

1. How do you address issues of school or district culture?

The culture of any school or district ultimately determines its trajectory. A positive culture built on the ethos of a shared vision will propel that energy into positive outcomes and a toxic culture sows mistrust and ultimately disintegrates the organization from within. I believe building the right culture is a fundamental responsibility of every leader.

I have been involved with building the culture of two schools – Bok Academy South was a startup charter school, and we had the opportunity to craft the school and its culture from the ground up; we were able to set the culture of innovation, teaching excellence, a can-do attitude amongst the staff, even before the students set foot on campus. That positive culture rippled through the student body and set Bok on a path of success that lived beyond the initial founding staff of the school. At Lake Wales High School, we walked into an existing culture and had to spend time understanding the different components, and decide which parts were positive and contributing to the greater good of the staff and students.

We started out with a SWOT (Strength, Weakness, Opportunity, Threat/barriers) analysis done by the staff, and then conducted multiple surveys to gather feedback from the students, staff, and parents. Held conversations with community members, SAC committee and other parents to get a broader perspective. Based on these surveys, the SWOT analysis, formal and informal meetings, we had to simultaneously deconstruct the negative aspects of the culture at the time, and build a culture that everyone was on board with. This is easier said than done; there is always a group who values something others don't, and a group that holds out on the new initiatives. It is a fine balance to address issues with culture; it begins with understanding where you came from – the history. In addition, one must understand the current reality in order to create a shared vision and begin to move the organization. In addressing any issue, I believe it is important to understand the perspective of all involved and what is driving that perspective.

Working to change culture takes time, patience, and deliberate planning. When acting as a change agent for developing a culture, one must model what you expect. To keep things manageable and positive, I like to set small yet identifiable goals, and then take advantage of every opportunity to reward positive behavior and celebrate the successes – however small they may be. I also recognize that cultural shifts do not take place in a vacuum, the daily work of the school is still moving forward and changing habits takes time, making it important to recognize individual and group successes and celebrate them publicly.

2. *How do you hold yourself and others in the district accountable?*

Each of us has the responsibility to do the right thing, in the best possible way, and in a timely manner. Over the years, I have engaged in the reflective practice of asking myself and those around me, did I give this objective my best? What else could I have done or what could I have done better? In order for us to grow, we need to measure our success and get feedback from all stakeholders.

For leaders, decision making needs to start with the end goal in mind and I believe, we must start by first hiring the right people. When putting a team together, a leader's primary responsibility is to put the right person in the right seat on the bus (Good to Great, Jim Collins). It is worth noting that a highly effective individual on one team, may not be the right fit for another team.

I am a part of many cross functional teams and being a school administrator, I often remind others in the group that just because I am the school administrator, it does not mean that my ideas are the best or that I should have the last word on everything; asking me to explain my decisions or actions is encouraged. The best ideas should be implemented, regardless of who suggested them. I surround myself with folks who are knowledgeable in their field, and I try to create a culture where everyone feels that for the purpose of achieving our mission, everyone must be accountable. An organization is only as strong as its weakest link so when one individual or one team fails, it lowers the outcome for the entire organization.

Accountability starts with setting clear objectives, and everyone agreeing on how we measure success. We also need to establish open channels of communication that will allow us to offer fact based feedback. It also enables the team to ask for help and trust that asking for help is not a negative. However, not asking for help and ending up with poor outcomes, is an issue. In any team, it is normal to have opposing views and sometimes even conflict. For transparent accountability to prevail, we also need to have some norms for handling conflict; we have to be capable of agreeing to disagree but still work towards the goal. Brene Brown sums it up by saying – 'clear is kind'.

As a leader, it is also my responsibility to assess what skills and resources does the individual or team need to accomplish the task. Ignoring it will result in a failed outcome; we cannot hold the individuals accountable if the initial set up was fundamentally flawed. Lastly, for a culture of accountability, if after providing all the support, resources, professional development, and ongoing dialogue, if we do not see the outcomes, it is also the leader's responsibility to make room on the bus for the right person to take that seat.