# Culture, Data, Conflict Resolution, and Celebrating Success

# 2

> *Anyone could carve a goose were it not for the bones.*
>
> —Eliot (1935), *Murder in the Cathedral*

## Carving a Budget Aligned With a School's Vision and Mission

Our utopian trip in Chapter 1 provided a clear view of the ideal learning environment school leaders seek. Unfortunately, no one lives in an ideal world. Instead, the world is filled with many challenges, such as shortages of fiscal, material, and human resources, and schools serve an ever-growing and increasingly diverse student population. In an opinion column, Will (2005) commented on the challenges of constructing the federal government budget when he penned, "'Anyone,' said T. S. Eliot, 'could carve a goose were it not for the bones.' Anyone could write a sensible federal budget, were it not for the bones—the sturdy skeleton of existing programs defended by muscular interests" (p. 4AA).

Noting Will's comment, the same can be said about the integrated school budget process. When school leaders become serious about aligning the school budget with the school vision, they can expect to encounter the sturdy skeletons of existing programs as they carve a budget aligned with the school's vision and mission.

The bones of programs near and dear to some stakeholders will not necessarily be germane to attaining the school's vision and mission. Besides the bones of existing programs, school leaders can also expect to encounter bones of impaired vision from stakeholders who either do not understand or choose not to accept the academic success for all as exemplified in the late Ron Edmonds's remark, still so applicable almost half a century later:

> We can, whenever we want, successfully teach all children whose schooling is of interest to us. We already know more than we need to do that. Whether or not we do it must depend on how we feel about the fact that we haven't so far. (Edmonds, 1979, p. 56)

The challenge for any school leader and stakeholders is growing a culture that supports a school's vision and mission of ensuring *all* students are important to us—*if*, as questioned by Edmonds, such a vision and mission is, in reality, actually important to us. And, just as important, if not more so, whether we actually believe it. An examination of the importance of school culture, data, conflict resolution, and celebrating success in the integrated budget model is in order.

## Culture



The importance of a school culture that is receptive to the integrated budget model asserted within this book cannot be overemphasized. Wilkins and Patterson (1985) wrote decades ago that "culture consists of the conclusions a group of people draws from its experience. An organization's [school's] culture consists largely of what people believe about what works and what does not" (p. 5). The integration of the budget and vision into a single process cannot flourish unless it is woven into the fabric of the school's culture as identified by Wilkins and Patterson.

The integrated budget model requires a school culture receptive to collaboration. Schools that possess a collegial spirit and share values, beliefs, and traditions are more apt to spawn the required collaborative environment that in turn increases enthusiasm, energy, and motivation (R. L. Green, 2016; Lunenburg & Irby, 2022). This integration must be valued by the school's culture since it frequently influences people's opinions and behaviors while serving as the vehicle to turn dreams into reality.

School culture was touched upon in Chapter 1 with the examination of the *Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL)3: Equity and Cultural Responsiveness*. This national standard calls on education leaders to "strive for equity of educational opportunity and culturally responsive practices to promote *each* student's academic success and well-being." This national standard warrants closer examination because the integrated budget process cannot exist with any degree of usefulness unless it is inculcated into the school's culture.

Culture can be described as the shared values, beliefs, traditions, customs, norms, attitudes, and behaviors of a learning community (R. L. Green, 2016; Sorenson, 2024; Sorenson et al., 2016). The use of the adjective *shared* in describing culture is of importance when considering it with the *PSEL 3* edict encouraging education leaders to "strive for equity of educational opportunity and culturally responsive practices." *Shared* is a *we* thing. *Shared* implies all stakeholders in the school possess common core values. *Promote* requires school leaders initiate, advocate, nourish, and sustain the school culture in such a manner that meets the edict of *PSEL 3*.

A brief examination of a school culture's three elements—values, beliefs, and attitudes—makes a case for the integration of budget and vision.

This examination is conducted within the PSEL obligation to advocate, nourish, and sustain the school culture.

### Values

Values are those ideals leaders hold near and dear. They are the ideals leaders deem important. Values shape the practice of principals, teachers, and staff. For the integrated budget approach to become inculcated within a school's culture, stakeholders must understand how this approach helps them fulfill their personal mission as well as the school's mission. It is essential for leaders to model their personal and professional values. Leaders advocate for the integrated approach to budgeting when they support it, plead its case, and assist the stakeholders in understanding it. Leaders nurture it by discussing it in formal and informal team meetings and by sharing it with parents and community members. Leaders sustain it by never allowing the integrated budget approach to be removed from the stakeholder's conscience.

### Beliefs

Beliefs are what leaders hold to be true. The integrated relationship among budget, vision, and planning must become something stakeholders hold to be true. Gradually, through time and effort and by consistently keeping the integrated budget process at the center of school planning, events will unfold and stories will develop that will become part of the school's heritage. Stories will be rooted in cherished accomplishments that occur through the integrated budgetary process. Rituals will manifest themselves as ceremonies. Traditions, customs, norms, ceremonies, and beliefs are to culture what movies are to scripts. They afford the players an opportunity to act out their beliefs. Beliefs become ongoing events that sustain the integrated budget approach in the school culture.

## Sad Sack School

Good, bad, or ugly, schools have a culture. The authors observed one school with a poisonous culture. A strong level of distrust existed among this school's stakeholders. Teachers didn't trust the principal. The principal didn't trust the teachers. Friction was high between professionals and paraprofessionals. No sense of community existed. The campus ran amuck. If there was a mission statement, it was likely "Take care

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of yourself." Throughout the campus, an air of failure and defeat prevailed. Distrust had replaced trust. Rumors replaced constructive conversation. Data were abused and used to abuse. The school was in a hopeless freefall.

This school did not set out to become what it had become. Undoubtedly, the school at one time was quite different. It appeared that time, difficult problems, and tough situations combined with weak leadership and the lack of a plan to address the school's challenges led to the poisonous culture. It was obvious the stakeholders were not satisfied with the situation, but they couldn't overcome their sense of helplessness and frustration. Their negativity generated more negativity, spinning into a bottomless downward spiral.

However, despite this desperate situation, glimmers of hope existed in a couple of areas within this school. This story illustrates the impact of an unhealthy culture on schools. The story also offers hope for those who are trapped in unhealthy cultures. This story is for those who are hunkered down in bunkers of positive thought in an unhealthy culture. Culture can be changed! Culture changes when hunkered-down groups purposefully seek such change. Change agents identify the root causes of discontent and start addressing these root causes, gradually dismantling the negativity.

Three excellent sources related to the topic of culture are Chapter 6 in *Essentials for New Principals: Seven Steps to Becoming Successful—Key Expectations and Skills* (Sorenson, 2024), Chapter 4 in *The Principal's Guide to Time Management: Instructional Leadership in the Digital Age* (Sorenson et al., 2016), and Chapter 6 in *The Principal's Guide to Curriculum Leadership* (Sorenson et al., 2011). These sources are instructionally and culturally based texts designed for school leaders and written in the principal's voice!

## Attitudes

Attitudes are how leaders feel about things. Did a parent or caregiver ever tell you "Watch your attitude"? This statement usually had "that" tone in it, letting you know your attitude was not appreciated for whatever reason. You learned as a child there were ways things were done around your home. In healthy homes, parents communicated with the family members to collaboratively develop a shared

family culture respecting all of its members. In unhealthy homes, dysfunctional behavior had family members in contentious relationships. Eventually, some unhealthy families seek intervention to improve the family. Other unhealthy families never seek intervention and either dissolve or remain contentious.

Schools are a lot like families. Over time, a school's stakeholders realize their school cannot function at its best unless they develop a healthy culture. The integrated budget approach is at the core of a healthy school's planning process. The more the integrated budget process is used in planning, the more deep-seated it becomes as part of the school's culture, and the organization's health improves.

Certain attitudes develop: This is the way things are done in the school, this is how we celebrate, and this is how we appreciate each other. It takes time for ideas like these to become part of the school's culture. Enthusiastic leaders never tire in their effort to advocate and nurture the budget–vision integrated relationship as a part of the culture.

Finally, school leaders must never cease in their efforts to sustain an open school culture. How? By what means? Education Week (2023) recommends a principal do the following:

- First, **listen to teachers**. Teachers are more likely to report a disconnect between leader demands and their own instructional capacity when teachers are not consulted on decisions about school support and fiscal, human, and material resources.
- Second, **nurture a culture of self-care.** Leaders must encourage teachers to set professional boundaries. Then, leaders must shield and defend teacher conference and planning times and, just as important, serve as a protective buffer when teachers are unjustly criticized, challenged, condemned, threatened, or abused.
- Third, **provide teachers time and space to support each other,** always ensuring teachers are able to frequently collaborate with each other and with campus leadership, especially during times of decision making.
- Fourth, **never overlook exhausted or burned-out teachers and staff**. In a study conducted by the Yale Center on Emotional Intelligence, teachers experience the highest turnover rate of any professional occupation (Yale School of Medicine, 2023).
- Fifth, **lift morale and find times to celebrate**. Generously recognize staff and do it often—every time there is an opportunity to celebrate. Think of the 1980 song *Celebration* by Kool & The Gang. Play the music, turn up the sound, create a long conga dance line, and celebrate! (See the section titled "Celebrating Success" that appears later in this chapter.)

## Data

Earl's (1995) school and data observation made more than three decades ago remains astute to this day:

> We live in a culture that has come to value and depend on statistical information to inform our decisions. At the same time, we are likely to misunderstand and misuse those statistics because we are "statistically illiterate" and consequently have no idea what the numbers mean. (p. 62)

Schools, at times, appear to be drowning in data. State testing data have a prominent role not only in state accountability policies but also in federal accountability policies. Leaders must ensure high-quality data are used in decision making. School leaders must work with school stakeholders in analyzing data, identifying solutions, and implementing those solutions. Time must be allocated for data gathering and analysis. Data analysis is essential to effective, efficient, and essential budget-building processes (see Chapters 3 and 6).

It is important school leaders regularly analyze data ranging from reading assessments to norm-referenced data, as well as district and campus diagnostic data and federal and state data. The plethora of data sources and questions requires an organized approach to data analysis. Examining data collaboratively encourages leader, faculty, and staff to become more involved in data-based decision making. This, in turn, quickly improves a team's ability to identify and employ different data types to best address instructional issues at hand. An essential-questions approach frequently proves highly effective in building data literacy. Ronka et al. (2009) pose eight important questions for consideration:

Time must be allocated for data gathering and analysis. Data analysis is essential to effective, efficient, and essential budget-building processes.

1. How do student outcomes differ by demographics, programs, and schools?
2. To what extent did specific programs, interventions, and services improve outcomes?
3. What is the longitudinal progress of a specific cohort of students?
4. What are the characteristics of students who achieve proficiency and those who do not?
5. Where are we making the most progress in closing achievement gaps?
6. How do absence and mobility affect assessment results?
7. How do student grades correlate with state assessment results and other measures?

Now, a serious question: Are each of the eight essential queries, as proposed by Ronka et al., a part of a principal's and team's instructional and budgetary decision-making processes? Additionally, how is data better ensuring equity and equality in schools and student achievement?

## Data-Driven Decision Making

The Sorenson-Goldsmith Integrated Budget Model (see Figure 3.1) is introduced in Chapter 3. The third and fourth components of this model involve data gathering and data analysis. As to not place the proverbial cart before the horse, the authors are compelled to call attention to data gathering and analysis before introducing their model. It's okay to look ahead in Chapter 3 and take a peek at the budget model, however.

Effective use of data changes a school's culture. Data expose bias and ignorance and provide "Aha!" moments as well as debunk ineffective practices. In short, data gathering and analysis are a catalyst for changing a school's culture from closed to open. In other words, they work for the good of the school.

The authors have personal experience using data to expose ineffective teaching practices. Ineffective practices, left alone and unchallenged, become encoded within a school's culture. To be fair, school leaders must not think ineffective practices are deliberately adopted with the intent to harm or limit student achievement or potential. This noted, whether ineffective instructional practices are unintentional or intentional, the results are the same—low performance for students *and* teachers, low expectations, and a drag on the school's culture.

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Both authors had the opportunity to affect school culture by using data to end the practice of ability grouping into academically segregated classrooms. Providing our faculties with longitudinal as well as disaggregated student achievement data made it apparent to the stakeholders that this teaching practice was only widening the gap between the various subpopulations on their campuses. This data "Aha!" moment could not be refuted by anecdotal arguments offered by those clinging to this antiquated and long-failed instructional strategy. The dismantling of ability groups began, albeit with strong resistance from a group dedicated to the ability-grouping mantra. A data-based decision-making culture planted a foothold in the school's culture.

As time passed (cultural change doesn't happen overnight), both campuses matured in incorporating data within the decision-making process. Stakeholders seeking additional data sources evidenced this. As the use of data-driven decisions increased on the campus, so did the level of teacher expectations for all students. No longer were faculty and staff content with whole-school academic performance data. There was an expectation for

data to be disaggregated into the appropriate subpopulations. Data analysis sparked imaginations as interventions were formulated to improve the performance of subpopulations not meeting campus expectations.

As data gathering and analysis continued their mercurial rise in the school's culture, so too did the concept of continuous incremental improvement. No longer would faculty, staff, parents, and community members be satisfied with maintaining the status quo. The school was now committed to continuous improvement.

One example of continuous improvement was seen in the area of student achievement. One teacher group that had been using data-driven decision making for several years was consistently witnessing its students' mastery on the state reading examination fall between the 90 percent to 100 percent passing rate. This teacher group took its data analysis to the next level. These teachers began examining not only *if* their students passed the reading exam but also *how well* they passed the exam. This led to a higher self-imposed level of expectation for student achievement. The academic goal was no longer limited to the state's mandated passing score on the exam but on how well the students scored above the state's required reading exam score. How sweet it is—incremental improvement.

This story is not over. The faculty and staff did not stop at this level of data analysis. They drilled their data analysis of student subpopulation performance down to the reading objective level. They even added an analysis of student wrong answers on the state exam questions. This analysis determined where and how the teachers refined their delivery of instruction to help the students master the reading curriculum. When faculty, staff, parents, and the community value data-driven decision making, watch out! The sky's the limit on where academic success will go.

## Barriers to the Use of Data

The previous data story had a happy ending. But happy endings don't occur without hard work. Barriers block data use in schools. Stakeholders must be diligent in their quest to gather and analyze data required in the third and fourth components of the Sorenson-Goldsmith Integrated Budget Model. Likewise, stakeholders must not allow personal bias on a subject matter to interfere with identifying subjects needing improvement.

Holcomb (2017) identified six reasons why data are little used and why it is a challenge to motivate people to be data driven. Holcomb's barriers to data use comprise the following:

- lack of proper training involving others in decision making and in the appropriate use of decision making,
- lack of time,

- feast or famine mindset (anxious there are no data or panicking over too much: "What are we going to do with all these data?"),
- fear of evaluation (frightened the data are going to be used against individuals or schools)
- fear of exposure (the troubling thoughts that even though your colleagues believe you are a good teacher, the data might expose you as a fraud), and
- confusing a technical problem with a cultural problem.

School leaders and faculties all have witnessed Holcomb's data barriers and, like the authors, have personally experienced them. Developing an awareness of these data barriers is necessary to address data concerns. Holcomb (2017) further postulates collecting data for the sake of collecting data is an exercise in absolute futility.

How does a school break down its data barriers? R. S. Johnson (2002) more than two decades ago effectively described the tried and true five stages in the change process for creating stakeholders who value the incorporation of data gathering and analysis into the decision-making process. Briefly, those stages are as follows:

1. **Building the leadership and data teams.** Building leadership and data skills must be incorporated in the reform process. Training is provided on the skills needed to collect and analyze data.
2. **Killing the myth/building dissatisfaction.** Data are used to reveal false beliefs about educational practices, such as having low expectations for certain groups of students.
3. **Creating a culture of inquiry.** The school values provocative questioning and responses that use data to inspire the school change process.
4. **Creating a vision and plan for your school.** This stage requires a long-term collaborative planning process that will result in positive change. It involves establishing priorities, allocating resources, and assigning responsibilities.
5. **Monitoring progress.** Monitoring becomes a part of the school culture.

This concludes an early peek into the Sorenson-Goldsmith Integrated Budget Model.

## Quality Data and Mountains of Information

Both Holcomb's and Johnson's books readily correlate with the technical expertise necessary in implementing the third and fourth components of

the Sorenson-Goldsmith Integrated Budget Model, to be introduced in the next chapter. Data gathering and data analysis are challenging components of this model. Be patient with yourself and others as data skills are acquired and honed.

W. Edwards Deming believed that "quality comes not from inspection but from improvement of the process" (Walton, 1986, p. 60). Leaders improve the process when they improve the quality of the data used in decision making. Good decision making, as intimated by Deming, is only as good as the quality of data used in formulating the decisions. The challenge for school leaders today is to sift through mountains of information to construct informed decisions. The dilemma faced in this process is that schools are about the business of students, and students' needs cannot always be easily described, plotted, and analyzed on spreadsheets.

Federal and state legislation have long aimed at increasing education accountability by requiring school leaders to use new data sources. Laffee (2002), some twenty years ago, wrote,"The tools of education—intuition, teaching philosophy, personal experience—do not seem to be enough anymore. Virtually every state has put into place an assessment system intended to measure and validate student achievement and school performance" (p. 6). That statement still applies today and reveals school leaders need to not only possess the three skills Laffee references; they must go beyond them.

## Data Types

Today's school leader must employ a variety of data types. Disaggregated data, longitudinal data, perception data, qualitative data, and quantitative data are five data types (see Table 2.1). Each data type provides its own unique assistance in developing an integrated budget.

**TABLE 2.1 Types of Data**

| DATA TYPE | DEFINITION |
|---|---|
| Disaggregated | Data are broken down by specific student subgroups, such as current grade, race, previous achievements, gender, and socioeconomic status. |
| Longitudinal | Data are measured consistently from year to year to track progress, growth, and change over time. True longitudinal studies eliminate any students who were not present and were not tested in each of the years of the study. |
| Perception | Data are used to inform educators regarding parent, student, and staff views or opinions about the learning environment, which could also reveal areas in need of improvement. |

| DATA TYPE | DEFINITION |
|---|---|
| Qualitative | Data are based on information gathered from one-on-one interviews, focus groups, or general observations over time (as opposed to quantitative data). |
| Quantitative | Data are based on "hard numbers" such as enrollment figures, dropout rates, and test scores (as opposed to qualitative data). |

*Sources:* Lemov (2021), Sorenson et al. (2011), and the American Association of School Administrators (2002).



### Disaggregated Data

Disaggregated data are data broken down by specific student subgroups, such as current grade, race, previous achievements, gender, and socioeconomic status. Disaggregated data provide leaders with an additional level of specificity needed to identify the academic needs of students.

Instead of examining student achievement data from a whole-school-population perspective, school leaders now have the opportunity to examine student academic performance by ethnicity as well as socioeconomic status. This approach to data analysis provides principals and teams with priority and academic direction as to where needs to intervene may exist.

Moreover, the use of disaggregated data can assist a campus leader and the faculty with the identification of specific instructional delivery problems that may very well have not been identified otherwise. Now school funding to assist the most in need can be budgeted and more appropriately disseminated.

### Longitudinal Data

Longitudinal data are data measured consistently from year to year to track progress, growth, and change over time. True longitudinal studies eliminate any students who were not present and tested in each of the years of the study. In an actual school situation, five or so years of data is recommended. Using sophisticated software, school leaders readily construct longitudinal comparisons of same groups from year to year, which provides guidance in areas of curriculum and instruction that require intervention and appropriately budgeted dollars.

### Perception Data

Perception data are data that inform educators about parent, student, and staff insights regarding the learning environment, which could also reveal areas in need ofenhancement, if not advancement. Perception data can be gathered in a number of ways, such as through interviews, questionnaires, and even by observations—all designed to gather opinions,

comments, and recommendations from stakeholders. Perception data is an essential aspect of the strategic planning process of any school community. This data type can be utilized to effect changes that bring about continuous instructional improvements within and across the teaching, leading, and learning environments.

#### Qualitative Data

Qualitative data are data based on information gathered from one-on-one interviews, focus groups, or general observations over time (as opposed to quantitative data). One exemplar of qualitative data is when a school district brings in focus groups to discuss a controversial topic such as the banning of certain library books, or sex education, or teachers carrying guns in schools. The district compiles the comments from the sessions and uses them in conjunction with information from other sources to consider revising or maintaining library content, or modifying the school's sex education program, or even recommending to the state legislature that teachers carry or not carry guns in schools for the purpose of safety.

#### Quantitative Data

Quantitative data are data based on "hard numbers." This data type can be counted or measured (as opposed to qualitative data). Examples include but are not limited to enrollment figures, dropout rates, and test scores. It is worth nothing that data can meet the definition of more than one data category.

#### Assessment

There are two basic types of assessment: formative and summative. An example of formative assessment is a pretest given in an academic area such as algebra, reading comprehension, or keyboarding skills. This information would then be used to drive the instructional strategy and the development of lesson plans.

The second type of assessment is summative. An example of summative assessment is a benchmark test given in mathematics, reading, science, or other subjects to determine individual student mastery of taught objectives. Formative and summative assessment, when planned properly, can yield all five types of data previously defined and examined. Formative and summative data used in conjunction with each other are invaluable in making program adjustments.

## Acknowledging Opportunities for Growth and Development

Schools have grown in complexity and require sophisticated assessment and data analysis. The immediate cause of this phenomenon is quite simple. A powerful idea dominating policy discourse about

schools stipulates students must be held to higher academic achievement expectations and school leaders must be held accountable for ensuring all students meet or exceed such expectations.

This perspective, and multiple others, subsequently dictate numerous, simultaneous, and systematic changes in leading and teaching. Such emerging viewpoints, demands, and expectations have dictated the absolute need for school leaders to be active participants in continuous and varied professional development opportunities. Data analysis is at the heart of this process.

For school leaders to be successful—whether it be in envisioning school reform initiatives, planning programmatic changes, developing a school budget, or advancing opportunities for increased student achievement—they must understand that the once-standard in-service workshop model is anything but acceptable. What is known and what research supports is professional development must be entrenched in practice and be research based, collaborative, standards aligned, assessment driven, and accountability focused—all of which serve to increase the capacity, knowledge, and skills of administrators to improve their leadership practices and performances.

Educators must recognize student learning can only be enhanced by the professional growth and development of school leaders. Educators must take this a step further by creating a professional learning community. Today, society can no longer educate the populace by employing a traditional education model. Those who have yet to make the transition must do so posthaste.

Staff development, like other facets of a school, must be data driven. Needs assessment surveys from the faculty analyzed in conjunction with data from other sources (such as student achievement data) increase the effectiveness of the training, resulting in increased performance of both teachers and students.

An example of data-driven staff development took place in a school with a high percentage of students who were not meeting with success in writing as measured by the state's assessment program. A review of the testing data by the site-based decision-making (SBDM) committee revealed this problem was evident throughout all the assessed grades.

The SBDM committee surveyed the teachers and discovered that the writing teachers felt inadequately trained to teach writing within the parameters of the curriculum and assessment program. The committee also discovered writing was only a priority for the language arts teachers in the grades that were tested by the state. Other teachers felt no ownership in teaching writing across the curriculum.

The SBDM committee members conducted a review of potential writing workshops and selected one they deemed most appropriate for their students based on an analysis of the disaggregated achievement data.

The committee also surveyed teachers throughout the district and developed a writing-across-the-curriculum plan that was supported by the faculty.

The SBDM committee ensured these two strategies were incorporated into the school action plan. Funding was secured to bring in writing consultants and to make out-of-town school-site visits where the writing curriculum and instructional practices were successful. Funds were also allocated to secure the required materials for the teachers, and the teacher training received priority on the professional development calendar.



## Pause and Consider

### Underground Resistance

The members of W. Nigel Bruce (WNB) Middle School's SBDM committee have grown in their understanding of the use and importance of a variety of data sources in campus planning. But unfortunately, not everyone at WNB shares the enthusiasm for increasing the use of data-driven decision making. LaKisha Galore and Stan Barrier are vocal in their effort to diminish data analysis at WNB. Their mantra is, "You can find data to prove anything." Ms. Galore and Mr. Barrier are creating a growing pocket of resistance to data-based decision making.

An excellent source pertaining to teacher resistance is the text *Responding to Resistors: Tactics That Work for Principals* (Sorenson, 2021).

- What, if anything, should be done to address Ms. Galore and Mr. Barrier's campaign against data-based decision making?
- What could the WNB SBDM committee do to proactively carry data analysis to the next level at WNB?

## Conflict Resolution

Conflict will always exist in the school budgeting process. Stakeholders have special interests and agendas. Passion, resistance, and even tempers can flair in the heat of the school budgeting process. Words can be spoken that people later wish they had not said. What's a school leader to do? First, carefully consider the next two subsections for clarification on handling conflict. Also, an excellent source for new

principals attempting to manage conflict is *Essentials for New Principals: Seven Steps to Becoming Successful—Key Expectations and Skills* (Sorenson, 2024).

## The Negative Things About Conflict

At your next faculty meeting, ask the assembled academic warriors, "How many of you *like* conflict?" If your crowd is typical, you'll see only a few, if any, hands go up. Most of those who respond affirmatively will be your campus clowns who just want attention. In all likelihood, when confronted with conflict, the jokester is the first one to offer a glib remark and then disappear. The remainder who raised their hands are likely those who could best be called troublemakers. They feel they have power. When we were young, we called them bullies. Most people will refrain from raising their hands because they share negative views of conflict.

First, in a conflict a problem arises that challenges those involved. This initial event is necessary because it draws attention to the problem and sets in motion a rebuilding process. Second, a conflict should be *rested*. Note that *resting* and *avoiding* are not the same thing. In this context, resting refers to a conscious effort to separate people from the problem and to deal with the problem. In other words, we must work to attain and maintain a proper perspective. When we concentrate on people instead of the problem, we lose objectivity and our edge for problem solving. Finally, conflict requires proper nutrition—an appetite for mutual benefit and a penchant for understanding. Thus, the need for conflict resolution.

Conflict resolution requires the participant to be open to conflict, have perspective, and possess a desire to achieve mutual benefit whenever possible. Lacking any of these elements can lead to disaster. Even though the conflict experience may be distasteful, an effective school leader will embrace the conflict and do everything possible to bring perspective and mutual benefit to all parties. "Yeah, right," you're saying. "That won't work with my crowd."

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True, it doesn't work out that easily all the time. Sometimes you just have to be the boss and make hard decisions. It comes with the territory. But if that's the only way you deal with conflict, you won't be viewed as an effective leader. Dictators can be extremely efficient, but in the long term, they are rarely effective. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the school.

Personnel disputes are costly, especially when left unchecked. Campus personnel disputes can lead to interrupted teaching and learning time and decreased productivity, and they certainly have a negative impact relative to morale. School leaders play a very important role ensuring conflict is minimal. Conflict resolution strategies work to mediate teacher-to-teacher, teacher-to-principal, and teacher-to-student disputes. Identified below are seven methods for resolving personnel conflict at school.

1. Ensure and maintain an open door policy.
2. Determine the severity of the issue at hand.
3. First, encourage faculty to handle the conflict on their own. If unable to do so, move on to Item #4.
4. Take action and step in to resolve and mediate the situation.
5. Listen carefully and thoughtfully to all parties. Provide each party with an opportunity to say their peace. Sometimes this involves due process.
6. Document, document, document. Remember, the incident never occurred if left undocumented!
7. Develop a solution by seeking common ground, brainstorming resolutions, developing a plan of action, and always following up after a few days and even weeks.

Remember, problems are opportunities to show sound and effective leadership. The best principals handle conflict by building trust and understanding, and by teaching others to do the same.

## Celebrating Success

School leaders must not underestimate their impact on a school's culture. The leader sets the tone of a school. In an era of increased outside accountability systems, along with fiscal constraints and political intrusions if not interventions, campus leadership teams and personnel are experiencing tremendous stress. Leaders must be cognizant of this underlying current in schools. Effective leaders celebrate success as a means of mitigating stress. They must lead in the establishment of a culture that appreciates success. Leadership in celebrating success manifests itself in any number of ways. It is only limited by one's imagination.

Principals lead celebrations at their schools for achieving goals by performing out-of-character acts such as kissing a pig, shaving their heads, sitting on the roof, dancing in a pink tutu, doing an Elvis impersonation, and even riding a Harley-Davidson through the gym.

Principals lead celebrations at their schools for achieving goals by performing out-of-character acts such as kissing a pig, shaving their heads, sitting on the roof, dancing in a pink tutu, doing an Elvis impersonation, and even riding a Harley-Davidson through the gym. These manifestations of success celebration often bring with them the side benefit of positive local media attention to schools. Sometimes a leader must let stakeholders have a little fun at the leader's expense. Leaders do this because they know a school culture with an atmosphere of love and support for stakeholders will accomplish miraculous transformations in student performance.

Celebrating success is not limited to attention-getting public stunts. Celebrating success can also be private. A handwritten note of thanks is worth a million dollars to the recipient. Who doesn't treasure personal notes of gratitude? These notes are

often tucked away and read again in moments of frustration or during times of reminiscing.

A face-to-face verbal compliment provides a positive benefit to the recipient as well as to the giver. Compliments need not be lengthy; they only need be sincere. As a sidebar, leaders must know how to model accepting a compliment. School leaders should not try to brush away a compliment by saying things like, "It was nothing." Instead, honor the compliment giver: "Thank you so much. I appreciate you recognizing my work and the work of my colleagues."

Celebrating success manifests itself in many other ways: awards assemblies, bulletin boards, newsletter references, marquees, parking privileges, covering a class so a teacher can have a longer lunch, T-shirts, and any other positive ideas you possess. Bathing schools in the celebration of success encourages the integration of budgeting, visioning, and planning. It also builds an open culture and positive climate!

Celebration should be an all-inclusive process. Do not limit it to teachers and students. Include everyone—the custodians, bus drivers, cafeteria help, parent volunteers, and community members. A positive, optimistic, and supportive school culture increases energy and motivation, and this is contagious to all stakeholders. School leaders encourage teachers to help their students celebrate success. So, be the head cheerleader for your school—you might even get to wear the uniform!



## Final Thoughts

Cultures can change. School leaders must (1) act purposely in growing a healthy and open culture, (2) be results oriented and data driven, (3) resolve conflicts on their campus, (4) celebrate success, (5) ensure efforts are ongoing, and (6) see the value of all stakeholders. Schools are more likely to fulfill their vision and mission when they align vision, budgeting, and planning.

Fostering a shared vision of a school's purpose while taking deliberate and collective action to align their budgets and commit their resources to the school's vision is a principal's gift to the learning community. The best way to make a school successful is to foster a culture in which the stakeholders have a shared vision of the school's purpose and future.

### Discussion Questions

1. Consider three values you share with your school. How have these shared values impacted your school's culture?
2. How do the beliefs and attitudes of the various stakeholders impact your school's culture? Provide positive and negative examples.

*(Continued)*

(Continued)

3. How do the school leaders affect school culture positively and negatively?
4. List your top ten data sources for building your campus budget. Why did these sources make the top ten list?
5. How can or does the effective use of data impact your school's culture?
6. How does the effective use of data impact your school's budgeting process?
7. How can the data types in Table 2.1 impact your campus in a constructive way?
8. How have you witnessed data being used in the decision-making process at your school? Was it used effectively? Defend your response.
9. How do the beliefs and attitudes of the various campus stakeholders impact your school's culture? Provide positive and negative examples.
10. How does this chapter relate to the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL) as documented in Chapter 1? Which standard(s) are specifically relevant and why?

## Case Study

### Scarlet C. Doyle Middle School

Scarlet C. Doyle (SCD) Middle School, a school of 540 students in Grades 6 through 8, is located in a southern border state less than two hundred miles from the U.S.–Mexico border. It is 62 percent Hispanic and 38 percent Anglo. It is one of six middle schools in Kilnwood City. Juan Molina is the principal. Although SCD has always been predominantly Hispanic, Dr. Molina is the first Hispanic to be named as the school's principal in its forty-two years of existence. Dr. Molina has been enthusiastically accepted by all of the school's stakeholders. He is using this acceptance capital to make needed instructional changes to ensure all children meet with academic success.

# Case Study Application

Table 2.2 contains two years' accumulation of achievement data for SCD. Recognize the table is abbreviated for the sake of brevity. Use these data to respond to the following questions:

1. Identify at least two instructional concerns at SCD. What types of data did you use to identify the concerns?
2. Examining the data provided, what would you recommend to Dr. Molina as the top instructional priority? Support your recommendation with data.
3. Recently a survey noted there was a detected increase in the positive perception of SCD by the parents between the last school year and the current school year. Is there anything in the given data that might explain the recent upward swing in the campus's public perception? Support your response.
4. What data are not provided that you would like to have to be better informed about the needs and strengths of SCD?
5. Make a connection between a PSEL standard and the SCD case study. Is there more than one? If so, identify all.
6. How might budgeted dollars be expended and in what areas specifically to enhance instructional programming and student achievement?

**TABLE 2.2 Scarlet C. Doyle Middle School State Academic Performance**

| | STATE | DISTRICT | CAMPUS | AFRICAN AMERICAN | ASIAN AMERICAN | HISPANIC | WHITE | LOW SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Met State Standard: Grade 6* | | | | | | | | |
| Reading | | | | | | | | |
| Second Year | 87 | 83 | 86 | * | 87 | 84 | 89 | 82 |
| First Year | 80 | 76 | 83 | | 86 | 80 | 88 | 74 |
| Math | | | | | | | | |
| Second Year | 78 | 65 | 80 | * | 92 | 77 | 84 | 73 |
| First Year | 71 | 61 | 65 | | 90 | 64 | 68 | 53 |
| *Met State Standard: Grade 7* | | | | | | | | |
| Reading | | | | | | | | |
| Second Year | 83 | 79 | 94 | * | 96 | 92 | 98 | 94 |
| First Year | 82 | 78 | 83 | | 90 | 77 | 93 | 72 |
| Math | | | | | | | | |
| Second Year | 71 | 60 | 71 | * | 80 | 69 | 76 | 69 |
| First Year | 63 | 52 | 57 | | 71 | 52 | 69 | 43 |
| *Met State Standard: Grade 8* | | | | | | | | |
| Reading | | | | | | | | |
| Second Year | 90 | 88 | 94 | * | 97 | 89 | 99 | 84 |
| First Year | 84 | 79 | 86 | | 91 | 83 | 93 | 75 |
| Math | | | | | | | | |
| Second Year | 67 | 57 | 83 | * | 95 | 76 | 92 | 72 |
| First Year | 62 | 50 | 48 | | 52 | 44 | 55 | 38 |

*Notes:* All numbers are percentages. * = Less than ten students.