cms®

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools

The Way Forward

Listening, learning and the case for change

CULTURE, ENGAGEMENT & SHARED VALUES

TASK FORCE

Discussion Questions and Responses

COMMUNICATION

QUESTION: What are the key communication issues that are of concern to employees?

ISSUES:

- **Messages vary across the district (from zone to zone; school to school; department to department)**
- **Lack of access to technology, especially as it pertains to support staff and the subsequent technology divide between employees. Lack of training; many employees can't check email or run basic computer programs to better do their jobs because they don't know how**
- **New policies are put into effect at a district, department and school-wide level, but are not communicated effectively to the public to generate community understanding and support**

- At the beginning of the school year, several "non-negotiable" initiatives are handed down. Many times, these initiatives are not practical or realistic at the school level
- When the district convenes small groups, employees don't always know who is included in the group, what they are doing or who is running the group. Their process is also not transparent
- Lack of communication, even within the school. Employees, like custodians get too little information. While others, like principals are overwhelmed by the amount of information they receive
- Parents often don't have the necessary information they need in order to help their child succeed. The tools put in place (Parent Assist and Parent University) are not communicated broadly enough to the parents most in need of the information, so many parents are not aware of the resources that are offered
- The perception some in the community have of certain schools discourages active engagement and public support for those schools

COMMUNICATION

QUESTION: What recommendations would you make to address or correct those key communication concerns?

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **Spell out clear, non-negotiable policies at the beginning of the school year. This will include what each school can and cannot do; must order or cannot order, etc. Other departments that should have non-negotiable policies: HR, Licensure**
- **Create a decision making process that is transparent. Publicize who is included in each small group and why they were chosen (their credentials). Include ways to volunteer for these special interest groups and how to provide feedback to the group. The process should be instituted by the board with policies established that should not change each time a new superintendent is selected. Also, the rationale and intent behind decisions should be clearly expressed.**
- **Rather than allow surplused inventory to sit idle in the warehouse, reallocate the technology to departments with a need**

- Ensure CMS is better represented at the state level. (DPI) so that our voice is heard
- Training should be updated but not as tech-driven, since technology is phased out every couple of years (ex. iPhones/iPads)
- Accountability should be equal across all employee titles (Ex.: If teachers are expected to respond to emails within 24 hours, principals, department members and directors should have to as well.)
- Principals need to listen to the people closest to the problem (i.e.: teachers)
- Better PR is needed at the county level to encourage participation in schools with a negative community perception
- Cultural competency training in a measured way to generate acceptance rather than fear
- Extra communication efforts to engage parents whose children are most at risk

FEEDBACK

<u>QUESTION:</u>   What are the key issues related to feedback that are of concern to employees?

<u>ISSUES:</u>

- Not much recognition at school level; often, no feedback is provided when something is done well
- A lot of emails are circulated but usually leave out auxiliary employees
- Teacher Evaluations by principals and peers often subjective and inconsistent, varies by principals
- Little opportunity for student or family input into evaluations

- Feedback is provided, but no plan of action is given
- Personnel are receiving directives from several different administrators following a classroom visit; the information and course of action isn't always the same
- Employees evaluated on un-defined goals, e.g., *global awareness*
- Some employees don't have mentors
- Formal mentorship process not always effective
- News reporting of "pay for performance" issues stirred up controversy in the community

FEEDBACK

QUESTION: What recommendations would you make to improve feedback systems at CMS so that employees can feel more valued and engaged?

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **Define terms and expectations on the performance evaluation**
- **Create a Career Development Plan with each employee, outlining goals, objectives, etc.**
- **If an employee is put on an Action Plan, define the expectations and requirements**
- **Provide departments and schools with a budget for professional development**
- **Similar to college courses, allow students (as well as parents) to respond to a survey about their teachers**

- Find a way to support new teachers, possibly with a mentor program
- Administrators schedule personal contact with each employee on an ongoing basis (separate from performance evaluation)
- Create an effective Teacher Mentor Program
- Support strategic compensation based on performance now being designed by CMS teachers

RECOGNITION

QUESTION: What are the key issues related to recognition that are of concern to employees?

ISSUES:

- **Some groups get recognized, others don't**
- **Programs for recognition vary between schools/departments (some are more creative than others)**
- **Discontinuation of district-wide programs that celebrated teacher and employee excellence**

- Professional development center closed; key focus became teacher certification
- Programs are started, but not continued
- Celebrations for school-wide accomplishments have ceased (School of Excellence awards)
- Strong focus on academic/teacher recognition; other groups are left out
- Little to no opportunity for students and families to formally thank or acknowledge employees who they feel deserve recognition

RECOGNITION

QUESTION: What recommendations would you make to improve recognition systems at CMS so that employees can feel more valued and engaged?

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **Allow teachers with excellent performance 1 hour alone**
- **Do a job-swap for 1-2 hours to better appreciate the work of others, e.g., principals serve lunch, etc**
- **Revive the Big Apple Award (and ensure something tangible is presented to the recipient)**
- **If the money isn't available at the school level, reach out to local businesses and community partners for contributions**

- Clarify how professional development dollars are allocated
- Create a Teacher Recognition Program with lots of options
- Budget for more Professional Development at the local, state and regional levels
- Support conference attendance as professional development
- Award salary/stipend incentives
- Promote social activities, to include getting dinner/drinks with co-workers after work
- Bring back Appreciation Days/Weeks/Months
- Provide an online form where co-workers, administrators and students can provide positive feedback about an employee's work
- Have recognition programs that invite the community's participation
- Bring back some of the successful programs implemented in the past
- Implement "Thank You Coupons" – that thank the recipient for their patronage, while also inviting comments related to the employee's performance

WORK ENVIRONMENT

QUESTION: What issues or concerns about the work environment do CMS employees have?

ISSUES:

- **Roles and policies are not clearly defined**
- **Morale is decreased after talking to other employees who are not happy**
- **Teamwork is not apparent; the custodial staff had major cuts and are working with a limited labor force; they are having to 'do a lot more with a lot less'**
- **Some departments may feel left out, due to their separation from the school's population (EC, ESL)**
- **New teachers often feel overwhelmed in their new position**

- The survey created more questions than it provided answers
- No breakdown by employee group, so we are unsure who is happy and who isn't
- Terms on survey undefined
- Heating and air conditioning is not standard across the district
- Due to budget and labor cut-backs, equipment takes longer to get fixed
- Noise control – Many areas in the schools are kept quiet (halls, classrooms), but in places like the cafeteria/kitchen, it is difficult to communicate effectively with other employees/students because of the noise (cafeteria workers are shouting at students in the line due to the noise)
- Schools/administration does not allow head janitors the opportunity to manage staff; projects and workflow is given directly to the individual janitor, rather than the head janitor
- Ease of access – parents and community members find entering the school to be too easy; security of the students/staff is compromised

WORK ENVIRONMENT

QUESTION: What improvements or changes to the work environment would you recommend to make CMS employees feel more valued and appreciated?

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **Administration needs to explain new policies and then check back in with their staff to see how the new policies are affecting their performance**
- **Implement changes gradually and with full understanding by staff; administration should check back in with staff after a period of time to evaluate the effectiveness of new policies and to gauge the employees' understanding and implementation difficulties**
- **Educate staff on district policies; update the policy website regularly and make the site more user-friendly**
- **Create an employee recognition program that highlights achievements of different employees within the schools, not just district wide; quarterly**

- Professional development for leaders and team members to encourage active listening
- Create a staff/teacher Rights & Responsibilities Handbook that clearly defines rules, expectations and consequences
- Provide the proper and necessary tools for employees to complete tasks
- Update equipment and technology so the staff is able to work efficiently
- Provide monitors at lunch to control noise in the cafeteria
- Redefine job duties to accommodate labor restrictions
- Improve leadership training; teach principals and department heads to communicate more effectively with the people they manage
- Translation kits – headsets designed to ease communication between the schools and parents; come in many languages; partner with community groups to obtain
- To improve morale, inform the schools/departments of the positive things employees are doing
- Host a webinar that employees who are interested in learning Spanish can complete daily/weekly

CAREER GROWTH

QUESTION: What is your perception of the opportunities CMS provides - or doesn't provide - for employees to learn, improve, and advance professionally?

ISSUES:

- **Wallace-funded, Principal Pipeline is an effective tool that helps principals manage their time**
    - **School administrators only have the power to change the calendar; in the principal's stead, they have no authority to make decisions**
    - **Community members, looking to speak with a principal, can be denied and asked to speak with the other school administrators (who have no authority)**
    - **$12,000/principal each year**
    - **Funding for Pipeline will end when the grant runs out**
    - **Ann Clark is looking for additional funding for the project**
- **New teachers find the professional development options hard to navigate**
- **Opportunities seem plentiful for some (nutrition, teachers) and are obsolete for others (support staff, secretaries)**
- **No feedback is given when you don't receive a position**
- **Some employees need better customer service and people skills, as well as professionalism (janitors)**

- The Leadership Academy made the principals feel engaged; they now feel disconnected
- Teachers/principals receive great training, but are unable or unsure of how to apply the training in the schools
- Qualifications for jobs posted are not specific and are uneven
- It is difficult for a clerical support staff employee to move up; very few job opportunities, a lack of encouragement to advance and limited qualifications make it almost impossible
- People are unaware development opportunities are available
- Unsure of how to use technology they are given

CAREER GROWTH

QUESTION: What recommendations would you make to enhance growth opportunities so that employees will feel more engaged?

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **Make PD more uniform and provide opportunities for everyone**
- **Focus PD that is offered and integrate how to apply the training into the classroom**
- **Send teams, rather than individuals, so they can implement new strategies across the board**

- Offer follow-up after PD to determine effectiveness
- After hiring talented people, promote from within the organization
- Mentor and provide clear paths for next career steps
- Customize PD for the schools, based on the demographic they serve (Ex., provide discounted Spanish courses for CMS employees that cater to high numbers of Hispanic/Latino students)
- Make the professional development opportunities accessible to everyone (bus drivers are unable to access the internet on the clock)

LEADERSHIP

QUESTION: What do you feel is the perception of employees about their immediate supervisors and district office administrators?

ISSUES:

- **Some leaders could take a greater role in the development of their staff**
- **Employees would like to see leadership model the behavior they desire**
- **Teachers are critical about how they feel about the school and their students; creates a culture of pessimism**
- **Teachers feel a lack of stability in their position; unsure whether they will be at their school the next year**

- Administrators and office supervisors are generally less visible
- People go around supervisors to obtain what they need/want
- Some senior staff members are not friendly, will not talk to others
- Unsure of who the district leaders are

LEADERSHIP

QUESTION: What can be done differently to improve those perceptions of the leaders in CMS?

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **Explain job descriptions to staff**
- **Solicit information from the departments and share that information across the district**
- **Create professional development for leadership courses**

- Share Principal Pipeline calendar with teachers, so they know where/what a principal is doing during the day
- Engage the teachers with the budget; ask for their input on how to spend money remaining in the budget
- Create a more friendly, open environment
- Let people know they are valued
- Don't force teachers/principals into positions
- Create a trial period for employees at new schools

CUSTOMER SERVICE

<u>QUESTION:</u> What are some of the issues and challenges facing CMS employees in regards to quality customer service?

<u>ISSUES:</u>

- **Front office staff displays unfriendly/unaccommodating behavior toward guests, vendors, parents, etc.**
- **Response time related to requests is slow or non-existent**
- **Customer service is not standard throughout the district**

- Challenge in obtaining information from certain departments
- Often receive incorrect information from contacts
- Employees are providing different levels of customer service and providing conflicting information

CUSTOMER SERVICE

QUESTION: What recommendations would you make to improve customer service in CMS?

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **Provide customer service/human resources training to leadership staff**
- **Provide a cheat sheet or FAQ guide for employees so they know the answers to common questions**
- **All employees should take a customer service workshop, especially front desk personnel**

- Try to find an answer before passing it on to another employee
- Establish a procedure for the most common tasks, questions, etc. and inform employees of procedures
- Make directors and principals accountable for the poor behavior of their employees; provide follow-up on complaints
- Have directors and principals complete monthly service checks and address issues
- Provide important information in both hard and soft copy
- Make website and intranet more user-friendly and ensure the information presented is up-to-date