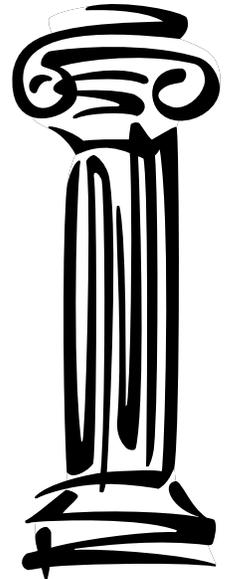


*Building a Framework:
The Role of the
Administrator
in Teacher Retention*



*Keeping
Quality
Teachers*

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Building a Framework: The Role of the Administrator in Teacher Retention

Working conditions cannot improve without a commitment from district and building level leadership. Superintendents, principals and special education administrators are key personnel in retaining teachers. In addition, the role of administration in retention and support for special educators is particularly crucial given a history of exclusion and isolation from general education that many special educators have experienced. Section One in this document summarizes the critical importance of administration in teacher retention.

School leaders at all levels of education can use the resources and strategies in this document to strengthen their efforts to ensure that students learn with high quality teachers. It should be noted that the term “school leader” extends beyond the role of superintendent or principal. Often, assistant superintendents, vice principals, or others are responsible for certain areas and this needs to be acknowledged when reading the strategies that are recommended. Further, some issues discussed here are building level, while others are district level. The categories described in Section Two touch on most aspects of effective school leadership. Therefore, this section will describe administrative strategies specific to those categories. A more in-depth and complete description of those strategies can be found in Appendix 3-1. Following is a compilation of strategies and recommendations that can be useful in retaining quality staff.

Because so much is being asked of those in leadership positions, it should be acknowledged that they also need support in order to do their jobs more effectively. They also need professional development designed to help them be better leaders.

Leadership/Decision Making

The decisions that school leaders make and how they make them have a direct impact on working conditions. Teachers often complain that decisions affecting them are usually made without their knowledge. Leaders need to involve teachers in making decisions. For example, leaders can involve staff

in departmental scheduling, student scheduling and duty assignments (Price, 2003).

Every school should have a mission statement and a vision based on shared values and beliefs. Leaders can engage all stakeholders in the process of developing the mission statement and vision for the school that provides focus and direction for all involved. (DiPaola, Walther-Thomas, 2003). If the school already has a mission and vision, revisit them occasionally with the stakeholders involved. Good leaders encourage others to be leaders and help bring out those qualities. Therefore, if teachers attend a conference or workshop, have them share their knowledge with the rest of the staff when they return. Leaders can have experienced teachers work together to solve an instructional problem (Spitz, 2003).

Administrators must be familiar with available resources to support the diverse needs of students, families and staff and must know how to access additional support in order to ensure appropriate education for all students and support for teachers. For example, leaders can make sure English as a Second Language and bilingual programs are effectively supported (DiPaola, Walther-Thomas, 2003). They can make special education concerns integral when planning for professional development, distribution of materials, books, classroom space and equipment. They can ensure that special education is not put at the end of the line as an afterthought (CEC, 2000).

Compensation plays a major role in retaining teachers. School leaders should develop teacher compensation packages that demonstrate that they are valued (Gareis, Strong, et al., 2003). Leaders can use salaries and bonuses as incentives to retain teachers (Billingsley, 2002). They also can put together a team of administrators and teachers to develop an incentive pay program (Morice and Murray, 2003).

School Climate

Teachers and students will do their best work in a healthy, pleasant environment. School leaders need to ensure a positive school climate and make the school a place where people want to be. Leaders can start by examining what Price (2003) calls the “fun and caring factors” in the school. Is there laughter in the school? Are people smiling? Do teachers want to be here? Is the school staff united or are there cliques? Are new staff members welcomed? Does the school have celebrations? Does the school treat mistakes as learning experiences, or opportunities to criticize? Does the school encourage risk-taking?

Every school has a history and a culture. If teachers are connected to their school and are part of it, they may be more likely to identify with it and stay, even in the tough times. The school leader needs to become the “developer and nurturer of the school’s culture” and share it with new teachers so they can gain a sense of membership and participation. Leaders can communicate the school’s history, traditions, legends and myths and share stories of the school’s heroes and heroines (Colley, 2002).

The school will not be the kind of place where teachers want to be if they don't trust the administration. To develop trust among teachers and all stakeholders — parents, students, community members, central office staff and school board members — leaders must be honest and up-front with them. Leaders can be visible to staff, students and parents in classrooms, in the corridors, at lunch, at bus duty, and at extracurricular activities (Hopkins, 2000).

Concerns over safety and discipline are two of the major reasons teachers leave their jobs. By developing consistent student behavior policies (Johnson and Birkeland, 2003) and addressing safety and discipline issues, much can be accomplished. Leaders can work to stop bullying and harassment. They can expand access to counseling, anger management and peer mediation. They can provide ways for students to communicate with adults about rumors and threats. Leaders can teach respect and responsibility and expand opportunities for students to work with adult role models in after-school education and recreation programs (NEA, 2003).

While working hard to develop a school climate where people are comfortable, leaders should remember to pay attention to the little things. Sometimes the principal or special education administrator is the person to make sure the copiers are working, schedule fewer interruptions during instructional time, turn on the air conditioning when needed, and provide food at faculty meetings (Scherer, 2003).

Infrastructure

If schools are to succeed in retaining teachers, a proper infrastructure should be in place that allows teachers to focus most of their time and energy on teaching. With this mind, school leaders should give new teachers less of a workload, fewer responsibilities and duties so they can concentrate on their classrooms and students (Sargent, 2003). Because excessive paperwork is a major issue among special education teachers, leaders should reduce this burden by such strategies as turning the task over to assistant principals, or by hiring paraprofessional special education clerks (Fielding and Simpson, 2003).

Leaders also must ensure that teachers have adequate resources and materials to do their jobs. (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Ingersoll and Smith, 2003). Sufficient common planning time should be built into the schedules of classroom teachers and specialists so they can address instructional needs and classroom concerns (DiPaola and Walther-Thomas, 2003). In addition, maintaining consistent procedures and schedules is important. Clearly explaining changes beforehand will avoid chaos and stress on everyone, especially new teachers (Public Education Network, 2003).

Content/Skills

The research is clear that students learn best from high quality teachers who know the subject matter and how to deliver it. Ensuring that teachers are

competent and have opportunities to improve their skills is critical. The school leader needs to be an instructional leader and communicate views on what is considered good teaching, as well as expectations for instructional practices, grading and student achievement. Administrators should share, model and encourage best-practice experimentation. Giving immediate feedback through comments or notes and being available for short, spontaneous counseling sessions are seen by teachers as being very supportive (Colley 2002). For special educators, school leaders should have a working knowledge of IDEA and NCLB so they can communicate with staff, families and the community regarding special education issues (DiPaola, Walther-Thomas, 2003).

Teachers have expressed the need for support in the form of performance assessments and evaluations. Leaders should structure formal evaluations around the needs of the teachers. Rather than covering every item on an evaluation checklist, a leader can schedule observations to focus on only a few skills at a time (Colley, 2002). Leaders can encourage teachers to choose an area of improvement and, with the principal, decide how to show evidence of growth in this area (Spitz 2003). Leaders can make sure they respect the learning curve for new teachers, and they can put the teacher's manual and standards documents into understandable language that is relevant to the way teachers are going to teach (Feiman-Nemser, 2003).

Finally, school leaders must be proactive in developing and implementing a plan to ensure that all staff develops culturally responsive practices needed to work with diverse students and their families (Kozleski, Sobel, and Taylor, 2003). School leaders also should establish an expectation that all staff will learn how to work with students with disabilities and provide opportunities for them to do so (Scherer 2003).

Community Involvement and Support

Involving parents, families and the community in meaningful ways is critical to the success of students and influences a teacher's decision about continuing in a particular school or leaving it to go somewhere else. School leaders need to look for ways to involve the community. Leaders can start by involving families when creating a mission statement and vision for the school (DiPaola and Walther-Thomas, 2003). They can involve families and the community when addressing safety and discipline issues including the establishment of a school safety committee that includes community representatives to gather and analyze data, put together and implement a plan, and monitor its results (NEA, 2003). Leaders can include parents on the school's interviewing and hiring committee to illustrate parent involvement in important activities (Johnson and Birkeland 2003). They also can learn what it is that parents want to know and provide them the information frequently and briefly (Wherry, 2003).

School leaders should go beyond simply involving the community and create relationships among the school, families and the community. Leaders

can visit families at home when possible. They can become familiar with business people and community organizations and ask them if they could help create learning experiences for students. Leaders can seek to make available health, social, mental health, counseling and other family services in the school and increase the number of adults in the building to provide care and guidance for students. Leaders can generate a broad set of activities in which family and community members can participate and contribute their talents to the school (Ferguson 2003).

Most educators and parents have had no training on how to work with one another, and many fear and avoid one another. School leaders should consider providing staff and parents with ongoing, research-based training on how to work together and create non-threatening social activities to bring them together (Wherry, 2003).

School Leaders Also Need Support

Much is being asked of school leaders, especially principals, in the quest to raise standards and student achievement. Expectations for school leaders include the following: provide teachers with the necessary resources and professional development they need to be successful; create supportive, comfortable environments conducive to doing good work; involve parents and the community at-large in meaningful ways; and be cheerful through it all.

To be successful, administrators need practical training to help them do their jobs more effectively from the start. They need ongoing professional development to keep them on top of innovations in education. Administrators also need continuous support from other school leaders, school staff and the community.

Appendix 3-1 provides an expanded list of suggested strategies that support teacher retention.

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Appendix 3-1

The Role of the Administrator in Teacher Retention

The strategies offered in this appendix expand upon the suggestions regarding management practices that support teacher retention made in Section Three: The Role of the Administrator in Teacher Retention. The appendix is presented in the form of a self-assessment instrument that can be used to help educators identify areas of strengths and needs. This instrument contains an extensive list of strategies, but should not be seen as the only interventions possible.

Before conducting an assessment, a school or district team should review the instrument and use only the relevant items. The team should feel free to add additional items if needed. Once the data is gathered, the team should analyze the information, then design and implement improvement strategies that address specific issues that are identified.

Assessment Category: Leadership/Decision Making

Topic 1: Building/district support for teachers

	<i>Never 1</i>	<i>Seldom 2</i>	<i>Most of the time 3</i>	<i>Always 4</i>
The superintendent, principal and/or special education administrator are involved in a formal teacher retention initiative.				

Topic 2: Policies/procedures that support teachers

	<i>Never 1</i>	<i>Seldom 2</i>	<i>Most of the time 3</i>	<i>Always 4</i>
<p>All teachers, including special educators, have clear, written job descriptions.</p> <p>Job descriptions are used to define the roles of para-educators.</p> <p>Job descriptions focus on the specific requirements of various roles, and are not overly broad or otherwise unrealistic.</p> <p>Job descriptions are actively used to shape expectations for personnel.</p> <p>The field of special education has changed its emphasis from separate programs for students with disabilities, to one that is based in the regular program and curriculum for nearly all students. Programs and service delivery systems may need to be reviewed and redesigned to ensure that they efficiently and effectively support the learning of students with disabilities in terms of current best practice.</p>				

	<i>Never</i> <i>1</i>	<i>Seldom</i> <i>2</i>	<i>Most of the time</i> <i>3</i>	<i>Always</i> <i>4</i>
<p>Special educators and special education programs focus on the learning and/or development of students with disabilities who are correctly identified</p> <p>An organizational chart is used as a tool for visualizing the extent to which special education teachers and programs are isolated or integrated within the system.</p> <p>There is an inclusive school philosophy in which all personnel share the responsibility for educating all students, and the unique contributions of special education personnel are understood and appreciated.</p> <p>Special education personnel are considered regular and fully integrated members of the professional team, and in practice, this means that they have the opportunity to be full participants in the same professional, extracurricular and school-based social activities as other faculty and share school-wide responsibilities similar to their peers.</p> <p>Because special educators typically have case management and paperwork responsibilities that other members of the professional team do not, overall workload is considered when special educators assume school-wide responsibilities.</p> <p>Issues related to fair and balanced personnel workloads are addressed in thoughtfully developed policy statements and management practices.</p>				

Topic 3: Teacher influence over curriculum and instruction

	<i>Never</i> 1	<i>Seldom</i> 2	<i>Most of the time</i> 3	<i>Always</i> 4
<p>Educators’ responsibilities center around activities that promote learning, rather than on clerical, housekeeping or management tasks.</p> <p>Trained, experienced educators are fully capable of making good decisions regarding their students, and are permitted and encouraged to exercise their professional judgment.</p>				

Topic 4: Appropriate class assignments

	<i>Never</i> 1	<i>Seldom</i> 2	<i>Most of the time</i> 3	<i>Always</i> 4
<p>There is periodic assessment of the match between individuals’ skills and their job requirements in order to support the development of both new competencies in current staff as well as the identification of personnel who are ready for new professional opportunities.</p> <p>New teachers are given the least desirable courses and classrooms, as well as the most challenging groups of students.</p> <p>Teaching assignments are aligned with certification, and take into consideration a teacher’s experience.</p> <p>First year teachers have a reduced workload.</p> <p>Policies permit veteran teachers to transfer to easier assignments or more desirable environments, leaving the more challenging jobs to new teachers.</p>				

	<i>Never</i> 1	<i>Seldom</i> 2	<i>Most of the time</i> 3	<i>Always</i> 4
<p>Policies permit general education teachers to “bump” special education teachers as a result of reductions in the teaching force.</p> <p>Paraprofessionals have appropriate credentials and experience.</p> <p>Paraprofessionals are deployed in accordance with their individual skills and abilities and are not pressed into service that is inappropriate on the basis of their credential, their abilities, or their experience.</p>				

Topic 5: Adequate pay scales and financial incentives

	<i>Never</i> 1	<i>Seldom</i> 2	<i>Most of the time</i> 3	<i>Always</i> 4
<p>District-level administrators and school board members establish equitable pay scales and benefit packages in consort with the teacher unions or other representative organizations.</p>				

Topic 6: Equitable application of licensing and certification regulations

	<i>Never</i> 1	<i>Seldom</i> 2	<i>Most of the time</i> 3	<i>Always</i> 4
<p>Only properly certified teachers are employed in order to build a quality, stable workforce.</p> <p>District personnel make few exceptions when hiring fully certified professionals for special education positions.</p>				

Topic 7: Induction and mentoring

	<i>Never</i> 1	<i>Seldom</i> 2	<i>Most of the time</i> 3	<i>Always</i> 4
<p>Distinguishing novice teachers from those with more experience provides a natural lead-in to providing novices with the special support they need as they settle into their roles and begin to lock in their skills.</p>				

	<i>Never</i> 1	<i>Seldom</i> 2	<i>Most of the time</i> 3	<i>Always</i> 4
Mentoring or induction programs create a new and important role for experienced educators, who typically find it rewarding and revitalizing to help beginning teachers master their craft.				

Assessment Category: School Climate

Topic 1: Comprehensive student support and discipline systems

	<i>Never</i> 1	<i>Seldom</i> 2	<i>Most of the time</i> 3	<i>Always</i> 4
<p>Student disciplinary policies set parameters on acceptable behavior and specify consequences for infractions.</p> <p>Teachers have the latitude to manage the behavior of their students, and to invoke the specialized disciplinary provisions of the IDEA when appropriate.</p> <p>Disciplinary policies and practices should seamlessly include the mechanisms specified in the IDEA that help schools to respond appropriately and constructively to students whose unacceptable behavior is a manifestation of their disability.</p> <p>Teachers' need for information, training and other resources in this area is assessed and addressed.</p>				

Topic 2: Focus on student results and outcomes

	<i>Never</i> 1	<i>Seldom</i> 2	<i>Most of the time</i> 3	<i>Always</i> 4
<p>Student assessment is regulated by established testing programs and articulated grading policies.</p> <p>Teachers have the latitude to assess and rate their students' performance, and to help determine when students with disabilities require alternative means of assessment.</p> <p>School policies and practices that support high educational standards and appropriate educational experiences for all students, including those with disabilities, are in place.</p>				

	<i>Never</i> 1	<i>Seldom</i> 2	<i>Most of the time</i> 3	<i>Always</i> 4
Administrative practices and operating procedures support excellent teaching.				

Topic 3: Safe environment

	<i>Never</i> 1	<i>Seldom</i> 2	<i>Most of the time</i> 3	<i>Always</i> 4
<p>Special education teachers and programs are assigned space in the same areas of the school as other teachers and classes.</p> <p>The instructional and workspace assigned to special educators and students with disabilities (when it is functionally necessary for their spaces to be separate from regular classrooms and offices) is equivalent in terms of functionality, comfort and attractiveness.</p> <p>The amount and type of space allocated for various types of activities is appropriate for the activities being conducted.</p> <p>Instructional areas are conducive to learning, and faculty workspace is functional and as pleasant as possible.</p>				

Topic 4: Climate of respect

	<i>Never</i> 1	<i>Seldom</i> 2	<i>Most of the time</i> 3	<i>Always</i> 4
<p>Expectations for educational personnel are well known to staff, parents and other members of the educational community. (This can be accomplished both by making relevant information widely available and by promoting the visibility of teachers as they successfully fulfill their roles.)</p> <p>The school is an inclusive community where the education of all students is a shared responsibility, and special education students and teachers are not isolated or marginalized.</p>				

Assessment Category: Infrastructure

Topic 1: Number of students

	<i>Never 1</i>	<i>Seldom 2</i>	<i>Most of the time 3</i>	<i>Always 4</i>
<p>Caseloads are determined by considering multiple factors, including the complexity of individual cases, the severity of students' disabilities, the number of different disability types served, and the range of students' needs because all of these factors interact to influence the manageability of a teaching assignment.</p> <p>Whenever classes or caseloads are being assigned, general caseload guidelines are used in conjunction with consideration of specific student characteristics and needs to determine if the proposed caseload is realistic and appropriate.</p> <p>Paraprofessionals, clerical staff, interns, volunteers and others are chosen over teachers to handle tasks that do not require an individual with full professional competencies.</p>				

Topic 2: Team teaching

	<i>Never 1</i>	<i>Seldom 2</i>	<i>Most of the time 3</i>	<i>Always 4</i>
<p>Special education personnel have adequate opportunities to communicate and work in conjunction with other professionals who have the same specialty areas.</p> <p>Schools have natural mechanisms that provide for and encourage student-centered collaboration between regular and special educators.</p>				

Topic 3: Planning time available

	<i>Never</i> 1	<i>Seldom</i> 2	<i>Most of the time</i> 3	<i>Always</i> 4
<p>Time is specifically allotted for important non-instructional activities such as teacher collaboration and planning, parent meetings, paraprofessional supervision or IEP development.</p> <p>Special education personnel within the same jurisdiction have structured opportunities such as common planning time to work with each other to identify and address service delivery issues and improve local professional practice.</p> <p>Teachers have sufficient time allocated to reasonably fulfill their professional responsibilities.</p> <p>Tasks requiring non-professional or lower skills levels are reassigned to paraprofessionals or other non-instructional staff, or by adjusting teacher caseload.</p>				

Topic 4: Curriculum guidelines

	<i>Never</i> 1	<i>Seldom</i> 2	<i>Most of the time</i> 3	<i>Always</i> 4
<p>Teachers can select methods and materials within the curriculum frameworks that are typically available to provide scope and coherence to instruction.</p>				

Topic 5: Adequate supply of materials

	<i>Never</i> 1	<i>Seldom</i> 2	<i>Most of the time</i> 3	<i>Always</i> 4
<p>Necessary teaching tools are on hand or readily available. (Suppliers can often provide sample materials to supplement what a school is able to purchase. Service organizations can sometimes supplement limited budget allocations for special materials or equipment. Programs that prepare teachers can sometimes loan curriculum materials, especially if they have an established relationship with a school or particular teacher.)</p>				

	<i>Never</i> <i>1</i>	<i>Seldom</i> <i>2</i>	<i>Most of the time</i> <i>3</i>	<i>Always</i> <i>4</i>
Administrators consider the degree to which various types of resources are available to teachers in all areas, especially when they have significant responsibilities for students with disabilities.				

Topic 6: Technology support

	<i>Never</i> <i>1</i>	<i>Seldom</i> <i>2</i>	<i>Most of the time</i> <i>3</i>	<i>Always</i> <i>4</i>
<p>Technical expertise necessary to ensure that computers and other equipment operate properly is readily available.</p> <p>Proper software is loaded and operating.</p> <p>The necessary peripherals such as printers or network connections are available and working.</p> <p>Personnel have the information and training to efficiently and effectively use technology resources.</p>				

Topic 7: Overwhelming paperwork

	<i>Never</i> <i>1</i>	<i>Seldom</i> <i>2</i>	<i>Most of the time</i> <i>3</i>	<i>Always</i> <i>4</i>
<p>Training is provided to help personnel write shorter, more focused and effective IEPs.</p> <p>Paperwork requirements in all areas, including special education, are streamlined, and unnecessary, duplicative and marginally useful reporting or documentation is eliminated.</p> <p>Forms are easy to use, clear and well organized. (Checkboxes and similar design features, where appropriate, can be easier to use than fill-in-the-blanks. Cues and reference material can be integrated into pre-printed and computer-based forms to eliminate confusion and the need to look up information. Related documents should work together as an integrated set.)</p>				

	<i>Never 1</i>	<i>Seldom 2</i>	<i>Most of the time 3</i>	<i>Always 4</i>
<p>Documents that are used by more than one organization or unit within an organization are uniform and compatible.</p> <p>Documents are routed in the simplest way that will support their function.</p> <p>Information is easy to find and readily accessible to those who need to use it.</p> <p>There is unnecessary duplication of information stored.</p> <p>Filing systems are uniform across the organization.</p> <p>Some of the responsibility for special education paperwork and process is reassigned to clerical staff, paraprofessional personnel or program assistants to reduce the impact of paperwork demands on education professionals without having a negative effect on students or learning.</p> <p>Staff members who are responsible for creating or using documents are well versed regarding their purpose, preparation and use, and training and related guidance materials are routinely provided.</p> <p>Computer-based technology to ease the paperwork burden on educators is used whenever possible. (It is possible to enhance virtually all aspects of document and data handling through the use of technology, including: the mechanics of document preparation; the content of documents in terms of accuracy, completeness and quality; transmission and security issues; and information aggregation and analysis.)</p>				

Assessment Category: Content/Skills

Topic 1: Opportunities for professional development

	<i>Never 1</i>	<i>Seldom 2</i>	<i>Most of the time 3</i>	<i>Always 4</i>
<p>Ongoing, high quality and relevant professional development opportunities are available to ensure that teachers are able to assist their students to perform to high standards despite an ever-changing social context, increasing student needs and evolving professional practice.</p> <p>Job designs reflect differing skill levels, experience, and focus areas to provide stimulating career development opportunities for teachers.</p> <p>Teachers have opportunities to learn new skills and develop their leadership potential from curriculum development to community outreach.</p> <p>Teachers have significant input into the determination of their individual and collective needs for continuing professional development that references organizational goals and priorities, current and emerging professional practice, and their own professional needs and goals.</p>				

Topic 2: Ability to work with diverse students

	<i>Never 1</i>	<i>Seldom 2</i>	<i>Most of the time 3</i>	<i>Always 4</i>
<p>Special education programs focus on the learning and/or development of students with disabilities who are correctly identified, not on students who have needs, such as motivation or discipline, but are not disabled.</p> <p>School-wide and district-wide assessment programs accommodate the need for some students with disabilities to have alternate, more suitable means of assessing their educational and/or developmental progress.</p> <p>Teachers' and administrators' need for information, training and other resources in alternate assessment is assessed and addressed.</p>				

	<i>Never</i> 1	<i>Seldom</i> 2	<i>Most of the time</i> 3	<i>Always</i> 4
<p>General and special education teachers have a sufficient amount of accurate and relevant information on their students. (This includes diagnostic information that clearly relates to educational issues and needs, and IEPs that are well written and include appropriate and realistic expectations for student progress.)</p> <p>There are budgetary and other administrative provisions that allow teachers to have access to highly specialized consultants or service providers to help them work with students with unusually complex disabilities.</p> <p>Specialized consultants and service professionals who are available to school personnel have been identified.</p>				

Assessment Category: Community Involvement and Support

Topic 1: System of family communication

	<i>Never</i> 1	<i>Seldom</i> 2	<i>Most of the time</i> 3	<i>Always</i> 4
<p>Members of the community are considered consumers and, as such, are periodically updated on district and school-wide issues and included in decision making where appropriate, i.e., hiring, policy development.</p>				

Topic 2: Community involvement in support of teachers and students

	<i>Never</i> 1	<i>Seldom</i> 2	<i>Most of the time</i> 3	<i>Always</i> 4
<p>Teachers, parents, administrators on all levels, and the community-at-large work together to develop a shared understanding of realistic and appropriate expectations for educational personnel.</p> <p>Parents and community members regularly express their goodwill and appreciation for teachers to acknowledge the good work they do.</p>				