# **Chapter Two:**

# The School Team

"Give a little to a child and you get a great deal back." John Ruskin

### **Overview**

nlike a competition, where individuals are pitted against each other, educators are moving toward the team approach for planning and sharing ideas. This concept eliminates the need to be competitive and allows all staff to focus on the most important objectives—setting and meeting high expectations for each student.

This chapter deals with bringing teachers and school personnel together who will meet standards set forth by the nation, state, and district, by the school's mission, and by each other to achieve the common goal of student success. Principals will recognize and find ideas on how to bring all the stakeholders together so they will become partners in the process.

The Shapshots:

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- 12. A Paraprofessional Uses Inappropriate Comments
- 13. One Week Into the Job a New Teacher Announces, "I Quit"
- 14. Teacher Knows Her Lessons But Cannot Execute Them
- 15. The School Brochure Is Not Quite to Your Liking
- 16. Teacher Switches Grade Level and Starts to Lack Confidence

Snapshot #5: The School Secretary Is Rude

ou receive a call from an irate parent: "Every time I call to ask a question, the secretary is not just unhelpful, she is impolite." This is not the first complaint you've received. Numerous other parents have come into your office on different occasions to complain about the same school secretary being rude, disrespectful, and "short" with them when they call or ask questions. She didn't exhibit those traits when you hired her. You respect her and the job she does. How should you handle this? Call the secretary in your office and close the door. Let her know of the complaints and listen to what she has to say. It may be that she is trying to do more than her share and this creates stress for her. Have a copy of her job description handy for you two to discuss. Depending on your relationship with her, you may want to ask what's wrong and if you can help her to make an effort to change her demeanor. You may need to observe the activity and workload at the front desk during prime times. She might simply be overwhelmed and

you may be able to change some of her responsibilities or get her assistance during the peak hours of the day. Ask if she may have some suggestions on how to make the office run more efficiently. Explain to her

Remember, first impressions can be lasting ones.

make the office run more efficiently. Explain to her the importance of her job; how she is the first person people see at the school each day. Because of her position, she gives the first impression of the school to all who come through the door. Listen and then offer your suggestions. A compromise or a resolution should be reached, with both of you agreeing that the school's greeter must always be welcoming and helpful and wear a smile. **Snapshot #6:** Too Many Referrals n art teacher sends an average of ten referrals to your office daily. This not only keeps you from attending to your other daily duties, it annoys the other teachers as well. Parents and teachers alike complain that she has no control in her classroom. How should you handle this?

Tip

This teacher needs immediate assistance. Act as a mentor by coming up with an exact classroom design for her and offer other staff to assist. Team her up with one of your top teachers,

perhaps one at her grade level or a department chairperson, and have her observe the classroom in action. Ask this teacher to work with her and assist in coming up with a classroom discipline plan. Meet with her on a regular basis to see whether she has made appropriate changes. Remember, even if the referrals stop, the classroom management may not have changed, so continue to monitor the situation.

Mentors illuminate knowledge and understanding. Other actions you can take are to offer suggestions and other resources; provide a timeline for improvement; and suggest or require that she attend workshops on classroom management, which might be available online.

You may want to work with the district on this plan. Make sure you date and sign all conferences with her, documenting them as official write-ups. Have another administrator present at all meetings. Snapshot #7: Teachers Talking in the Wrong Place

wo teachers coming out of a team meeting begin arguing loudly in the main lobby. One says he thinks the changes the principal is making are all wrong and will only create unnecessary paperwork. The other disagrees, saying the new system will make teachers more accountable. The quarrel turns nasty as they insult each other with such accusations as "incompetent" and "stupid and lazy." Parents, colleagues, and students hear these comments. How should you handle this?

All members of the faculty and staff should be civil and professional with one another.

Meet with each teacher separately to gain background information. Decide how you want to proceed and then call them in together. You can choose to let them blow off steam and hope the problem passes or confront them directly. Tell them they both acted unprofessionally. In the future, you'd like them to discuss their disagreements in a private place and in a professional manner. If the teacher doesn't like a new policy, ask him to come to you so he can find out firsthand why a change is being considered. Give them a warning that, if it happens again, there will be an official conference for the record. Teachers have a right to disagree with policy changes but should be encouraged to see you, the principal, when further explanation is needed.

**Snapshot #8:** An Experienced Teacher Can't Take It Anymore

*Listen first and then find a solution.* 

teacher comes to you, extremely distressed, asking to speak with you privately. Once you close your office door, she breaks down, sobbing that her personal life is a mess and she just can't face the students anymore. She gives you her immediate notice; she won't be back after today. How should you handle this?

> Is the teacher just having a bad day? Listen to her and try to provide assistance. Are there any school board programs or resources that can assist her in her crisis? If so, recommend them.

Let her know that you are there to help and assist her. You may want to recommend that she stay home for a day or two and rest. However, if her decision is final do not try to dissuade her. Respect her decision. Be sympathetic. Then quickly look to fill her position. Bring in your staff and assistants and brainstorm on all the people you know who could possibly take over perhaps one of your substitutes or maybe a friend or relative of one of the staff who may have an interest and have the credentials to be an interim teacher. If these avenues prove unsuccessful, call the district and work with the human resources or personnel department.

As soon as you can, advise the parents of your plan and assure them you will get the best possible teacher for their child's class. Inform them that your grade-level department chairperson and/or team leader is sharing her lessons with the replacement and their child's education will not be disrupted but will continue to be of top quality. When you find the perfect successor, let the parents know by letter, including a summary of the new teacher's background and why you personally think she is the perfect match for the school and their child. You may want to invite parents in for an open house to meet and greet the new instructor. Snapshot #9: Cafeteria Rudeness

kindergarten child went home and told his mother that the lady in the cafeteria with the red hair yelled at him because he forgot his lunch money. She raised her voice so all his friends knew that he didn't have any money in his account. She also said he was lucky she gave him lunch at all, but she won't do it again until he brings some money in. The mom calls you that same afternoon yelling at you to do something about this staff member. How should you handle this?

When a complaint about a staff member is made, speak to the employee immediately. Call the cafeteria worker into your office. Give
her a chance to tell her side of the story. Make it
clear that at your school you promote positive attitudes toward children. As the adult, she

should know the proper way to speak to children, and that yelling is unacceptable. Remind her of the money collection regulations and that the responsibility does not fall on the child, but on the parent or guardian. A note should go home with the child and the teacher should be informed so he

can remind the child or even call the parent. Give the cafeteria worker a warning. Let her know if it happens again, there will be a conference for the record.

Snapshot #10: Assessing and Testing Too Much

s. Quiz seems to prefer testing rather than teaching her students. When you visit her room, all you see is "drill to kill." The poor third graders look tense and frustrated, and parents are complaining. How should you handle this?

Meet with the teacher and review your goals and the school's mission, which should state that all children need to learn. You need to explain to her the importance of analyzing her data and that to

test, test, and test is not good teaching. Testing does not legitimize that a teacher has taught a skill; she must know each and every student in her room has gained that skill. Share the **Standardized Testing Percentiles Worksheet** on page 39 with her. Classes have a variety of students coming from many cultures, with multiple learning styles, and functioning at various skill levels. One lesson-oriented test does not fulfill the needs of every pupil. Creating a portfolio with an acknowledgement

of skills gained and skills that need re-teaching is the way to best serve the student population.

Every child learns at his own pace.

# Standardized Testing Percentiles Worksheet

TEACHER:				GRA	<b>DE(S)</b> :	SCHOOL		
Student Name (Last, First)	ESE	LEP	IEP	Reading %	Math %	Writing %	Last Year's % (s)	+/- Gain/Loss

1. Have the teachers fill in last year's percentages at the beginning of the school year. Note: Highlight in yellow any child who was below grade level the past year. Write in the ESL/LEP level or, if the child has an IEP, note exceptionality-related services in the appropriate column.

2. At the end of the school year, have staff finish the columns by filling in the new percentages. The last column is of prominent importance. You and the teacher can analyze the year-to-year gain or loss for each student and review the overall performance of the class as a whole.

Snapshot #11: If I Teach Physical Education, Why Do I Need to Know About Reading Skills?

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teach physical education. That is what I am trained to do and what you hired me for. The contract never said anything about reading. What is this about teaching reading skills?" The PE teacher brings this up at a faculty meeting after listening and attending a workshop about the importance of reading across the curriculum. His students are failing his subject because they can't read the health textbook, yet he still doesn't grasp that good reading skills are important. How can he expect them to understand the content if they are not reading on grade level? How should you handle this?

Tip: You don't want to answer this teacher by criticizing him in front of the entire faculty. Maybe there are others who feel the same way. Take a deep breath, reflect, and then prepare your answer which should be a summary of what the workshop lecturer just spoke about. Make the point that critical content is important and that all the teacher's students need to understand the content. Remind him that teaching is about reaching all students every single day. Every subject, even physical education, includes some reading. It's his job to know how to help the poor readers as well as the good ones.

Sometimes you may need to remind your staff why they went into teaching.

Snapshot #12: A Paraprofessional Uses Inappropriate Comments

paraprofessional is caught by several parents making inappropriate comments to a student at dismissal time. One of the parents who overheard her words comes to you and complains, demanding that something be done immediately. You are already running late for a faculty meeting. How should you handle this?

attention and assure her you will address the situation as soon as you can. After the staff meeting or first thing the next morning, call the paraprofessional into your office. Present the complaint made and listen to what the paraprofessional has to say. You may want another administrator present. Depending on the nature of the comment she made to the student, you may need to take further action. Review your code of conduct for employees from your staff handbook. Give advice and remind the paraprofessional of her duties and responsibilities and the policies and procedures of the job.

Thank her for bringing the issue to your

Repeat information to summarize what was said and that it was understood by all the parties.

Snapshot #13: One Week Into the Job a New Teacher Announces, "I Quit"

> Have an open-door policy for all staff.

ou've had a tough day. You have dealing with an angry parent over class placement, a child temporarily reported as lost, and another child receiving a minor bruise in aftercare. You're just about to go home and relax when one of the new teachers marches into your office and announces, "I quit." After teaching for just one week, she feels overwhelmed and can see she's not cut out to be a teacher. She's already decided to take a position in her father's real estate firm. How should you handle this?

First, take many deep breaths, which will calm you and give you time to think of a very good response. Tell her to sit down and explain further how she feels and what exactly she is finding the most difficult. Be a good listener! Take notes if you have to so you can repeat back exactly what she told you. Even though she truly might be overwhelmed, show kindness and offer to mentor her. Let her know you feel she has the makings of a good teacher, and that is why you hired her. Ask her to give it a try and reiterate that you and your faculty members are there to assist her whenever she needs you. Everyone is "at risk" at some point during one's lifetime. Suggest that she postpone her decision until a time when she is less stressed and can unemotionally consider all options.

Provide a positive acknowledgement for each staff member at least once a year. Snapshot #14:

Teacher Knows Her Lessons But Cannot Execute Them

> Good teaching is both an art and a science.

ften when you go into Ms. Smart's classroom to observe, you notice she is not following the lesson plans you reviewed. Though her lessons are great on paper, her teaching methods are not. You are afraid that her students will not complete the grade-level skills needed to successfully move on to the next grade. How should you handle this?

Have a conference with her and explain your

expectations for your teachers and students. Ask how she feels she is doing and go from there. It

might be beneficial to use an evaluation form that allows you and her to evaluate her performance and compare the results. You may want to use the **Informal Teacher Assessment Worksheet** on page 46 to assist you. This will give you a basis for dialogue as you review the form line-by-line and discuss it. Let her explain her point of view and then you can share yours.

Other good ideas are: get a colleague or team member to mentor her; send her to workshops; offer her books to read and websites to review; place a substitute in her room so she is free to observe some of the more effective teachers on your staff; and send some exemplary teachers into her room to observe and have them conference with her afterwards to give her their suggestions.

Effective teachers create student success!

Principal Talk! • The Art of Effective Communication in Successful School Leadership

Snapshot #15: The School **Brochure Is Not** Quite to Your Liking

your staff's feelings.

our assistant principal, Miss Write, worked all day on the new school brochure. Unfortunately, you are not happy with the results. You find the layout difficult to follow and the text too wordy. You know Miss Write worked extremely hard and is guite proud of her accomplishment. She is eager to please and easily upset. How should you handle this?



Call your assistant principal in and thank her for all of her hard work. You can then add that you know how hard she worked on the brochure and you appreciate her efforts. Now comes that "But . . ." Gently give her your first impressions, perhaps referring to it as a great

first draft. You could mention that your instructions weren't clear or now that you see it, you have some additional ideas to incorporate. Assistant principals are very busy people. You may suggest that instead of her doing the work herself, she work with a committee of several talented staff members who are artistic and techie savvy. She can oversee and delegate the work and use the committee to review the draft and make constructive suggestions. Offer to set aside part of the next day to work with her. *Remember to be sensitive to* Your mission is to produce the brochure just the way you want it, while not hurting her feelings.

# Snapshot #16:

Teacher Switches Grade Level and Starts to Lack Confidence

Remember to ask: "How are you today? How are things going in your classroom? Can I assist you with anything?" ast June, a veteran teacher set her mind on making a change. You both decided at your exit meeting that she could give kindergarten a chance. Yet when school starts, you observe she is struggling with her new class. She especially has difficulty adjusting to the widely divergent skills of kindergarteners. You can see her losing her enthusiasm and you both realize that a terrible mistake has been made. How should you handle this?

Tip: Meet with her and offer suggestions based on what you have seen in the other kindergarten rooms. Assure her that you know she is an excellent teacher and that you don't want her to lose heart. Team her up with one of your best kindergarten teachers and let her visit her room to observe and to gain insights on how to work with younger students.

It might be beneficial for her to attend professional workshops that focus on the primary grades. There she can learn classroom management techniques and curriculum and have a chance to discuss ideas with others who may be having similar problems. Make time to work with her. Observe and

Make sure each teacher understands the curriculum and the skills to be taught.

provide feedback. As the educational leader, it is important to visit the grade-level, department, and/or team meeting to see what the concerns are. Have the teachers provide you with minutes of the meeting. Use the **Grade**level/Team Meetings Minutes

**Form** *on page 131* in Appendix A to assist you. Doing this will help you become familiar with the teachers who are showing signs of struggling.

## Informal Teacher Assessment Worksheet

**Directions:** Have the teacher do the assessment first. Then, the evaluator—either you or your designee—completes the second column using the same criteria. Finally, compare the responses in the two columns to open up a dialogue on areas of strengths and weaknesses. **Put the appropriate score in the box:** 1 - **Not observed** 

- 2 Needs Assistance (Would benefit from a mentor and attending professional workshops)
- 3 Performing (Shows evidence of the criteria most of the time)
- 4 Exemplary (Consistently shows evidence and would be a great mentor or team leader for others)

Date:	Teacher's Name:	Grade:	
<b>Evaluator's Nam</b>	e and Position:		

Criteria	Staff	f Evaluator	Criteria	Staff	Evaluator
Has adequate plan book			Gives parents and students clear, specific, and timely feedback		
Has state benchmarks for each lesson			Familiar with the teacher handbook	1 7	ſ '
Prompt, efficient, and consistent in grading			Follows through on administration and/or parent requests	· † – ,	ſ ′
Lesson plans touch on all learning modalities			Enforces limits with conflict resolution	1 '	ſ ′
Keeps student assessment and portfolios up-to-date			Is tolerant of students with differences and treats students equally	1 7	ſ ′
Demonstrates professional growth			Accepts criticism	· † – ,	ſ ′
Keeps emergency lesson plans for substitutes on hand			Ensures that students are well-supervised at all times	1 '	ſ ′
Interacts positively with parents (orally and in writing)			Handles classroom incidents and emergencies effectively	1 '	ſ ′
Is punctual and has good attendance			Dedicates part of class lessons to review and practice; clear examples	1 '	<u>ا ا ا</u>
Dresses professionally			are demonstrated	'	1 /
Anticipates, addresses, and follows through on behavioral concerns			Keeps classroom attractive and safe and rotates student's work	1'	$\square$
Uses a variety of teaching strategies			Adheres to policies, practices, and procedures stated on job description	1 '	ſ ′
Mixes small and large group instructions			and in staff handbook	'	1′
Demonstrates good classroom management			Sets high expectations for students		$\square$
Attends all grade-level, department, and/or team and faculty meetings			Uses data to construct appropriate lessons and assessments	<b>—</b> '	ſ
Meets deadlines for all paperwork to administration (report cards, lessons, charts, notes)	)		Notifies administration of absences in a timely manner	1	
Demonstrates knowledge on all subject matter			Maintains a curriculum that provides a variety of activities and materials	1′	ſ <u> </u>
Uses positive words and praise to build student self-esteem			Implements rules on behavior firmly and consistently	1 '	í – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – –
Teacher's Signature: Date:		Fva	luator's Signature Date	7.	

Teacher's Signature:	Date:	Evaluator's Signature:	Date:
Evaluator's Comments:	Zuio		24101
Evaluator o commenta:			

**Teacher's Comments:** 

# Points To Ponder:

#### PONDER

What makes a high quality school? Can we still operate schools with the same old theories and practices?

#### POINTS

To be more productive, to keep staff more involved, to produce higher achieving students, and to increase community and parental awareness, try some of the following:

- Disperse tasks to small teams. Teams can reflect, problem solve, plan activities, and coach one another.
- Set clear goals for accountability and assessment.
- Share long-range goals with the entire staff and constantly update.
- Share the vision with all school stakeholders from students to teachers to janitors to parents and community leaders.
- Concentrate on job satisfaction for employees.
- Allow employees to be part of the decisionmaking process, the setting of long-range goals, and analyzing the vision.
- Know failures are going to occur, but offer encouragement to change and to move forward.
- Become a clear communicator.
- Listen to the community needs and decisions.
- Speak clearly when communicating with the community.
- Remind staff that they are an essential part of the customer service department for your school.

#### PONDER

Are you worried that new teachers are not working to their fullest potential? Are they getting the help they need to do their very best? Is there a plan in place so they don't get off to a bad start?

#### POINTS

Work with new staff:

- Find out if the district has an induction program in place.
- Plan and design a mentorship program with all your grade-level, department chairpersons, and/or team leaders and assistant principal. Designate who will assist in carrying out the program throughout the year and who will work with whom.
- Make sure there is planning time where the new teacher can share ideas with a veteran teacher.
- Set aside times where mentoring teams can visit each other.
- Visit with the teams and ask their opinions on how the program is working; if necessary, make adjustments according to their recommendations.
- Conference with the new teachers and offer your wisdom. Get to know them and make them feel welcomed as an important part of your school.