” takes an enormous amount of time and experience, and instituting a solid teacher mentoring program can be one of the most influential steps in getting teachers to make this shift in thinking. Having someone in whom you can trust, and regularly reflect on your own teaching practices with is essential to achieving this outcome. By setting mentoring as a priority in your school district, mentor teachers can play an important role in modeling the skills a new teacher may need to survive and thrive in the profession. Three components would serve as the underlying structure to any and all mentoring activities. First, collaboration in planning would be essential. Second, understanding student growth and learning would be an ongoing continual process, and finally, reflection on one’s own teaching craft would round out the third objective.

When looking at any issue with the goal in mind to improve, Bolman and Deal’s human resources “frame” must be considered. You need to know that basic Human Resource practices include building and implementing an HR strategy, hiring the right people, keep them once they're hired, and most importantly investing in them. By establishing a mentoring program with well-thought out goals and objectives, you will be empowering them, and promoting diversity of thinking through collaboration. (Bolman & Deal 2013) According to Bolman and Deal, the well

being of any company can be traced back to the well being of its employees, and an ongoing, consistent mentoring program would codify this for all time.

Teacher Evaluation

According to Wiggins and McTighe, teachers need “feedback at various phases...from peers, from expert reviewers...about what is and isn’t working” (Wiggins and McTighe 2005). In our mind, however, the systematic evaluation of teachers is a double-edged sword: a fine line like a dagger’s edge on which many administrators trample, rather than treading carefully. On the one hand, evaluations can lead to wonderful opportunities for teacher growth. Some may see the feedback from administrators as a challenge to rise to even higher heights and use the opportunity as a multiplier: taking their competency and sharing it with others, creating a wonderful, magical domino effect where all those around them are inspired to achieve greater too. On the other hand, administrators who treat teacher evaluations as a chance to play “gotcha”, pointing out every mistake that was made, and evaluations are viewed as stressful and intimidating, rarely leading to useful growth.

At MC2, we will help by giving useful information and support, encourage teacher participation and redesign work if needed of the evaluation tools and rubrics currently being used by your district. The training we can give evaluating administrators will be explicit and consistent, offering the clearest picture possible of what good teaching looks like, and how to foster growth in the ensuing conversations after evaluations. We believe that it’s important to hold principals and assistant principals accountable for learning how to objectively and consistently evaluate teachers with wide varieties of experience and subject area expertise.

Building Professional Development

To us at MC2, we believe that targeted, almost surgical, professional development for staff is another essential ingredient to the healthy growth of a district. According to Bolman and Deal,

effective strategies for running an organization include high involvement, high performance, and high commitment managerial practices. This means in-house training. We feel that it is essential to cultivate teacher leaders who are immensely talented teachers who can then also take on the responsibility of sharing their wisdom with others. When you send staff to off-site day-long seminars, or bring in a high-powered trainer for an intensive workshop, you often end up with an overload of information, or that which teachers will view as tasks that lead to nowhere. Teachers can take in and retain focused concepts especially well when it comes from a trusted colleague with the “street cred” to back up the message they’re sharing. PLC’s should be in charge of looking at data and asking the question, “where are the gaps, and how do we close them?” After that, teacher leaders can be called upon to share what’s working for them. This can lead to other opportunities for job-embedded growth.

District Professional Development

This heads us in a similar direction – towards district wide professional development. One of the first things necessary to creating sustainable leadership is having a “commitment [from] the entire school community to a ... *long-term* vision” (Blankstein 2013). The second step is dividing up the leadership. Running a district, or a school, is “too big [of a job] to do alone” (Blankstein 2013). This process of egalitarianism means taking formal steps to make the workplace a democratic place where employees share in the decision making process. According to Bolman and Deal, key decisions should still be made by managers, but input from others is sought after and listened to. At the district level, this would mean taking the district’s mission, vision, values, and goals (re-inspected and re-committed to by the end of our first year), and applying these larger initiatives to the individual buildings, and getting buy-in from all key stakeholders. The democratic piece would be key in getting commitment from all.

Conclusions

To us, “HR” stands for more than just *human resources*. It stands for *human relations*, and that’s how we will treat you and your staff over the course of the next four years. We see you as human beings, with values that match our own. We’re all about improving student growth through strengthening the staff on their terms. Together, we can help to align our mission with yours, and create a shared vision for professional development that will change the way business is done in your district. We will help you cultivate a more productive, innovative workforce staffed with people who are willing to go out of their way to get the job done. When individuals find satisfaction and meaning in the work they do, organizations profit from the effective use of the employees' talents and energy (Bolman & Deal 2013). For schools, this idea should be valued as highly as any other! When teachers are not treated like a burden, to be cheated out of pensions and health care benefits and even duty-free lunches, it is sure to create a more positive culture. At MC2, we help you to treat employees as humans, rather than resources. We will help you establish a trustworthy mentoring system, train administrators on how to recognize and celebrate teaching strategies that work, develop teacher leaders who can implement effective and worthwhile building professional development, and align building goals with district initiatives so that all stakeholders are invested and committed, and trained accordingly. When said "high-involvement strategies" are implemented, higher success for all can be achieved! Thank you for considering the MC2. As Albert Einstein said, “We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them.” It’s going to take some novel ideas and original thinking, and we’ll be there for you!

References

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