

## Promising Practices and Implementation Tools

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**3. Lever Addressed:** Professional Culture

**4. Title of Promising Practice:** Building and Sustaining a Strong School Culture

**5. District(s) Where Implemented:** Revere Public Schools

**6. Applicable Grade Levels:** Pre-K-12

### **7. How This Practice Reflects District's Mission & Core Values:**

This practice and the district's mission and core values are really one in the same, in that the district's articulated beliefs lay the foundation for a strong professional culture. These beliefs are embedded in every initiative and decision made in Revere Public Schools:

- All students can learn.
- Improved instruction is directly connected with the quality of teaching.
- All educators are engaged in the decision making process and work for a common goal.
- All district initiatives focus on the "moral imperative" or what is best for the kids and are filtered through Revere's key values of "Rigor, Relevance and Relationships" (or "The 3 R's").

### **8. Goals of This Practice:**

1. Achieve a Best Urban District in the State distinction (BUDS).
2. Work towards meeting AYP.
3. Keep students in school and moving towards a four year college education.
4. Embrace the community and involve all stakeholders in working toward a common goal.

### **9. Description of This Practice and How it Addresses Criteria for This Lever:**

- Perhaps the most concrete and compelling example of the strong

professional culture that prevails in Revere is the existence, make-up and function of the District Steering Committee and seven lever sub-committees designed to address the processes that influence educator expertise. Two years ago, seven interconnected sub-committees were formed that focus on key areas, or levers, of school improvement. These are:

- Organizational Structure
- Supervision and Evaluation
- Professional Development
- Teacher Leadership
- Professional Culture
- Induction
- Recruitment, Hiring and Placement

In addition, a District Steering Committee, comprised of teachers, administrators and Union representation, serves as a liaison to a lever sub-committee as well as the oversight and decision making group for all goals and initiatives generated by each group. This design has helped to connect the Steering Committee to the lever work as well as connecting the levers to each other. This collaborative approach also allows Revere's central office administrators and other Steering Committee members the unique opportunity to see the bigger picture of how all sub-committee plans fit together like interrelated pieces of Revere's school improvement puzzle.

- The Professional Culture Sub-Committee meets on a monthly basis, as do other sub-committees, but has found its goals are best met by splitting off and involving members in the other six sub-committees. In this way they are the "culture watchdogs" for the district and assist other committee members in filtering through the "3 R's" of their work. For instance, when the Professional Development Sub-committee creates a proposal for PD around writing SMART goals, that proposal is filtered through three questions: Is it rigorous? Is it relevant? Does it establish strong relationships? These three filter questions are intended to permeate every aspect of Revere's work and ensure a systematic approach to improving student achievement.
- Another creative example of Revere's efforts to build upon a collaborative culture is the Round Robin series of meetings devised by the District Steering Committee. This unique structure enables sub-committees to meet with each other and discuss selected areas of potential overlap between their plans. (This

Round Robin matrix is also attached as an implementation tool.)

- As a result of these meetings, the Professional Culture, Supervision and Evaluation, Professional Development and Induction Sub-committees have collaborated on achieving their goals. For example, the PD Sub committee, with input from the S&E committee, is currently focused on providing teachers and administrators who have been identified as needs improvement in an area, a list of resources that they can readily access to help them improve. These resources will be in addition to the support provided by mentors and principals.
- Central to all committee goals and practices in Revere is the deeply understood belief that all kids can learn. This central belief is especially important for students in an urban district who may not come to school with the same advantages and background experiences as students from more affluent communities. To address this gap, the Superintendent believes that all members of the Revere Public Schools must share in this belief and help create a culture that embraces the population they serve.

In addition, woven throughout the work of Revere's integrated subcommittees is a powerful "we're all in this together" attitude that is modeled by the Superintendent, Assistant Superintendents, Principals and Directors, and owned by all teachers. Striving to be the best urban district in the state, administrators build up pride among teachers, reminding them constantly of the considerable influence they have on children. Teachers are continually encouraged to help students understand the importance of 16 years of education and that hard work in school can unlock the future, a message many may not receive from home.

- The administration also believes that they must support teachers with resources, time, and professional development to enable them to continually grow and effectively meet the needs of all students. Implementation of the new educator evaluation system has provided an additional opportunity to underscore this belief and continues to ensure quality teaching. From the initial research stage to on-going discussions about thoughtful implementation, teachers, union leaders and administrators have been engaged in collective decision making about new evaluation procedures.

Because of the superintendent's commitment over 11 years of leadership, there is an established sense of trust where honest professional conversations can be

heard. This is in part because the administration has continually kept the focus on helping teachers help kids and enabling teachers to succeed.

Just as teachers need professional development to continually grow, administrators also attend extensive professional development on how to create a respectful, open, and honest culture that encourages communication and teaches administrators skills for working with struggling teachers in a way that encourages growth and promotes collaborative efforts.

- Developing teacher leadership capacity, built on a culture of trust, cooperation and true partnership with administrators is another hallmark of Revere's culture. Highlights of these teacher leadership and career advancement opportunities and future plans are as follows:

- 1.) Along with the traditional leadership roles of mentor, professional learning group facilitators, and math and literacy coaches, Revere has committed to a unique inclusion of Teacher Evaluation Leaders in the supervision and evaluation process. A key role that Teacher Evaluation Leaders play is to provide ongoing professional development in their buildings and also serve as resources for teachers and administrators when questions or clarification about a particular process or form arises. Twenty-five Teacher Evaluation Leader positions were funded last year and all teachers were invited to apply.

- 2.) The Teachers Teaching Teachers model has been in place in Revere for a few years.

TTT was created to empower teachers with a particular expertise to provide PD for their colleagues. For example, any department can get together to identify what PD they need most, and present a proposal to the Superintendent and Assistant Superintendents to both develop and run a course or workshop. Seven such paid positions and trainings have been funded throughout the district this year.

- 3.) An innovative vision for the future is to add Master Mentor positions to the induction process in Revere. This position is envisioned to encompass a three year cycle, with a primary focus on supporting new teachers and administrators in the first critical months and years of teaching.

- Another key component of Revere's positive culture is a strong partnership with the Teacher's Union. Union leaders are integral members of the District

Steering Committee and lever sub-committees, so there is always a union representative at the table when key decisions are being made. Lastly, education in Revere is seen as "our profession", with teachers, teacher leaders and administrators all working towards a common goal.

As detailed below, this promising practice exemplifies the criteria necessary for a strong **Professional Culture** as they relate to positive change:

The superintendent at the district level and the principal at the school level ensure there is an articulated set of core values that drive behavior and decisions as well as an organizational culture that supports open and honest communication, continuous professional improvement, data-based decision-making, and joint responsibility for student learning and achievement. District and schools actively involve teachers, families, and other stakeholders (as appropriate) in decision-making.

Teachers regularly engage in instructional conversations, peer observations, collaborative planning, and ongoing collegial support.

District and schools are characterized by a climate of shared responsibility for continuous improvement.

Data are continuously examined and analyzed to guide instructional decision-making.

District and school culture is characterized by trust and willingness to discuss "undiscussable" issues.

Superintendents and principals are evaluated on their ability to build a workplace culture of non-defensive examination of teaching practice and leadership practice in relation to student results.

Superintendents and principals receive professional development to enhance this capacity.

#### **10. How This Practice Was Implemented So It Was More Successful Than Others:**

- Identifying and embedding a common purpose or "moral imperative" into all that happens in the district has been the cornerstone of the positive environment in Revere.
- Creation of a District Steering Committee and seven lever sub-committees that embody collaboration, integration, trust, transparency and an equal voice at the table has also contributed to a strong culture.
- In essence, the positive culture that has been developed in Revere serves as a highly effective umbrella under which all other district work is grown, guided and nourished.

#### **11. How This Practice Changed The District or School:**

- Belief that all kids can learn is a lived expectation vs. a written expectation.

One powerful example of this is at the high school level. In 1990 there were no AP courses offered for students because this core belief was not deeply held by all. Currently, there are over a dozen different AP courses offered to students in grades 9–12.

- The desire to constantly improve, collaborate, share leadership and consistently hold all to high expectations has contributed to a more vibrant professional learning community in Revere.

**12. Resources (time, money, materials etc.) Required For Successful Implementation:**

- Time and funding for quality Professional Development in the form of courses, programs, workshops and technology based resources.
- Time for collaboration on sub-committees, analyzing student work and sharing best instructional practices.
- Although more abstract, the greatest resource has come from two decades of a belief system that has been modeled and supported by administration and teachers.

**13. Tools You Used To Implement Or Advance This Practice:**

**See separate attachments:**

1. District Wide Culture Survey
2. Common Norms for District and Building Level PLC's
3. Round Robin Chart
4. District Core Values