MARIANO MARCOS STATE UNIVERSITY
College of Teacher Education

Center of Excellence in Teacher Education

The Teacher and the Community, School Culture & Organizational Leadership

Prepared by:

VIDA V. ANTONIO

Associate Professor IV

vidavantonio@yahoo.com

SCHOOL CULTURE

A Good School Culture

➢starts with connections — strong and overlapping interactions among all members of the school community

School Culture

❖ generally refers to the beliefs, perceptions, relationships, attitudes, and written and unwritten rules that shape and influence every aspect of how a school functions,

❖ but it also encompasses more concrete issues such as the physical and emotional safety of students, the orderliness of classrooms and public spaces, or the degree to which a school embraces and celebrates racial, ethnic, linguistic, or cultural diversity.

❖ Basically, a school culture consists of the underlying influences and attitudes within the school — based on the norms, traditions and beliefs of the staff and students.

❖ **<u>Importanc</u>**<u>e</u>: the prevailing atmosphere in your school will affect everything that goes on inside its walls.

❖ This goes beyond the student body: it also involves how teachers interact with each other, their students, and the parents.

❖ School Culture results from both conscious and unconscious perspectives, values, interactions, and practices, and it is <u>heavily shaped by a school's particular institutional history</u>.

❖ Students, parents, teachers, administrators, and other staff members all contribute to their school's culture, as do other influences such as the community in which the school is located, the policies that govern how it operates, or the principles upon which the school was founded.

School Culture (by L. Spacey)

➢the [norms](#) and shared experiences that evolve over school's history.

➢the character of a school that gives a school qualities beyond its structures, resources and practices.

➢Culture provides stability and isn't easily changed.

Why School Culture is Important?

- ✓ improved school culture contributes to greater school success.
- ✓ when school culture is strong, teachers and students have a greater incentive to strive for their maximum potential.
- ✓ Satisfaction, morale, and fulfillment all grow as school culture blossoms.

➢ **Strong school culture breeds dedicated teachers**

❖ With the encouragement provided by a healthy school, teachers are more likely to prioritize their professional development and aptitude by improving their skills, expanding their base of knowledge, and connecting with their students.

❖ Motivated teachers are more apt to tailor their approaches to students' individualized learning needs (where possible), better prepared to guide their students toward excellence, and more willing to praise their students for a job well-done.

❖ The positive relationship between students and teachers is likely to grow.

❖When students know that teachers and staff care, that they will celebrate their achievements, provide constructive criticism when they fall short of a goal, and work tirelessly to promote the best interests of the student population, students will have a desire to show up and do their best.

❖Students in a strong school culture understand that there is pressure to succeed, but also acknowledge the pressure is positive and know that the school is there to support them in rising to any academic challenge.

BENEFITS OF STRONG CULTURE

✓ In a healthy environment, the professional relationships between a school's staff can become more congenial and productive.

- ✓ With collaborative input from all parties on major school decisions, a wider range of views becomes represented.
- ✓ Opportunities are more evenly distributed among the student population, increasing the likelihood that disadvantaged students have a chance to succeed.

School Culture & Reform

❖ School culture has become a central concept in many efforts to change how schools operate and improve educational results.

❖ While a school culture is heavily influenced by its institutional history, culture also shapes social patterns, habits, and dynamics that influence future behaviors, which could become an obstacle to reform and improvement.

❖**Ebony Bridwell-Mitchell**, an expert in education leadership and management, explains that researchers who have studied culture have tracked and demonstrated a strong and significant correlation between organizational culture and an organization's performance.

❖Once principals understand what constitutes culture — once they learn to see it not as a hazy mass of intangibles, but as something that can be pinpointed and designed — they can start to execute a cultural vision.

Ways of Improving School Culture

✓ Establishin **professional learning communities** that encourages teachers to communicate, share expertise, and work together more collegially and productively.

✓ Providing presentations, seminars, and learning experiences designed to educate staff and students about bullying and reduce instances of bullying.

✓ Creating events and educational experiences that honor and celebrate the racial, ethnic, and linguistic diversity of the student body, such as hosting cultural events and festivals, exhibiting culturally relevant materials throughout the school, inviting local cultural leaders to present to students, or making explicit connections between the diverse cultural backgrounds of students and what is being taught in history, social studies, and literature courses. For related discussions, see **multicultural education** and **voice**.

✓ Establishing an **advisory program** that pairs groups of students with adult advisor to strengthen adult-student relationships and ensure that students are well known and supported by at least one adult in the school.

✓ Surveying students, parents, and teachers about their experiences in the school, and hosting community forums that invite participants to share their opinions about and recommendations for the school and its programs.

✓ Creating a **leadership team** comprising a representative cross-section of school administrators, teachers, students, parents, and community members that oversees and leads a school-improvement initiative.

5 Strategies of Building Effective School Culture
(by K. Wagner)

- <u>1. Planning a bridge program for new students and staff</u>. Administrators should start by introducing a school's newcomers to the institution's ethos and expectations as soon as possible. This allows them to make an easy transition and fit in with the school culture.

- <u>2. Making school-wide goals visible</u>. By making the school's mission and goals publicly accessible (as opposed to tucked away in a back office), the entire school can understand and share in a similar purpose and work toward it collaboratively.

- <u>3. Keeping a loyal opposition</u>. Through inviting constructive criticism, multiple viewpoints are expressed, and school leaders can address deficiencies in their proposed policies.

- <u>4. Establishing collaborative networks.</u> Seeking the aid of outside experts can help provide a neutral point of view on a school's challenges and introduce objective solutions for improving school culture. The viewpoint of a trusted third-party can sometimes offer a perspective no faction within the school could have conceived.

- 5. <u>Holding school-wide rallies and assemblies</u>. Daily gatherings of a school's staff and student body help further instill the idea that the school is a unit working toward shared goals, and it offers an opportunity to build positivity through celebrating achievements and laying out expectations.

Reform & Debates

❖ attempts to reform school cultures may be more likely encounter resistance, criticism, or controversy in schools that are most in need of cultural reforms. In recent years, problems related to school culture are being cited as reasons for why schools should be closed or why a significant percentage of the teaching faculty should be fired. In these cases, "school culture" may become <u>a flashpoint in larger debates</u> about specific school-reform policies and strategies.

❖ Because all school cultures are unique, it is important to investigate and develop an understanding of the underlying causes of any debates, including the preexisting cultural conditions that may be contributing to the debates

BASIC FORMS
Positive vs. Negative School Culture

➢ positive school cultures are conducive to professional satisfaction, morale, and effectiveness, as well as to student learning, fulfillment, and well-being.

Toxic vs. Positive School Culture

➢ A <u>toxic school culture</u> has been described as a place where "staffs are extremely fragmented, where the purpose of serving students has been lost to the goal of serving the adults, where negative values and hopelessness reign." (Realizing a Positive School Culture, 1998)

➢ On the other hand, <u>a positive school culture</u> is a place where your efforts are translated into positive experiences for both staff and students. Success, joy, and accomplishment are all main features of a positive school culture.

➢ When your school has <u>a positive culture</u>, teachers are excited to work because they see the bigger picture, and students are in a better position (mentally and emotionally) to learn.

Strong vs. Weak School Culture

❖ Beliefs, values, and actions will spread the farthest and be tightly reinforced when everyone is communicating with everyone else. In a <u>strong</u> school culture, leaders communicate directly with teachers, administrators, counselors, and families, who also all communicate directly with each other.

❖ A culture is <u>weaker</u> when communications are limited and there are fewer connections. For example, if certain teachers never hear directly from their principal, an administrator is continually excluded from communications, or any groups of staff members are operating in isolation from others, it will be difficult for messages about shared beliefs and commitments to spread.

Building a Positive School Culture

- **<u>Key Questions:</u>**

➢ How do you want teachers and students to feel when they walk into school every morning?

➢ Are your teachers dreading coming to work in the morning?

➢ Do students walk into the building with their heads down, trying not to interact with others?

- **<u>Key Questions:</u>**

❖ Or are your teachers excited, starting each class with enthusiasm?

❖ Do you hear laughter in the hallways when students are coming in?

How School Leaders are Involved: Basic Steps

➢ **Read the culture of your school**: Analyze and understand the current culture of your school. This means observing the attitudes of teachers in the classroom and in staff meetings, and understanding the general feeling of students towards the school and the staff.

➢ **Identify which aspects are toxic and which are positive**: Write down the aspects of your school that improve the atmosphere and those which cause negative feelings in teachers and students.

➢ **Reinforce positive elements**: From that list, pull out the positive aspects of your school culture, and include other values, attitudes, or qualities that you would like to see in your school. Then, take action to reinforce those positive qualities and create a positive school culture.

Culture is shaped by five interwoven elements, each of which principals have the power to influence:

❖**Fundamental beliefs and assumptions**, or the things that people at your school consider to be true. For example: "All students have the potential to succeed," or "Teaching is a team sport."

❖ **Shared values**, or the judgments people at your school make about those belief and assumptions — whether they are right or wrong, good or bad, just or unjust. For example: "It's wrong that some of our kindergarteners may not receive the same opportunity to graduate from a four-year college," or "The right thing is for our teachers to be collaborating with colleagues every step of the way."

❖ **Norms**, or how members believe they *should* act and behave, or what they think is expected of them. For example: "We should talk often and early to parents of young students about what it will take for their children to attend college." "We all should be present and engaged at our weekly grade-level meetings."

❖ <u>Patterns and behaviors, or the way people actually act and behave in your school</u>. For example: There are regularly-scheduled parent engagement nights around college; there is active participation at weekly team curriculum meetings. (But in a weak culture, these patterns and behaviors can be different than the norms.)

❖ **Tangible evidence**, or the physical, visual, auditory, or other sensory signs that demonstrate the behaviors of the people in your school. For example: Prominently displayed posters showcasing the district's college enrollment, or a full parking lot an hour before school begins on the mornings when curriculum teams meet.

A REPRESENTATIVE SELECTION OF A FEW CHARACTERISTICS COMMONLY ASSOCIATED WITH POSITIVE SCHOOL CULTURES

✓The individual successes of teachers and students are recognized and celebrated.

✓Relationships and interactions are characterized by openness, trust, respect, and appreciation.

✓Staff relationships are collegial, collaborative, and productive, and all staff members are held to

- ✓ High professional standards.
- ✓ Students and staff members feel emotionally and physical safe, and the school's policies and facilities promote student safety.
- ✓ School leaders, teachers, and staff members model positive, healthy behaviors for students.

✓ Mistakes not punished as failures, but they are seen as opportunities to learn and grow for both students and educators.

✓ Students are consistently held to **high academic expectations**, and a majority of students meet or exceed those expectations.

✓Important leadership decisions are made collaboratively with input from staff members, students, and parents.

✓Criticism, when voiced, is constructive and well-intentioned, not antagonistic or self-serving.

✓ Educational resources and learning opportunities are **equitably distributed**, and all students, including minorities and students with disabilities.

✓ All students have **access** to the **academic support** and services they may need to succeed.

15 Examples/ Elements of School Culture

- 1. <u>**Symbols**</u>

➢ Symbols such as colors, logos, fashion, places and people. For example, a school uniform or building with unique and compelling architecture.

- **2. Stories**
  - ➢ Information and myths that give the school an interesting character.

- **3. Legacy**
  - ➢ The history of a school such as a list of graduates who went on to do great things.

- **4. Language**
- ➢ Elements of language that are unique to a school such as slogans, terms and slang.

- **5. Traditions**
- ➢ Traditions such as unique ways of celebrating accomplishments

- **6. Rites of Passage**
- ➤ Ceremonies and traditions that mark milestones.

- **7. Habits**
- ➤ Habits such as an environment where being late for class is taken seriously.

- **8. Expectations**
  - ➢ Expectations in areas such as student conduct and professional diligence. For example, the expectation that faculty prepare for lessons and not just wing it.

- **9. Methods**
  - ➢ Educational methods such as a system of student leadership.

- **10. Honor Systems**
  - ➢ Rules that aren't enforced by controls to give students an opportunity to demonstrate that they are trustworthy.

- **11. Etiquette**
  - ➢ Conventions of polite behavior that exist between faculty and students

- **12. Ethics**
  - ➤ The ethical climate of a school.

- **13. Comradery**
  - ➤ Students and faculty who identify with the school and feel a sense of belonging and community.

- **<u>14. Loyalty</u>**
- ➢ Students and faculty who feel a sense of allegiance and duty to a school.

- **<u>15. Tone</u>**
- ➢ The overall atmosphere of a school. For example, a school that embraces tradition and discipline versus a school that embraces change and creativity.

References

- Great School Partnership, The Glossary of Education Reform (2013). School Culture. Retrieved online from https://www.edglossary.org/school-culture

- Justin Raudis' School Leadership (2018). 11 Real Ways to Build a Positive School Culture. Retrieved online from https://www.prodigygame.com/blog/school-culture

- Shafer, L. (2018). What Makes a Good School Culture?. Retrieved online from https://www.gse. Harvard.edu/news/uk/18/07/what-makes-good- school-culture

- Malone University (2018). Importance of School Culture. Retrieved online from https://online.malone.edu/articles/importance-of-school-culture/

- Spacey, J. (2017). 15 Examples of School Culture. Retrieved from https://simplicable.com/new/school-culture

Get in Touch With Us

Send us a message or visit us

Laoag City, Ilocos Norte, Philippines
(63) 77-600-2014
cte@mmsu.edu.ph

Follow us for updates

f facebook.com/MMSUofficial
🌐 www.mmsu.edu.ph