Reviving the Professional Culture

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Grand Canyon University: EAD 513

August 28, 2019

Maynard High School is a growing high school with 1,100 students enrolled in grades 9-11. The youth of the school (two years old) suggests that there are no traditions set for the school. A school this age means that anything can happen to assist students and administrators with setting and achieving an optimal school culture. A principal and three assistant principals ran the school; however, shortly before I was assigned to this school, one of the assistant principals quit the school to “pursue other endeavors in education.” That was proven not to be true. The assistant principal left Maynard because of increased tension between him and the “now” outgoing principal of Maynard, Dr. Leslie Tazwell-Bey.

Currently, Maynard has significant issues associated with climate and culture. Based on the information presented in the case analysis, Maynards’ climate and culture have caused one of the three assistant principals to quit, ten of the forty-five teachers to submit letters of intent to seek other school opportunities, and the principal reassigned. In a situation this severe, it is not a stretch of the imagination to assume the culprit behind Maynards’ lack of academic achievement. These kinds of issues are often present in newer schools where there are no traditions and preestablished cultural identities present to guide the behaviors and attitudes of the students and staff. These kinds of issues often persist in school without a concrete vision and forward direction for the school. I plan to change that by advocating for the school in the community, utilizing the principles of servant leadership to promote active learning, and taking an active approach in creating actionable short- and long-term goals for the school.

My new vision for Maynard High School is to convert it to a Career and Technology Education (CTE) school where students graduate within four years of enrollment. My new mission for the school is that every student completes his/her program with an industry-standard certification in one of the CTE pathway program offered. I plan to introduce CTE programs in trade programs that lead to high paying, highly desirable careers in the area. In order to understand what programs the students want, I plan to ask them to complete a series of surveys related to program choice and to participate in a Choice Fair in which they learn which courses they will have to take and what career options are available in that career area.

When considering which leadership style would lead me to the best results at Maynard, I settled on servant leadership as the main style. Servant leadership means being available and open to helping your students and staff grow in their education and profession. “As the demands of our public education system have become greater, student motivation and new methods of attaining student academic achievement have become increasingly elusive (Black, 2010).”In other words, as public education moves forward, the consensus is that we must act in new and inventive ways to push and motivate our students and staff. From this, I can infer that I can use the principles of servant leadership to motivate and inspire my students to become better and higher achieving. The text suggests that servant leadership is the best way to move forward in motivating my new school community to reach higher and achieve more.

Creating goals for Maynard is not going to be easy. The school has only been around for two years. However, a toxic culture has been allowed to fester and grow. Staff who were there to open the school are now leaving for other opportunities, and an administrator has quit. My long-term goals for Maynard spread for ten years. They include increasing student attendance in the building from 64.2% to 90% over 10 years and to increase academic achievement overall in the building from 61.7% to 89.7% over the course of 10 years. My short-term goals spread over the next year. Progress on these goals can easily be measured through data management and operations. By utilizing the data programming we have at our disposal through the district, we can make an abstract plan more concrete with actions such as biweekly call logs and home visits for chronically absent or underachieving students. They include increasing staff participation in professional development sessions by at least 25%, assigning weekly surveys for students and staff as it relates to the school culture and climate of the school and reviewing the relevant data as it relates to the

When I first came to Maynard, I examined the professional development calendar from the previous year and, through conversations with the Instructional Leadership Team, created a new year-long calendar that offered courses and sessions that maximized the skills I know we will need in the building for the year. I created smaller learning communities through which teachers can share their concerns and ideas in a judgment-free environment without repercussions, but a large learning community throughout the school. According to the literature, “We had to be willing to move from knowing about PLCs to functioning as a PLC so that it prevailed as our culture (Smith, 2012).” That is to say, coming through the door, I knew I needed to turn the entire school into a PLC so that learning as a community of teachers was so engrained in the culture of Maynard that it made no sense not to be learning while in the new school program. I interpret this to mean that by allowing teachers to feel as though “not learning” is “not an option,” professional development becomes a way of life. I also know that excellence in professional development is necessary for increasing student achievement.

Advocating for the students of Maynard and their families was not an easy task. Because of the youth of the school as a whole, there was no real community initiative to try and establishing community involvement and outreach. By analyzing the data gathered over the last two years, we can make a concrete plan to go out into the community and learn why they send their students to Maynard in the first place. What were they promised with enrollment? How can we hold accurate and make those promises real for their students even today? These questions and more can be answered by talking with parents and community stakeholders about Maynard. By renewing our commitment to the community through reasonable partnerships on behalf of the school and the students. Another form of advocacy is increasing parent involvement at Maynard. The relevant literature suggests that “The parent-teacher conferences have been made more parent-friendly and outreach is active (Every Adult Advocates, Every Student Graduates, 2011).” When parents feel welcomed, they will attend more often. I interpret this to mean that procedures and accommodations need to be in place to ensure that as few barriers to attending conferences exist as possible if we want parents to come. By renewing our commitment to the community and making parents feel more welcomed, we can reach and advocate for students on a deeper level.

Upon taking the helm at Maynard, I implemented several changes at Maynard because we owe it to the students and the surrounding community to be the very best we can be in every way possible. Creating a renewed commitment to the advocating for the school in the community, setting attainable long- and short-term goals, and making a commitment to servant leadership through schoolwide professional development are a few of the changes I made coming into Maynard and what I want to continue to change in the coming years.

References

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