



10 Ways to Increase Teacher Satisfaction and Engagement



A Project Report from



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Introduction

In early 2019, my firm was engaged to conduct a comprehensive study of the attitudes and opinions of some 250 teachers working for a collective of independent schools in a large North American city. It involved both focus group discussions and a survey of all teachers.

The analysis of the results is ongoing and individual school reports are being finalized. The findings that have already been reported highlight teacher priorities and concerns that need to be considered. For the teachers, it seemed that the process was therapeutic, allowing them to give expression to frustrations and articulate latent opinions – both positive and negative – that had not previously been brought to the fore.

Ultimately the results will create a basis for strengthening and improving the relationship between faculty and administrations. They will encourage schools to continue practices that are working well and change those which are not. More importantly, this will provide a roadmap to create a more supportive, engaging and satisfying environment for teachers - which, in turn, will create an enhanced educational experience and better schools.

Interestingly, it is already clear that many of the results are consistent with dynamics that I have seen in the many schools with which I have worked throughout my career. While the findings on one hand are very particular to the schools and teachers involved, there is a universal nature that could be instructive and beneficial to every school.

What is clearly emerging from the research are these ten ways that schools can increase teacher satisfaction and engagement.



Make the classroom the focus

In most schools, classroom instruction is still at the core of the educational experience and teachers want to feel that the administration's fundamental purpose is to support teaching and the educational program. Anything that distracts from that, whether special events not directly supportive of the curriculum or intercom announcements, should be minimized.

Curriculars first

When students are frequently excused from class to participate in athletics, arts-based or other activities, teachers perceive it as diminishing the importance of their work – and they may be correct. Co-curricular activities should not be given priority over classroom time and routine.



Effective discipline

Discipline does not exist in a vacuum. While it is closely connected to quality of instruction, the student-teacher relationship and class-management skill, there must be a clear sense of what is acceptable behaviour as well as progressive, meaningful and consistent consequences for misbehaviour.

The impact of diversity

As many independent schools seek to accommodate a broader range of student learning profiles, the impact on teachers must be considered. These students require teachers who understand their needs, while having the appropriate skills and attitude. Additional supports and mentoring may be needed. Classes may need to be smaller to allow students to thrive. What is necessary to meet the needs of a range of students must be holistically considered,





Change management

Major new initiatives should only be adopted after careful thought is given to the resources that will be required and the additional teachers' time that will be necessary.

Examples include the adoption of academic programs like IB or accreditation by external associations. Teachers cannot be expected to devote the intensive amounts of required without relief from other responsibilities, and without proper support.

Manage meetings

Teachers' time should not be consumed by needless, unproductive and unduly long meetings. Teachers are extremely busy with the demands of lesson and course planning, marking and co-curricular responsibilities. While meetings are often necessary, teachers' time can be respected with agendas distributed in advance as well as follow up that includes summaries of decisions made and those responsible for implementation.



Collaborative decision-making

Teachers expect to have meaningful input into decisions that affect the educational experience. As highly educated professionals, they should be encouraged to participate in decisions – to offer their ideas, insights and perspectives. Collaborative decision-making will result in better outcomes and a better-run school with a more engaged, loyal, energized and committed faculty.

Informal consultation

In situations where their formal input is unwarranted or impractical, teachers still want to be heard. Not every decision warrants a formal process and in fact, some decisions must be made by the Head alone. But those decisions should at least be made after careful and genuine consideration of the views of teachers.





Beyond the classroom

Teachers want school administrators to appreciate the work they do beyond their classroom teaching. That might include coaching athletics or staffing clubs and activities. While teachers don't necessarily expect to be paid extra for this work, they want those contributions to be taken into account when they need consideration, such as leave for personal matters or emergencies.

Communication is key

Teachers expect communication from administration to be timely and appropriate. Teachers should know in advance of assemblies, special events and meetings and should never receive important information "through the grapevine" from students or parents.



Schools, school districts and school collectives can learn a great deal from this research and can implement programs and policies that will enhance teacher satisfaction and engagement. Even greater benefits will likely accrue to schools or organizations that conduct their own research enabling them to better understand and meet the unique needs of their own faculty.



For more information about this study or to discuss:

- A similar faculty research study
- Strategies for improving teacher satisfaction and engagement
- Related professional development for educational leaders

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