Success Story.

Crisis as Opportunity

Hillsboro-Deering High School

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H-DHS was identified as an underperforming school, and finished close to the bottom on “NECAP”, the regional achievement testing, for the fifth consecutive year. The school was plagued with major challenges; low teacher/student expectations and accountability, consistently low student achievement, poor discipline, fighting, weapons, poor attendance, a high drop-out rate, poor parent/community relations, administrative turnover and more.  The school was on “Warning Status” for the Standard on Assessment with The New England Association of Schools and Colleges, and in danger of losing accreditation.  In the midst of this, the superintendent and high school principal resigned and were replaced by interim people.

The entire town was upset, and a series of community focus groups were conducted.  Each clearly identified wide-spread concerns, and demands for accountability, with both school leadership and the faculty.  The district was actually considering exercising the right to impose mass dismissals.

Future Management Systems was engaged to immediately intervene and address a compelling sense of urgency for this school community.  Provisions were made for us to spend a week of summer professional development with the entire faculty and newly appointed administration.

**Challenges**

* How to engage a dispirited faculty to unify, and take proper professional leadership in restoring a strong sense of school community, ownership, and reciprocal accountability.
* Raising expectations and accountability for leadership, faculty and students.
* Effectively provide leadership coaching support to a new administrative team during a process of transformation for this entire school community.
* Addressing the consistently large turnover of administrators and teachers
* Ultimately, the task was to develop trust, confidence and critical support for HDHS.

**Strategies**

FMS was given latitude in determining the nature of this professional development.  Recognizing that the data collected from the community focus groups had never been processed; FMS carefully processed all forum information and identified the common themes for concern.  The faculty had actually never seen this data.  Prior to sharing the themes with them, the faculty was organized into their own focus groups, and provided an opportunity conduct their own assessment of the strengths and weakness of H-DHS, and reach consensus on the major themes.

When the faculty compared their major themes with those of the community, they discovered that, in fact, they were identical.  This revelation took the sting out of community criticism, promoted unanimous ownership and produced a unified commitment to take immediate action.

The faculty was divided into effective work groups to identify the highest priorities for action. The consensus was that school culture, student behavior and achievement were the top three priorities. They unanimously defined “school culture” as the most critical first step.  This led to an exercise where everyone identified a “Right and corresponding “Responsibility” that they felt should define the attitudes and behaviors of **every** member of this school community.  Further, everyone agreed that they must commit to consistently modeling and being accountable for what is expected of students.  Along with each norm, the faculty also clearly identified what it would look like, when a “Rights / Responsibility” was, and was not being demonstrated.

After a process of refining, the “Rights/Responsibilities for H-DHS were unanimously adopted, with a clear agreement that they applied to every adult, and that the responsibility for monitoring belonged to everyone, not simply the administration. This ownership empowered everyone to self-regulation, peer influence and reciprocal accountability, and provided students/parents with a proper model for the attitudes, behaviors and performance.  In addition, since every voice was heard and consensus achieved, there would be no “minority report “or “undermining” in any form. The R/R also articulated a commitment for distributive leadership, broad based consensus, decision-making, team-building, the empowerment of faculty and students, personalizing instruction and transparency.

The documents were printed as posters and table top reminders, placed throughout the school for opening day.  When students reported on the first day, the entire school discussed the source and substance for change going forward.  HDHS enjoyed the best opening of school they had ever experienced, and there was an immediate boost in school climate and attitudes.  School administrators now had renewed credibility with faculty, and they, in turn, had more credibility with students and parents alike.  The entire school community responded very positively to the change and support increased with every passing day.

One month into the school year, FMS conducted an audit on how well the R/R were being implemented.  The faculty was divided into small groups and asked to respond to the question “Are we backsliding, and if so, what does that look like?”  Each group spokesman posted the major responses on the wall and shared them with the larger group.  Once this was done the faculty was asked to look at the entire wall in silence, and consider what had been said.  A statement from one teacher said it all, “I have not done what was pledged, and need to immediately do so.”  The unanimous response from faculty was to recommit, and periodically, audit themselves.

**Indicators of Success**

* Three months into the school year, students and teachers demonstrated a strong sense of purpose, and for the first time, approached the NECAP Regional achievement test very seriously.  This assessment carried no direct academic implication for students, and previously, they had little concern for performing.  Months later the results documented a huge gain in scores that were directly attributable to a developing sense of responsibility and pride in their school community.
* There is strong, competent and stable leadership at H-DHS, with a principal and assistant, committed to high, positive expectations, collaboration, reciprocal accountability, and continuous improvement for every member of the school community.
  + The best administrators and teachers are being attracted and retained.
* H-DHS received formal recognition by the Department of Education for consistent increases in student achievement.
* Full Implementation of successful educational practices (i.e. Response to Intervention) ensuring the academic, social and emotional growth of every student).
* The daily attendance rate is 94 percent, current drop-out rate is zero, incidence of fighting and weapons possession is down to 3 per year, and the school is a physically, emotionally and socially safe environment for teaching and learning.
* The school achieved full accreditation by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges, (NEAS&C).
* U.S News and World Report identified H-DHS as one of the top 11 schools in New Hampshire.
* Received the NHDOE “Commissioners Circle of Excellence Award Schools” for demonstrating a high-level of determination, in meeting the diverse needs of learners, in innovative and bold ways.
* Significant and consistent narrowing of the achievement gap between identified and non-identified students in both math and reading achievement.
* H-DHS was accepted into the League of Innovative Schools (LIS), committed to fostering forward thinking innovation in the design and delivery of secondary education.  The LIS is comprised of schools from across the state, and is affiliated with the New England Secondary Schools Consortium (NESSC).
* Received the NHIAA Sportsmanship Award
* H-DHS “Student Voice” invited to present at the New England Secondary Schools Consortium Annual Conference on “High School Redesign, cultural turn-around and student engagement.
* The New Hampshire Department of Education created a new state teacher effectiveness model that was based on one that developed by faculty as “H-DHS Professional Evaluation Program.