

Smile and The Whole World Smiles with You

Relevance of Topic:

Our faculty is having problems with motivation and cooperation. This is due to the overwhelming demands placed on our staff.

Introduction/Rationale:

Our inquiry activity is regarding positive school climate. Improving the school climate is a part of our school improvement plan. Due to low Terra Nova test scores, our school has been placed on the state's hit list. This has drastically affected faculty morale. Many teachers are tired and overwhelmed. Our plan is to bring the life back to our school by creating opportunities for staff to relax and socializes without the pressure of meetings and staff development. Our hope is that relaxed, positive people will be better educators. As people who care about teaching, our students and the people we work with, we want to do everything we can to create a positive working and learning environment.

Organization of Study:

The first step is to send out a survey to list ideas they have for our Wahoo Wednesdays. Next, we will begin facilitating activities on Wednesdays for 6 weeks. At the end of the 6 weeks we will ask the participants to give us feedback on how effective the inquiry was for stress reduction and maintaining a positive attitude.

Questions for Inquiry:

1. Will Wahoo Wednesdays promote staff stress reduction?
2. Is there a positive or a negative reaction from the staff?
3. How do we react to negative comments from the staff?
4. Will the advertisement school wide help improve staff/student morale?
5. What will the outcome be school wide?
6. Will this be a positive project that we as a school can continue?

Research Support:

"My Morale Has Fallen, and It Can't Get Up!"

This article from The Education Digest offers practical ideas for boosting and maintaining teacher morale. IN this article, Ann White gives the burned out teacher tips for living a healthy and happier life.

A main component to our inquiry is physical activity. This article stresses the importance of being active. Teaching is a profession which requires energy and enthusiasm on a regular basis. A lack of those qualities impacts the atmosphere in a negative way. Through Wahoo Wednesdays, we are hoping to change the negative

energy to positive energy. Most of our activities are physical in nature, which helps reduce stress and improves overall health.

"Reflections of Resilient, Persevering Urban Teachers"

This is a study focusing on 10 successful urban educators. These 10 educators were selected for the study based on several criteria. They were all African-American, had 10+ years of teaching experience and worked in schools located in urban environments.

The study found these teachers had 5 things in common. First, they all shared a love of teaching and children. Second, all reported satisfaction from making a difference in the life of a child. These teachers also felt support systems were imperative to succeeding in an urban environment. They listed support systems such as church, and other spiritual outlets, family, friends, and each other. All participants in the study felt that being a member of a team was crucial to their success as educators.

Wahoo Wednesday is designed to create a positive, fun, team atmosphere. In this atmosphere, members of the faculty are able to get to know one another and spend time together in a stress free environment. This article chose these teachers because they were exemplary educators in urban schools. These teachers stressed the importance of teamwork.

Stanford, B. H. (2001). Reflections of resilient, persevering urban teachers. *Teacher Education Quarterly* 28(3), 75-87.

White, A. T. (2000). My morale has fallen and it can't get up. *The Education Digest* 65 (7), 61-63.

Participants:

The participants of this study are the staff of Sarah Moore Greene Magnet Technology Academy who chose voluntarily to attend Wahoo Wednesdays after school one day per week. Of those who have attended thus far, all but 3 are female and the majority are white. The ages of the participants range from the mid twenties to the mid fifties. They teach grades 1 through 5 as well as special education and special areas. We have both certified teaching staff and non-certified teaching assistants attending our sessions.

Data Collection:

We are using various forms of data to help gauge the progress of our project. We began by administering a survey. This survey was to see how much interest there was in Wahoo Wednesdays. This first survey also asked for topics and ideas we could use to incorporate into the programs each week.

We also sent out emails to each participant asking their opinion on school morale. These emails also gave the program participants a chance to give their opinions on why there is low staff morale, as well as ways they thought morale could be improved.

We are using interviews, email, and surveys to help determine the greatest need at our school. We are using a spreadsheet to chart attendance at Wahoo Wednesdays. This will help us determine which programs were more appealing than others.

We are using data techniques that help us hear the concerns and frustrations of our staff. We also want to know which activities were the most enjoyable. The success of this project depends on how well we listen to the voices of our colleagues.

Wahoo Wednesday Results:

Well, it is official! Smile and the whole world really does smile with you. We are so excited about the outcome of our Wahoo Wednesday inquiry activity. After pouring over emails and surveys we have tallied the results and are pleased to announce Wahoo Wednesday was a huge success!

The activities took place on Wednesdays from approximately 3:15- 4:15. We found people stayed much longer than we had anticipated. Those surveyed said they found they lost track of time during the activities and really were able to concentrate on having fun.

We had a total of 43 people participate in some way over the 6 weeks. There were 24 classroom teachers, 8 teaching assistants, 1 administrator, 1 member of the custodial staff, and 6 special others who work in the building.

The activities planned included volleyball, line dancing, scooter hockey, a scavenger hunt, an afternoon of team building activities, and our final afternoon of karaoke and volleyball.

Each activity was publicized Monday morning on our school news.

We made a personal appearance each Monday and tried to get the staff excited for the week ahead as well as the planned Wahoo activity. We posted fliers around the school and tried to recruit through word of mouth as well. After each Wahoo Wednesday we showed a Power Point slide show through the school production lab. This was broadcast on each television throughout the school. We had a lot of positive feedback from staff members who enjoyed seeing their colleagues on TV.

Surprisingly, we had a very positive response from the students in the building. On numerous occasions we were asked by students what was happening for Wahoo Wednesday. Each Wednesday teachers reported their students were asking if they would be going to Wahoo Wednesday later that afternoon. We also had several students ask if they could come to Wahoo Wednesday.

We sent out an email asking for feedback regarding Wahoo Wednesday. One 3rd grade teacher wrote, "Hey girls! I want to thank you for starting this project for our school. It is good to have times to get together with teachers and not worry about test scores or parents, or whatever...just to have time to enjoy the place we are in. It is much easier to smile at your kids when you feel like the staff is behind you and likes you!! It all comes down to being a better teacher for our students...and better attitudes are a huge step

towards better teachers and should I even venture to say better test scores? Again, you are doing a great job and we appreciate your efforts!”

We also sent out a survey for each participant to fill out. Out of 40 participants surveyed, 100 percent said they enjoyed Wahoo Wednesday. The participants named scooter hockey, line dancing, volleyball and the scavenger hunt as some of their favorite activities. Suggestions for activities in the future include- swing dancing, dodge ball, soccer, outdoor activities, poker, basketball, car games, bingo.

Participants listed several reasons as to why they participated in Wahoo Wednesdays: School spirit, stress reduction, social time with adults, and to improve school morale.

All participants said their stress levels were reduced. One teacher wrote, “I didn’t have time to think about all the things that stress me out during the day. For an hour, I was thinking about Wahoo Wednesday.”

Other positive outcomes included seeing the assistants in our building stay after school, and 30 participants listed getting to know teachers from other grade levels as a positive outcome. A fourth grade teacher told us, “I got a chance to get to know people in the building I had never spoken to before. Now when we see each other in the hall, we have something to talk about.”

Other positive outcomes included teachers starting their own activities. Several teachers in the building planned a school wide potluck lunch and named it the Wahoo Luncheon. Teachers from each grade level were asked to bring food. We all ate lunch together in the conference room and unwounded.

100 percent of participants said there were no negative outcomes. Many stated the only negative was the length of the project- 6 weeks. All participants expressed interest in continuing the project.

Almost all surveyed said they felt Wahoo Wednesday boosted school morale for those who attended, and they stated there needed to be more people involved.

When Wahoo Wednesdays resume we have a few changes we would like to see. It is our recommendation that we give more responsibility to other staff. We suggest each Wahoo Wednesday have different staff members (or grade levels) take over the planning. We would also like to see one Wahoo activity begin each in-service day. This would be a great way to get more people hooked on Wahoo Wednesday. We will also include Wahoo Wednesday participants on our weekly newscast. We want to show how many different people are participating.