



## Is Your School's Culture Toxic or Positive?



A School Administrators Article, Education World

Below are the **KEY POINTS** from this article.

“School culture is the set of norms, values and beliefs, rituals and ceremonies, symbols and stories that make up the ‘persona’ of the school,” says Dr. Kent A. Peterson, a professor in the Department of Educational Administration at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

### POSITIVE OR NEGATIVE?

“There’s an informal network of heroes and heroines and an informal grapevine that passes along information about what’s going on in the school...A set of values that supports professional development of teachers, a sense of responsibility for student learning, and a positive, caring atmosphere” exist.

On the other hand, in a toxic school environment, “teacher relations are often conflictual, the staff doesn’t believe in the ability of the students to succeed, and generally negative attitude” prevails, notes Peterson.

Staff and administrators in a positive school culture believe they have the ability to achieve their ambitions. Their counterparts operating in a negative school environment lack faith in the possibility of realizing their visions.

*School culture has a profound effect on staff development. “It affects attitudes toward spending time to improve instruction, motivation to attend workshops, and the activities people choose to participate in,” Peterson says.*

### WHAT CAN ADMINISTRATORS DO?

Principals need to “read the school” Peterson suggests. They must talk to storytellers on the staff to discern what kind of history the school has. Staff and administrators need to examine what they have learned about the school culture and then they must ask two questions:

- What aspects of the culture are positive and should be reinforced?
- What aspects of the culture are negative and harmful and should be changed?

In “Positive or Negative?” Peterson shared ways in which principals and staff leaders can nurture the school culture’s positive aspects. They include the following:

- Celebrate successes in staff meetings and ceremonies.
- Tell stories of accomplishments
- Use clear, shared language created during professional development to foster a commitment to staff and student learning.

When administrators and staff

collaborate in a strong push to foster [the positive], an environment [flourishes] in which learning blooms. Read more at [http://www.educationworld.com/a\\_admin/admin/admin275.shtml](http://www.educationworld.com/a_admin/admin/admin275.shtml).

### Toxic or Positive?

*Which term describes your school's culture?*

#### **A toxic school culture**

- *Blames students for lack of progress*
- *Discourages collaboration*
- *Breeds hostility among staff.*

#### **A positive school culture**

- *Celebrates successes*
- *Emphasizes accomplishment and collaboration*
- *Fosters a commitment to staff and student learning.*

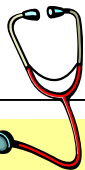


## Protocol Questions



Protocol System addresses these general School Level questions:

- **PLANNING:** What planning occurs to organize and support the professional development for teachers?
- **LEARNING:** How and how well is the professional development delivered to teachers?
- **IMPLEMENTING:** What implementation is provided to ensure that teachers apply the skills and knowledge gained through the learned professional development?
- **EVALUATING:** What evaluation occurs to ensure that the professional development resulted in teacher application in the classroom and improvements in student learning as a direct outcome?



### Check-up of the Protocol System

- Does the data of the needs of the school connect with the professional learning that takes place?
- Are the components of effective PLCs demonstrated: ex. Student-focused, data driven lesson study, professional learning, etc.?
- Does the implementation (follow-up) of professional learning demonstrate an understanding that professional learning is not a one-shot experience?
  - How are teachers implementing strategies learned from the professional learning activity?
  - How does monitoring/documentation of implementation occur: walk-throughs, classroom visits, reflections, etc.?
- What has been the impact of professional learning affected practices? What was the result of learning and implementing professional learning, etc.?
- Is there a connection of the School Improvement Plan to the professional learning that takes place at the school?

### Professional Development System Evaluation Protocol: Educator Protocol Review PowerPoint

The Professional Development Department is providing a PowerPoint for administrators interested in sharing some **Professional Development Protocol Review** information with educators at their schools. The **Educator Protocol Review** PowerPoint is located in **Public Folders**. To access the PowerPoint in **Public Folders** please go to the **Professional Development** folder, open the **PD Contact Protocol Information** folder, open the **AIF Protocol Materials** folder, and then open or save the **Educator Protocol Review** PowerPoint.



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**Congratulations to Kenyetta Feacher and the Lesson Study team at Lakeland Highlands Middle School for the winning entry in the April, 2011 PD Showcase!**