Harbors of Hope

The Planning for School and Student Success Process

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Together, the staff committed to the creation of a warm, loving atmosphere where students could take pride in their culture while accepting responsibility for their behavior and learning. The staff’s stated quest was to provide a safe and orderly environment and to improve the academic performance of their students, most of whom lived in poverty. Sacred Heart began its journey to becoming a Harbor of Hope by developing a school Responsibility Plan. The plan was founded on the staff’s commitment to treating every student with dignity and respect while working to establish a climate of safety and order. At the same time, the staff began to focus on ways of acknowledging positive efforts in order to reinforce positive choices.

**Actions Leading to Success**


1. Treat every student with dignity and respect:
   - Use in-school suspensions instead of out-of-school suspensions.
   - Establish a quiet room for reflecting and teaching.

2. Acknowledge positive efforts:
   - Implement a “caught being a positive role model” system.
   - Set weekly classroom goals.
   - Create attendance, attitude, and academic (AAA) awards.

**Thinking Outside of the Box**

As the Sacred Heart Staff built their collaborative culture, they found themselves thinking creatively about issues they
Monticello High School:  
A Harbor of Hope in Virginia

Both Sacred Heart and Lawrence Heights were established schools where the staff, with the leadership of the principal, determined there was a need to improve. The story of Monticello High School (MHS), in Albemarle County, Virginia, is somewhat different.

Monticello opened in 1998 with 914 students from grades 9 through 12 and 95 professional staff. The school was built to relieve overcrowding in the two existing high schools, which were located in very affluent areas. Monticello was built in the district of the county with the lowest socioeconomic profile, where the student body is characterized by high eligibility for subsidized lunch, an unusually high incidence of students with exceptional needs, and a diverse ethnic population. With its opening, catchment areas in the county were revised so that the student body would be drawn from each of the two previously existing high schools as well as from the area immediately surrounding the school. As a new school, Monticello faced challenges before it ever opened.

Irving Jones was the first principal of Monticello High School. Dilemmas for him came early, when many parents from the two existing high schools resisted sending their children to MHS. Monticello was an unknown entity and they feared that the demographics of the new school would translate into an inferior education for their children. When the Virginia Standards of Learning results came in after the first year of the school’s operation, their fears seemed justified.
Chapter 2

Harbors of Hope: What We Have Learned

Stephen Covey (1989) makes the point that highly effective people have strong character combined with high levels of competence. We believe that schools that are effective also have strong character combined with high levels of competence. People and schools with character are principle-centered. They value qualities such as fairness, integrity, and honesty. Human dignity and the principles of potential, growth, and patience underpin all interactions with students, staff, or parents. “Principles are not practices,” writes Covey. “They are deep, fundamental truths that have universal application” (p. 35). When principles become part of a school’s culture, they provide a foundation for the development of practices that will nurture and encourage all members of the school community.

Principle-centered educators are passionate about what they do. Michael Fullan (2001a) identifies moral purpose as essential to changing school cultures, explaining that “it is about both ends and means. In education, an important end is to make a difference in the lives of students. But the means of getting to
they made remarkable strides. In 3 years the overall performance of ninth-grade students had increased by 15% and the performance of the African-American student population had increased by 20%. They began by studying information on the current situation and used it to establish focused goals and implement new structures and systems for enhancing student achievement. They closed the gender and race performance gaps through gathering and tracking critical evidence as they employed high-yield strategies in their work with students. All of their efforts were responsive to their stated values.

**Summary**

Study is crucial to the planning process. Beginning with a set of core values, a school can tailor its data-gathering to meet its needs. “Measuring what matters” involves defining what matters through the identification of shared values and then the creation or selection of assessment tools that will provide critical evidence that can be used in planning to improve. Reflection on the critical evidence gathered will inform subsequent actions to be taken on the journey toward becoming a Harbor of Hope.
**Observation:** This information is quite general and does not hold much promise for grade or student specific planning. It could, however, generate a discussion about whether overall achievement at the 58th percentile is considered adequate for the school.

**Level 2—Overall School Results Disaggregated by Gender**

On the district test of reading administered during May, the average performance level for the school by gender was 66% for girls and 50% for boys.

**Observation:** These numbers indicate a large discrepancy in general achievement levels between girls and boys. This is important information.

**Level 3—Disaggregation by Grade**

The scores are reported by average percentile ranking.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scores</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Observation:** This information indicates that, on the whole, students begin to encounter more difficulty in the third grade. This critical evidence could prompt staff to explore the causes and look for appropriate interventions.

**Level 4—Disaggregation by Grade and Gender**

The scores are reported by average percentile ranking.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grade Average</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Highly effective schools set both character and competence goals. Character goals are usually school-wide and have an impact on the culture of the school. Competence goals tend to be academic and are student- or discipline-specific. Both character and competence goals focus on learning and improved student outcomes. What makes them distinct from each other is their focus.

Much of the current writing about school improvement centers on what we call the competence goals. These goals tend to have a narrow focus with an emphasis on measuring improvement using numbers and percentages. Our concern is that when schools focus only on academic achievement, the heart and passion that reside in school-wide character goals will go untapped. School-wide goals pertain to things such as student leadership, ritual and celebration, teamwork, social responsibility, the arts, health and fitness, parent involvement, multiculturalism, and anti-bullying. These are the areas that we consider the “umbrella curriculum,” because of their protective reach. We believe that skill and knowledge in these areas are as important to the development of the whole child as are the skills of literacy and numeracy. They involve life-skills learning and have a notable impact on the development of each student as well as on the character of the school. Goals for learning in these areas enhance school culture by providing opportunities for all students to excel. They also assist in creating the sense of community needed by students if they are to experience feelings of belonging and support as they learn and develop as individuals. School-wide character goals combine with academic, discipline-specific competence goals to create Harbors of Hope. The combination is powerful.
A culture of student recognition is illustrated through such things as displays of student work, celebration assemblies, honor rolls, student-of-the-week projects, and lunch with the principal. Of course, the nature of student recognition practices must change to remain age-appropriate as students progress through school. The importance of student recognition, however, never goes away.

8. Is the philosophy behind our discipline policy understood by all? Rather than using the term “discipline policy,” we prefer to think in terms of a “code of conduct” which outlines behavioral guidelines and responsibilities for all members of the community: students, staff, and parents. Ideally, the philosophy informing a code of conduct would see “discipline” as a learning opportunity for students. In such an approach, parents and teachers are seen as models, mentors, and coaches for students. The importance of their partnership in support of students is stated in a code of conduct which clearly articulates lines of communication and processes for responding to behavioral issues. The important questions about a code of conduct are:

- Is it respectful to all people?
- Is the philosophy clearly stated?
- Are the “bottom lines” pertaining to extreme behavior identified and communicated?

Clear and thoughtful practices relating to behavior management, discipline, and personal conduct have a major impact on the culture of a school. They should not be punitive or founded in a hierarchy of power; instead, they should set the stage for student learning and respectful relationships in a climate that is safe for all.