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Assessing A District's Culture Through An Annual School Culture Audit: A Policy Advocacy Document

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ASSESSING A DISTRICT'S CULTURE THROUGH AN ANNUAL SCHOOL

CULTURE AUDIT: A POLICY ADVOCACY DOCUMENT

Robert S. Tomic

Educational Leadership Doctoral Program

Submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirement of

Doctor of Education

In the Foster G. McGaw Graduate School

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This document was created as *one* part of the three-part dissertation requirement of the National Louis University (NLU) Educational Leadership (EDL) Doctoral Program. The National Louis Educational Leadership EdD is a professional practice degree program (Shulman et al., 2006).

For the dissertation requirement, doctoral candidates are required to plan, research, and implement three major projects, one each year, within their school or district with a focus on professional practice. The three projects are:

- Program Evaluation
- Change Leadership Plan
- Policy Advocacy Document

For the **Program Evaluation** candidates are required to identify and evaluate a program or practice within their school or district. The "program" can be a current initiative; a grant project; a common practice; or a movement. Focused on utilization, the evaluation can be formative, summative, or developmental (Patton, 2008). The candidate must demonstrate how the evaluation directly relates to student learning.

In the **Change Leadership Plan** candidates develop a plan that considers organizational possibilities for renewal. The plan for organizational change may be at the building or district level. It must be related to an area in need of improvement, and have a clear target in mind. The candidate must be able to identify noticeable and feasible differences that should exist as a result of the change plan (Wagner et al., 2006).

In the **Policy Advocacy Document** candidates develop and advocate for a policy at the local, state or national level using reflective practice and research as a means for supporting and promoting reforms in education. Policy advocacy dissertations use critical theory to address moral and ethical issues of policy formation and administrative decision making (i.e., what ought to be). The purpose is to develop reflective, humane and social critics, moral leaders, and competent professionals, guided by a critical practical rational model (Browder, 1995).

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A THREE-PART DISSERTATION:

THE IMPACT OF AFTER-SCHOOL TUTORING ON STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT: A
PROGRAM EVALUATION

TRANSFORMING A SCHOOL'S CULTURE THROUGH COLLOBORATION,
RELATIONSHIPS, AND SHARED VALUES: A CHANGE LEADERSHIP PLAN

ASSESSING A DISTRICT'S CULTURE THROUGH AN ANNUAL SCHOOL CULTURE
AUDIT: A POLICY ADVOCACY DOCUMENT

Robert S. Tomic

Educational Leadership Doctoral Program

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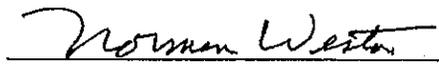
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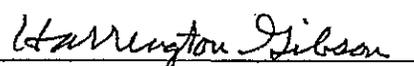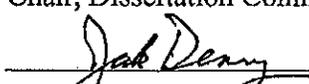
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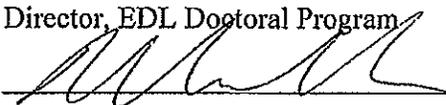
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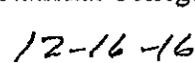
ABSTRACT

Healthy school cultures play a significant role in improving a student's educational experience as well as creating a professional environment for staff. Sustaining a positive school culture throughout a K-8 district allows for similar experiences for students and provides stability at the staff level throughout the district. The recommended policy for Yorktown School District would require each school to complete an annual school culture audit to ensure the presence of a strong foundation for all stakeholders. Utilizing the School Culture Triage Survey on an annual basis to determine strengths and areas to focus on will provide a school and district the information needed to build a strong foundation for all stakeholders to flourish. The focus is on three main categories: professional collaboration, collegial relationships, and self-determination (CISC, n.d.). Incorporating this inexpensive, annual school culture audit requires buy-in and commitment from staff and administration. As a result, the ability to collaborate, make adjustments, and solve problems together throughout the year will benefit all stakeholders.

PREFACE: LEADERSHIP LESSONS LEARNED

One of the most significant roles of an educational leader is to ensure the existence of a conducive and supportive environment that allows all students to receive an excellent educational experience. Implementing a district policy that focuses on the school culture paves the way for an excellent foundation for all stakeholders to grow and flourish. This policy advocacy does just this by focusing on a research-based survey called the School Culture Triage Survey. The survey allows for anonymous feedback from staff, followed by discussion and collaboration on the results, to determine the focus and school initiatives for the upcoming school year. As a result, by offering feedback and collaborating, staff are not only paving the way but earning ownership. This process only begins with the completion of the annual School Culture Triage Survey because it's a reflection of the past year's experience. The real work begins when faced with the task of creating goals and initiatives from the results and collaboratively addressing unforeseen circumstances during the school year. This is where the real learning curves occur for all stakeholders.

The role of the administrator/principal is significant due to the fact that this person needs to able to distinguish between adaptive and technical change. This will help the leader understand and better prepare the staff when making value-based changes or improving skill sets. One of the underlying factors is the level of trust within the entire staff. When there's trust there's the opportunity to have open and productive discussions that result in solutions to problems. At times, even when the correct decisions are made, change is difficult for most people even if it's the right thing to do. This is where the saying, "patience is a virtue" is a key factor in seeing successful initiatives come to fruition throughout a staff.

As a result of change that occurs due to the necessary evolutionary process of improvement, it's inevitable that the staff will go through a filtering process over time. Some of this change might be due to retirements, but some of the turnover will be a result of how some staff members do not want to be a part of the change process and how things are done differently on a day to day basis. Positive and necessary change that is research-based, is the right thing to do for overall school improvement, but for some individuals it does not matter, they do not want to be a part of the evolutionary process. The building leader then has the responsibility to hire additional staff that in the long run should be a better fit for where the current staff is heading. This is an excellent opportunity for the administrator to fill in those critical missing pieces that will help propel the staff forward and speed the evolutionary or change process.

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SECTION ONE: VISION STATEMENT

Awareness of the Need for Change

A critical aspect of a school system is the stability and sustainability of its school

culture. School culture is the layers of fabric that involve all stakeholders in a school

system (students, staff, and parents). School culture can be described as:

> School culture is the set of norms, values and beliefs, rituals and ceremonies, symbols and stories that make up the "persona" of the school. These unwritten expectations build up over time as teachers, administrators, parents, and students work together, solve problems, deal with challenges and, at times, cope with failures (Peterson, as cited in CISC).

Working in a K-8 school district in the Chicagoland area for the past nine years

and having the opportunity to be in an acting principals role in one building, and being

the principal for two other buildings, has confirmed my belief in the need to advocate for

a policy that requires consistent monitoring of the school culture of each building and the

overall district. Having experienced the cultures in feeder schools that house grades four

through six, and currently as principal of the seventh- and eighth-grade middle school, I

can confirm that the culture in each building can be drastically different for all

stakeholders. In my current role as building principal at Campton Middle School, my

main initiative for the first year is examining and restructuring the school culture. This is

the second building that I've had to examine and change the school culture in Yorktown

School District.

A change leadership plan that I worked on involved transforming a middle

school's culture through collaboration, relationships, and shared values. This experience

of thoroughly examining the school culture of Campton Middle School helped me

understand the importance of having a healthy school culture for all stakeholders. One of

the critical components is ownership by all stakeholders which requires a consistent level

of collaboration. Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) stated that "Schools characterized by collaborative cultures are also places of hard work and dedication, collective responsibility, and pride in the school" (p.113). Having a collaborative culture is especially important when there is the need to inventory processes, structures, and resolve problems within a building and all stakeholders. This policy document though set up for a pilot is intended to expand at the district level.

Critical Issues

As the students and parents of Yorktown School District transition from one building to the next as they complete their educational experience from kindergarten through to the eighth grade, their experience in each building can vary drastically. Their experiences range from healthy, positive, and nurturing environments to temperamental, inconsistent, and at times, unsupportive environments. Having different experiences throughout the K-8 experience can negatively impact students from a social and academic perspective. In addition, when those experiences are so varied, parents receive different levels of service and support that result in frustration and the need for district office administration to intervene and resolve problems.

The school culture in Yorktown School District can vary greatly from building to building. The ways and methods in which the staff and administrative team function are also quite different depending on the leadership teams and the staff. There are some buildings that are collaborative and supportive and which you would deem to have a healthy school culture, based off staff retention rates, parent involvement and satisfaction, and a high level of student performance.

There are other buildings that you can classify as inefficient and dysfunctional at times due to their inability to function collectively. Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) defined Balkanized teacher culture as "separate and sometimes competing groups, jockeying for position and supremacy like loosely connected Balkan states" (p.115). This is certainly the case in Campton Middle School, where the known culture within all stakeholders is the belonging to a specific team within the school. The Campton Middle School concept and perception is "four buildings under one roof," which has resulted in confusion and inconsistencies for all stakeholders.

This is also the case when you look at Yorkton School District as a whole. Each building is an independent entity within the district and there's a constant "jockeying for position" mentality among the schools at all times. As a result, the level of cooperation and articulation amongst each building would not be defined as consistent or collaborative. This has also impacted some buildings internally by having grade levels competing against other grade levels for internal supremacy based off of student performance.

At the administrative level, there's a variety of leadership styles within Yorktown School District that sets a different cultural tone for the type of school culture that exists in each building. There is also a discrepancy of experience and success rate within the administrative team. In this instance, success can be defined as a combination of the following: teacher retention rate, teacher satisfaction, parent satisfaction and volunteering, student performance rate, and the need for district office to resolve issues in individual buildings. With the varying levels of leadership style and experience,

providing some consistent district-wide structures would help in beginning to create continuity and a collaborative culture throughout Yorktown School District.

<center>Recommended Policy</center>

The policy that I'm recommending is incorporating school culture audits in each individual school of Yorktown School District. This should be done annually so there can be continual monitoring of the needs and strengths of building staff. Staff and administration would be involved in the process by offering their feedback on how a building is functioning. The tool for the school culture audit is the School Culture Triage survey. The survey (Appendix A) is from the Center for Improving School Culture (CISC) and it encompasses the Likert scale, with questions assigned a rating from 1 to 5 points. The questions are categorized under three headings:

1. Professional Collaboration: Do teachers and staff meet and work together to solve professional issues e.g. instructional, organizational or curricular issues?

2. Affiliative/Collegial Relationships: Do people enjoy working together, support one another and feel valued and included?

3. Efficacy or Self-Determination: Are people in this school here because they want to be? Do they work to improve their skills as true professionals, or, do they simply see themselves as helpless, victims of a large and uncaring bureaucracy? (CISC, p.103)

The purpose of using a uniformed audit across the district is to ensure consistent measurement and focus on the same things. The School Culture Triage Survey focuses on collaboration, relationships, and how we get things done. This begins the process of improving a school culture in a building and overall better continuity within the district.

The results of the survey would be shared with staff to collaborate and confirm the things that we need to objectively work on. There would be goals established along with an action plan based off of the survey results. This would be incorporated in the school improvement plan along with specific professional development initiatives.

This process would be done annually as each building focuses on the things they specifically need to work on to create healthier school cultures, which in turn helps improve the culture of Yorktown School District. The results and findings of this survey should not be part of an administrator's evaluation due to the fact that it might lose some of its objectivity when staff complete the questionnaire. What can and should be part of the administrators' evaluation is the follow-through and monitoring of the action plan that has been created with staff.

<center>Envisioned Effect</center>

Incorporating this policy helps in continually improving each individual school culture and the district culture as a whole. Regardless of the individual school leadership and when new administrators are assigned to different buildings or when new staff members are added to a building, the focus and priority is in maintaining a healthy school culture. Our other stakeholders (i.e., students and parents) will experience the same level of support and positive nurturing environment through their K-8 academic experience in Yorktown School District, which is critical for academic, social, and emotional growth.

One of the pillars of a healthy school culture is focusing on rapport building for all stakeholders. Milner (2015) stated that "there is compelling evidence that relationship building can be an essential element to teacher and student success" (p.94). This will pay dividends when students transition from one grade level to the next and into a new

<center>5</center>

building. This move into unchartered waters calls for the need to focus on rapport building and establishing a new level of trust to ease the transition process into another school and to build on past relationships. Building a rapport with staff and administration can help when difficult decisions need to be made for the good of the building. Maintaining the same spirit of relationship building with parents and community members builds the foundation for unlimited possibility.

Having staff involved in offering feedback in how the building functions offers them the opportunity to have consistent ownership and help shape the culture of the building. Utilizing evidence-based decision making through group discussions will help in the commitment to professional development initiatives for the building and entire district as collaboration becomes the norm and not the exception. Creating and emphasizing a collaborative environment should help in staff commitment and retention over time.

SECTION TWO: ANALYSIS OF NEED

Section two addresses the "analysis of need" by highlighting the importance of policy advocacy through five lenses: educational analysis, economic analysis, social analysis, political analysis, and moral and ethical analysis. Yorktown School District will be reviewed and analyzed as we look into why there should be a policy that requires each building in the district to complete a school culture audit. The School Culture Triage (Appendix A) Survey from the Center for Improving School Culture (CISC) and the three distinct sections from the survey (professional collaboration, affiliative/collegial relationships, and efficacy/self-determination) is reviewed in section two.

Educational Analysis

Having a healthy and stable school environment is the foundational piece for growth. Williamson and Blackburn (2009) stated that "understanding culture—how it works and how it can be shaped—is important for improving a school's program" (p.60). Sustaining a healthy school culture positively affects all stakeholders: staff, students, and parent/guardians. Williamson and Blackburn (2009) also stated that "it takes time and patience to shape school culture, but doing so is one of the most powerful ways a principal can improve his or her school" (p.60). The initial challenge is getting to the level where you have a healthy school culture followed by continual monitoring to sustain that level. "An analysis of the school culture—whether in-depth or as a cursory preview of need—is essential for all schools as they strive to improve" (CISC, p. 130). The annual monitoring of school culture needs to occur to help improve how a building and district function as whole.

An important part of school culture is how the staff and administrative team work together as a whole. The art of collaborating is a critical component in how things get done on a daily basis. Additionally, collaboration is as much about how we get things done in a cohesive manner as well as how we improve our skills in the classroom. Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) stated that "teaching is a collective rather than an individual enterprise and that analysis, evaluation, and experimentation in concert with colleagues are conditions in which teachers improve" (p.112). Working together to help improve our skills in the classroom is how we can positively impact our students. Research has shown that a healthy school culture impacts student academic achievement (Cohen, Pickeral, & McCloskey, 2008; Bischoff, Deris, Johnson, & Quin, 2015). As we improve our craft in the classroom, we also need to make sure that we are cognizant of our values.

Being mindful of our school values and beliefs is a critical piece in moving forward as a staff. Reeves (2009) suggested that "culture is reflected in the behavior, attitudes, and beliefs of individuals and groups" (p.37). Additionally, this is an adaptive challenge that not only deals with the minds of individuals, but also with their hearts (Heifetz, Grashow, & Linsky, 2009). Monitoring this piece is critical so that growth is assured. Without monitoring, growth can be stymied. Monitoring a school and district culture on an annual basis is a critical piece in continually evaluating and keeping your hands on the pulse of the organization.

Economic Analysis

When the leader of the building puts value in something and demonstrates this through their actions then there is a higher probability that the staff will respond favorably.

> It's pointless and expensive putting everyone in a district through a packaged workshop on how to become professional learning communities if some of the principals have not been able or willing to build trust and respect with and among their teachers (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012, p. 113).

As a district, the entire administrative team, including the principals at each building, need to demonstrate the same belief system and values so there is consistency across the district (Reeves, 2009; Dernowska & Tlusciak-Deliowska, 2012). Regardless of the building-level leadership and when principals change, the attention to school culture needs to be sustained and made a priority for the benefit of the staff and students. As a result, students will have a more consistent educational experience at Yorktown School District. As they transition through three buildings during these nine years, both students and parents should experience more continuity in the service that is provided for them. This should positively impact student mobility rates. From a staff perspective, continuity becomes key to minimize staff turnover rates when a new principal comes aboard.

When a building and school district experience a high level of attrition on an annual basis, it proves extremely debilitating. Rebuilding a staff consumes large quantities of time and effort. The support needed during the school year for new staff members is more labor-intensive allowing you the ability to give them the best opportunity to succeed. Shakrani (2008) concurred, by stating that "trapped in a cycle of teacher hiring and replacement, low-performing disadvantaged schools drain their districts of precious resources that could be better spent to improve teaching quality and

student achievement" (p. 2). The numbers do not lie, as an estimate of 224 million was spent in one year by the state of Illinois for teachers that transferred to other buildings (Shakrani, 2008). "The Department of Labor estimates that attrition costs employers about 30% of the employee's salary" (Shakrani, 2008). High turnover rates can cripple a school's growth and it can take years to find stability again.

What makes this more challenging for Yorktown School District is that we're a Targeted Title I District, with Campton Middle school having approximately 70% free and reduced lunch with a majority minority student population. What this means is that there is a higher probability of losing our staff members to more stable and wealthier schools (Roza, 2010; Shakrani, 2008).

Maintaining a healthy school culture and monitoring it annually is critical in offering the staff an excellent work environment that helps them grow and succeed both personally and professionally.

<div align="center">Social Analysis</div>

Continually improving a school and district culture helps more than just one part of a school system; it aids all stakeholders: students, staff, and parent/guardians.

> Collaborative cultures do require attention to the structures and formal organizations of school life, but their underlying sources of strength are informal in relationships, conversations, expressions of interest, provisions of support, and ultimately the mobilization of collective expertise and commitment to improve the lives and life chances of students. (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012, p. 114)

When there's trust and unconditional support, the opportunities of growth for all is unlimited and the one stakeholder that benefits the most are our students. "School culture must be the infrastructure for actualizing the goal of the school—improved student performance in a caring environment" (CISC, p.130). The systems and structures are

necessary to allow for cohesion throughout an organization, but the culture is what makes things happen and tick (CISC).

Completing an annual school culture audit will allow for the staff to give feedback and acquire a level of ownership. The growth process continues as teachers receive feedback and buy into new initiatives following the analysis of the results. Block (2009) stated that **"this requires us to believe in the possibility of this organization, this neighborhood, this community is mine or ours to create"** (p.127). All staff need to be involved in this process as we put words in print and take action to continually model our cultural expectations. Reeves (2009) stated that "the most challenging changes are adaptive and note that these challenges cannot be solved by someone who provides answers from higher up" (p.39). This reinforces the point that annual school culture audits are as much for the principal as they are for the staff.

Political Analysis

Utilizing an annual school culture audit would benefit all stakeholders in a school and district. Doing so allows for ownership by staff, offers the staff and administration critical information on the current condition of the school, provides the opportunity to place some corrective actions in place to for the upcoming school year, and ultimately improves the educational experiences of all students.

> Schools need tools for developing and assessing school culture, and must be held accountable for their school cultures. Many schools do not intentionally shape their cultures because they lack the tools for doing so. Many such tools exist and are described in detail in resources such as the frameworks of the National School Climate Council and books such as Building an Intentional School Culture, An Ethic of Excellence, Smart & Good High Schools, and Leading a Culture of Change, to name just a few. (Character Education Partnership, 2012, p. 7)

Yorktown School District will use the School Culture Triage survey that was created by the Center for Improving School Culture (CISC). This is even more important now due to the continual changing of demographics and social economic levels of our public schools. Ravitch (2010) stated that one of the ways to "improve our schools is to improve the conditions in which teachers work and children learn" (p.225). Our schools are changing rapidly nationwide and if we don't work together to successfully meet the different needs of our students then our effectiveness as a staff begins to diminish.

The State of Illinois adopted the 5Essentials Survey, which is a more extensive version of a school culture audit and encompasses a wider range of how a school functions. The five essentials are the following: effective leaders, collaborative teachers, ambitious instruction, supportive environment, and involved families. The University of Chicago's research over 20 years reinforced that a "school strong on these essentials is more likely to: improve student learning and attendance, graduate students, improve ACT scores, get students into college, and retain staff" (UChicago Impact, 2014, p. 1). The results per building are also posted on the school State Report Card as another assessment to paint a clearer picture on how a school is performing. This is an example of how, at the state level, the accountability level has surpassed the PARCC assessments (state performance assessment). Completing a local audit is highly recommended due to the accessibility of the tool, specificity of the tool, the efficiency of proctoring the survey, and the timeliness of the results.

<center>Moral and Ethical Analysis</center>

The ultimate purpose for a school culture annual audit is to ensure that we are working to the best of our abilities in creating the best environment for all stakeholders.

All students of Yorktown School District should have consistently successful experiences as they transition between the three different buildings during their K-8 experience. Our staff should be provided the highest level of professionalism by all members as well as have the opportunity to grow and have a voice in the direction that the building is heading. Fullan (2001) eloquently stated that:

> Moral purpose is about both ends and means. It is about acting with the intention of making a positive difference in the lives of employees, customers, and society as a whole. It is striving to improve the quality of how we live together. Leaders in all organizations contribute for better or worse to moral purpose in their own organizations. Moral purpose is critical to the long success of all organizations.

Completing and having all staff participate in the school culture audits is the moral obligation of all staff members as we strive to create the best learning environment possible for all students of Yorktown School District.

As one of the leaders of Yorktown School District, I have the obligation to ensure that all staff members have the opportunity to participate and provide feedback on building-wide decision making. All staff members should be part of a collaborative environment that "talk together, plan together, and work together" (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012, p. 114). Reeves (2009) stated that "change in culture requires relentless personal attention and "scut work" by the leader (p. 39). I need to model this on a consistent basis as I personally participate in this endeavor as well as engage staff members to be part of the change that we all want to see in our school and district culture.

With a majority minority district population and being classified as a Title I target district, we are obligated to provide the services that are required to help our student population grow and prosper. Completing annual school culture audits along with incorporating the action plans for improvements in the school improvement plan should assist us in helping all students. Brown and Moffett (1999) stated that "strong

professional communities of teachers were able to successfully adapt to the needs of

diverse and demanding student population by holding high expectations for all students

and by sharing knowledge of effective teaching practices in the content areas" (p.67).

This is part of the process of continually reshaping the school culture process as we set

the highest bar possible in meeting the needs of all of our students.

SECTION THREE: ADVOCATED POLICY STATEMENT

Introduction

The overall goal is to create and maintain a healthy school culture throughout the Yorktown School District. In section three, the goal of the policy advocacy statement will be highlighted along with a point-by-point description of the details and specific steps that need to be taken to achieve the goal. The public advocacy statement seeks to transform a district's culture through annual school culture audits. This will be achieved by each staff completing the school culture audit on an annual basis so there can be continual improvement made to the environment of each building, a process that should benefit all stakeholders. This will help with continuity between the buildings by assisting the building leadership in emphasizing efficient systems and structures and maintaining a high level of professionalism on how things are done on a daily basis. This is especially critical when building leadership changes and presents the potential for fluctuations in the school culture.

Goals

To strive for and continue to achieve the goal of creating and maintaining a healthy school culture throughout Yorktown School District, the following goals need to be addressed:

- Collaborative Environment: Staff in each building need to be able to collaborate efficiently within grade-level teams, content teams, leadership teams, administrative teams to plan for all facets of education (curricular, instructional, scheduling, assessments, etc.).

- Process: During implementation dips or time when problems occur, the staff will rectify the situation by working together and coming up with solutions (thereby minimizing the need for district-level assistance) (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012).

- Celebrations: All stakeholders need to be celebrated throughout the school year to recognize achievements and accomplishments of individuals and groups.

- Relationships: Building and maintaining a positive and constructive rapport with all stakeholders is essential for continuity and maintaining a positive environment.

- Ownership by staff: When staff have ownership then they are fully vested and committed.

Objectives

All of these goals can positively impact a school's culture and are embedded in the School Culture Triage survey (CISC—see appendix A). The following are objectives that would occur to achieve the goals listed:

- Staff in each building annually completes the school culture audit survey anonymously

- The results of the survey are reviewed and discussed amongst staff and administration

- Action plans are created for the current year and incorporated in the school improvement plan based off of the survey results

- Professional development needs are determined and established for the school year

- School administrator will be evaluated on the action plan that is created based off of the survey results (e.g., planning, implementing, and monitoring)

The survey and action plans would be used and acted on across all buildings of Yorktown School District. The consistency and continuity throughout the school district will cement a solid foundation of productive school cultures and should help with a transition when there is new leadership.

<center>Needs, Values, and Preferences Represented by the Policy</center>

The policy advocacy of continually monitoring and changing when needed and refining a school culture benefits all stakeholders that are involved. All students of Yorktown School District will benefit with the attention to details on school culture by being a part of a learning environment that is nurturing and high-spirited. One of the key factors is having a consistent educational experience as they move through three buildings from kindergarten through to the eighth grade. Milner (2012) stated that "building and sustaining relationships can influence how welcome students feel in an environment and also help them construct positive attitudes about school" (p. 95). Experiencing a consistent positive culture that focuses on building healthy relationships is one of the key ingredients for students to be successful.

The other key stakeholders are the parent and guardians who serve as critical partners and support systems to each school and child. Their experience will translate into increased levels of school involvement and support that becomes critical when building

social capital (Boyatzis & McKee, 2005). Providing consistent positive experiences for parent guardians should result in a supportive community base.

Maintaining a healthy school culture is beneficial in many ways for a staff. Working in a collaborative environment benefits the staff and helps them grow professionally as individuals and as a group. "Professional collaboration requires time, practice, and accountability (Reeves, 2009, p.46)". The other side of the spectrum is that the staff would be involved in the transformation of the school culture process by completing the survey anonymously and providing critical feedback in the action plan. With staff providing that feedback, it offers them a voice that results in ownership. As a result there will be a higher retention rate, which should provide stability for both the staff and district as a whole. The human resource and financial liability that the district needs to absorb with a revolving door for staff negatively impacts a school and district for years to come (Roza, 2010).

When there is lack of stability at the building level, district administration's level of involvement increases. Sustaining a healthy school culture throughout the district will relieve or minimize the district administrative team from unnecessary damage control. District office administration can also stay abreast of the school cultures through the action plans created by each building. Fullan (2001) stated that "it is about acting with the intention of making a positive difference in the lives of employees, customers, and society as a whole" (p. 1). District administration becomes efficient and maintains stability while positively impacting the lives of all stakeholders.

Goals and Objectives are Appropriate and Good

All the components of education, such as curriculum, instruction, scheduling, and extracurricular activities are all critical pieces. However, stakeholders are the glue that keep it all together; they make up a district, and how they function on a daily basis creates the school culture. A nurturing school culture that is high-spirited, collaborative, and safe for all is an environment in which all stakeholders can grow and excel. Students are motivated to do their best and are given the support systems needed to succeed. Staff are vested by being given a voice and the opportunity to grow professionally in a supportive and collaborative environment. Parents and guardians are confident in the consistent service provided for their child and they respond with unconditional support. All of the goals and objectives highlighted should help create and sustain positive environments for all the stakeholders.

Ensuring that school cultures are healthy is even more vital in the United States and in the state of Illinois. With the current trends of changing demographics and social economic classes throughout urban, suburban, and rural areas across the United States, the ability to work collectively as a staff and community has never been more important than now. To make matters more challenging, the level of school accountability has drastically changed since 2012 with No Child Left Behind legislation being scrutinized and revised with the Common Core Standards replacing the Illinois State Standards, the PARCC assessment replacing the ISAT, and the teacher and administrative evaluation process being completely restructured. All of these circumstances can cripple or negatively impact a school district especially if the school culture is not at a positive

level. Focusing annually on our school culture is essential to meet the needs of all of our stakeholders.

SECTION FOUR: POLICY ARGUMENT

Sustaining a healthy school culture throughout Yorktown School District is a foundational piece that must be a yearly priority throughout each school building. Section four of the policy advocacy document discusses the benefits and challenges of implementing such a policy requiring an annual school culture audit. The opinions and information are based on research, personal experiences, and the expected effect that the utilization of annual audits will have on all stakeholders.

Argument

Provides Staff a Focused Approach

Incorporating a school culture audit on an annual basis that focuses on the same elements (collaboration, process, celebrations, relationships, and ownership by staff) throughout a district will allow for focus and attention to be directed at those elements that allow buildings to run efficiently. Williamson and Blackburn (2009) stated that "understanding culture, how it works and how it can be shaped, is important for improving a school's program" (p. 60). The school culture audit allows the staff from each building and the district as whole to help shape and monitor the culture of each individual building on an annual basis to continue growth. The focus is on the whole, and not the individual, such as the principal. Fullan (2008) reinforced that the "key reason why organizations do not sustain learning is that they focus on individual leaders" (p. 107). The annual completion of a school culture audit should allow for the staff as a whole to assist in shaping the culture and development of a strong foundation that helps in the transition process of new administrators.

Promotes Staff Ownership in School Initiatives

Professional development for staff is critical in ensuring that there is continuous growth and a focus on the current school year. Reeves (2009) discussed the need in "pulling the weeds" from the previous year's school improvement plan so the current year has a focus that can be realistically achieved in one year along with staff buy-in (p. 15). Completing the school culture audit allows staff to anonymously offer feedback on recommendations on new initiatives or reinforce what still needs to be addressed. This may include how we celebrate, build relationships, and collaborate, specifically with regard to scheduling, curriculum, instruction, and assessments. When staff have ownership and buy-in with the initiatives, then there will be fidelity and commitment. Additionally, staff are be able to troubleshoot and assist when there is an implementation dip, a problem that has a high probability of occurring during the school year when an initiative needs to be revised (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). The stakeholders who benefit from the focus and commitment to building initiatives are the students.

Staff Relationship Building

One of the main elements of the School Culture Triage Survey is relationships and how the staff work together. Having respect for others and being able to work efficiently in a diverse environment is critical for growth and the overall health of the building. Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) both confirmed that working in collaborative cultures as a teacher allow you the best potential for professional growth. Block (2009) stated that working in "small groups are where transformation takes place" (p. 93). Being able to collaborate within different groups (content teams, IEP meetings, leadership team, grade level teams, and administrative teams) including all stakeholders is critical in

building and sustaining an excellent school culture. Monitoring our strengths and

weaknesses with our rapport building and the ability to collaborate in groups and the staff

as a whole is essential for a productive and positive school culture.

Recognizing and Celebrating Successes

Celebrating successes throughout a school year not only recognizes

accomplishments and hard work, but motivates everyone to do their best and strive for

excellence. Auditing how, what, and who we celebrate annually pays dividends in

improving the overall morale of a school culture. Continually trying to improve in this

endeavor will improve staff and student morale and if aligned to new initiatives, will

keep the stakeholders focused throughout the school year. Williamson and Blackburn

(2009) stated that "it's important to reward teachers who are leading efforts to improve

rigor in your school" (p. 61). Acknowledging and rewarding all stakeholders that made

progress, achieved goals, and improved efforts to reinforce the school's values is critical.

Focusing on this consistently throughout Yorktown School District is essential in helping

all students stay motivated and receive the same level of service throughout their

kindergarten through eighth-grade educational experience.

Consistent Focus Across the School District

Yorktown School District would benefit in many ways with the annual School

Culture Triage Survey being completed by every school staff across the district. Each

building focuses on the same elements that are proven to be essential in maintaining a

healthy school culture that is "essential for improved student achievement" (CISC,

p.130). This allows each building to monitor its strengths and incorporate initiatives to

improve weaknesses. As a result this should minimize district-level involvement in

managing disputes or problems at the building level. When deemed necessary to change

building leadership, the transition should be more seamless with a strong staff and the

focus on the same school culture elements. As a result, the staff retention rate should be

stable which will save money spent on recruiting new staff. Additionally it will save

building administration time due to the higher level of supervision and support that new

staff would need. Stability will be achieved at each building level when staff retention

remains high.

<div align="center">Counter-Argument</div>

Buy-In Needed by Staff and Administration

The most significant challenge to facilitating a school culture survey annually is

the buy-in from the staff and administration. The building principal needs to be a

champion for the cause and if there is any feeling that the School Culture Triage Survey

is not a valuable tool then the staff will reciprocate. On the other side is the commitment

from staff to complete the survey and the level of honesty adhered to. The more sincere

and committed the staff is in completing the survey and then following up with honest

conversations on the results the more beneficial it will be in the long run. It needs to be

reinforced that the survey is here to stay and that we will be committed to completing the

School Culture Triage Survey as our annual audit to monitor each building's health.

Time Commitment

The other challenge is dedicating one of our most valuable resources: time. Time

needs to be invested in preparing the survey, completing the survey, tabulating the

results, analyzing and sharing the results, and then discussing the action plan that should

be put in place following the results. Reeves (2009) stated that "although cultural change

is challenging and time-consuming, it is not only possible but necessary" (p. 36). Since the new initiatives will be added in the school improvement plan for the upcoming school year, there needs to be follow through by continually monitoring the plan. The monitoring component is essential due to the fact that there may be some resistance to change and being adaptable to change only improves over time when the school culture improves (Reeves, 2009).

The only comparable survey that still needs to be completed is the 5Essentials survey that is mandatory by the state of Illinois. The 5Essentials is a much more extensive survey that involves many more questions and consists of five categories (effective leaders, collaborative teachers, ambitious instruction, supportive environment, and involved families). The pitfall for staff and administration is that two surveys need to be completed, the School Culture Triage Survey and the 5Essentials. The lack of buy-in from staff and or administration could be a problem due to the time involved in filling out two surveys and the accuracy and honesty of the responses. There needs to be a high level of conviction to see the benefits throughout the school year. Additionally, district administration needs to be informed of the results and the action plan that will be incorporated in the School Improvement Plan so they can monitor the process and the results.

SECTION FIVE: IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

Transforming Yorktown School District's culture in each individual building through annual school culture audits requires an implementation plan. In this section, I will be outlining the policy advocacy recommendation through the following components: staff development plan, school culture working committees, data collection, time schedules, and program budgets. When beginning a district-wide initiative, focusing on one building as a blueprint for the entire district is an effective initial strategy to introduce the policy advocacy plan. The building that is the focus for the first initial year of the policy advocacy plan is Campton Middle School. The middle school is where all other schools from Yorktown School District feed into, so beginning with the largest school and providing the support needed would be beneficial and prudent.

Staff Development

The first step in beginning this policy advocacy needs to be done in a very strategic way for the Campton Middle School staff. Reeves (2009) stated that:

> Although many leaders can eloquently describe their vision of the future and convey genuine optimism and hope, they nevertheless fail to grasp the fear and anxiety that change – even positive and necessary change – creates among their colleagues (p. 8).

How this concept is presented to staff is extremely important, but knowing how to anticipate and minimize resistance is just as critical. Reeves (2009) reinforced that communicating what's not going to be changed as the initial message should prepare the staff to be more open minded about what should be changed. Taking an initial position of what's working first, before we begin the change process, will set the staff up for more successes. This needs to be understood and reinforced to continue the growth process of a

culture within a building, As a result, the staff will continue to buy in and take ownership of the change and the level of resistance should continue to dissipate.

The initial step in beginning this process of changing a school culture is the honest feedback from the staff on the School Culture Triage Survey. The continual process requires a high level of collaboration amongst the entire staff and requires constructive conversations that are honest and respectful. This requires that there is a level of rapport and a continuous focus on respectful relationships throughout the staff, including the school administration. Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) reinforced that "collaborative cultures value individuals and individuality because they value people in their own right and for how they contribute to the group" (p. 114). Being comfortable, confident and an active member that provides constructive feedback is essential. Additionally, this also requires that there is time allotted for staff and specific committees to meet and collaborate on specific initiatives.

To prepare and continually assist the staff for ongoing change and growth the leadership team needs to be able to recognize the difference between technical and adaptive challenges and be prepared to assist accordingly. Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky (2009) stated that "adaptive challenges are typically grounded in the complexity of values, beliefs, and loyalties rather than technical complexity" (p. 70). For example, changing a school's grading philosophy (e.g., standards based grading) is more adaptive, while knowing how to input data in a grading program is a technical challenge. Heifetz et al (2009) also reinforced that "addressing an adaptive challenge must be done by the people connected to the problem" (p. 74). This is where top-down decision making

cannot resolve all challenges and the ownership of change needs to involve all staff members to be successful.

Collaborating and soliciting feedback from staff needs to be accomplished in a calculated and efficient manner. Block (2009) stated that "all change includes work in one or more small groups, which is why we use the shorthand phrase the small group is the unit of transformation." (p. 95). In smaller numbers the discussions can be rich and focused, involving all parties around the table. The groups can be arranged in content-specific subjects and other initiatives that are critical to a successful school year, such as school culture or awards committees. "The small group also offers self-correcting quality when things are not going well" (Block, 2009, p. 95). Being able to address matters when needed throughout a school year is essential due to unforeseen circumstances. These matters can only be successfully addressed if the key people that have immediate impact on the matter are involved as well as staff buy-in.

Create School Culture Working Committees

There are designated committees established to meet during the school year to discuss, plan, and make decisions on building wide matters such as attendance/discipline/celebrations, content-level matters such as curriculum and assessments, special events and celebrations, school vision/mission/core values, and current school year building initiatives. This should allow for all staff members to be involved in a productive small group environment where they can offer input, to be a part of the decision making process during the context of the school year, and feel invested in the school's evolution process and acquire legitimate ownership.

Listed below are the committee names and the main topics that each is responsible for:

- **School Culture Committee:** Responsible for vision/mission/core values and the recognition of stakeholders that model the values

- **Content Level Teams:** Math, English Language Arts, Social Studies, and Sciences—curriculum scope and sequence, instructional strategies, assessments, performance results, and recommendations for improvements

- **Discipline Committee:** Discipline data, concerns around the building, recommendations or revisions on building rules or procedures

- **Awards Committee:** Awards events for students and staff and recommendations for new celebrations

- **Leadership Team and Teaching Teams:** School initiatives, upcoming events, and matters that involve instruction, curriculum, scheduling, building-wide data, and discuss necessary revisions

The committees meet weekly, bimonthly or monthly throughout the school year. These meetings will allow members to report on the progress being made on every other month of the school year (October, December, February, & April).

To make sure the meetings are consistent and productive, the following template agenda will be utilized:

1. Objective(s)
2. Data to review and analyze
3. Recommendations
4. Actions Steps

5. Who's responsible

Each committee is responsible in creating an agenda and meeting minutes that are shared with all members of the committee along with the building principal. The building principal houses all of the agendas and minutes (documents) to be used as a reference for progress made through the school year and to use as an artifact to support the school improvement plan initiatives of the school year.

Data for Decision Making

The last big piece in preparing the staff is ensuring that our observations and decisions are based off of objective means. The utilization of data helps us in making more authentic decisions that are based off of facts and not perceptions. This would include using discipline data, student performance results and grades, attendance for staff and students, and when and how often we celebrate all of the stakeholders that make up Campton Middle School.

The summative assessment used to gauge growth is when the staff completes the School Culture Triage Survey and the results are compared and contrasted from the previous year. Each question and category of the School Culture Triage (professional collaboration, collegial relationships, and self-determination) is compared to determine growth. Additionally, the total points earned will be compared with the previous year's total to confirm overall growth. The incorporation of our core values needs to be applied and modeled daily. "Core values are simple and understandable, yet comprehensive enough to guide employees through a wide of variety of everyday situations" (Brox, 2013, page 2). These are the values that the staff agreed on and need to be incorporated in

our daily decision making. Finally, student and staff morale can both be measured by the results of the 5Essentials survey that is given and completed in the month of March.

Time Schedule

The transformation of a school culture is a process that occurs over time as staff and administration work together to improve the environment for all stakeholders. The following table, located on the next page, is a time schedule that would occur over a 12-month calendar year. It also includes a description of the aforementioned committees.

Table 1

Timeline for school culture activities

Date	Description
April 2016	School Culture Triage Survey is completed based off the experience from the 2015–2016 school year
May 2016	Principal tabulates and analyzes the results from the School Culture Triage Survey
June 2016	Share the results with the staff and allow them to collaborate and discuss the results in small groups on each specific section of the survey (professional collaboration, self-determination, and relationships). Staff should be given the opportunity to offer additional feedback.
July 2016	With additional feedback from staff during the June meeting and follow-up team leadership meetings, an action plan based off of the results is created and recommended for the school improvement plan for the 2016–2017 school year.
August 2016	The action plan is presented to the Yorktown School District Superintendent and the School Board and finalized for the upcoming school year and included in the School Improvement plan for the 2016–2017 school year.
September 2016 –May 2017	During the 2016–2017 school year the designated committees meet to discuss specific initiatives: a) School Culture Committee b) Content Level Teams: Math, Social Studies, English Language Arts, and Science c) Discipline Committee d) Awards Committee e) Leadership Team and Teaching Teams
October–December 2016; February–April 2017	During these monthly staff meetings, each committee share their findings and progress being made during the current school year.
April 2017	The School Culture Survey is completed based off the staff's experience from the 2016–2017 school year. The results are compared to the previous year's results to determine the growth and the specific needs that the staff has to focus on.

The results and comparison of the surveys will be used to determine effectiveness and the

recommendation to expand to the other schools of Yorktown School District. The results

will also begin the process all over again by focusing on what specific components need to be addressed during the following school year.

Program Budgets

The budget for the first year of the school culture policy advocacy is based off of only Campton Middle School needs since the pilot will occur there. Items that would fall under materials and supplies would be absorbed by the general building budget. The main part of the budget involves paying the staff an hourly wage of $21.00 for participating in after-school committee meetings:

Table 2
Staff salaries

Description	Cost
35 staff members @ $21.00 per hour x (3 hours a month x 8 months)	$17,640

The one unknown is the professional development that is needed for staff. This can only be finalized following the results of the School Culture Triage Survey and the analysis and discussion of the results. An anticipated budget if a presenter/consulted is brought in would be the following:

Table 3
Professional development budget

Description	Cost
1 hour fee for a presenter/consultant costing approximately $1000 x 4 sessions	$4000
Staff meeting costs of $17,640 and the anticipated cost of $4,000 for consulting	Total = $21,640

The total anticipated budget for the cost of staff meeting after school and anticipated

consultant fees would be $21,640.

SECTION SIX: ASSSESSMENT PLAN

The assessment plan section includes the methods of monitoring the implementation progress and how outcomes will be assessed to determine the impact that an annual school culture audit should have on Yorktown School District. Specifically, we will look at how the School Culture Triage Survey should be utilized to develop a building-wide plan for the upcoming school year, and that it will be embedded in the school improvement plan. This assessment section will be laid out in three categories: monitoring the implementation, assessing outcomes, and stakeholder responsibilities.

Monitoring the Implementation

Throughout the school year there are a number of committees and teams that meet to oversee different responsibilities and initiatives (see page 28). This committee structure is derived from the results of School Culture Triage Survey and the specific initiatives that were incorporated in the school improvement plan. These committees allow us to monitor the progress that is being made and more importantly, allow for the opportunity to revise and change course as needed due to unforeseen circumstances or inefficient practices.

Each committee meets weekly, bimonthly, or monthly and have an assigned administrator to help oversee and guide the process. Agendas are used to help guide the meetings to insure the focus remains on what needs to be discussed, confirmed, and any recommendations needed. There are notes taken from each meeting that will be shared with the committee members and the administrative team. The administrative team collaboratively monitors all committees with the building principal collecting and

housing all the documents (meeting agenda and notes). Table 4 outlines the committees

that are meeting throughout the school year:

Table 4
Culture assessment committees

Committees	Members	Who's Responsible	Products and Activities	Meeting Frequency
Building Leadership Team	Building Administrative Team and Teacher Leaders	Principal	-School Data-Gathering and analyzing performance/attendance/discipline data. -Create, plan, and structure curriculum/scheduling, building procedures, & current events. -Agenda, minutes, data, action steps, assigned roles	Weekly
Building Teaching Teams	Teachers from that specific team	Team Leader	-School Data-Present and analyze performance/attendance/discipline. -Assist in planning and structuring curriculum/scheduling, building procedures, & current events. -Agenda, minutes, data, action steps, assigned roles	Weekly
Content Building Level Teams: Social Studies, ELA, Math, Science	Selected Building Administrator and Content Teachers	Assigned Building Administrator	-Analyze content performance data and plan for curriculum, instruction, assessment -Agenda, minutes, data, action steps, assigned roles	Bimonthly
Building Discipline Committee	Selected Administrator and Teachers	Assigned Administrator	-Gather and analyze discipline data, discuss and plan for behavior contracts, hotspots on school grounds,	Bimonthly

			revising rules and procedures -Report – agenda, minutes, data, action steps, assigned roles	
School Culture Committee	Selected Administrator and Teachers	Assigned Administrator	-Recognizing and celebrating successes -Vision/mission/core values being practiced/applied in the day to day of running the building -Agenda, minutes, action steps, assigned roles	Monthly
Awards Committee	Selected Administrator and Teachers	Assigned Administrator	-Scheduling and organizing special events: awards, special achievement, monthly student and staff recognition -Agenda, minutes, data, action steps, assigned roles	Monthly

Building Leadership Team

The Building Leadership Team is a building-level (existing) team that focuses on school-wide initiatives including school culture (principal, assistant principal, dean, school psychologist/social worker, and team leaders). The building leadership team meets weekly to discuss student performance data, matters that involve instruction/curriculum/scheduling, upcoming events in the building, and or building-wide matters such as building procedures or school initiatives. The building principal along with the collaboration of the administrative team creates the agenda and documents the meeting notes and recommendations.

Building Teaching Teams

One of four building-level (existing) teams with a focus on team initiatives that includes school culture (team leader and teachers). There are five teaching teams in the building that are made of up from 8 to 16 teachers from different content and grade levels (seventh and eighth grade) as part of the team. Each teaching team has a team leader who is responsible for creating an agenda and leading the meeting. The weekly agenda includes the items from that week's leadership team meeting along with specific topics pertinent to that team. Notes from the meeting along with recommendations are forwarded to the building principal for review, with possible further discussion with the team leader and principal. An administrator might be present at a teaching team meeting.

Building Content Level Teams

Building Content Level Teams are content specific teams (social studies, English language arts, math, and science) that were initiated through the school culture policy (administrator and content teachers). There are four different content teams that are specific to their subject: social studies, English language arts, math, and science. Each team consists of anywhere from 6 to 10 teachers and includes both seventh- and eighth-grade levels. Each team meets bimonthly with an administrator assigned to each team. The administrator is responsible to create the agenda for each meeting centered on the following: curriculum scope and sequence, instructional strategies, assessments, student performance results, recommendations for improvements, and opportunities to celebrate successes by all stakeholders. A teacher from each content team takes notes during the meeting and then shares this with the team and administration.

Building Discipline Committee

The Building Discipline Committee is an existing building-wide committee with a focus on school culture and the overall behavior and management of the building (administrator and teachers). The discipline committee that meets bimonthly is led by an administrator and includes a group of teachers that can be from any teaching or content team. The administrator assigned will create the agenda on the following topics: discipline data, concerns with specific students or areas around the building, and recommendations or revisions on building rules and procedures. The assigned administrator documents meeting notes and communicate with administrative and leadership team.

School Culture Committee

The School Culture Committee is a new building wide committee with a focus on school culture, core values, and celebrations (principal and teachers). The school culture committee meets monthly and is led by the school principal and includes a group of teachers that can be from any teaching or content team. The focus of this team is to discuss how the school's vision, mission, and core values are being realized daily, and recognizing stakeholders that model these values. The principal completes meeting notes and shares with the administrative and leadership team.

Awards Committee

The Awards Committee is an existing building-wide committee focusing on celebrations and special events (administrator and teachers). The awards committee meets monthly and is led by an administrator and includes teachers from different teaching or content teams. The agenda items center around discussions on upcoming

award events for students and staff and recommendations for new celebrations. The administrator assigned completes the meeting notes, communicates to the building principal, and this is shared with the leadership team.

Every other month of the school year during staff meetings, each committee and team presents and shares the progress that they are making and any pertinent information that should be shared with the entire staff (October, December, February, and April). This level of collaboration and transparency allows for immediate revisions when necessary and the recognition of individuals who are modeling and setting the tone for high expectations for all stakeholders. This entire monitoring process encompasses all three main categories of the School Culture Triage Survey: professional collaboration, collegial relationships, and self-determination (CISC).

<center>Assessing Outcomes</center>

To evaluate and determine the impact of the annual school culture audit there are four outcomes that are measured: Results of Annual School Culture Triage Survey, Student Attendance, Student Discipline Data, and Staff Attendance.

Table 5
Audit outcomes to be measured

Outcomes	Who's Responsible	Product(s)	Frequency
Results of the School Culture Triage Survey	Principal will administer and analyze the results	-Total final score comparison from previous year -Average weighted score comparison per question and category -Create a PowerPoint and present to staff	Annually Administered in the spring (April) and presented in the summer
Student Discipline Data	Building Administrative Team	-Number and type of discipline infractions -Analysis of data -Presented to staff	-Monthly and quarterly review -End of year final numbers
Student Attendance Data	Building Administrative Team	-Average student attendance per grade level -Presented to staff	-Monthly and quarterly review -End of year final numbers
Staff Attendance	Principal	-Analysis of teacher attendance -Building average presented to Leadership Team and District Administration	-Monthly and quarterly review -End of year final numbers

School Culture Triage Survey Results

The main assessment that is used to determine the current status of the school culture will be the School Culture Triage Survey. Following the completion and analysis of the survey results, a plan would be created in collaboration with the entire staff during the summer before the new school year. This plan focuses on the deficiencies or the areas to improve on that have been outlined in the survey results. In the month of April, close to the end of the school year, the staff completes the survey once again based off of their current year experience with the new initiatives incorporated. "Administering the survey at the same time each year is advisable if one wants to chart progress over time, since responses tend to vary with time of year" (Schaps, 2009, p. 9). The total final score from the Likert scale survey will be compared to the previous year's results to determine overall growth. Each category is also be compared, along with looking at each weighted score per question, to determine growth. Going through this 12-month process allows us to determine the big-picture growth and the ability to delve deeper into specific deficiencies that need to be addressed.

Student Attendance and Discipline Data

Analyzing specific student data such as attendance and discipline are pieces of the puzzle that help paint a clearer a picture of a school's culture. The student attendance is monitored on a monthly and quarterly basis. When there is a high attendance rate, this shows the level of investment and commitment to school and gives every student the best opportunity to be academically successful and to ultimately earn promotion to the next grade level. Student discipline data that will be monitored and analyzed are the total number and the types of infractions. This is monitored monthly and quarterly to

determine patterns and if there are positive or negative trends. Schools that have a higher attendance rate and lower discipline infractions are positive signs for an improved school culture.

Staff Attendance

Having a high staff attendance rate through the school year offers stability and a familiar instructional experience for all students. Positive staff attendance on a daily basis is a key piece in creating a consistent rhythm in a building that is fluid and flexible. Attendance will be monitored on a monthly and quarterly basis, and this is compared with student discipline data to determine if there are any correlations (e.g., higher discipline incidences in a homeroom where the instructor is absent on a regular basis). The stability of the staff will be a positive reflection on the school as a whole with all stakeholders.

Stakeholders Responsibilities

All stakeholders play a role in a school's culture, and the adults set the tone. With the administration overseeing a building they ultimately hold the highest level of accountability. The staff plays a critical role not only by modeling the core values with the students, but being honest and constructive with feedback on the annual audit. The student's role is their level of commitment and investment in their educational process.

Administrators

The tone and expectations for responsibility begins with the administrative team. The administrators need to practice on a daily basis the big-picture school culture pieces such as modeling the core values and collaborating with all staff. Specifically, the administrative team is responsible to guide and lead each committee by creating agendas,

setting the tone by collaborating, ensuring that the meeting notes are completed and given to the principal to house, administer the School Culture Triage Survey and confirm findings with staff, and communicate the findings and progress to the superintendent.

Staff

The expectations for the staff members are for them to collaborate and model the core values, complete the School Culture Triage Survey with honest and constructive feedback, get involved within the established committees, and demonstrate excellent attendance throughout the school year. Additionally, teacher leaders are responsible to create a weekly Teaching Team agenda that reflects the focus from the Leadership Team meeting. This agenda and meeting notes are communicated and given to the building principal.

Students

The responsibilities for the students begin with having excellent attendance and being respectful and cooperative. The students are expected to be fully vested by giving their best effort and welcoming all challenges. We need the students to actively seek out help when struggling.

SECTION SEVEN: SUMMARY IMPACT STATEMENT

In the summary impact section we discuss how the policy will impact the school district. The following four areas are addressed: why this is an appropriate policy, the consistency with the district's vision and mission, whether the needs and values of the stakeholders are represented, and the impact on the school improvement plan.

Why this is an Appropriate Policy

Yorktown School District is obligated to provide the best educational experience for all of its students, parents, and guardians. The foundation of an excellent education is a school culture that is positive, motivational, collaborative, enables stakeholders to resolve problems together, and places a tremendous focus on building relationships and making connections with others. Additionally, this recommended policy incorporates standards 6 and 7 from the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders 2015 created by the National Policy Board for Educational Administration. Standard 6 encompasses "building professional capacity and practice within a staff" and Standard 7 is "fostering a professional learning community of teachers" (National Policy Board for Education Administration, 2015). The students of Yorkton School District need to be exposed to positive and enriching school culture environments during their Kindergarten to eighth-grade experiences. To ensure that there is consistency across the buildings in the Yorktown School District there should be a similar focus on school culture and this can be achieved in part by utilizing the School Culture Triage Survey in each building and then following through with the planning and action steps established in partnership with the entire staff.

Policy is Consistent with District Mission and Vision

Analyzing and evaluating a school culture should not be an action that happens only periodically. There needs to be an intentional focus and a continuous commitment to help improve and sustain a healthy school culture environment. The time invested in consistent monitoring will benefit many facets of education. "Making a quick assessment of the school culture can assist in determining the wisest allocation of time and resources toward its long-term development and improvement" (CISC, p. 219). When you look at this from a district perspective, being able to strategically support all the schools in the district in an efficient and cost effective manner benefits each individual building and the district as a whole.

What makes this a challenging endeavor is not only the commitment by staff, but the acceptance of change as an evolutionary process and a necessity for continual improvement. At times this requires adaptive change by staff members, and this can be the most challenging kind of change due to the fact that it's requiring an internal values adjustment. As a result, the core values of a school and district begin to shape and mold into a common vision for all stakeholders. This will result in more consistent decision making which is based off of the values and vision of a building and district.

Needs and Values of All Stakeholders are Represented

Implementing this policy needs to be done by using the same approach as the desired effect, progressively making the change to improvement. Foundational change does not immediately occur and typically long lasting change takes time due to unexpected or unforeseen events or circumstances. Adapting the policy advocacy of transforming a district's culture through annual school culture audits only in Campton

Middle School for its inaugural year allows for a pilot to determine the best approaches. This is a prudent and calculated approach to ensure that the rollout to the entire district should be more meaningful and sustainable in the long run.

With the focus on the School Culture Triage Audit centers around three core areas: professional collaboration, collegial relationships, and self-determination (CISC). All three of these sections will impact all stakeholders in a positive and pragmatic way. The heart and focus of this audit is to determine the level of collegial relationships. This will impact how we collaborate and how decisions are made during the context of the school year. This should have a profound impact on how all three stakeholders—students, staff, and parent/guardians—move forward. This policy is a process of monitoring and improving how we interact, engage with each other, work together, and continually improve our skills and crafts in providing our students with a consistent and excellent educational experience.

Impact on School Improvement Plan

The results of the School Culture Triage Survey and the new initiatives for the upcoming school year will be incorporated in the school improvement plan. This will fall under the school culture section of the school improvement plan. All school leaders need to have a focus on the school improvement plan for their building. The Professional Standards for Educational Leaders 2015 included the following standard: "Standard 10. School Improvement – Effective educational leaders act as agents of continuous improvement to promote each student's academic success and well-being" (National Policy Board for Education Administration, 2015). All school leaders need to ensure that

a school culture initiative is embedded in the school improvement plan as it impacts all

other building initiatives and strategies.

> This means that a school can adopt and seek to implement an improvement
> strategy, but if the culture is one that resists change or the staff and stakeholders
> misunderstand the reasons for the change, the strategy will not be embraced with
> the level of fidelity that is needed for successful implementation (Ezen, 2014, p.
> 3).

The building administrator will ultimately be responsible for the results of the action plan

that have been implemented for the new school year. The school improvement plan is

introduced to the superintendent of Yorktown School District and the School Board.

Throughout the school year the action plans put in place is reviewed and this will be a

part of the school administrator's evaluation process.

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APPENDIX A

School Culture Triage Survey

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always or almost always
Professional Collaboration					
1. Teachers and staff discuss instructional instructional strategies and curriculum issues.					
2. Teachers and staff work together to develop the school schedule.					
3. Teachers and staff are involved in the decision-making process with regard to materials and resources.					
4. The student behavior code is a result of collaboration and consensus among staff.					
5. The planning/organizational time allotted to teachers and staff is used to plan as collective units/teams rather than as separate individuals.					
Collegial Relationships					
6. Teachers and staff tell stories of celebrations that support the school's values.					
7. Our school reflects a true "sense" of community.					
8. Our schedule reflects frequent communication opportunities for teachers and staff.					
9. Our school supports and appreciates sharing of new ideas by members of our school.					
10. There is a rich and robust traditional of rituals and celebrations, including					

holidays, special events, and recognition of goal attainment.					
Process or Self-Determination					
11. When something is not working in our school, the faculty and staff predict and prevent rather than react and repair.					
12. School members are interdependent and value each other.					
13. Members of our school community seek alternatives to problems/issues rather than repeating what we have always done.					
14. Members of our school community seek to define the problem/issue rather than blame others.					
15. The school staff is empowered to make instructional decisions rather than waiting for supervisors to tell them what to do.					
16. People work here because they enjoy it and choose to be here.					