Building a Positive Transformational Culture: Lessons From High-Performing Urban Schools

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Why are AVID elective teachers more likely to generate strong learning results for diverse students than typical teachers?
Non-selective, urban schools (serving primarily students from low-income families) that demonstrate high achievement for all students.

These schools evidence:

- High proficiency rates for all groups
- High graduation rates for all groups
- High rates of access to challenging programs for all groups
- Demonstrated success for English learners
- Low rates of suspension/expulsion for all groups
- Other indicators of student success/achievement
Empowering School Characteristics

- Challenging Curricula
- Effective, Engaging Instruction

Positive Transformational Culture
Similarly, Outstanding AVID Teachers Provide:

- Access to Challenging Curricula
- Instruction that Engages All Students
- A Positive Transformational Culture
### Positive Transformational Culture

**FOR STUDENTS**

- Educators consistently interacted in ways that led all students to feel respected and valued.

- Educators consistently interacted in ways that led all students to feel intelligent and capable. Students and parents perceived reasons to be hopeful.

- Educators provided all students multiple avenues for achieving success and recognition. For example, grading systems promoted effort and generated successes.

- Educators led all students to perceive that educators *wanted them* to be at school. (Not just for ADA purposes!)

- Educators caused students from all groups to perceive that they were emotionally and physically safe.

- Educators convinced students from all groups that “school” was intentionally designed to be meaningful and helpful to them.

- Educators led students from all groups to feel empowered to nurture their own academic, social, and personal growth.
In schools that achieve great results for all demographic groups, a positive transformational culture exists school-wide (not just in a few classrooms).

The positive transformational culture is the base for changes in curriculum and instruction.
So, what must leaders (district leaders, school leaders, and teacher leaders) do to create positive transformational cultures throughout a school?
Wishful thinking is rarely sufficient to create a positive transformational culture.
Task 1:

Creating a Positive Transformational Culture for the Adults
## A Positive Transformational Culture for Adults

In high-performing schools, we found that:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Details</th>
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<tr>
<td>Leaders consistently interacted in ways that led all personnel to feel respected and valued.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leaders consistently interacted in ways that led all personnel to feel intelligent and capable.</td>
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<td>School personnel believed that their colleagues perceived them as important contributors to the school’s transformational efforts</td>
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<td>School personnel perceived that their leaders were committed to helping them succeed in their professional roles.</td>
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<td>Leaders caused all school personnel to perceive that they were emotionally and physically safe.</td>
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<td>Educators perceived that school leaders provided abundant, professionally valuable supports that were likely to lead to success in educating the diverse groups of students they served.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leaders led school personnel to feel empowered to nurture their own pedagogical, academic, social, and personal growth.</td>
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Key Issues in Creating a Positive Transformational Culture for Adults

- Consistently modeling behavior that leads all personnel to feel valued, respected, capable, and intelligent

- Identifying and changing the policies, procedures, and practices that lead adults to not feel valued, respected, capable, and intelligent

- Creating opportunities for personnel to model and strengthen the school’s positive transformational culture for adults
Task 2:

Leading Adults to Believe that Changing the Culture for Students is Worth the Effort
Key Issues in Leading Others to Perceive that Changing the Culture for Students is Worthwhile

• Putting forth a clear vision of a positive culture that resonates with a critical mass of teachers and other adults

• Helping adults understand that their efforts to improve curriculum and learning are most likely to succeed if they change the culture students experience

• Emphasizing the moral imperative (the benefit to students, all groups of students, and each individual student)

• Keeping the reasons for change (students) in the forefront
Task 3:

Leading Adults to Believe that “the Change” is Possible
At This School – In This City – With These Kids
Key Issues in Leading Others to Believe that the Change is Possible

- Noticing, acknowledging, and where appropriate, celebrating evidence of progress in establishing a positive culture for students

- Finding and highlighting evidence of positive transformational cultures in schools that serve similar populations of students

- Acknowledging the real challenges to changing culture, while highlighting logical reasons to believe that success is attainable

- Confronting disbelief respectfully and firmly
Task 4:

Leading Adults to Know What Actions/Practices are Critical to Create a Positive Transformational Culture for All Students
Key Issues in Leading Others to Know What Actions/Practices Are Critical

- Engaging students and teachers in identifying the actions or practices that influence the extent to which students feel valued, respected, capable, and intelligent. Critical practices might address:
  - Patterns of interactions between adults and students
  - Efforts to relate lesson content to students' experiences and cultures
  - The attractiveness of classrooms and facilities
  - Efforts to engage every student throughout each lesson
  - Grading policies
- Encouraging individual and group commitments to change specific actions or practices that influence the culture for students
- Regularly acknowledging observations of effort to change the culture
Task 5:

Leading Adults to Believe They Have Abundant Support to Create a Positive Transformational Culture for Students
Key Issues in Leading Others to Believe They Have Abundant Support

- Addressing culture issues through professional development, teacher collaboration, and observation/feedback
- When improvements are not evident, identifying and responding to the reasons for a lack of change (Consistently demonstrating a growth mindset)
- Assuming responsibility for being part of the solution
- Engaging other school and teacher leaders in supporting others in making changes to the culture of their classrooms
- Giving people the space to try new approaches without penalty
Collective Efficacy

The collective efficacy of a school team can be more powerful than socio-economic factors in predicting student achievement (Goddard, Hoy, and Hoy; 2000).
Creating a Positive Transformational Culture for Students

- Leading Adults to Believe that Changing the Culture for Students is Worth the Effort
- Leading Adults to Know What Actions Are Critical to Changing the Culture for Students
- Leading Adults to Believe that It Is Possible to Change the Culture for Students
- Leading Adults to Believe They Have Abundant Support to Change the Culture for Students

Creating a Positive Transformational Culture for the Adults
For More Information Read:

Teaching Practices from America’s Best Urban Schools

(Johnson, Perez, Uline)

Leadership in America’s Best Urban Schools

(Johnson, Uline, Perez)
Join Us at the
America’s Best Urban Schools Symposium
October 8-10, 2018, La Jolla, CA

Learn about the principles and practices that urban educators use to attain high achievement for all groups of students.

Register at www.ncust.com