

A stylized, colorful illustration of a landscape. The background features wavy, layered bands of light blue and white, suggesting a sky or water. In the foreground, there are rolling green hills with a brown path winding through them. On the left, there is a green tree, a purple flower, and an orange flower. A small red and orange bird is flying in the sky, leaving a white trail.

SCHOOL CULTURE

Rockway Middle School
9393 S.W. 29th Terrace
Miami, Florida

Mrs. Josephine Otero, Principal
Mrs. Maria Rodriguez, Teacher

A stylized landscape illustration. The background features blue and white wavy bands representing hills or clouds. In the foreground, there are green rolling hills. On the left side, a tree with a dark brown trunk and several large, rounded, purple and pink flowers stands on a small mound of orange and brown earth. The overall style is clean and modern with a textured, paper-like appearance.

School Culture

School culture is norms developed over time based on shared attitudes, values, beliefs, expectations, relationships, and traditions of a particular school that cause it to function or react as it does.

Why is School Culture Important?

What research tells us:

“Positive learning can only take place in a positive culture. A healthy school culture will affect more student and teacher success than any other reform or school improvement effort currently being employed.”

-Gary Phillips

School Culture vs. Climate

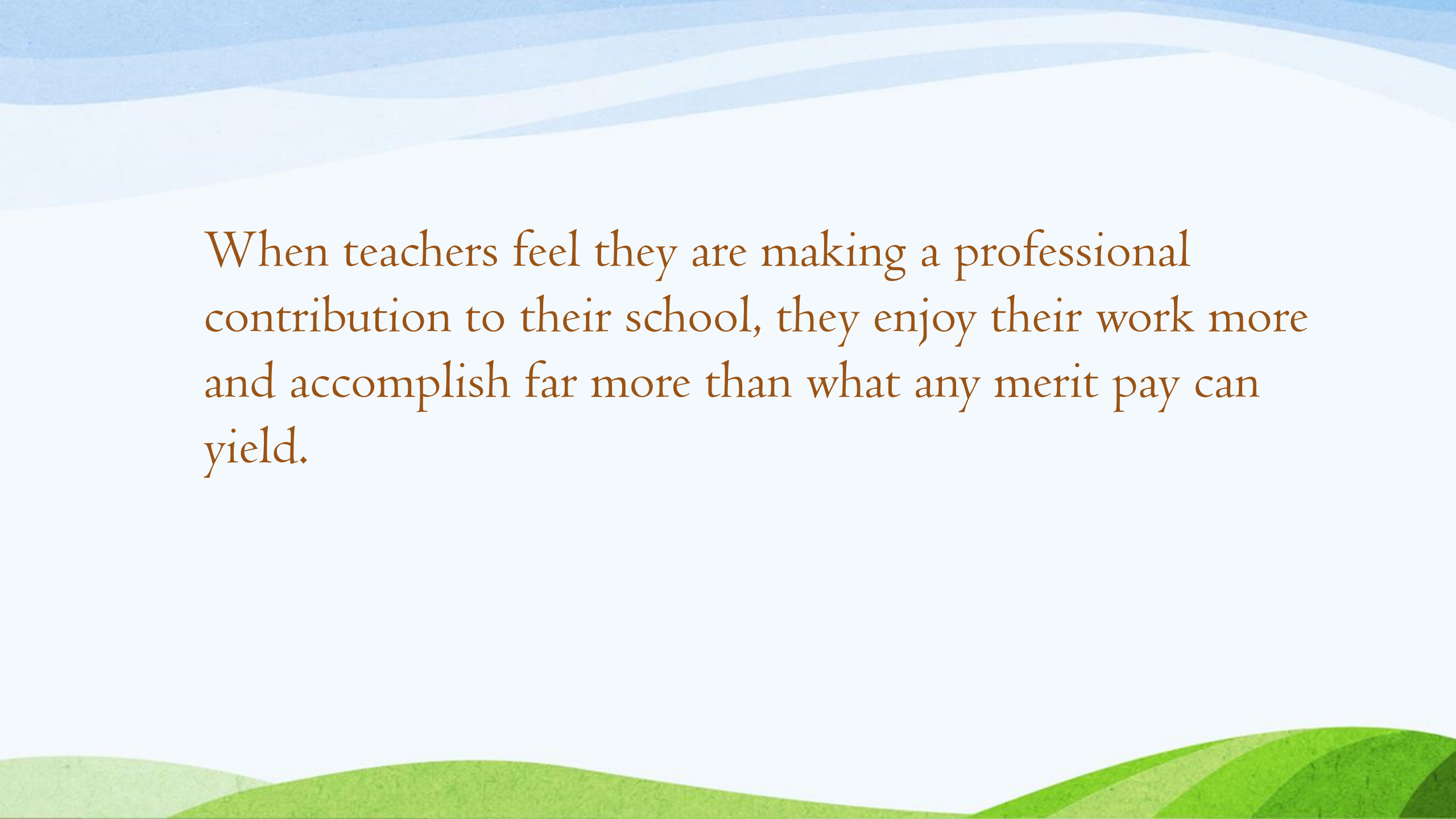
- School Culture is over a period of time...the history (Personality)
- School Climate is now, it's the perceptions/emotions being evoked (Attitude)

Elements of Positive, Successful Cultures

- a rich sense of history and purpose
- core values of collegiality, performance, and improvement that stimulate quality, achievement, and learning for everyone
- positive beliefs and assumptions about the potential of students and staff to learn and grow
- a strong professional community that uses knowledge, experience, and research to improve practice

Elements of Positive, Successful Cultures Cont.

- leadership that balances continuity and improvement
- ceremonies that reinforce core cultural values
- stories that celebrate successes and recognize heroines and heroes
- a physical environment that symbolizes joy and pride
- a widely shared sense of respect and caring for everyone



When teachers feel they are making a professional contribution to their school, they enjoy their work more and accomplish far more than what any merit pay can yield.

Ways the Culture Seems Exhibited

- What hallways and classrooms look like.
- Relationships among staff.
- How newcomers are treated.
- Relationships between staff and administration.
- How students who are struggling are treated.
- Relationships with parents and the community.
- How staff collaborate to improve the school.
- How successes and accomplishments are celebrated.

(Deal and Peterson, 2009)

Key Elements that Frame School Culture

- Structure
- Powerful work ethic
- Common behavioral and academic expectations for students and staff
- Trust
- Staff and parent empowerment

A stylized landscape illustration. The foreground features rolling green hills in various shades of green. On the left, a tree with a dark brown trunk and several large, rounded, purple and pink blossoms stands on a small orange mound. The background consists of layered, wavy bands of light blue and white, suggesting a sky or distant hills. The overall style is clean and modern.

Changing School Culture

Shaping Positive Cultures

- Work with the informal network
- Recount stories and history
- Role model core norms and values
- Use symbols and artifacts
- Communicate core values in your actions
- Use ceremonies and celebrations to recognize accomplishments

Building a Culture-rewiring Team

Leader #1 – the risk taker, culture-busting leader who creates a vision easy to follow

Leader #2 – the first one to follow #1 leader

Leader #3 – the second one to follow leader #1. Motivates others and helps to create a crowd.

When most people become followers of the vision, the rest will feel it would be risky not to join in.

The leaders can present the vision through stories that glorify the future of the school while respecting the past, and then they can send the team out to tell these stories.

Times of Year When Culture is Vulnerable to change

- The start of the school year
- A new principal
- The holidays
- Awards and recognitions
- Test scores
- Outside directives
- First or one-time events
- Crisis
- Loss of life



The Role of the Principal

HEAD OF SCHOOL IS:



- Symbol of Culture
- Potter who shapes the Culture
- Poet who uses language to describe the Culture
- Actor who plays out the values and vision
- Healer who presides over life transitions in the community

The Principal Sets the Tone in Establishing School Culture

- Be visible
- Choose a positive attitude
- Identify patterns of behavior (students and staff)
- Don't procrastinate; address problems
- Empower staff to be the disciplinarians
- Keep the "Monkeys off Your Back"
- Gather good ideas from other schools
- Look professional

Feedback is Essential in School Culture

- Oral feedback is more effective than written
- Quality feedback is needed, not more feedback
- Much of the feedback provided by the teacher to the student is not valued and not acted on
- The most powerful feedback is provided from the student to the teacher and or to peers.

“Teachers usually have no way of knowing that they have made a difference in a child’s life, even when they have made a dramatic one. . .

Good teachers put snags in the river of children passing by, and, over the years, they redirect hundreds of lives. . .

Great schools are made up of people who can never really know the good they have done.”

Kidder (1989): *Among Schoolchildren*

Thank you for allowing us to share our school culture experiences with you.



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