Indicator Explanation

DOMAIN	EFFECTIVE PRACTICE	INDICATOR
Culture	Build a strong community intensely focused on student learning	4A.2 The school promotes, recognizes, and celebrates academic achievement and personal competencies in school rituals and routines, such as morning announcements, awards assemblies, hallway and classroom wall displays, and student competitions.

A principal's competency in providing a positive school culture is important to a variety of student and teacher outcomes, including student attendance, discipline and teacher retention (Hargreaves, 2012; Johnson et al., 2012). For example, collaborative and positive school cultures where teachers are valued and their impact celebrated, both at the individual and team level, can improve teacher retention in high-needs schools (Simon & Johnson, 2015). While effective principals give frequent feedback on instructional effectiveness, they must also recognize and reward accomplishments that contribute to the school's accomplishments and progress towards its mission and goals (Dös & Savas, 2015). These celebrations of individuals, teams, and the school as a whole can contribute to individual teachers' professional efficacy and to the collective efficacy and academic optimism of the staff as a whole, which have been shown to benefit instruc- tional innovation, student learning and achievement (Beard et al., 2010; Ross & Gray, 2006; Schwabsky et al., 2020). Celebrations should be focused primarily on student learning outcomes, to build towards the "academic press," or the extent to which the school is driven by the pursuit for academic excellence and high but achievable goals for all students (Hoy et al., 2006).

According to the School Superintendents Association, principals should build cultures of collaboration within schools in part by celebrating the work of others:

> Find ways to publicize your ongoing collaborative work, giving credit to those who have taken on new roles. As projects draw to a close, focus on the ways collaborative work has enhanced the school and the neighborhood. Use your celebrations to recruit new partners and fortify future collabora- tion. In this way, collaboration becomes rooted in the school's culture. (Kruse, n.d.)

Other strategies include the principal highlighting in the weekly bulletin or email the best instruction- al strategies observed, providing opportunities during staff meetings for teachers to view a brief video of a colleague successfully using a specific instructional strategy, and regular encouragement of teachers to share success stories with one another (National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2005). Princi- pals should also ask themselves, "What am I doing as a school leader to build a culture of appreciation and recognition for my staff?" (Kinney, 2009). Michael Fullan (2008) notes that the first rule is to "love your employees," and showing appreciation is a good place to start. Principals should be asking themselves such questions as: How well do I know my staff? Do I regularly recognize them for their accomplishments? Do I recognize their efforts to go above and beyond what is expected in their work with students? There are many ways to express appreciation, but the important thing is to remember to do it, and do it frequently (Kinney, 2009).

Principal Positivity and Establishing a Positive School Culture

Principal celebrations of success are part of a more general principal competency of establishing a positive school culture. Parsons and Beauchamp (2012) studied principals at highly effective elementary schools, and found that one key leadership theme that emerged was that the principal is positive:

> Positive meant having fun, celebrating, having a sense of humor, and working with enthusiasm…Principals were confident leaders who supported the emotional needs of teachers and who balanced academic with affective learning. When teachers talk about "positive" as a concept, they also focused on the kinds of positive, specific feedback they were given by their principals. Teachers noted that they started staff meetings with "bouquets" (kudos) and that their principals acknowledge them and celebrated their successes. (p. 706)

Research shows that members of a school community (teachers, students, parents, staff and administrators) are more likely to experience happiness and success when they believe they work within a supportive and high-performing collaborative culture (Thapa et al., 2013). This belief starts at the top with school leaders and teaching staff. The power of positivity in schools, and the principal's role in creating this positivity, is further confirmed with recent research examining the impact of the Optimism Project which took place in rural Florida schools (Johnson et al., 2019). University researchers "coached a cadre of principals and teachers to increase optimism and improve collaborative culture, with the goal of improving teacher retention and ultimately student achievement" (p. 185). The optimism coaching focused on drawing attention to the positive instructional practices and school outcomes, and offered support and guidance for implementation of best practices for "positive leadership." Successful strategies used in the project included:

> *Weekly Success Stories* documented teacher and school leader successes and achievements:
> Prompted by a weekly calendar invitation, educators sent artifacts and testimonials that showcased the impact they had on their school community: events with community stakeholders, classroom gains and celebrations, and new initiatives. Highlights were shared within the administration and grade-level teams during their weekly meetings. (p. 186)

While initially many educators were reticent as they believed they would be perceived as bragging, when reminded that they were learning from each other with the shared goal of student success, fears were cast aside and ideas began to flow. Some teachers also asked students to share artifacts and evidence of the success they had achieved, a peer they had assisted, or challenges they have conquered.

The Parking Lot Rule, where all staff members were asked each school day to think about a student who they had positively impacted that day before they leave school grounds:

> This activity reminds educators that words and actions that serve to encourage, comfort, motivate, and celebrate students can be transformational. Furthermore, rather than thinking about their to-do list or what could have gone better that day, staff members were prompted to remind themselves daily of their profound potential for impact. (p. 187)

The Classroom Success Exit Ticket showed how positivity filtered down to classroom learning environments. At the end of each day, every student wrote on a sticky note their responses to prompts such as "What was the best part of your day?" "What amazing thing did you learn today?" Exit tickets informed teachers about what activities or experiences students found most rewarding, and simultaneously encouraging student celebration of successes and growth.

Other strategies also included the 5 to 1 Ratio in which teachers created bulletin boards to note positive student successes and behaviors with sticky notes, and negative actions (e.g., disciplining a student). Each week boards were examined to determine whether they were maintaining a ratio of five times as many positive as negative opportunities to celebrate pos-

itive things occurring in the school. Our Teacher Heroes gave students receiving awards (e.g., "Student of the Month") an opportunity to recognize a teacher who had contributed to their success. Results from this study on the Optimism Project included improvement in school culture, teacher and student attendance, and disciplinary referrals at project schools in comparison to similar schools in the district and statewide. The study authors note that strategies incur little to no cost, and are easily replicable in other school settings.

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