

News Release

For Immediate Release

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Marshall Public Schools Initiates Employee Engagement Discussions

Marshall, WI - Employee satisfaction in the field of education has declined statewide since the implementation of ACT 10 in 2010. Awareness of this trend was a contributing factor to the District's fall launch of a strategic design process which includes looking at ways to grow as a district and opportunities for school improvement, including staff engagement. The District has enlisted Studer Education to guide us through the process. Barb Sramek, District Administrator shares "We all feel the increased stress due to the financial drain and legislative attacks on public education. It affects all of us and we empathize."

A small group of parents addressed the Board and Administration at the February School Board meeting with concerns about two teachers that had left the ELC midyear. The parents expressed concerns that those teachers felt underappreciated and undervalued. They wanted to know from the District, why teachers are leaving. Barb Sramek indicates "While the District cannot discuss individual personnel matters or speak on behalf of those teachers, it is important to the Board and Administration to acknowledge those concerns and let the community know we appreciate the contributions of all of our staff members. They are correct, however, when they say they are undervalued. When it comes to putting a value on their work, we just can't do enough. The decade of disrespect for public education has taken its toll. We don't want to see teachers leave and we understand why parents are concerned. It's not in the best interest of students when teachers leave in the middle of the year, and students are always at the center of our profession."

Of the teachers that have left the district this school year, none have moved on to similar jobs in other districts. Most have sought employment outside of the classroom. Unfortunately, those opportunities don't wait for the school year to end. Every teacher that has left has expressed that it has been a difficult decision. Sramek adds, "While we selfishly would like them to stay, we understand and respect the hard decision they have to make for their own lives and families."

The District began an employee engagement inquiry at the beginning of the school year as part of the district growth initiative. Employee surveys and focus groups were launched in October. They were conducted by Studer Education so employees could have the opportunity to give feedback anonymously, knowing that some employees don't feel comfortable giving feedback in front of their peers or employers. The collection of employee input, district-wide, is important in identifying opportunities to grow as a district.

Based on initial results, each building principal has begun group conversations with their staff regarding their building culture. They have asked what they can do better, as principals, and have learned that even when they do things with the best intentions, sometimes their actions or words can be perceived differently than they were intended. These honest conversations take courage, but the goal is to continually grow and be better. One example of a conversation shared at the February Board meeting by Mr. Sniff, High School Principal, centered around his continual questioning of teachers about why they were doing things the way they were. Sniff shares "Some teachers perceived it as a challenge to their practice. To me, it was curiosity and a sincere desire to understand their teaching approach. I was like the kid who constantly asks 'Why?' to everything. I want to do better, and I truly appreciate the honesty of our staff."

Barb Sramek states "We are going to continue the dialogue as a District. There will be further opportunities for input with Studer Education throughout the year. This is an ongoing process and we are going to move forward together, as one team."