

Memo

To: Colleagues
From: Professional Relations Council
Date: June 1, 2009
Re: Teacher and Board of Education Relationships

It is hard to believe we are at the end of the school year! As we bring the year to a close, we wanted to update you on the work with the teachers, Board of Education, and Administration focused on teacher and Board of Education relationships.

This year, the Board of Education identified a goal of fostering positive relationships with Clayton's teachers. The initial step towards this goal was to develop an understanding of what teachers thought about Board/Teacher relationships via a client survey. This represents the same approach that Clayton's teachers and administrators use to gather feedback. Teachers were asked a variety of questions that were based on research developed by the University of Florida about measuring trust in organizations. The client survey was followed with two collaborative meetings on October 7, 2008 and November 5, 2008. The purpose of the follow-up meetings was to review the results of the client survey, collaborate on identifying the common themes and then build consensus among Board of Education members and teachers on what actions to take to address the issues identified by the group. A third collaborative meeting was held on April 29, 2009.

Board of Education Client Survey

Objective

As a first step toward the goal of fostering positive relationships with Clayton's teachers, the Board of Education distributed a client survey to all of Clayton's certified teaching staff and administrators.

Methodology

A survey invitation was sent to a total of 290 teachers and administrators. The survey was e-mailed to the group and administered in a way that only allowed each respondent to complete the survey only once. All survey responses were given confidentially in order to allow for complete anonymity of staff completing the survey.

Response Rate

The 228 completed surveys translate into a response rate of 78.6 percent or about four out of every five staff members who were invited to take the survey. This response rate is high enough to allow for general conclusions to be reliably drawn from the survey data. Furthermore, the response rate was also high enough that one could easily expect to generate similar results if the survey was conducted again using a random, scientific sample of the same 290 staff members. Responses were received from:

- 83 PK-5 teachers
- 73 9-12 grade teachers
- 51 6-8 grade teachers
- 21 administrators

General Observations – Agree/Disagree Questions

About two out of every three respondents agree that the Board of Education's decisions are guided by what is best for Clayton students. In addition, about the same number feel that the Board is active and visible in our community and is also trying to maintain a long-term commitment to Clayton's teachers. A majority (57%) of those completing the survey did recognize the Board of Education's desire to maintain a positive relationship with Clayton's teachers. However, over half of those surveyed disagreed with the statement, "The Board of Education really listens to what teachers have to say." More than half (55%) of respondents disagreed with the notion that there are effective channels of communication between the Board of Education and Clayton's teachers. The same number (55%) also felt that the Board of Education does not "give Clayton's teachers enough say in the decision-making process." Slightly less than half (49%) disagreed with the statement "The Board takes the opinions of Clayton's teachers into account when making decisions." A lesser number of respondents (47%) don't feel the Board of Education considers the impact on Clayton's teachers when making decisions.

General Observations – Cross-Tabulated Results

Survey results were cross-tabulated among the following four categories: PK-5 teachers, 6-8 teachers, 9-12 teachers, and administrators. The purpose of cross-tabulating results is to see if there is a significant difference in the response of a specific demographic when compared to the overall survey results. The cross-tabs show the following:

- PK-5 teachers as a group were more likely to "agree" in their responses
- Those identifying themselves as 6-8 and 9-12 teachers tended to disagree more with survey statements when compared to the overall responses and the response of PK-5 teachers.
- Secondary teachers were two to five times more likely to strongly disagree with statements than PK-5 teachers.
- Responses were similar among all demographic categories on the questions related to effective communication channels, teachers' say in the decision-making process and the Board's ability to balance data-driven accountability with the need to provide flexibility.

Communications Lab, October 7, 2008

The Communications Lab is a critical component of the Professional Relations Council. The Communications Lab is held in the fall and is a forum for direct communication among teachers and the Board of Education.

Our focus this year was fostering teacher and Board of Education relationships. The Board is committed to hearing the voices of a broad representation of teachers from across the District. Therefore, the Professional Relations Council and the Board of Education asked the Office of Human Resources to randomly select teacher colleagues to participate in the Communications Lab. Teachers were grouped by years of service, and then randomly selected from each group. Teachers from each building and from all stages of their careers were present, and added their voices to this conversation. Those participating in the conversations developed responses among their respective groups to the following focused questions:

1. A) What do you think are the three most important issues that the District must address over the next three years?
B) In your opinion, which of the three issues needs urgent or immediate action?
2. How can we convey respect for teachers as professionals while aligning and standardizing practices?
3. A) What do teachers believe the Board of Education needs to know when making decisions?
B) What does the Board of Education believe teachers must know about decisions they make?
4. How can the Board of Education and teachers support each other in their respective roles?

Reflections of Participants

Teachers

- Life in Clayton is a very complex double-edge sword! The BOE works hard for very little appreciation (and no pay)! It was amazing how much everyone at the table was of like minds.

- The BOE has been made more personal and there has been communication among the different stakeholders about the complexity and challenges that exist in building increased communication, trust, and respect.
- That the BOE is very concerned about its relationship with teachers and striving to improve it.
- It's hard to determine which decisions are made by the BOE or administrators. Better communication will help foster better understanding between all stakeholders.
- I learned that perceptions of teachers vary greatly from P-5 to 6-12. It was important for us to have this time to meet with the BOE to identify ways we could work together in the future.
- That all parties want the same thing: better communication, build trust, value professionalism.
- That there is much agreement among the district employees about why there are problems and what those problems are. This actually makes it a lot easier to go to the next steps at significantly improving relations between the district employees and the BOE.
- There has been a healthy openness and willingness to discuss challenges that exist between the teachers and BOE.
- This was a great opportunity to hear many different perspectives.
- I feel energized and hopeful that a stronger relationship between teacher and BOE is desired and is possible. I am amazed at the passion of this community. This format is a great model of the power of face to face communications.
- Everyone really has interests of the students at the center of what they do. So it isn't as difficult to assume good will.

Administrators

- More in common than different in respect to intended outcomes, goals, and communication systems. Need to work together – ongoing – continue the work begun tonight.
- It is clear that the BOE and teachers are serious about improving their relationship and that both sides are interested in supporting one another. I will admit that I was skeptical entering this evening but I truly believe that the conversation has been worthwhile.
- Shared frustrations from multiple perspectives-teachers-administrators-BOE members. We need processes to help us work together collaboratively.
- That we should all assume good will. Give respect to all stakeholders. This responsibility for establishing a respectful community involves everyone.
- That there is a lot of shared middle ground and a desire to build trust and respect.
- Very promising for future professional communication, interaction, and relationships.
- I think it was productive and that it is a good starting point for future conversations. The process will take time but I think it will pay huge dividends in the end.
- Time well spent in thoughtful conversations which was extremely enlightening.
- Very positive, honest, candid talk.

Board of Education

- The feeling and passion behind (it).
- There is lots of good energy and goodwill in the relationship between BOE and teachers inherently. It's up to us now to identify the things that we think can "bring out" and capitalize on the latent positives that exist. Not sure if we got there by the end of the evening. The meeting was very abruptly stopped/shut down.
- I met several new teachers and we had an open, honest, in-depth discussion. We easily arrived at ideas of how to improve teacher/BOE relations.
- I learned a greater appreciation for teacher/staff/administration perspectives on issues affecting the board, and the impact on those parties in the way the board makes its decisions, as well as the decisions the board actually makes.
- Very open frank discussion. I would like more discussion of action item.
- I felt this was a meaningful discussion and I feel I have a better appreciation for employee perspectives and attitudes on issues affecting the board.

The evening concluded with the group outlining 11 action ideas for next steps, which included:

1. Be visible (could look different)
2. Increase face-to-face time; decrease e-mail time
3. Protocol/framework for teacher-to-Board of Education member communication
4. Establish direct communication "piece" between teachers and Board of Education
5. Have another meeting like the one tonight (this was time well spent)
6. When question come from Board of Education to Don, evaluate how much time it will take ...use the time to evaluate whether the questions should be asked ...who is asking the question (one person or the Board of Education)
7. Board of Education E-news to the staff – explain why decisions are made
8. Board of Education visit classrooms related to content area up for report/review
9. Establish clear protocols for how things are discussed; how teachers/parents/administrators communicate with Board of Education; how to handle concerns; publicize protocols
10. Introduce Board of Education on opening day
11. Interim status reports (Board of Education member visits with committee or committee checks in at Board of Education meeting during process) for curriculum review to eliminate lots of questions being asked after a report is complete

The PRC was charged to review and determine next steps that would be discussed in a follow-up meeting with communication steps.

PRC Review and Next Steps, October 27, 2008

The Professional Relations Council met on October 27 to review the action ideas and consolidate them for the next step. The PRC agreed that action should be focused in the following areas:

Action Step 1

- Group Report-Out #3) Protocol/framework for teacher-to-Board of Education member communication
- Group Report-Out #9) Establish clear protocols for how things are discussed; how teachers/parents/administrators communicate with Board of Education; how to handle concerns; publicize protocols
- Group Report-Out #6) When questions come from Board of Education to Don, evaluate how much time it will take; use the time to evaluate whether the questions should be asked; who is asking the question (one person or the Board)

Action Step 2

- Group Report-Out #4) Establish direct communication "piece" between teachers and the Board of Education
- Group Report-Out #5) Have another meeting like the one tonight (this was time well spent)

Action Step 3

- Group Report-Out #1) Be visible (could look different)

Action Step 4

- Group Report-Out #12) Interim status reports (Board of Education member visits with committee or committees; checks in at Board of Education meeting during process) for curriculum review to eliminate lots of questions asked after a report is complete

Communications Lab, November 5, 2008

At the follow-up meeting to the Communications Lab on October 7, 2008, teachers and Board of Education members reconvened on November 5, 2008 to fine tune their recommendations for supporting each other in their respective roles. The groups that met provided input regarding the following actions that all agreed would bring us the most leverage and could be implemented this year, including:

- Establishing clear communication protocols between the Board of Education, teachers, parents and administrators
- Looking for other ways (events) for the Board of Education and teachers to communicate/interact
- Increasing the Board of Education's visibility in our schools
- Revising the curriculum review process to allow for additional interim communication and exchange of information between the curriculum committees and the Board of Education

Everyone involved in the process expressed commitment to this work.

Elementary Communications Labs

Communications Labs for elementary teaching staff were held: Captain on April 15th, Meramec on April 20th, and Glenridge on April 23rd. Two focused questions were used to frame these conversations at the building level:

1. What is our vision for the elementary curriculum?
2. What realities impact this vision?

Communications Lab, April 29, 2009

A Communications Lab was held on April 29, 2009. A new group of randomly selected teachers, as well as PRC members, Administrators and Board of Education members met to continue the work begun in fostering teacher and Board of Education relationships. Teachers were grouped by years of service, and then randomly selected from each group. Teachers from each building and from all stages of their careers were present, and added their voices to this conversation. Those participating in the conversations developed responses among their respective groups to the following focused questions:

1. a.) In our continued efforts to foster Board of Education and Teacher relationships, what do you want the Board of Education to understand about your work as a teacher?
b.) What do you want teachers to understand about your work as a member of the Board of Education?
2. What can we do to build a sense of mutual responsibility and accountability?

Reflections of Participants

Teacher Responses

What have you learned from this evening's conversation?

- I learned that the Board struggles with organized parent groups and how to work with them just like teachers do. I was relieved to know that our voice is still valued as professionals in curriculum design and instruction and that they struggle to balance our role and that of stakeholders.
- How important communication and relationships are is what I learned! In order to withstand problems that will occur, relationships must be strong! There are many ways communication can be improved.
- Validation that communication, face to face communication, is at the heart; is essential; to building relationships.
- How trust is needed between the BOE and teachers- the concerns of each and its importance.
- How dedicated/focused our Board members really are. A reminder to say 'thank you'.
- We all have the same goals in mind.

- Everyone is on the same wavelength!
- I learned that we have some common themes yet different perspectives. It was good that passion for kids was the most common theme.
- Board members are representing all stakeholders. They do want to assume goodwill.
- The District truly cares about bridging the gap between teachers and Board members (looking at survey results to guide concerns); Board members do not have agenda; all staff, parents, and Board care about kids first.
- BOE online Minutes and pod casts; people around the District.
- The BOE is open to hearing from us. Open communication is important. Having set venues is needed. There should be protocol for concerns from parents and teachers.
- Look at the different perspectives; children come first; we all want the same vision.
- We were all here as one unit – not as two or three separate groups.
- Everyone is passionate about student education and frequently feels misunderstood or stressed.
- Board/teachers/Administration all share the same focus: Clayton's students.
- As an elementary teacher, I learned the perspectives of middle and high school teachers.
- Passionate perspectives of colleagues and Board member
- Everyone sees flaws to the system. Everyone sees ways to make things better. Communication and collaboration are the most important part.
- The Board is open to hearing about our work and willing to listen. We care very much about children.
- Although I felt it was true, the conversation tonight confirmed that teachers in Clayton are highly passionate, hard-working individuals who want what's best for their students. And our Board members are quite similar!
- BOE members at my table are willing to listen to teachers and respectful of teachers.
- Everyone is here for the kids.
- Board and teachers all have student interests as their primary concern. Relationships need 'face time'. More of this type of venue or casual meetings is a goal.

What is your reaction to this evening's conversation?

- I was also relieved to hear commitment to Wydown's needs, though they are not on the current bond issue. I appreciate the time the Board took to listen to teachers this evening and their desire to do more of this.
- I felt I was heard and that the Board does want to listen. Next steps – what about the Administration? When and how can they communicate better? How much of the problems with the BOE is the Administration? Is the reason the elementary is so positive because we have had their kids and met them?
- Very positive. Appreciate the leadership in pulling this together.
- We need more!!! Good idea meeting with each building...
- Thank you for this opportunity. It is much appreciated.
- It was wonderful and very insightful.
- Very positive – people's opinions and ideas are respected in this District.
- I would love to see and have more of them.
- Very enjoyable, enlightening!
- Conversation was very powerful and honest. No holding back. Valuable in trust building. Need to continue building trust.
- Loved the groupings by years in the District; good suggestions resulted from 2nd question.
- Organized and appreciative! BOE welcome all ideas!
- A good beginning; we must assume good will; how can we keep communicating and expressing our frustrations openly without fear.
- I appreciated having my voice being heard and meeting in an informal way.
- It was a big step forward!
- The conversation was very positive and productive allowing both sides to be articulate.
- Valuable conversation and interactions among staff and Board.
- We are all on similar 'pages'. We really all do understand each other, the communication doors just need to be opened wider.
- Very positive – to be repeated or with some variations, as suggested.
- Enjoyed seeing how people think about solutions/problems differently than I do.
- It was beneficial in every way!
- I appreciate the opportunity to be listed to. Thank you.
- The conversations are always good. But it's the concrete follow-up that really matters.

- We are moving in the right direction to improve BOE/staff relationships.
- I enjoyed it very much! Let's have more.

Administrator Responses

What have you learned from this evening's conversation?

- The BOE shares the same concerns about communication and trust issues that teachers and staff have expressed.
- How important it is to share open dialogue with structured questions and protocols.
- Communication needs to result in action to ensure trust in system and integrity of the participants.

What is your reaction to this evening's conversation?

- I feel very positive about the conversations that took place tonight. I think they lay an important foundation for future conversations.
- Good conversations – thank you!
- Shared purpose and mission – what's best for our children; trust is central to relationships; lack of personal communication → lack of understanding → lack of trust → lack of communication; whereas personal communication results in understanding of shared purpose, mutual trust and more meaningful communication.

Board of Education Responses

What have you learned from this evening's conversation?

- I love our teachers! The more I meet, the better I feel.
- That some teachers feel loss of joy in jobs due to all the pressure on assignment, alignment, etc.

What is your reaction to this evening's conversation?

- Need more; deepen our understandings in a more substantial way than anything we could study at the BOE table.
- Once again – reaffirms the value and benefit of semi-structured discussions between BOE and teachers. Love the 'random' teacher selection. We need to continue these discussions.

Unclassified Response

- Thank you for the opportunity to talk and learn --- it is a reflection of the greatness of the value of discussion ... I am grateful that you value it, too.

The evening concluded with the group outlining 5 action ideas for next steps, which included:

1. Give all staff the opportunity to participate in a Communications Lab and to have the opportunity to share and understand the focus and purpose of the evening.
2. Replicate the Lab forum at buildings, providing informal times to get to know each other better and to foster relationships.
3. Increase opportunities for interactions in different venues such as brown bag lunches or morning coffee. Cycle people through with a BOE member at each event. Once a month have a different coffee or lunch to attend. Communication Labs as well as BOE meetings can be held at different buildings so that everyone can see each others' buildings. This would increase interaction. Rotate BOE meetings at all locations.
4. Foster other forms of communication - seek the multiple perspectives of every decision and communicate the 'why' of every decision.
5. Continue these forums on a regular basis and avoid emails when engaging in personal communications. Challenging issues can be discussed at informal meetings rather than in a rigid BOE format. Communication is the key.

PRC Review and Next Steps, May 12, 2009

The Professional Relations Council met on May 12, 2009 to review the action ideas and consolidate them for the next step.

- The Board of Education will conduct a client survey at the start of the 2009-10 school year. Plan is to disseminate the survey to staff on August 24, 2008
- Communications Labs are a valuable forum for conversation. Continue with the format of randomly selected teachers, rotating so all teachers get the opportunity to participate.
- Two Communications Labs will be held next school year: a fall Communications Lab on September 16, 2009 and a spring Communications Lab on April 14, 2010.
- Moving the Labs to a building other than the Admin Center will be explored.
- Explore more opportunities for informal forums for communication

Communication is the key!

*Trust is the assurance that one can count on the good will of another
to act in one's best interest.*

A. C. Baier