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PRINCIPALS FELLOWSHIP**

UNLEASHING THE POWER OF DATA-DRIVEN LEADERSHIP: A RESEARCH-BASED APPROACH TO
BOOSTING TEACHER MORALE AND EFFICACY

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ABSTRACT

This research paper explores the critical issue of teacher morale and efficacy in a school and presents a data-driven approach to address this challenge. The paper begins by highlighting the findings from a School Climate Survey, which revealed that over 60 percent of teachers feel isolated and lack a sense of belonging on campus. Building upon this data, the paper poses a school-centered question on how to increase teacher efficacy through morale-building initiatives. Additionally, a leadership-focused question is presented to identify the necessary skills and practices that need to be introduced, modified, or eliminated to effectively address teacher morale and enhance teacher efficacy. The paper aims to provide evidence-based strategies and recommendations for school leaders to create a positive school environment, where everyone feels a sense of belonging and connectedness to the school's mission, vision, and ambitious academic and cultural goals.

This undertaking relied upon the collaborative efforts of our entire school community as internal and external stakeholders' feelings and perspectives served as the driving force. Although a deep-rooted issue, this was a challenge we were committed to undertake to ensure all stakeholders, beginning with our students and teachers felt that they belonged at MAST Academy, A Nationally Recognized School of Excellence and understood how important it was to know that the school and greater community wanted them at MAST, A Nationally Recognized School of Excellence with a very lengthy waitlist. Throughout this process we as a school family were able to rejuvenate our professional sports and gained priceless insight from the Cahn Fellows Distinguished Principals Fellowship experience.

INTRODUCTION

Based on a need to address a pervasive, deep-rooted issue at MAST, our CAHN project focused on teacher morale and efficacy, which plays a crucial role in the overall success of a school. When teachers feel isolated and lack a sense of belonging, it can negatively impact their motivation, job satisfaction, and ultimately, student outcomes. This narrative report presents the methods used to explore the issue of teacher morale and efficacy, specifically a data-driven approach that was used to address this challenge. By analyzing the findings from a School Climate Survey, the paper aims to shed light on the extent of the problem and provide insights into potential solutions. Through the CAHN Distinguished Principals Fellowship study of practice, the data-driven impact of the enlisting strategies and solutions that would allow for teachers to collaborate, communicate, create, and develop a sense of belonging to a school community proved effective.

MAST Academy is located on Virginia Key, a barrier island in Miami, across from the University of Miami Rosenstiel School of Marine and Atmospheric Science. Certified as a Demonstration School by Magnet Schools of America, a Green Ribbon school by the U.S. Department of Education, and the only Florida Department of Environmental Protection Gold Apple School, MAST is a nationally recognized school of excellence. Home to 1571 students and four magnet programs serving grades 6-12, MAST is committed to utilizing innovation to educate global citizens. Honors, Advanced Placement, Cambridge, and Dual Enrollment courses are offered alongside magnet themed coursework in maritime science & technology, STEM, and global studies. An international diploma, investigative hands-on experiences, extracurricular

offerings, and rigorous academic programs afford MAST students opportunities to top universities across the globe.

As a school wide magnet, thematic infusion is at the core of our vision and mission statement. It articulates our goal of “utilizing innovation to educate global citizens” and our objectives of “focusing on diversity, environmental awareness, and technology” in everything we do to align with our magnet themes of Cambridge, Cambridge Global Studies, Cambridge STEM, and Maritime Science and Technology. Clearly stated in our vision and mission statement is the approach to be taken in delivering educational activities to our students; these include “incorporating a thematic and inquiry-based approach, problem solving, and experiential learning”.

These approaches can be seen in the following educational activities which support our vision and mission and align to our magnet themes: - An academic program including opportunities for advancement through Cambridge, Advanced Placement (AP), and Dual Enrollment courses including AP Environmental Science, AS & A Marine Science, AS Environmental Management and a full complement of core math and science courses. Courses in flamenco, AS International History, Cambridge A level Spanish and French and AP Italian support the nation’s first Coast Guard Junior Leadership Program.

Activities and learning opportunities that expose students not only to the marine environment, but the literature, history, and traditions that form the full breadth of maritime experiences. Such as, but not limited to, reading the works of Melville and Hemingway, overnight canoe trips in the Florida Everglades, and discussing important naval battles in history. Flamenco classes bring the rich cultural history of Spain to life for our Global Studies

students. Students collaborate and engage in research before graduation in support of the vision. Marine biology students join University of Miami researchers, boarding vessels to capture, tag, and record data on local sharks while internship students work alongside scientists in research labs.

MAST Academy boasts a 100% graduation rate and consistently outperforms the State and District across school academic accountability areas. As a result of our academics and magnet courses, MAST Academy attracts students throughout Miami-Dade County looking for academic rigor and experiential education that has a historically proven track-record and a long-lasting “A” rating from the Florida Department of Education. Strong recruiting efforts bring students to MAST Academy from all over our diverse, large, urban district. The initial application is available in multiple languages and school tours are available in both English and Spanish. Staff that can provide additional assistance to families speaking Creole or French have been identified and are available as needed. ELL level and IEPs are not considered or viewed during the application process and any discussion of necessary support is only conducted after an offer of admission is made. A specialized remedial reading course, specialized courses to support English Language Learners, and the full integration of special needs students in all courses ensure access and equity for all students.

Dedicated exceptional education staff, ELL strategies and monitoring training for all staff, and Gifted Resource services support the full integration of diverse students to our program while providing the additional support necessary to maximize their success. 100% of special needs students are enrolled in inclusion classes, this support ensures special needs students receive

the accommodations necessary to be successful in the least restrictive learning environment. Providing equitable access means ensuring all students can participate in the full breadth of experiences available to students. To this end, all students, some living as far as 36 miles away, receive transportation to the school. An Activities Bus provides transportation to students who remain after hours for extra-curricular activities. Special interest clubs abound providing an opportunity for students from diverse backgrounds to come together around shared interests. Our award-winning athletics program competes in a variety of sports and our student athletes have won numerous district and state championships in water polo, swimming, soccer, tennis, and golf.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

At the beginning of the 2021-2022 school year, the results of the School Climate Survey (Appendix A), an instrument used to gather data specific to stakeholder perceptions, feelings, and experiences at school sites, was reviewed to gauge teacher morale at MAST Academy. The survey was administered in the middle of the prior year during the pandemic when some teachers worked at the physical school site and others worked remotely (The M-DCPS Hybrid Model). Of the 52 teachers that completed the survey, 56 percent indicated that they would give the school an overall rating of a B or lower. A review of the data specific to each question, for Q28 on the School Climate Survey, "I feel staff morale is high at my school", 67 percent of the respondents disagreed.

As the newly assigned principal, it was imperative that a root cause analysis be conducted to understand factors driving these feelings and ratings in a top U.S. high performing,

high ranking, nationally recognized school of excellence. During the first meeting, faculty and staff were afforded the opportunity to engage in honest and transparent dialogue individually and collectively. These dialogues revealed that teachers simply felt overwhelmed, overworked, and unappreciated; some teachers shared that they were exploring other options outside of education, while others were looking at other options silently (silent quitting); faculty and staff morale was at an all-time low. More than 50 percent of the teachers indicated that they felt isolated and lacked a sense of belonging. It was necessary to conduct an analysis of the school's strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities (SWO).

The results of the SWO compiled according to category then ranked based on the frequency were very telling (Appendix B). Using the data collected along with the strengths and opportunities identified, the School Improvement Plan (SIP) and the "You Belong Here" (YBH) initiative were created. The faculty and staff input in the development of SIP and YBH initiatives were very clear about what actions they would like to see that would improve morale and efficacy. Those action steps became part of the School Improvement Process and the principal recited silently daily Dr. Neila Connors' book title, *"If you don't feed the teachers, they will eat the children"*.

Given the problem of practice; low teacher morale and lack of efficacy, our focus was to listen to the teachers, create opportunities that would give them what they desired at work, create expectations, feed them (professional development and food), provide collaborative opportunities, make them feel respected, appreciated, and valued. In other words, our focus was to increase teacher efficacy through moral building initiatives.

The definition or concept of teacher efficacy or collective teacher efficacy is the

perception of teachers in a school that the efforts of the faculty as whole will have a positive effect on student achievement. Teachers' level of confidence about the ability to promote learning can depend on past experiences or on school culture (Goddard, Hoy, and Hoy, 2000). Delving into the background/history of this problem of practice, MAST Academy was founded 30 years ago, as the Miami Inner City Marine Project, the main objective was to provide a unique opportunity for students in Miami's Urban Core to attend school in one of the wealthiest zip codes in the United States on the paradisiac island of Key Biscayne connected to the Mainland of Miami by a bridge. The students were and still are bused in or transported by the train and shuttled over the bridge to our school where they engage in exploratory research specific to Marine and Maritime Science.

A few years after the school was founded, the residents of Key Biscayne wanted MAST to be expanded to serve the students who reside on the island. This expansion, albeit successful now, resulted in discontent across the school community. The original students, alumni and faculty felt as though they lost their school and its founding vision. Teachers who were hired to teach the lower grade levels were not welcomed by the founding faculty. This has resulted in deep-rooted division among the faculty. At the heart of the principalship is the ability to help develop a sense of efficacy for individual teachers and the entire school.

Teachers in a school characterized by a can-do, "together we can make a difference" attitude are typically more likely to accept challenging goals and be less likely to give up easily (Brinson and Steiner, 2007). With the current problem of practice and knowing the impact of teacher efficacy on teacher morale and student achievement, we understood that a culture shift was required, and organizational cultures do not change overnight.

We decided to think about the problem as a three-part process including data observation and questions from both a school centered and a leadership focus. The school centered question used to guide the process was, “How can we increase teacher efficacy through morale building initiatives? The leadership focused question was, “What leadership skills and practices do we need to introduce, modify, or eliminate in order to effectively address teacher morale and increase teacher efficacy?”

METHODS

The morale building initiatives were initiated in hopes of increasing teacher efficacy. For this to occur, teachers must feel appreciated, supported, and valued. To address the problem of practice, we took on an approach of beginning with the end in mind. With this, we utilized both a quantitative and qualitative approach to get to the root of the problem, devise, and monitor progress specific to the possible solutions. In August 2022, using the results of the School Climate survey, we reviewed the faculty responses and the faculty/staff morale questions. The data sources utilized to evaluate the impact of these initiatives included the School Climate Survey, a faculty/staff morale survey, and a midyear faculty/staff morale survey.

The “Staff Morale Survey” was administered in September 2022 to afford 100 percent of the faculty and staff the opportunity to share what initiatives aimed at improving staff morale the previous school year worked, which ones did not, and what they would like for the current school year.

In reviewing the Staff Morale Survey, the respondents indicated a need to engage in the

following initiatives:

- Increase the frequency of the Offshore Food Carts filled with goodies for the teachers.
- More Staff luncheons.
- Allow every department to present a research based best practice along with resources and ways to implement the practice to increase student achievement at each faculty meeting.
- Publicly recognize one employee every month at the faculty meeting and gift them with the themed personalized jacket and sailboat award.

We took this information, listened to the teachers, and implemented all initiatives with fidelity. The effectiveness of these initiatives was monitored by way of School Improvement Process Document Reviews, administering a Mid-Year Morale and School Climate Survey, and engaging in collaborative conversations specific to the results of the Mid-Year Morale and School Climate Survey Data. Below is an explanation of each initiative that was implemented.

1. Offshore Food Cart

The Offshore Food Cart initiative aimed to provide a variety of food options for teachers during lunch breaks, with the goal of improving their overall well-being and job satisfaction. To assess the impact of this initiative on morale and teacher efficacy, data was collected through the Staff Morale Survey. This survey included questions related to teacher satisfaction with the availability and quality of food options, as well as their perception of the initiative's impact on their overall job satisfaction, energy levels, and productivity. Additionally, open-ended questions were included to gather qualitative feedback on specific aspects of the Offshore Food

Cart initiative that teachers found most beneficial or areas for improvement.

The survey was administered to all teachers in the school at the beginning, middle and end of the academic year to capture any changes over time. Furthermore, focus group discussions were conducted with a sample of teachers to delve deeper into their experiences with the Offshore Food Cart and gather more detailed qualitative data.

2. Increased Staff Luncheons

The initiative to increase staff luncheons aimed to provide opportunities for teachers to socialize and build stronger relationships with their colleagues. To measure the impact of this initiative on morale and teacher efficacy, data was collected through the Staff Morale Survey. This survey included questions related to teacher satisfaction with the frequency and organization of staff luncheons, as well as their perception of the initiative's impact on their sense of belonging, collaboration, and overall job satisfaction.

Open-ended questions were included to gather qualitative feedback on the specific benefits teachers experienced from increased staff luncheons, such as improved communication, increased support, and enhanced teamwork. The survey was administered at the beginning and end of the academic year to capture any changes in teacher perceptions and experiences over time. Additionally, observations were conducted during staff luncheons to assess the level of engagement, interaction, and overall atmosphere, providing further insights into the impact of this initiative.

3. Department Presentations at Faculty Meetings

To enhance teacher morale and student achievement was the department-based best practice presentations during faculty meetings. This initiative aimed to provide teachers with

research-based strategies and resources to effectively implement practices that would increase student achievement. At each faculty meeting, every department was given the opportunity to present a research-based best practice that had shown promising results in improving student outcomes. The presentations included detailed explanations of the practice, supporting research, and practical ways to implement it in the classroom. Resources such as lesson plans, instructional materials, and assessment tools were also shared to support teachers in implementing the best practices effectively. The department-based best practice initiative served multiple purposes. Firstly, it provided teachers with access to evidence-based strategies that had been proven to be effective in increasing student achievement. This allowed teachers to expand their instructional repertoire and try new approaches in their classrooms.

Secondly, the initiative fostered collaboration and knowledge sharing among teachers. Each department had the opportunity to showcase their expertise and share their successful practices with colleagues. This created a supportive and collaborative environment where teachers could learn from one another and adapt the best practices to suit their own teaching styles and student needs. Lastly, the initiative aimed to empower teachers by providing them with the necessary resources and support to implement the identified best practices. By equipping teachers with the tools they needed, they were able to confidently implement the strategies in their classrooms, leading to improved student engagement and achievement. The department-based best practice presentations were conducted regularly throughout the academic year, ensuring that teachers had ongoing access to new research-based strategies and resources.

The impact of this initiative was assessed through teacher feedback and observations of classroom practices. Overall, the department-based best practice initiative played a crucial role

in enhancing teacher efficacy and student achievement at MAST Academy. By providing teachers with research-based practices, resources, and opportunities for collaboration, this initiative contributed to a positive and effective teaching and learning environment, increased teacher confidence, and collective teacher efficacy.

4. Employee of the Month Program

The Employee of the Month program aimed to recognize outstanding teachers and boost their morale. To evaluate the effectiveness of this initiative, data was collected through multiple sources. Firstly, the Staff Morale Survey included questions related to teacher perception of recognition and appreciation within the school community. Teachers were asked to rate the impact of the Employee of the Month program on their motivation, job satisfaction, and overall sense of recognition.

Additionally, to specifically assess the impact of the Employee of the Month program on teacher efficacy, this survey included questions about the perceived value of the recognition, its impact on collaboration and teamwork, and the overall influence on teacher efficacy.

Qualitative feedback was also collected through open-ended questions to gain insights into specific ways in which the program positively affected teacher morale and efficacy. The faculty/staff morale survey was administered midyear to capture the ongoing impact of the Employee of the Month program and to gauge any changes in teacher efficacy.

In addition to surveys, interviews were conducted with selected teachers who received the Employee of the Month recognition to gather their personal experiences and reflections on the program's impact.

5. Data Collection:

The Staff Morale Survey was administered to all teachers in the school to gather their perceptions and experiences related to the morale building initiatives. This survey was conducted at the beginning, mid-year, and the end of the academic year to capture any changes over time. The survey consisted of Likert-scale questions to measure teachers' agreement or disagreement with specific statements, as well as open-ended questions to allow for more detailed responses. This survey included questions tailored to each initiative, allowing for a comprehensive evaluation of their impact on teacher morale and efficacy.

The midyear survey also included Likert-scale questions and open-ended questions to gather both quantitative and qualitative data. The data collected from these surveys were analyzed using statistical methods to identify trends, patterns, and correlations. Additionally, qualitative data from open-ended questions and focus group discussions were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify common themes and extract meaningful insights.

Overall, the combination of the School Climate Survey, faculty/staff morale survey, focus group discussions, interviews, and observations provided a comprehensive and multi-faceted data collection approach to assess the effectiveness of the morale building initiatives in enhancing teacher efficacy. The surveys allowed for the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data, providing a holistic understanding of the impact of these initiatives on teacher morale and efficacy. The inclusion of open-ended questions, focus group discussions, interviews, and observations allowed for a deeper exploration of teachers' experiences, perceptions, and suggestions for improvement. The data collected from these various sources were analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative methods, ensuring a comprehensive evaluation of the

initiatives' effectiveness.

RESULTS

This section presents the detailed results of the study, which aimed to assess the effectiveness of morale building initiatives in enhancing teacher efficacy. The initiatives implemented included the Offshore Food Cart, increased staff luncheons, Department Presentation at Faculty Meetings, and the Employee of the Month program. Data was collected through the School Climate Survey, a faculty/staff morale survey, focus group discussions, interviews, and observations.

1. Offshore Food Cart

The Offshore Food Cart initiative aimed to provide a variety of food options for teachers during lunch breaks, with the goal of improving their overall well-being and job satisfaction. The School Climate Survey revealed that the Offshore Food Cart had a positive impact on teacher morale and efficacy. Teachers reported higher satisfaction with the availability and quality of food options, with 85% of respondents indicating that the initiative improved their overall job satisfaction. Additionally, 78% of teachers reported increased energy levels and productivity as a result of the Offshore Food Cart (Appendix C). These findings suggest that providing convenient and diverse food options positively influenced teacher well-being and job satisfaction.

Qualitative feedback highlighted the convenience and variety of food options as the most beneficial aspects of the Offshore Food Cart initiative. Teachers expressed appreciation for the opportunity to have a wider selection of meals during breaks, which saved them time and

effort. Some teachers also mentioned that the initiative allowed them to try new foods and flavors, which added excitement to their workday. Suggestions for improvement included expanding the food cart's operating hours to accommodate teachers with different schedules and incorporating healthier food choices to promote overall well-being.

Focus group discussions further supported the positive impact of the Offshore Food Cart initiative. Teachers shared their experiences of increased satisfaction and enjoyment during lunch breaks, which they attributed to the availability of diverse food options. They expressed gratitude for the initiative and emphasized its positive impact on their well-being and job satisfaction. The discussions also revealed that the Offshore Food Cart served as a social hub, facilitating informal interactions, and fostering a sense of community among teachers.

2. Increased Staff Luncheons

The initiative to increase staff luncheons aimed to provide opportunities for teachers to socialize and build stronger relationships with their colleagues. The School Climate Survey revealed that increased staff luncheons had a positive impact on teacher morale and efficacy. Teachers reported higher satisfaction with the frequency and organization of staff luncheons, with 80% of respondents indicating that the initiative improved their sense of belonging within the school community. Additionally, 75% of teachers reported enhanced collaboration and teamwork as a result of increased staff luncheons (Appendix D). These findings suggest that creating opportunities for socialization and relationship-building positively influenced teacher morale and collaboration.

Qualitative feedback emphasized improved communication, increased support, and

strengthened relationships among colleagues as the key benefits of increased staff luncheons. Teachers mentioned that the luncheons provided a relaxed and informal setting where they could connect with colleagues from different departments and grade levels. They appreciated the opportunity to share ideas, discuss challenges, and seek advice from their peers. The luncheons were seen as a platform for building a sense of community and fostering a supportive network within the school.

Observations during staff luncheons further supported the positive impact of this initiative. The observations revealed a high level of engagement, interaction, and a positive atmosphere among teachers. Teachers were observed engaging in lively conversations, exchanging ideas, and collaborating on various topics. The luncheons appeared to create a sense of unity and camaraderie among the staff, contributing to a positive work environment.

3. Department Presentation at Faculty Meetings

The department-based best practice presentations during faculty meetings were found to have a positive impact on teacher efficacy and student achievement. Survey results indicated that 92% of teachers found the presentations valuable for their professional growth, and 88% reported increased confidence in implementing research-based practices. Furthermore, 80% of teachers reported improved student engagement and achievement as a result of implementing the best practices presented. These findings suggest that providing teachers with research based strategies and resources through department-based best practice presentations positively influenced their instructional practices and student outcomes.

4. Employee of the Month Program

The Employee of the Month program aimed to recognize outstanding teachers and boost their morale. The end of year Staff Morale Survey indicated that the program had a significant positive effect on teacher morale. Teachers reported feeling more recognized and appreciated within the school community, with 92% of respondents stating that the program positively influenced their motivation. Moreover, 85% of teachers reported increased job satisfaction as a result of the recognition received through the program. These findings suggest that recognizing and appreciating teachers' efforts can have a profound impact on their morale and job satisfaction.

Qualitative feedback highlighted the program's impact on collaboration and teamwork. Teachers expressed that the Employee of the Month program fostered a sense of camaraderie and support among colleagues. They mentioned that the recognition received through the program motivated them to work harder and strive for excellence. Teachers also appreciated the opportunity to showcase their achievements and share best practices with their peers. The program was seen as a catalyst for building positive relationships and promoting a supportive work environment.

Interviews with selected teachers who received the Employee of the Month recognition further confirmed the positive impact of the program. These teachers shared personal experiences of increased motivation and a sense of pride in their work. They expressed gratitude for the recognition and described how it boosted their confidence and reaffirmed their commitment to their profession. The interviews also revealed that the program had a ripple effect, inspiring other teachers to excel and contributing to a culture of continuous improvement within the school.

Overall, the results of the study indicate that the morale building initiatives, including the Offshore Food Cart, increased staff luncheons, Department Presentations at Faculty Meeting, and the Employee of the Month program had a positive impact on teacher morale and efficacy. The initiatives were successful in improving teacher job satisfaction, motivation, energy levels, collaboration, and sense of recognition and appreciation. The findings from the various data sources, including surveys, focus group discussions, interviews, and observations, provide a comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of these initiatives in enhancing teacher morale and efficacy.

It is important to note that while the results of this study are promising, there may be additional factors influencing teacher efficacy that were not specifically addressed in this study. Further studies could explore the long-term effects of these initiatives and investigate other potential strategies to enhance teacher morale and efficacy. Additionally, ongoing evaluation and feedback from teachers should be considered to continuously improve and refine these initiatives.

REFLECTION

As the principal of MAST Academy, I am honored to have had the opportunity to participate in the CAHN Fellowship Program for Distinguished Principals. This program has provided me with invaluable knowledge, skills, and resources to enhance the overall well-being and efficacy of our teachers. Through the implementation of morale building initiatives, such as the Offshore Food Cart, increased staff luncheons, Department Presentations at Faculty

Meeting, the Employee of the Month program, we have witnessed significant positive changes within our school community.

The findings of this study, which assessed the effectiveness of these initiatives, have reinforced the importance of prioritizing teacher morale and recognizing their contributions. The Offshore Food Cart initiative, for instance, has not only improved teacher job satisfaction but has also positively impacted their energy levels and productivity. The convenience and variety of food options have been well-received by our teachers, and their feedback has been instrumental in refining the initiative to better meet their needs. As a result, we have observed an increase in teacher engagement and enthusiasm, which has translated into improved instructional practices and student outcomes.

Increased staff luncheons have proven to be an effective means of promoting socialization and relationship-building among our teachers. The positive impact of these luncheons on teacher morale, collaboration, and a sense of belonging within the school community cannot be overstated. The relaxed and informal setting has facilitated open communication, the exchange of ideas, and the building of supportive networks among our staff. The observations during these luncheons have provided tangible evidence of the positive atmosphere and engagement among our teachers. As a result, we have witnessed increased collaboration and a collective commitment to student achievement.

The implementation of the department-based best practice presentations during faculty meetings has been a valuable addition to our efforts in enhancing teacher efficacy and student achievement at MAST Academy. This initiative provided a platform for each department to share their expertise and present research-based strategies that have shown promising results

in improving student outcomes. Through these presentations, teachers were exposed to a wide range of evidence-based practices and resources that they could incorporate into their instructional practices. The positive feedback from teachers, with 92% finding the presentations valuable for their professional growth, indicates that this initiative has been successful in providing teachers with the necessary tools and knowledge to implement effective practices in their classrooms.

One of the key benefits of the department-based best practice presentations was the opportunity for collaboration and knowledge sharing among teachers. Each department had the chance to showcase their successful practices and share their expertise with colleagues. This created a supportive and collaborative environment where teachers could learn from one another and adapt the best practices to suit their own teaching styles and student needs. The increased confidence reported by 88% of teachers in implementing research-based practices further highlights the impact of this initiative on teacher efficacy. Moreover, the department based best practice presentations have had a positive impact on student achievement. As reported by 80% of teachers, the implementation of the presented best practices resulted in improved student engagement and achievement. This suggests that the strategies shared during these presentations were effective in enhancing student learning outcomes.

In reflection, the department-based best practice presentations have been a valuable addition to our faculty meetings. They have not only provided teachers with research-based strategies and resources but also fostered a culture of collaboration and continuous improvement. The positive impact on teacher efficacy and student achievement reinforces the importance of sharing best practices and staying informed about the latest research in education. Moving

forward, it is crucial to sustain and further develop this initiative. Regularly incorporating department-based best practice presentations into our faculty meetings will ensure that teachers have ongoing access to new research-based strategies and resources. Additionally, providing opportunities for teachers to reflect on the implementation of these practices and share their experiences can further enhance the effectiveness of this initiative.

The department-based best practice presentations have been a successful initiative in our efforts to enhance teacher efficacy and student achievement. By providing teachers with research-based strategies, resources, and opportunities for collaboration, this initiative has contributed to a positive and effective teaching and learning environment at MAST Academy. We will continue to prioritize the sharing of best practices and the implementation of evidence based strategies to further support our teachers and students in their educational journey.

The Employee of the Month program has been a powerful tool in recognizing and appreciating the outstanding efforts of our teachers. The program has not only boosted their morale but has also fostered a sense of camaraderie and support among colleagues. The recognition received through this program has motivated our teachers to excel and has contributed to a culture of continuous improvement within our school. The personal experiences shared by the selected teachers who received the Employee of the Month recognition have been inspiring and have further validated the impact of this initiative. As a result, we have seen an increase in teacher efficacy and a greater commitment to student success.

It is important to note that our school was already outperforming both the state and district in terms of student achievement. However, the implementation of these morale building

initiatives has further enhanced our success. The positive impact on teacher morale and efficacy has directly translated into increased student achievement. Our students have benefited from teachers who are more motivated, engaged, and supported. The initiatives have created a positive and nurturing environment that fosters student growth and success. Through the implementation of these morale building initiatives, we have witnessed a transformation in our school community. Our teachers have expressed higher levels of job satisfaction, increased motivation, and a stronger sense of recognition and appreciation. The collaborative and supportive environment that has been fostered has had a direct impact on teacher efficacy and overall student success. As a result, our school continues to outperform both the state and district, further solidifying our reputation as a high-achieving institution.

FELLOW REFLECTION

I am grateful for the support and guidance provided by the Cahn Fellowship Program for Distinguished Principals in enabling me to implement these initiatives effectively. The knowledge and skills gained through the program have been instrumental in driving positive change within our school. I am committed to continuing to evaluate and refine these initiatives based on ongoing feedback from our teachers, ensuring that we consistently meet their evolving needs. Moving forward, I believe it is crucial to sustain and expand upon the success of these initiatives.

The findings of this study have highlighted the importance of prioritizing teacher morale and recognizing their contributions. As the principal of MAST Academy, I am dedicated to creating a supportive and empowering environment for our teachers, one that fosters their professional growth and enhances their overall well-being. I will continue to explore additional

strategies and initiatives to further enhance teacher efficacy and ensure the success of our students.

In conclusion, the Cahn Fellowship Program for Distinguished Principals has been a transformative experience, equipping me with the tools and knowledge to implement effective morale building initiatives. The positive impact of the Offshore Food Cart, the Employee of the Month program, and increased staff luncheons on teacher morale and efficacy has been evident. These initiatives have not only enhanced our school's already impressive performance but have also contributed to increased student achievement and accolades. For the first time in my role as instructional leader, I started the new school year fully staffed at a time when there is a global teacher shortage. I am grateful for the opportunity to have participated in this program, to have worked alongside my amazing ally, and look forward to continuing to lead our school towards even greater success.

ALLY REFLECTION

Entering the 2022-2023 school year was not what I expected. As an Ally in the Cahn Fellowship, my view of what makes a great leader was enhanced on a level that I cannot measure. As a teacher, I did not think I had the make-up for what makes a great leader. Teaching children, continuing to enhance my knowledge, and honing my skills so that I can help my colleagues and students to the best of my ability are values I have always lived by. Who knew, those values are at the foundation of what drives the framework of leadership. Never thinking I would be put in a position to do just that until becoming an Ally in the Cahn Fellowship.

Prior to my participation in the Cahn Fellowship, I did not have a clear understanding of the leadership qualities I naturally possessed. I thought my colleagues would ask me for

assistance because I worked hard and took pride in helping their growth. Not knowing it was so much more than that. This past year has afforded me the opportunity to learn about who I am as a leader and my leadership style. Often, wondering “why me” as I attended more sessions, I understood why it was me. In the Leadership Decisions session with Lily Woo, I realized that in stressful situations I have an innate ability to think through unexpected instances and circumstances that come naturally to me, and others may have to work to achieve.

I have been able to engage more with people that I normally would shy away from because I may have felt that we would not mesh well. During the Cahn Fellowship as an Ally, I have been educated on my leadership style. This process has been essential in learning by myself and what I need, to collaborate and communicate with those who have a different style. The people I would have avoided prior to this experience I no longer shy away from those tough conversations or ignore situations that I feel will have an adverse effect on my relationship with others. Instead, I leaned into the teachings of Dr. Anthony Hacking, and was able to not only understand my communication style but to also look through the lens of how others may communicate and get to the root of issues. Learning this one thing, I have been able to feel confident working alongside, Cahn Fellow Dr. Cadian Collman-Perez, address the areas of MAST problem of practice.

I do feel that understanding who I am and being able to recognize what I need from others and how they communicate has allowed me to grow not only as a teacher leader but as a person. Being that our problem of practice involves increasing teachers’ morale and efficacy, it is extremely critical to have effective communication. Arriving at MAST mid-year of Dr. Collman Perez’s first year at the helm of the school exposed me to a unique perspective of leadership.

Experiencing life outside the classroom for the first time in a place, with all new people and a different location, I had begun to rethink my decision. Relocating to a new place with little life in the staff, support, or collaboration was hard for me to process my first few months.

Reflecting on this now that I have attended sessions and have experiences and opportunities through the Cahn Fellowship, learning more about who I am, what drives me, and how I strive to make others achieve success has become clear. My style of leadership has evolved in all areas as an Ally. Communication, cooperation, understanding personalities, understanding my strengths, and bringing it all together has had a direct impact on my professional development obtained through the Cahn Fellowship. Because I have a better understanding of how I communicate and what areas my strengths are, I can recognize how I relate to others and their distinctive styles. In the task we have taken on this journey of building efficacy and morale, effective communication is crucial. My voice has been discovered throughout this process. The nature in which I interact with people has also changed. Through this mentorship, I have been able to elaborate on how I will build better relationships, so I can in turn be an effective leader.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to express our deepest gratitude to the world-renowned faculty and staff of MAST Academy for their unwavering dedication and commitment to excellence in education. Their expertise, passion, and tireless efforts have been instrumental in the success of the morale building initiatives implemented at our school.

We would also like to extend our heartfelt appreciation to our esteemed alumni

advisors, Mr. Raul Garcia and Mr. Scott Saperstein, for their invaluable guidance and support throughout this journey. Their wisdom, experience, and commitment to our school community have been invaluable in shaping the direction and impact of our initiatives.

We would like to acknowledge Dr. Barbara McKeon, the CAHN Program Director, for her visionary leadership and for providing us with the opportunity to participate in the Cahn Fellowship Program for Distinguished Principals. Her guidance, mentorship, and belief in our potential have been instrumental in our growth as educational leaders.

We would also like to express our gratitude to Mr. Chuck Cahn for developing the Cahn Fellowship Program, which aims to develop and grow distinguished principals across our country. His commitment to educational excellence and his vision for empowering school leaders have had a profound impact on our professional growth and the success of our school.

Special thanks go to my amazing ally, Unethia Fox, for her unwavering support, dedication, and belief in the initiatives implemented at our school. Her tireless efforts and groundwork have been crucial in ensuring the successful implementation of the morale building initiatives and their positive impact on our school community.

Lastly, we would like to thank all our students and parents of MAST Academy for their continuous support, collaboration, and enthusiasm. Without a generous donation from our school's PTSA, it would not have been possible to implement some of these initiatives. It is through their collective efforts and unwavering commitment to excellence that we have been able to create a positive and thriving educational environment.

We are truly grateful for the support, guidance, and contributions of all those mentioned above. Their belief in our initiatives and their commitment to educational excellence

have been instrumental in our journey towards enhancing teacher morale and student achievement.

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APPENDIX A

School Climate Survey

Leadership & Relationships

	73%
Q03-School personnel work together as a team.	79%
Q04-Administrators solve problems effectively. Q05-I	75%
feel my ideas are listened to and considered. Q07-My	87%
Principal is an effective administrator.	88%
Q08-My Principal represents the school in a...	87%
Q09-My Principal demonstrates good...	79%
Q10-My Principal deals with conflict constructively.	69%
Q11-My Principal responds in a reasonable time...	92%
Q12-My Principal treats me with respect. Q13-My	63%
Principal is receptive to constructive... Q28-I feel	33%
staff morale is high at my school.	

APPENDIX B

MAST SWD

2021-2022

Strengths:

- Supportive Parents
- Great Students
- Cambridge and Maritime (College board) Academic Programs

Weaknesses:

- Staff Morale and Faculty Division
- Little to no opportunities for staff collaboration
- Staff Attendance (Burn-out is real here)
- Frequent change in leadership
- Teachers do not feel valued or heard.
- Inconsistent Disciplinary Measures
- Teachers do not feel respected or supported.
- Administrators give little to no feedback.
- Administrators are not visible.
- Students and staff are not celebrated or recognized.
- No Cross-departmental collaboration
- Gaps and inconsistencies with implementing research-based strategies across the curriculum

Opportunities

- Celebrate and recognize the faculty and staff.
- Feed the faculty and staff (Professional Development and actual food)
- Visit/observe the faculty teaching and give feedback.
- Listen to the faculty.
- Highlight the faculty.
- Create opportunities for the faculty to get to know each other.
- Stop separating Cambridge and Maritime, we are ONE school.
- Maintain Facilities (Cleanliness and Branding)
- Allow teachers to take mental health days.
- Transparent and honest communication from administration.

80 85 90 80 70 60 50 40 30 20 10 0

80⁸⁵

75⁷⁸

APPENDIX C

Offshore Food Cart - Data

35

25

Comparison

Beginning Mid End I feel more satisfied with my job I have more energy and is more productive at work

APPENDIX D

Increased Staff Luncheon Data Comparison Impact on Sense of Belonging



Beginning Mid End I feel a sense of belonging I collaborate and feel a part
of the team