

School Culture Evaluation Exercise

The opposite page contains a list of cultural elements that characterize school philosophies and practices. The left column reflects a culture that is not conducive to enhancing student outcomes, and the right column reflects cultural elements that research has validated as supporting personalization and improved student outcomes. An accurate depiction of your culture will provide you with a sense of the level of effort and time it will take to implement your proposed change goal.

Purpose:

- To provide a picture of your school's current culture
- To provide a picture of the culture required to support your proposed *Breaking Ranks* changes
- To highlight the cultural gaps that must be addressed prior to the changes being implemented or addressed in parallel with the changes
- To foster a discussion among team members and stakeholders that clarifies what best practices are required for positive change—to get people on the same page
- To provide stakeholders with an idea of the scope of proposed changes and the level of effort and time required to plan for and implement the change.

Who: The *Breaking Ranks* team and other stakeholders as appropriate to support project goals and approach.

When: At the beginning of the change leadership process, i.e., once data has been collected and options identified and prior to capacity assessment and building.

How Long: 40–60 minutes.

How:

- As a group:
 - Reach consensus on a definition for each word or phrase before the group rates it.
 - Place a “C” on each arrow to reflect where your school currently stands on each culture element. Take time to discuss different perspectives and work to come to a consensus placement.
 - Mark F on each arrow to reflect where your school needs to be in the future to adequately support your goals. Take time to discuss different perspectives and work to come to a consensus placement.
- As individuals:
 - Prior to starting the exercise, recreate the form on a flipchart or board.
 - Ask each person to fill out the form on their own. Provide definitions of words or phrases as required.
 - When each person has filled out the form, ask them to replicate their results on the flipchart or board.
 - As above, go through the results and come to a consensus on what the words and phrases mean and where the Cs and Fs go.

Processing the Results: When done as individuals, note first the disparity of perspectives and the implications for getting everyone to agree. Identify large and noteworthy C–F gaps and discuss the implications for your goals. Identify actions that must be taken on the basis of your analysis, i.e., what it will take to turn Cs into Fs. Use this survey with your team to ascertain the status of school culture as it relates to student performance. Discuss areas of perceived weakness in depth.

School Culture Evaluation Exercise

Instructions:

- Place a C on each arrow to reflect where your school currently stands on each culture element listed.
- Place an F on each arrow to show where your school needs to be in the future to adequately support your proposed change goal.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The school culture is focused on the needs of the adults in the building 	↑	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The school culture is focused on what is best for the students
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is being taught is most important 	↑	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is being learned is most important
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The emphasis is on covering the subject matter content 	↑	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The emphasis is on students demonstrating mastery of content
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers tend to “close their door” and teach in isolation 	↑	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers work together in collaborative teams
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers rarely interact with one another regarding professional practices 	↑	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sharing of professional practices happens on a regular basis
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assessments are rarely given, summative in nature, and tend to be tests used to reward and punish student performance 	↑	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assessments are frequent, balanced, formative in nature, and used to inform instruction
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Common assessments have not been developed 	↑	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Common assessments are regularly used in all core content areas
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support programs are designed to remediate learning 	↑	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support programs are designed to intervene for successful learning
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The staff isolates the students into “your kids and my kids” 	↑	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The staff embraces the students as “our kids”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Professional development efforts are not focused on school improvement goals 	↑	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Professional development is individualized, on-going, job-embedded, and designed to aid in school improvement efforts
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grading policies are punitive in nature and discourage students 	↑	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grading policies enhance student motivation and encourage students to never give up

Interview or Focus Group Protocol

This tool provides you with a qualitative data-gathering strategy for obtaining information from individuals or groups. It is intended to foster conversation rather than to be used like a survey with content-specific items.

- This tool should be modified to fit your situation. Tailor the probes to fit the stakeholder with whom you are speaking. There are more probes than anyone will typically need. Identify those that best meet your needs and the people you are interviewing.
- As a general technique, if someone expresses a concern or complaint, push for data and ask for examples. Also push for data to support positive responses.

Explain the Purpose of the Interview/Meeting

- To gather data to understand stakeholder needs
- To gather data to understand what's working and what could be improved
- To gather data to understand current initiatives
- To gather data to support implementation of a specific initiative

Explain Confidentiality

- Data won't be shared with anyone
- Data will only be shared as theme—there will be no attribution of data to any specific person

Interview Strategy

- Use the probes as a starting point for discussion
- Select the questions that best meet your needs
- Follow the probes with requests for more detail and information

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Sample Probes—Broad

- What's working?
- What's not working?
- What would you like to see more of?
- What would you like to see less of?
- What prevents you from...?
- How would you describe the climate here?
- Since you've been here, what major change efforts have made the most difference. Why?
- If you remember change efforts that did not succeed, what were the reasons they didn't meet expectations?
- If you remember change efforts that succeeded, why did they succeed?
- What are the major challenges for you? For students? For teachers? For administrators? For support staff?
- Since you've been here, what's changed for the better?
- Since you've been here, what's changed for the worse?

Sample Probes—Focused

- What is the school's vision/mission/values?
- How would you describe communications here?
- To what degree are parents involved?
- To what degree is the community involved?
- What's the first word that comes to mind when you think of this school?
- What supports are you receiving that assist you in your job?
- What is professional development like here?
- What are the school's primary goals?
- What do people at this school value most?
- What is your school's biggest strength?
- What is your school's biggest limitation?
- What is the best experience you've ever had here?
- What is the worst experience you've ever had here?
- If you could change one thing, what would it be?
- How helpful is the district office?

Other Probes—Add Your Own:

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