

Case Study

Engagement Growth Through Leadership Development

+14

PERCENTAGE POINTS

In eight years of implementing Gallup-recommended approaches to professional development, employee engagement increased by 14 percentage points to the highest level achieved by any education organization to date.

Source: GALLUP

CHALLENGE

GALLUP HAS PARTNERED WITH GREATER ST. ALBERT CATHOLIC SCHOOLS (GSACS) in Alberta, Canada, for many years to maximize the opportunity for every student in every classroom to be engaged with school and to succeed in the future. The school district aims to create a welcoming learning community that awakens students' hearts and minds so they may live a full life in service to others. These welcoming school communities are built by selecting top talent and by ensuring that each employee's workplace needs are met. With highly engaged, talented leaders in classrooms, schools and support teams, the district has seen great gains in engagement, even in the wake of challenging administrative changes that have impacted structure and learning.

APPROACH

Selecting Top Talent

TO HELP SELECT TOP TALENT, GSACS began using Gallup's TeacherInsight (TI) — an online assessment to build a talent-based hiring system within the school district. The TI tool is a research-based, structured talent assessment that predicts success in the teaching role by measuring applicants' innate talent for the job. The district uses the TI scores in conjunction with other criteria to select the candidates most likely to succeed.

Another key component of building a talented and engaged employee pool was the use of Gallup's PrincipallInsight (PI), a research-based, structured talent assessment that predicts success in the principal role. Finally, Gallup's SupportInsight (SI) was used to select those hired in supporting roles. The district embraced a strategy to recruit and select top talent in executive leadership.

Using these empirical measures to inform the selection of top talent across the school district was the first step in ensuring that every school and department had the best opportunity for success. The district wanted to learn how they were doing at engaging their top talent to ensure that those employees would remain in their roles and contribute to student success in the long term. Gallup's employee engagement research shows that the most highly engaged workgroups have lower turnover, more productivity and lower absenteeism. While GSACS perceived that its employees were committed to their work, it wanted a practical way to understand engagement and leverage it toward improvement.

Meeting Workplace Needs

In 2008, Greater St. Albert Catholic Schools implemented an engagement initiative using Gallup's Q¹² employee engagement survey — a census of the organization's 600 employees — because of the robust meta-analytical data that show how the 12 measured elements are related to key organizational outcomes such as productivity, absenteeism and turnover. Since 2008, there has consistently been well over 90% participation in the online survey, a rate that exceeds the average for Gallup's employee engagement web surveys (88%).

In the inaugural administration of the Q¹² survey, GSACS showed strong engagement, with nearly half of employees engaged at work. Truly engaged workplaces are rare. Gallup research shows that just 13% of employees worldwide are engaged in their jobs. Engaged employees are involved in, enthusiastic about and committed to their work and workplace. Eighty-seven percent of employees are either not engaged or indifferent — or even worse, actively disengaged and potentially hostile — to their organizations. Some school districts buck this trend and are committing to student-centric and employee-focused strategies. Within these districts, employees are emotionally invested in and focused on creating welcoming school environments where students are excited about learning. Greater St. Albert Catholic Schools is one of these districts that set the global standard for a great workplace.

With such high initial engagement scores, it might have been easy for GSACS leaders to be content with their above-average results. But they were not. Instead, the district committed to ongoing annual engagement measurement, implemented engagement improvement plans at the local and building levels, and continued to strive for engagement excellence even during difficult changes when legislation beyond the district's control made the commitment to meeting employee needs a challenge. After several consecutive years of improved engagement, in 2012 and 2013, engagement slipped as the district experienced a mandatory reorganization that resulted in losing control of a school and shifting leadership and priorities. The district demonstrated strong change management capacity and focused on local engagement strategies. As a result, while engagement slipped overall, still more than half of employees were engaged. Since that trying time, engagement has continued to improve. Today, engaged employees outnumber actively disengaged employees by a 12-to-1 margin, which puts the district at a best-practice standard.

Engaging Leaders

The superintendent prioritized the engagement of district and school leaders. Executive leaders implemented a leadership succession plan rooted in identifying those most equipped for success in the role. They intentionally selected talented principals and district leaders and worked hard to ensure that they invested in those employees' engagement and growth. The superintendent conducted in-depth one-on-one interviews with principals and administrators to understand what district leaders most needed to be engaged in their work and to fulfill the mission and purpose of the school district.

Coupling quantitative engagement data with in-depth interviews was an effective approach to further understand how to help leaders be engaged and encourage them to engage their teams. The value of in-depth conversations is being able to understand the extent to which the engagement data reflect the lived experience of particular groups of people — namely, district and school leaders. The superintendent conducted Employee Engagement Leadership Debriefs, and the in-depth interviews provided an opportunity for district leaders to offer their opinions about what they individually needed to do their work. Their voices were heard concerning what they most needed to provide crucial support to those in their care.

Gallup research shows that as much as 70% of the variance in employee engagement scores among work units is explained by the influence of managers. Since managers bear such an important responsibility for the engagement of their employees, it is important that they are engaged with their work and that they are held accountable for facilitating dialogue and initiatives that address the workplace needs of their teachers and support staff.

Through one-on-one engagement debriefs, GSACS executives learned that most leaders say having the opportunity to do what they do best every day is the most critical element to their engagement. Secondly, coworkers' commitment to doing quality work is key to their engagement. Many leaders also said the mission and purpose of their organization are important. Leaders shared that they need varied experiences and challenges to grow, and need feedback on their performance. Additionally, they want mentorship opportunities to learn and grow. School leaders say they are most disengaged when expectations are unclear, when there is a lack of communication, and when they do not feel supported and valued.

This candid and pointed feedback was gathered and analyzed by executives who have created approaches to ensure that there is clear communication with leaders and that there is a caring and supportive environment that values the strengths of each leader.

Student Centricity

While Greater St. Albert Catholic Schools has invested in building the engagement of its talented leaders and workforce, they have kept the engagement and success of their students central to their focus. The district measures the hope, engagement, entrepreneurial aspiration and career/financial literacy via the Gallup Student Poll, an annual web-based survey of students in grades five through 12. They understand that the engagement of teachers and principals is important to building students' engagement with school. The district participates in the survey to include the student voice in its school improvement efforts. The district is including an additional item on the survey that allows students to self-identify as First Nations, Metis or Inuit. The data help inform leaders about what this important student population might need to be more engaged in school and ready for the future.

IMPACT

AFTER YEARS OF SELECTING TALENTED EMPLOYEES and measuring and building engagement, Greater St. Albert Catholic Schools has a highly engaged workplace that far outpaces that of most other organizations. By listening to district leaders and encouraging local action to build engagement, the district has sustained high engagement during times of change — and even increased the engagement of its employees over time. By analyzing engagement data over several years, Gallup has found that engagement has increased by 14 percentage points in the district.

- Results from the most recent employee engagement survey show that engaged employees outnumber actively disengaged employees by about 12 to 1.
- Employees who received feedback on the employee engagement survey, who participated in an effective action-planning discussion, and whose team made progress on its engagement goals are more engaged than their peers who did not engage in these activities.
- Those who take fewer sick and personal leave days have somewhat higher engagement than their peers who take more leave.
- The engagement of certified employees and support staff has increased over time.
- About six in 10 fifth- through 12th-grade students in the district are engaged with school, which outpaced the overall convenience sample from the 2015 Gallup Student Poll.

Gallup will continue to support the innovative efforts at Greater St. Albert Catholic Schools to build engaged schools where administrators, principals, teachers, staff and students all have the opportunity to live full lives in service to others today and in the future.

ABOUT

GREATER ST. ALBERT CATHOLIC SCHOOLS formed in 1995 after the amalgamation of three historic school jurisdictions. Catholic education in the region dates back 150 years to the arrival of the Grey Nuns in St. Albert in 1863 providing schooling to seven orphaned children. Today, the district provides Catholic Education to over 6,000 students in the municipalities of Morinville, St. Albert and Legal. Greater St. Albert Catholic Schools is a welcoming learning community that awakens the hearts and minds of students while educating and nurturing each to learn, live fully and serve others.

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