

Case Study

Advancing a School District's Mission: Building Engagement of Students, Staff and Parents

10%

Schools with higher employee engagement have an average of 10% more students who are engaged at school, and schools with higher employee engagement have, on average, 4% more hopeful students.

Source: GALLUP

CHALLENGE

THIS LARGE U.S. SCHOOL DISTRICT has a distinguished track record and history of excellence. The district hires talented teachers and principals and has developed those leaders' strengths and skills to improve student, staff and parent engagement. For many years, the district has partnered with Gallup, using selection instruments based on Gallup's 80 years of education research. District leaders recruit and hire teachers who fit well within the school system's culture — those who can engage others and, of course, help students succeed in the classroom. To continue building on its past successes, the district sought additional ways to encourage further development and excellence within all three of its core constituencies: students, employees and parents. School leaders invited Gallup to partner with the district to support its efforts in building and implementing a district-wide engagement strategy.

APPROACH

SCHOOL LEADERSHIP'S GOAL WAS TO HELP FULFILL THE DISTRICT'S MISSION AND PURPOSE by maximizing the school experience for students, teachers, staff and parents, leveraging every person's contributions and input to build engaged and successful schools. District leaders began by measuring the engagement within each of those three groups. The school system needed a baseline understanding of where each cohort's engagement stood and how each group's engagement level compared with other world-class organizations. The district first measured student engagement through the Gallup Student Poll in 2009. At that time, the poll contained 20 core items that measured hope for the future, engagement with the school and student well-being. School leaders also measured employee engagement every other year via the Gallup Q12 employee engagement survey. Finally, the school district measured parent engagement using another Gallup instrument designed to highlight the key drivers of parents' engagement with their school. Parent and employee engagement were each measured on a biennial basis. With these survey metrics, school leaders had a 360-degree perspective of engagement across its three core constituencies.

To help boost engagement in the district, school leaders embraced a strengths-based philosophy. To enrich their focus on what is right with people versus what is wrong with them,

and to maximize that approach for the purposes of professional development, leaders provided the CliftonStrengths assessment for teachers and principals. They encouraged schools to fold engagement and CliftonStrengths initiatives into their continuous improvement plans. The school system understood Gallup's wide-ranging research showing organizations that use strengths-based development have increased performance, higher engagement, lower turnover, increased productivity and less absenteeism. When Gallup consultants began to implement strengths-based development within the district, they found that many administrators and leaders knew their strengths but were looking for a better understanding of how to use them to improve their school's performance and engagement. To help with this, Gallup began coaching leaders on how to use their strengths to increase engagement, work better in teams, encourage best practices in the classroom and improve the overall engagement of the entire district. Many leaders clearly understood and were committed to developing the strengths of their employees to accomplish their goals, and many schools began to invest in a strengths-based approach to growth and development. As such, over time, CliftonStrengths has become an important part of how the district's employees live, learn and work together.

IMPACT

THE SCHOOL DISTRICT'S EFFORTS TO INCREASE engagement and incorporate strengths-based development into each of its schools have helped students, teachers and parents become more engaged with the district than ever before. Engagement levels within the school system outpace those of many of the district's peer organizations. In 2014, the school district became eligible for the Gallup Great Workplace Award due to its high employee engagement scores. Leaders submitted a portfolio of their engagement strategy reflecting their efforts and goals, and Gallup practice leaders awarded the district with this selective recognition. Gallup consultants have linked employee engagement to student engagement within the district. Schools with higher employee engagement have an average of 10% more students who are engaged at school, and schools with higher employee engagement have, on average, 4% more hopeful students. Gallup has also discovered links between parent engagement and that of employees and students. Schools with higher parent engagement scores have higher employee engagement (by nine percentage points, compared with schools with lower parent engagement scores) and have higher student engagement (by six points). In the latest administration of the parent engagement survey, Gallup analysts also discovered that having a welcoming environment is the top driver of parents' engagement with their child's school. These and other findings from the data have helped the school system leverage Gallup's analytics to steer dialogue and action aimed at helping every student be "engaged today — ready for tomorrow."

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