



## Beating the Odds: Schools with Positive School Climates

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### Leadership Key Theme 1: Building Relationships

Principals cite building relationships with their staff, students, and other stakeholders as a key to successful leadership.

- “It is intentional with your leadership and the respect you have for your teachers to build significant relationships and at [my school] we say authentic relationships, the type of relationship that will last... build that community of learners. You need people to be on your side, so that you can get things done.”
- “There is absolutely a symbiotic relationship between teachers and school leaders.”
- “I listen to them. If they have to vent, they can come in here and say what they have to say. I am their listening ear. I make them feel that they are somebody. That they have a voice in this school, they have a voice when it comes to decisions. We have formed a sense of family, not just with the students, but with the staff, all of us.”
- “Building relationships is very, very important. Building relationships with your staff, your students, the mailman, the maintenance people, you know everyone who is a stakeholder at your school, that is very important.”

### Leadership Key Theme 2: Instilling Trust

“People have to trust you”: Principals stress being transparent with staff to lead effectively.

- “One thing that I try to make public is when I make a mistake, I own it. And so that really builds trust and I think that’s very, very important. When the school leader is open and public about his or her mistakes then it establishes a culture that makes the learning environment one of where we are practicing. Practice is all about making mistakes...You can’t have a solid learning environment or solid observation and feedback without having solid leadership first.”
- “The trust factor is so important to what we do. If people know they can trust you they’ll go through a brick wall for you; that’s where we spend our time, creating that trust factor for our faculty...When your faculty trusts you, there is no limits to what you can do.”
- “You can go in and say, “I don’t know the answer, I don’t know how to do this; help me.” I think that gives my team that trust...being vulnerable and setting that tone of I don’t have all the answers. I am a learner. I know I’m a leader, but I can learn and lead at the same time. Building that culture of I don’t have all the answers, but together in this room, we can do anything. If we care enough, we can solve any problem that comes our way.
- “Support them, encourage them, recognize them, be honest with them, you gotta be honest with them; you can’t try to hide things from them. Tell them what the truth is and just go from there.”



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### Learning Environment Key Theme 1: Feeling Safe and Welcome

**“A sense of family”:** Through the strong relationships built from the principal’s leadership, students feel safe and welcome in their school.

- “I [visit] the classrooms, asking [students] how they are doing, how was their bus ride to [school], and we make it personal with them...If anything happens...they can stop by the office and see me...We make it personal and it’s intentional...And it’s really bad the first time you say something to a child is when you’re disciplining them. You need to have a relationship with them, and it carries over to the learning aspect.”
- “The learning environment is very important and that starts with the leadership. That’s in your building, the tone that you set, the staff that you have. That learning environment is very important...They feel like they can achieve, survive in that environment, [students] feel safe in that environment.”
- “Being visible and being there for people. I think it’s little things like the fact of people knowing you’re going to do what you say you’re going to do, and students feel safe in that space.”
- “If you see students acting out, that’s everyone’s responsibility to address it, not just the classroom teacher...We (teachers and staff) had a consensus that yes, this was everyone’s problem...That changed the culture and climate of my school drastically.”

### Learning Environment Key Theme 2: Consistently Teaching Your School’s Culture

**“Modeling [the] expectations”:** Principals consistently model the core values so that students see and understand the cultural expectations of the school.

- 100% of principals said clear, consistent communication improved the learning environment.
- “It’s almost safety for them. They know it, it’s a tradition. It’s consistent. It’s redundant. So, for me, our school and student culture is based on creating and training those traditions, but also for our adults it’s being redundant and consistent about living those values in the school every day.”
- “Not just setting those expectations but modeling those expectations... And you can’t just say that you are going to do something because students, teenagers...they know when you are not for real...Actions speak louder than words... You have to model that behavior...We want respect from the students, but we also demand respect of them. We have to respect them.”
- “We spend a lot of time doing these traditions, like [school chant] and we do claps, and we do these things that are unique to building what it means to be a [student at this school]. And [students] almost finish my sentences; they know what I’m going to say before I even say it.”
- “Number one, having those values, those traditions, those things that are commonplace...Every Friday homeroom teachers would pick a student to be [School mascot] of the week...it allows them to be celebrated for living out or embodying those core values.”



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### Observation and Feedback Key Theme 1: Clear Expectations

**“Concrete understanding”:** Principals spend time reviewing rubrics and setting “look fors” to ensure teachers and leadership teams are prepared for observations.

- “Identify what we [leadership team] are looking for before we go into the classroom...Observe teacher practice...We need to have more face to face conversations so that we can have that one on one role plays with the teachers so they can see the change when they put those actions into play.”
- “Before the observational cycles start, we make absolutely sure the TEM Rubric is reviewed from the front cover to the back cover. We visit the teachers in the classroom for their practices, we overview the “look fors” for teachers and for students...if I’m not doing well checking for understanding...we go back and have a PLC to make sure that everyone has a concrete understanding so that they can do really well...because every teacher may have a bad day but if they understand what the framework is for teaching then they can do an awesome job in the classroom.”
- “Communicating the expectations – sharing with the ILT/admin team the expectations. Then sharing those expectations with the teachers prior to observing teacher practice and providing feedback.”

### Observation and Feedback Key Theme 2: Scheduling

**“We had to buckle down and set a schedule”:** 90% of principals said increased frequency of observations helps teaching ratings, but scheduling remains a constant hurdle.

- “I set a schedule so that we would do feedback that same day of the observation, after school. So, it was fresh in my mind, their mind, and then we had time to really sit and talk about what we saw, what went on, what changes or support they might need.”
- “We had to buckle down and set up a schedule and keep that schedule...Being in the classroom [as an administrator] is a number one priority for us. And that’s what helped us turn around our performance in the classrooms.”
- “We made it our business that once you schedule your observation, you schedule your post-conference for your feedback...When you say you're coming... when you put it down and say, 'this is what I gotta do', we got out there and did it.”

### Observation and Feedback Key Theme 3: Glows and Grows

**“Giving glows and grows”:** Providing clear, actionable, & specific feedback to create a culture of improvement.

- “We’ve put a lot of intentional work around that, and every teacher got some type of feedback in a bite sized action every week. So, it just became part of our learning environment that we are all learners and leaders in the building.”
- “Teachers get immediate feedback in a form of an email which consist of strengths and/or areas for improvement. They are specific and detailed. Specific actions are given in order to improve best practice.”