Communication

Scenario #1 – (Facts/Data)

You are a new principal assuming leadership at an elementary school that has experienced three different principals in the last five years. The teaching staff is a mix of veteran staff members (more than ten years of teaching experience) 40%, and staff members who are new to the school and the profession (less than five years of teaching experience) 60%. The last principal was very authoritarian. He spent a lot of time collecting data from classroom walkthroughs and giving negative feedback to teachers about their performance. Consequently, teachers developed a negative opinion about data. People started to view data as a tool for criticism and leadership authority, rather than a tool to facilitate professional growth and development. He served for two years, and during that time school performance on state math and reading tests dropped.

You begin your tenure with a review of past performance and it is evident that literacy is a “brutal fact.” All performance data reveal that your students read below grade level, and your school has some of the lowest test scores in the school district and state, and this has been a reality for many years. You have a background in literacy, and you’ve earned a bachelors and master’s degree in literacy education. In fact, you spent three years as a literacy coach with a very strong track record in increasing literacy proficiency. How do you, the new principal, effectively use data to confront the necessity to improve literacy practices considering the fact that data was used as a deflating tool of criticism in the past?

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Scenario #1 - Data | Strategies |
| What data would I gather? |  |
| How would I present the data to appeal to a sense of commitment? |  |
| How would I use the facts to inform, not to scold? |  |
| How would I use the facts to stimulate personal ownership and internal agency? |  |

Scenario #2 (Persuasion)

You’re a high school counselor and you are concerned about the number of students receiving out-of-school suspensions for minor disciplinary infractions. You are in your second year of employment at your school, though you have been an educator for 15 years. As a counselor, you get a bird’s-eye view of the impact that disciplinary suspensions have on student grades, credit acquisition, and ultimately graduation. You review the school data on student disciplinary infractions, and nearly 80% of the students receiving suspensions of 3 days or less are for three predictable violations; insubordination, classroom disruption, and failure to follow to school rules. As a counselor, you do not have the authority to enforce a change in policy, but you have the opportunity to persuade the opinion of the teachers and administrators in your school.

Before accepting employment in your current school, you served as a teacher in a high school that embraced the *Restorative Justice* theory. Instead of punishment, your former school created an environment and created structures that helped students recognize the error of their ways and created opportunities for students to commit acts of service that atoned for their misdeeds and added value to your school culture. This method resulted in a 90% reduction in student infractions, and out-of-school suspensions were nearly eliminated. You and your former colleagues experienced intensive professional development in the Restorative Justice methods, and you even had the opportunity to share your success with others at a national conference.

You recognize that the current situation at your high school mirrors that of your former school and you believe that Restorative Justice would be a perfect response to your school’s dilemma. In the short time that you have served in your position, you have observed that both administrators and teachers are passionate about strict student behavior policies and administering punishment for students who do not adhere to those policies. Your observation and school data reveal that this mindset and method are not making any impact on changing student behavior, it is only leading to a culture of conflict and student alienation. The experience and insight that you gained at your former school makes it difficult for you to simply disassociate yourself from this reality. How do you use the power of ***persuasion*** to convince your colleagues to reflect on the ineffectiveness of their current practice and embrace Restorative Justice?

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Scenario #2 - Persuasion | Strategies |
| How would you help people recognize the importance of your idea in their context and their reality? |  |
| What resistance/arguments might you expect the people that you are trying to influence to pose to devalue your proposal? |  |
| How would you counter their arguments? |  |
| What details or concrete processes would you share to increase the confidence of those that you are trying to influence? |  |

Trust

Scenario #3– Empathy

You are the principal at a high-performing elementary school. Your school has won several awards for student academic achievement, including your state’s highest honor, the Blue Ribbon Award. You just received notification from the state department of education that last year’s state academic testing results revealed that your economically disadvantaged students at your school performed significantly lower than the other students in your school, and the gap is so large, that the state has placed your school in the category of *Needs Improvement*.

This achievement disparity between students based upon socio-economic status has been personally upsetting for the last three years. You attempted to inspire your staff to enthusiastically take on this challenge in the past by exposing them to data and citing research, but that approach did not stimulate the response that you wanted. In addition, the data revealed that most economically disadvantaged students are also very mobile. The average residency of an economically disadvantaged student in your school is seven months. So, when the staff starts to see signs of progress with economically disadvantaged students, most of them move.

Your staff prides themselves on being hard-working student advocates. Most indicators of performance would validate that personal belief, but the data concerning economically disadvantaged students disrupts that narrative and it is a sore topic of discussion. In the past, you could kick the can down the road. The state’s designation has created a sense of urgency and you have to confront this anomaly in your data. The coping mechanism that your staff has traditionally used when addressing this issue is to blame the student and the circumstances that created this crisis. You regularly hear; “I can’t be their teacher and their parent!” or “If they wouldn’t move so much, we could help them!” or “If I concentrate on their needs, it will take time and resources from my good students, and that isn’t fair!” Personally, you have observed that the staff’s past attempts to support economically disadvantaged and mobile students have been half-hearted at best, and the intervention methods and systems could improve greatly. Empathy does not require that you share the same emotion or you agree with a person’s stance, it requires that you understand that emotion and you consider it when attempting to positively influence a person’s behavior. How do you engage them in this process with empathy, while also helping them to understand that their practice and effort can improve?

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Scenario #1 - Empathy | Strategies |
| How would you create opportunities to demonstrate genuine concern about the emotions of your followers? |  |
| What types of strategies would you use to stay fully engaged and process their concerns and refrain from giving personal opinions or rebuttals? |  |
| How would you collaborate with your followers and create a collaborative resolution to their stated issues? |  |
| How would you continue to demonstrate empathy throughout the entire change process? |  |

Scenario #4 – Credibility

You are the new principal at an elementary school. The teaching staff was enamored with the personality of the previous principal. They were endeared by his warm personality and his commitment to listen to the concerns of teachers. He was fired by the new district superintendent because although he was beloved, student academic performance declined over his five year tenure, and there were a lot of complaints levied by parents and the local middle school who welcomed six graders annually from your elementary.

One of the traits that the staff admired about the former principal was his willingness to subvert district policy and protect them from systemic change, and ultimately changes in their professional practice. The school district has invested heavily in the Professional Learning Communities at Work model (PLC) over the past five years. The board of education has arranged for an early student dismissal every Wednesday so that teachers would have two hours of collaborative time. The district has allotted nearly 50% of its professional development budget to invest in conferences and training to enhance teacher skill in the areas of curriculum, assessment, and academic interventions to enhance the PLC process. All of the other schools in the district have demonstrated enormous gains in student achievement, but your new elementary school has shown a decline in the indicators of student academic achievement. It is well known that the former principal did not require teachers to attend their collaborative meetings and that he fabricated reports to the central office to give the appearance of compliance with the district expectations.

You were hired because of your track record and knowledge of the PLC process. You have studied the process extensively and you are a true believer in the process. Your previous school was honored as a model of this process and you are expected to stimulate the same level of commitment for PLC at your school that has been modeled throughout the school district. How would you establish yourself as a credible leader and establish the trust necessary to stimulate commitment for the PLC process with a staff that has been taught to rebel?

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Scenario #2 - Credibility | Strategies |
| How would you articulate your moral purpose and connect it to the change that you propose? |  |
| How would you stimulate a moral connection between your followers and the change that you propose? |  |
| How would you display your knowledge, competence, and expertise in this area? |  |
| How would you establish your commitment to the process that you are proposing, and that you are the kind of leader that is consistent and *Walks the Talk*? |  |

Scenario #5

You are a veteran teacher with twenty years of experience at the elementary level. You have decided to expand your horizons and are hired to teach high school English. While the English department is welcoming, considering you have no experience teaching high school students, you make note that your team has apprehension regarding your addition to the team. You soon discover that your new team meets regularly to create, implement, and analyze common assessments. Over time, department members are impressed with the data that show your students have excelled academically. The previous year, the principal initiated weekly instructional rounds, a process whereby teachers observe each other’s instruction to generate professional development. After several weeks of observing colleagues, you realize that your peers mostly lecture when they teach, whereas your years of elementary-level teaching have prepared you to create an engaging learning environment using additional instructional strategies. At the last team meeting, common assessment data revealed that 26% more of your students has proficiency than those taught by your peers.

Frequent data analysis has allowed you to share with your colleagues the instructional methods you effectively use to produce student learning. However, you notice that your colleagues usually listen and congratulate you by saying, “nice job,” but rarely demonstrate a sincere desire to learn your instructional delivery techniques. While it pleases you that your students have benefited from your teaching practices, your peers’ lack of student achievement concerns you. Over time, it becomes clear to you that your colleagues’ inability to implement effective teaching strategies stems from a lack of capacity than from a negative attitude. How would you initiate a process whereby your peers can begin to learn and implement instructional practices more conducive to student achievement?

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Scenario #5 – Collective Problem Solving | Strategies |
| How would you build momentum toward collectively addressing shared challenges? |  |
| What resources would you use to formulate a healthy sense of professional curiosity toward possible solutions? |  |
| What research would you use to complement the collaborative solutions that staff generate? |  |
| How would you promote the transition from learning to applying? |  |

Scenario 6

After one-year as superintendent you are pleased to learn that your leadership style has generated a strong sense of trust and credibility among a majority of stakeholders throughout the district. An anonymous survey of site principals revealed that 92% of respondents trust your intentions as leader and, as a result, find you to be very credible. In addition, the survey reveals that your intentional approach to gathering and discussing data relevant to student achievement has persuaded principals to embrace a sense of professional curiosity toward unveiling possible ways that could increase student learning schoolwide. You realize that the political context for change is ideal and decide that investing in sending principals to conferences on helping teachers improve their instructional delivery would meet with very little resistance. In addition, you invest thousands of dollars in building a professional library that displays some of the most current research aligned with increasing student achievement, and you encourage principals to invest in bringing consultants to their school to add yet another layer of professional development. You also passionately promote administrative book circles as an avenue for learning.

After one year of supporting principals in this manner, district-generated benchmarks show very little growth in student achievement, and even though you promoted administrative book circles, you noticed many principals stopped checking out books halfway through the year. This reality makes you question whether the tradition of using principal meeting time to discuss management and compliance matters need to change. How would you, as superintendent, design principals’ meeting time so they learn best practice and generate action plans for effective implementation of what they have learned?

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Scenario #6- Social Context for Learning | Strategies |
| How would you create a process that incorporates collaboration between stakeholders as an essential component of implementation of best practice? |  |
| How would you incorporate peer observation and discussion as an integral aspect of learning and implementation? |  |
| Would you consider initiating a coaching approach to generate learning, and if so, what steps would you take to do so? |  |
| What practices would you incorporate to include feedback and reflection in the learning process? |  |

Scenario 7

Becoming a counselor at your alma mater has been a dream come true, and when your colleagues nominated you to become the lead counselor, you could hardly contain your excitement and enthusiasm. Your former high school counselor, who is still, after thirty-years, a member of the counseling department, is especially proud of you.

After reviewing data and meeting with administration, you decide that you need an action plan for more students to take the SAT. You conduct focus groups with students and discover that your department needs to better inform students of the steps required to get into college, because many students will become the first in their families to graduate from high school and attend college. You invite your colleagues to brainstorm strategies to address this issue. The group decides that once a month, counselors will present pertinent information regarding college admission, including information on taking the SAT in classrooms. This way, they ensure all students receive the information they require for post-secondary success. Because students are required to take four years of English, you approach the English department members to gain their support and permission to present your information during their classes. The English department agrees.

After three months of initiating this plan, counselors share positive feedback, and students report that they have much more awareness of the steps they need to take to access postsecondary institutions. At your next counselors’ meeting, you ask your colleagues to share their experiences with presenting to students. It surprises you to learn that only one counselor, your former high school counselor, has not followed through with the agreed-on plan. When you politely ask your former high school counselor what happened, she shares that she has been too busy dealing with other counseling responsibilities and will present to English classes “when she has time.” You sense disappointment from the other counselors that a colleague has not followed through with the agreed-on plan, but no one says a word to the veteran counselor.

You feel distraught over what to do next. Should you initiate a conversation with your former counselor as to the expectations you, as a lead counselor, have? Would it be rude to ask someone who was instrumental in your high school success to explain why certain actions have not been taken? If you choose not to address the issue, do you risk losing credibility in the eyes of the counselors who have followed through with the agreed-on plan? What course of action would you take?

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Scenario #7– Tactful Confrontation | Strategies |
| If you deem a confrontation is necessary, what steps would you take to initiate this tactful confrontation? |  |
| What language and setting might you choose to initiate this tactful confrontation? |  |
| If you discover that the lack of follow through is due to a lack of support of the why, who, how (rational resistance) how might you respond? |  |
| If you discover that the lack of follow- through is due to a lack of will (irrational resistance), how might you respond? |  |

Scenario 8

You are the principal of a middle school. Careful analysis of student data revealed that students from specific cohorts, mainly English learners and students with disabilities, were not progressing academically at an acceptable rate. The school leadership team began to explore reasons why these students did not excel. The team discovered that a lack of additional time and support at home significantly deterred learning. After several weeks of studying how more successful schools with similar student demographics support student learning and get staff input, the leadership team proposed changing the school schedule. It proposed that the school day include a forty-minute block of time when all students in need of academic assistance could gain additional time and support. After much discussion and planning, administration was able to create a thirty-minute block of time for this purpose, and 95% of the staff reached consensus to proceed with the plan.

Implementation of this plan required some patience and re-structuring, but data have confirmed that the additional time and support helps students. The thirty-minute support schedule allows students to receive the extra support from teachers or other staff members whose instructional delivery of the specific lesson or topic has proven effective. It disappointed the leadership to learn that three weeks after initiating this process some teacher refused to send their students to receive this help simply because they did not want to “share students with teachers who might confuse them.” When administration attempted to explain that data from participating students showed the programs benefit, the handful of teachers who refused to take part filed a grievance with the teachers’ association, noting the program violated their “academic freedom” as teachers. Even after the leaders of the teachers’ association indicated that they could not support the grievance because of the remaining staff members’ overwhelming support of the program, the group of teachers rarely, if ever, have sent their students for the appropriate support. Instead, they have chosen to have their students ‘complete worksheets and do other busy-work that shows no indication that it supports learning.

You have scheduled a separate meeting with each of these teachers, and you anticipate that they will require a tactful confrontation that will ultimately reveal an illogical resistance to change. How would you initiate professional monitoring as a course of action?

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Scenario #8– Professional Monitoring | Strategies |
| How would you communicate the need to professionally monitor desired behaviors? |  |
| How would you decide to professionally monitor this particular cohort of teachers’ behavior? |  |
| If you discover that the individuals need additional support to learn expected behaviors, how might you provide that additional support? |  |
| What process would you initiate to provide consistent feedback on the observations you make as a result of your professional monitoring? |  |