

How do you address issues of school or district culture?

Positive culture is essential to collective success and needs continual attention and care. Building positive culture is about fostering connections, shared beliefs, values, and behaviors supportive of the vision and mission. Each person should feel a sense of belonging and part of the LWCS Family. We need to collectively decide on what we believe to be true; an example of a fundamental belief is at Lake Wales High School, "You Are Your Brother's Keeper." What a powerful message of caring for the entire school community! This provides a sense of responsibility for one another, certainly key to positive culture.

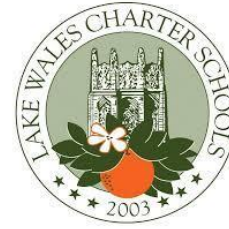
I have seen in action how shared vision can have an incredible impact. I was part of a district with a vision that all students should be college, career, and life ready. This was supported by the community and so opportunities were forged to make this possible. It became a collective responsibility, resulting in greater academic results for children that resulted from, in part, equitable access to rigorous academics and work-based learning experiences.

Positive culture needs to be pervasive throughout the system, just part of how we conduct ourselves-with respect, kindness, and holding each other to high expectations. This is true of students, parents, teachers, staff, and administrators; as adults we serve as models for children, this is part of the informal curriculum. Children are observing adults' behavior, appreciate boundaries, and are looking for guidance and acceptance.

Each school, while being part of the larger culture, has autonomy for traditions, celebrations, and fun! Being at school should be engaging and something looked forward to; to learn together and being missed if you are not at school. Positive culture builds a sense of belonging, increased attendance, and decreased disciplinary issues.

Culture can be hard to define but can be seen. Students taking part in athletics, the arts, academic competitions, and clubs-feeling joy at being part of something larger than themselves. Meetings and interactions that are respectful with productive discourse. Participating in community activities together through volunteerism. Teachers and staff feeling valued through collaboration and time for learning prioritized.

There will be instances in which district or school culture is not where we desire it to be. What is important is having authentic conversations on how we can make growth and improvements. This type of approach is possible only with trusting relationships; students, parents, educators, and community members having the ability to problem-solve and forge a path together.



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

With a shared culture, we will hold one another accountable with expectations of respect, kindness, and integrity. Putting students first in decision-making will guide our course.

Through agreed upon goals that are aspirational, yet realistic, there is alignment in accountability for the superintendent and others in the district. A collaboratively developed plan provides parameters for these goals and defined measures, creating continuity while maintaining autonomy at each school. Related data and systems will inform programming and student experiences across the district.

More importantly, however, is the ability to collectively develop a vision for the student experience and expected outcomes for Lake Wales Charter Schools. As we determine what is needed, there are accountability measures that will be in place to enact this vision at all levels, including student achievement data and perceptions of progress from parents, employees, and community members.

Thoughtfully designed and transparent evaluation systems for all employees, including the superintendent, are a priority. Providing opportunities for input and adjustments periodically is essential.

Listening to feedback, both formally, and in daily interactions, is needed; being approachable and willing to adjust supports an environment of continuous improvement.

There will be situations in which we need to adjust our course. These are opportunities for growth and learning, while being accountable. With a culture of trust, teams become stronger through challenges. Monitoring of expected outcomes and measures with a constant focus on students first in decision-making is essential.