

**Benchmark – Reviving the Professional Culture**

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**EAD-513: Shaping School Culture**

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### **Summary of Existing School Culture**

Maynard High School possesses several obvious advantages. With it being just two years old, Maynard is in a very sense, a new school. New classrooms, buildings, equipment, and with the newness there should be an air of hopefulness and promise. But Maynard's presence as a new school can be a double-edged sword. Because Maynard is only in its second year of existence, the school has not developed any real culture, character, or history to draw upon. Maynard is also beset by what seems to be a relatively high turnover rate, considering its age. The fact that the school's new principal, an assistant principal and seven of the 45 teachers (nearly 15%) have resigned is a flashing, red warning sign that this new school has yet to find its bearings and needs to create meaningful engagement strategies with every one of its stakeholders immediately or risk suffering more turnover and upheaval.

### **Mission and Vision Statement**

The mission of Maynard High School is to create a challenging environment that prepares its students to deepen their knowledge, skills and abilities in order to become valued members of our world. We rely on innovative teaching methods to enhance and encourage our students to become lifelong learners. Maynard also commits to training students that diversity (cultural and otherwise) is our strength. We celebrate that diversity through positive educational atmosphere, emphasizing school spirit, sportsmanship and the hard work necessary to achieve our goals and educational accomplishments. .

At Maynard High School we have a vision of creating a school where excellence is honored and cherished as a way to prepare all of our students to be successes in the new global economy that is our future.

**Short-term Outcomes**

To assess students' abilities and ambitions accurately so they are placed in classes that help them best realize their potential.

To present instruction in a manner that best accommodates various learning styles and ability levels.

**Long-term Outcomes**

To help students come up with realistic career plans and develop a foundation of skills and abilities that will allow them to adapt and function in a changing technological environment.

To demonstrate to students that with every right they are guaranteed as a citizen in the United States there is an equally important responsibility to uphold as a member of a democratic society.

**Involvement and Collaboration to Collect Data**

One model to improving school climate characterizes the gathering and implementation of data to create a healthy culture “a journey, not a one-way trip,” that involves a series of landmarks. To be successful the journey must engage students, staff, families, and the community on an ongoing basis. (National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments, 2022).

The best way to collect data from our stakeholders is to include the standard techniques of data collection: surveys of staff, students, and families. A new administrator would be wise to conduct focus groups, do individual interviews and conduct community forums with representatives of all these stakeholders to gather information about what the school is doing right, and doing wrong, how it can best serve the needs of students in the community as well as what the community expects from Maynard High School as its new educational partner.

Once that information is gathered, as an administrator I would rely on the staff to help decide what areas of improvement need to be prioritized since the staff are the best positioned to know what else is being worked on in the school and who among them is best to address the priorities.

Several areas are of particular concern and need immediate attention. Teacher evaluations are haphazard at best. A formal system of evaluation needs to be restarted – or started – with evaluations being tracked for improvement. Professional learning communities need to be reestablished with teachers sharing standard curriculum across grade levels, subjects, and departments. The professional development plan needs to be investigated and to encompass the new approach to teacher accountability. The approach should be the subject of staff discussions for suggestions on weaknesses or any improvements that can be made to the plan.

#### **Responding to the interests of students' families/caregivers**

The home visit model introduced in this module's readings seemed particularly effective as a method of introducing a school to the wider community. The same kind of playbook should be used at Maynard High. As an administrator I would take a professional teacher's workday to split up the community into sections and have my teachers schedule personal visits at parent's homes to remind them that they are an integral part of making MHS a success. Gainesville, Georgia schools adopted an approach of including the community in growing its schools by flagging barriers to student learning, including bullying, negative school experiences, as well as problems with gangs and drugs.

Our research into Maynard High School did not indicate the ethnicity of our student population, but because of its large Hispanic population, Gainesville bridged the communication gap between the school and the community by hiring a bilingual parent-teacher coordinator. The school system's five-pronged approach, including "community outreach, home involvement in

schooling, student and family assistance, crisis and emergency help and classroom enabled approaches to enable learning” helped reduce disciplinary actions by 48% in the 2008-2009 and 2010-2011 school years (Molnar, 2013).

Another great example of involving parents in the culture of the school is the inclusive support system showcased at Carlton School Charter in Northern California. The Carlton School model could easily be duplicated at Maynard. Parents sign contracts with teachers and students outlining responsibilities and mutual expectations. Parents are included in a telephone chain alerting them to school events. Parents are also encouraged to visit the school anytime and are required to volunteer 40 hours a year of their time to attend school-sponsored events (Deal & Peterson, 2016).

#### **Building and sustaining relationships with community partners**

High school students and volunteering provide a natural way for Maynard High School to weave itself into the culture of the community by demonstrating the care exhibited by its students. I would suggest Maynard “adopt” a certain charity every semester and have students focus their time, service and talents on that charity. An Iowa high school designed and presented plans to improve an urban farm run by a local nonprofit. The supportive relationships formed working with community members ended in students learning architecture, construction and engineering as they worked alongside the professionals in those fields to design their project. These same connections can lead to students’ internships at Maynard which further solidify the community-school connection and often provide students with real-world skills they can take into the job market (Sudderth, 2022).

**Advocate publicly for the needs of students/families and the community.**

The quickest and surest way to establish a new school's necessity in a community is to forge partnerships within the community that both fulfill a real community need and encourage rigorous student learning. If an administrator can identify an authentic community need and devise a way to use Maynard students to address that need, it is a first step in the process.

It is no longer enough to simply ask for the public to spend more money on resources for our schools. School leaders need to take an extra step to show how critical schools like Maynard High School and our capital, its teachers, students, and staff, are to the vitality of our community.

**Rationales for your decision.**

One important lesson that schools must learn following the COVID pandemic is how vital it is for learning communities to move their focus beyond communication to the goal of connection.

As I have outlined above, as an administrator I will attempt to establish connections at every level and with every stakeholder.

Connection in this case can be defined as “the energy that exists between people when they feel seen, heard, and valued; when they can give and receive without judgment.” Communication can be transactional and impersonal. If we focus on establishing authentic human connections, through social justice outreach, collaboration with the community and enhanced relationships with parents, our relational trust will surely grow (Pile & Gilchrist, 2020).

## References

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