



CULTURE BUILT WITH CARE & PURPOSE

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As we interview “new to the district” educators our first question is this: Agree or disagree with the following statement from Rita Pierson, “Kids don’t learn from people they don’t like?” While educators must maintain high standards and recognize that teaching is not a popularity contest, our district firmly believes that the relationship between students and staff significantly impacts learning outcomes. Students are more likely to exert effort on assignments or their performance on local or state tests when they do not want to disappoint their teachers.

We often see athletes who go above and beyond for victory, driven by coaches who invest deeply in their success. Similarly, students usually adopt the persona of their teachers or coaches depending on the culture of the classroom or locker room. As a former high school principal, I found it fascinating to observe the same student in various environments throughout the day.

The common factor is the student, while the transformative influence rests with the adult present. As a building or district leader here are some questions to ask yourself, regarding building culture:

- Are you being intentional about going to classrooms to support?
- Are you taking the time to observe curriculum integration in the trenches?
- Are you taking time to listen to students who will be brutally honest about how they perceive learning?

Many of our administrators have gone to a mobile office cart to be in the hallway during passing periods and avoid the tedious office tasks that engulf your day. Staff who adopt a collective commitment to never giving up on students can find the results to be profound. Students can discern whether an adult is solely focused on delivering content or if

they genuinely care about understanding their unique needs.

The Professional Learning Community (PLC) process becomes essential, fostering collaboration among staff to establish a shared purpose that benefits both students and educators. As Superintendent, I try to rotate around the K-12 PLC meetings that occur weekly. It is vital to know the needs, celebrate their gains, and hear how I can support the learning process financially or through professional development. Teachers and administrators can often feel isolated despite being surrounded by hundreds of students and colleagues, while they navigate the daily grind of their schedules. Therefore, these PLC meetings should serve a purpose beyond discussing daily challenges or gripes; they should focus on strategizing solutions and sharing successes. Our district also prioritizes fostering positive connections at home through handwritten positive postcards, encouraging phone calls, and sharing positive feedback regarding our staff’s lives beyond the school environment. Throughout this article, you might notice a common word. Positivity because just like kids, an adult takes on the collective spirit of the group in which they are involved.

Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) is crucial for every school trying to improve its culture. At the upper levels, where challenges can be most pronounced, we established an in-house tutoring system known as the Irish Hub. This system allows students to take tests at the end of the day without missing critical class instruction. Additional rooms known as Irish Hub Tutoring, provide support from National Honor Society (NHS) students, core teachers, and paraprofessionals, offering small group and one-on-one assistance to deepen understanding of the material.

We also believe in the philosophy that it is not “how fast you learn the material” the true meaning of education is to learn the material. Our hope is students and teachers recognize the effort invested in ensuring that no one succumbs to failure. Comments like, “You should have studied harder,” OR the “student just doesn’t care,” does not truly address why the learning did not take place. A particularly encouraging remark was passed on by our high school administrator highlighting a new student who expressed appreciation for the culture of CHS stating, “Your teachers will not leave me alone and refuse to let me fail.” We are only in September and this student recognizes the culture of Chapman High School.

What does culture mean to USD 473? Sure, we love to host staff gatherings, and recognition events, and give warm greetings at the door. We believe those are vital for fostering a sense of belonging and self-worth. However, I would argue that the collective efficacy of “Doing What is Best for ALL kids,” as articulated in our vision statement, makes the difference. It encourages collaboration among staff, allowing students to understand and meet high expectations, believing in kids when those challenges arise, and ensuring they **NEVER GIVE UP** on learning.