



DISTRICT-WIDE

School Culture Transformation

Hope Public Schools are going through a transformation. They are focusing on positive climate and culture as a part of the district-wide strategy for improvement in the wake of being labeled academically distressed.

SUMMARY

Hope Public Schools, in Southwestern Arkansas, is in the midst of a district turnaround. The community had been wrestling with the image of their public schools, which had been labeled “Academically Distressed” by the Arkansas Department of Education. Additional data indicated that Hope students were not learning at rates comparable to their more affluent peers in neighboring districts.

Bobby Hart, the district superintendent, and his school board began to create the district’s strategic improvement plan by identifying focus areas and setting a clear, compelling vision for classrooms across the district in each area. After Hart and the board analyzed data from a variety of sources, school culture and climate emerged as a component of the plan that needed increased focus and outside support.



**HOPE PUBLIC SCHOOLS
ARKANSAS**

6 SCHOOLS

GRADES PREK - 12

2,349 STUDENTS

**83% ECONOMICALLY
DISADVANTAGED**

9% SPECIAL EDUCATION

46% AFRICAN-AMERICAN

31% HISPANIC

1% MULTIPLE RACES

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Making District-wide Culture Change A Reality

Based on the district turnaround plan, Hope district and school leaders created systems of support to ensure positive culture change would be implemented and maintained across the district.

THEY TOOK THE FOLLOWING STEPS TO IMPLEMENT EXCELLENCE IN SCHOOL CULTURE DISTRICT-WIDE:

- 1 SET A DISTRICT-WIDE VISION OF EXCELLENCE
- 2 ANALYZE SUMMATIVE DATA
- 3 SET CULTURE GOALS
- 4 USE LEADING INDICATORS TO MONITOR PROGRESS
- 5 BUILD CAPACITY FOR CHANGE WITH SHARED LEADERSHIP
- 6 CREATE COLLABORATIVE SYSTEMS FOR CULTURE DATA ANALYSIS

Set a District-wide Vision of Excellence

To begin a plan to change culture, district leaders must have a clear and compelling vision for what excellence will look like across the district. Leading this change across multiple campuses will require that staff across the district are motivated and bought in to taking on the challenge of changing their campuses and classrooms to improve student outcomes. Teachers, specifically, must be excited about what is possible for their students, as they will be at the heart of what happens daily to contribute to this positive cultural shift. Leaders can begin by asking questions such as: What will it look and sound like to be a student who excels in our schools? What are the expectations we have for how students and teachers interact with one another every day? What signs or indicators will show us that schools have an increasingly positive, supportive, and motivating culture?

Hart, the superintendent, along with district and school leaders, and the school board began the district's strategic culture improvement planning process by setting a vision for success. Informal and formal conversations with stakeholders in the community, teachers, other district and school leaders, as well as students and parents indicated that the need for a unified approach was felt by many. Additionally, research proving a positive culture leads to improved academic outcomes led Hart and the other leaders to understand that setting a motivating vision for positive, nurturing classrooms across the district was going to be a key to achieving their goal of district-wide academic improvement.



Analyze Summative Data

After setting the vision for culture excellence throughout the district, leaders must examine their reality relative to this vision. Analyzing existing data about culture and discipline throughout the district allows leaders to assess how close they've been to achieving their vision in the past and helps to inform strategic priorities for the future. District-wide trends as well as individual school/campus data will inform decisions about changes to be implemented in the coming school year. Districts can identify campuses that may need additional support, bright spots to highlight and learn from, as well as areas of priority that span across campuses.

HOPE DISTRICT AND CAMPUS LEADERS ANALYZED DATA FROM A VARIETY OF SOURCES IN ORDER TO INFORM THEIR STRATEGIC PLANNING. SOME EXAMPLES OF DATA SOURCES INCLUDE:

At the district-level, this analysis allowed Hope leaders to customize district and school professional development focus areas and calendars, and plan for targeted campus and leader support. They also identified, through this analysis process, specific culture trends that needed to be improved at each school.

- 2016-2017 STUDENT SURVEY DATA
- DISCIPLINE/OFFICE REFERRALS
- IN-SCHOOL SUSPENSION RATES
- OUT-OF-SCHOOL SUSPENSION RATES

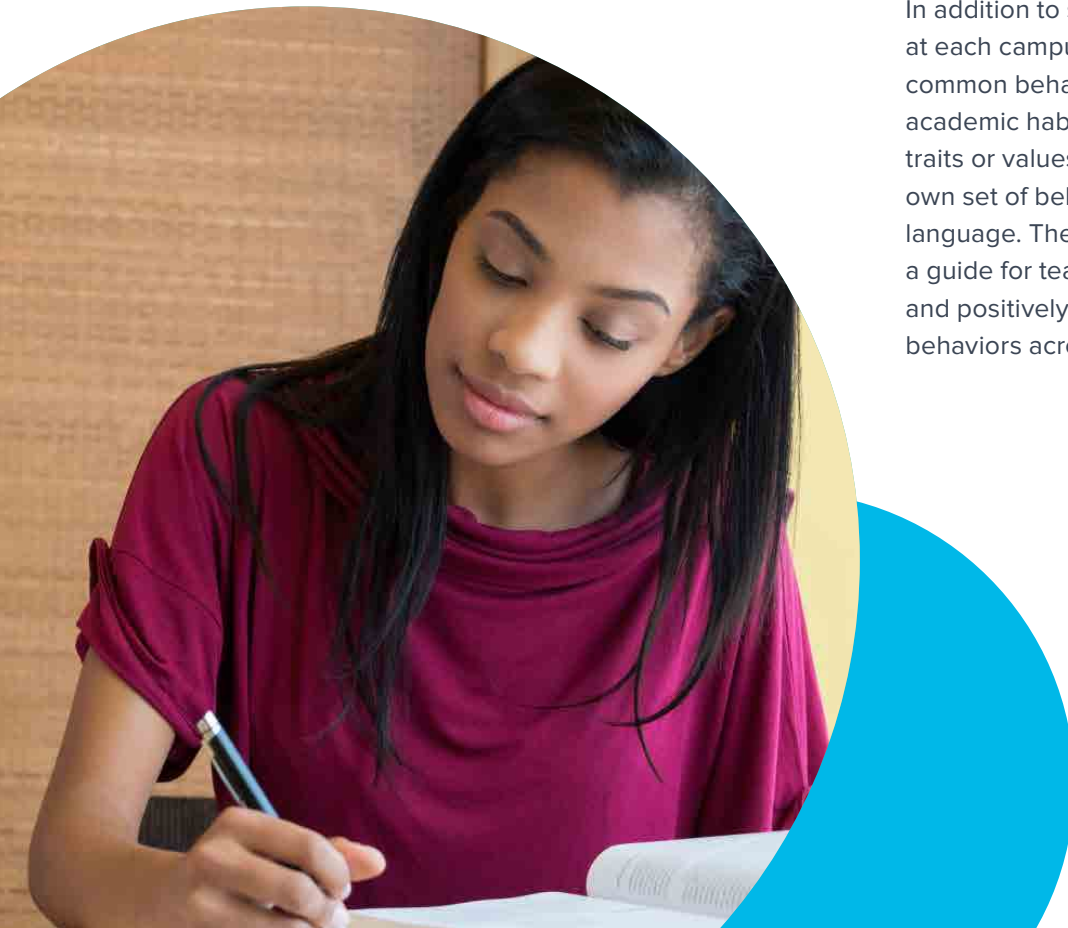


Set Culture Goals

After analyzing the data at both the district and then school campus level, leaders then began the process of setting goals for the coming school year. Goal-setting at both the district and school level helps leaders know whether their vision for change is coming to life. Goal-setting can and should encompass both qualitative and quantitative measures of success. Leaders should ask themselves, “How will I know that our vision for culture change is being achieved? What things can we see in the data? What things will students, teachers, and parents say, think, and feel about our school if we are successful in achieving our vision?” This process should occur first at the district level, and then again at the school level. Beginning with a district goal will help guide the focus and specificity of school goals.

At Hope, one of the first steps that each school culture team took after analyzing their school specific data was goal setting alongside their Kickboard School Culture Coach. School leaders, using discipline and culture data from the previous school year, set individual campus goals for the upcoming school year with each of their culture teams. Goals ranged from reducing disciplinary send outs or suspensions to increasing positive interactions between teachers and students, as evidenced by increases in the student survey results.

In addition to setting goals, culture teams at each campus in Hope determined common behaviors to track. From academic habits to specific character traits or values, each campus created their own set of behaviors using a common language. These behaviors served as a guide for teachers to explicitly teach and positively reinforce desired student behaviors across their campus.



Use Leading Indicators to Monitor Progress

Leading indicators are measurable factors that change before other data points start to follow a particular pattern or trend. Examples of culture leading indicators might be the positivity ratio—the ratio of positive-to-negative interactions—of a classroom or grade level. An increase in positivity might occur before the number of students being sent out of class or total disciplinary referrals decrease, indicating that trend is coming. Therefore, the positivity ratio may be seen as a leading indicator. Campus leaders say that paying attention to leading indicators helps them coach and support teachers because they can react to that data before other outcomes need their attention. Lagging indicators such as high suspension rates or office referrals require more time and result in missed instructional time for students and adults, as well as intervene with the student after the behavior pattern is in place, as opposed to proactively addressing it.

HART IS GRADUALLY SHIFTING HOPE'S DISTRICT CULTURE DATA COLLECTION PLAN TOWARD LEADING INDICATORS OF CULTURE. THESE INCLUDE:

While leaders still submit quarterly data on discipline referrals and suspensions to the district, Hart knows these lagging indicators can't inform proactive measures. He says that by the time a leader has data on lagging measures of discipline, it's too late. School leaders can be proactive by addressing behavior patterns and classroom culture to prevent behaviors that would merit a referral or suspension. This means that leaders need real-time data on student behavior and teacher-student interactions - which is something Hart acknowledged Kickboard provides.

- POSITIVITY RATIOS
- TRENDS IN SPECIFIC BEHAVIOR INSTANCES
- PROACTIVE WATCH LISTS WHERE STUDENTS ARE FLAGGED FOR A PATTERN OF MINOR BEHAVIORS



Because they have real-time data at their fingertips, school leaders spend time together during Principal PLCs analyzing their data (both lagging and leading indicators) and collaborating on ways to respond to trends in their own data. By working collaboratively and monitoring the progress of each school across the district, leaders continuously improve both individually and collectively by learning from each other and from their data at the principal level.

During Hope principals' meetings, leaders collaborate on strategies for coaching a teacher whose praise ratio is low or on school-wide incentives to change a rising occurrence of "off task" behavior—data they are getting from Kickboard. Principals collaborate on classroom instructional strategies for increasing a desired behavior or ways to cut down the number of students hitting the counselor's watch list for peer conflicts.

Build Capacity for Change with Shared Leadership

At the district level, designated leadership is key. Whether or not a district has a dedicated position for culture leadership, someone should serve as the owner in this area in order to ensure cohesion, consistency, and accountability at many levels. School leaders must know who will provide internal support and professional development for school culture change, as well as who will serve as the district's central contact for vendors and partner agencies.

Superintendent Bobby Hart knew immediately that he couldn't make a district-wide positive shift in school culture happen with just a superintendent's edict or a policy change—he needed collaboration and buy-in at all levels of the organization. He designated a district-level culture leader to own the strategic culture planning and implementation.



Two levels of leadership must exist to ensure culture change across the district: district level leadership and school level leadership. At the school level, leaders other than the principal might include the Dean of Culture/Students, grade level chairpersons, or assistant principals who are tasked with analyzing and responding to school-wide data. Sharing the responsibility for change with a behavior or culture team allows teachers and other leaders to contribute to the school's vision for change.

Hope Public Schools developed both school and district leads/teams to accomplish their goals. The district lead, in collaboration with a Kickboard School Culture Coach, customized a professional development plan. Then each principal created a campus-level culture team who collaborated over the summer to set campus-level culture goals, develop positive incentive plans, and determine common behaviors to reinforce. Each campus team then built out and delivered teacher training on strategies for positive student support. All of the campus-level efforts were aligned to the district vision for positive culture—a true united effort across the entire district.

Create Collaborative Systems for Culture Data Analysis

In addition to analyzing real-time data at the district and school level during principal's meetings, culture data should also be analyzed at the grade and classroom level by the teachers, themselves. One way that smaller groups of teachers and administrators can dive into data at this level is through dedicating time in already existing structures such as grade level meetings or PLCs. Teachers are at the heart of making cultural changes with their students - it only makes sense to dedicate time in teacher-centered meeting structures to discuss culture data and strategies together.

At Hope Public Schools, culture data is analyzed at the classroom level by teachers during monthly Culture PLCs. After the Kickboard School Culture Coach modeled the structure of these meetings, campus-based leaders then began implementing the structure regularly with teachers across grade levels. After analyzing and reflecting on culture data from their own classrooms, teachers work together to identify and replicate what is working and collaborate on what needs additional refinement.

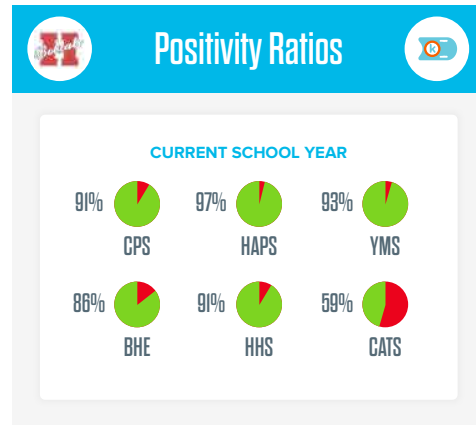
In its first year of implementation, Hope School District has already seen dramatic signs of success.

3:1 POSITIVITY RATIO

All campuses have an intentional focus on positivity, and most have maintained a 3:1 positivity ratio throughout the year.

REDUCTION IN OFFICE REFERRALS

One middle school reduced office referrals by 34% compared to last school year with another middle school reducing referrals by 70%.



INCREASED FOCUS ON TEACHING AND LEARNING

Superintendent Bobby Hart has seen a marked change in the way teachers engage with one another during Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). By focusing on culture at the start of the year, they've been able to increasingly focus more wholly and deeply on academic data and learning.

CONCLUSION

If there's one thing Superintendent Bobby Hart wants his leaders to understand about the process of transformation, it's that there is never one destination they're hoping to reach. The destination will continue to migrate further down the road to excellence as teachers, leaders, and students continue to make improvements in school culture.

The path, however, will follow the same data-driven steps they took to begin the journey—having real-time data about school culture to measure progress and determine the next goal post on the journey to improvement.