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Dynamic Teacher Leadership

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While reading “Improving Teacher Retention with Supportive Workplace Conditions,” I was reminded of the school for which I currently teach. The article explains that teachers are more likely to stay in their current positions when the workplace is concerned with the teachers’ time, leadership, professional development, and access to resources. It also emphasizes that school leadership plays a key role in keeping teachers in their classrooms.

According to the article, time, administrative leadership, empowerment, and professional development are the key factors that attribute to teacher retention. The authors state that the time teachers spend outside of the classroom working on things for their students is not appreciated as it should be. A teacher’s time is valuable and administrators should seek to provide fair and appropriate teaching assignments and workday schedules. Additionally, the administration of schools should strive to be supporting and trusting of the teachers who work there. The authors also affirm that teachers “derive great satisfaction from their work when they are able to contribute to decisions such as scheduling, selection of materials, and professional development experiences” (Marvel et al., 2007). Furthermore, teachers appreciate the opportunities to work their peers; when teachers are isolated, a damaging effect occurs on teacher satisfaction, effectiveness, and retention. The authors make it very clear that teacher retention is a problem and that administrators need to know what teachers need to feel welcome, accepted, and supported in order to keep them coming back to work with the kids.

I have to say that I agree completely with the article. If I did not have the wonderful working conditions that I truly have been blessed to experience, I do not know if I would wake up every morning and want to go to work; actually, most mornings it doesn’t feel like going to work. I definitely have a sense of belonging in the school “family,” I know I am appreciated for what I do, not only because the principal is so great about letting us know how great we are, but because the parents of the kids do as well. I think it would take a very strong force, or a very severe circumstance to move me from my current position at North Oldham. The authors of the article show that teachers are happiest where they are supported and appreciated, and this fact does not surprise me in the least.

Time and Professional development were also key arguments in the article. I have to agree that time is of the essence for every teacher on the planet. I believe we have one common request from everyone we meet professionally: “Just please don’t waste my time!” Our time as educators is too precious to sit in monotonous meetings that never carry over to resolutions or action. Professional development is much the same: “Give me something I can use!” In my experience, the only way to know what a teacher needs is to ask; sometimes you’ll find that educators want to be trained on similar programs or strategies, while at other times it seems as if every teacher wants to focus on something different. However, the beauty of professional development is that it can be tailored, and it does not have to take place in PLCs. Professional Development can be personal, it can be within a small group, or it can be faculty wide. Our administrators are constantly asking what we want and what we need to be the most effective teachers in our classrooms. They understand that our needs are unique and they are accommodating and open to new ideas. The flexibility of the administration is a key to keeping the teachers at North Oldham happy.

Overall, the article was right on target for what teachers want and need in their professional working environment. If there is no freedom, no trust, and isolation, you are basically working in a prison. Teachers work hard to get their degrees just like every other profession, why should they be sentenced to life in a cell with little to no creative facility in most cases, when that is what is truly needed to be an exceptional teacher? I am beyond fortunate to have the environment and the working conditions I have, but I also do not take them for granted. I feel that many teachers who work in positive environments and have the means necessary to do all they can, often sell themselves short or find something to complain about, no matter how great they have it. Okay, yes, Jefferson County teachers have higher salaries, but would you really give this up for a pay raise? I think not. Working conditions like the ones at North do not just “happen.” A positive and supportive environment for teachers is built, slow and meticulously, by the administration. When a teacher is gifted the opportunity to work in place with such caring administrators, teachers, counselors, parents, and building staff, they cannot walk away just because the money might be better somewhere else.