

Building Culture and Capacity Using Lunch and Learn

David Lee, Principal, Harris Intermediate School, Box Elder School District

David.lee@besd.net



Have you ever wondered how you can get a little more time to do something with your staff that can have a significant impact on the culture of your school and to unify everyone? Well, we have found just the thing!

For the past three years at Harris Intermediate, our teachers have participated in a monthly book study during what we have come to call “Lunch and Learn.” At the beginning of the year we purchase a book for each teacher and then study one chapter per month. The first year we studied “Teaching with Love and Logic, the second year was “Culturize” by Jimmy Casas, and this year we are studying Shawn Achor’s “The Happiness advantage.” We provide lunch and the teachers come and enjoy a book study discussion.

Initially, we only had teachers participate, but then last year we developed a schedule that allows all staff members to participate in one of four time slots that we provide the book study and lunch. Our main goal was to help all staff feel a part of our culture and school community, as well as engaging them in continuous learning opportunities. Something we realized is that we hire paraprofessionals and expect them to do important interventions or other jobs working with students, but we often do not provide the training and support that we could. With our Lunch and Learns, we are able to have scheduled time monthly to meet with all staff and to provide them tools to help them to better engage with students and to build relationships that support our school's mission.

This has been an excellent time for us to get to know all of our teachers as well as our paraprofessionals, and we wouldn't want to ever go back to not having access to them each month. We have received significant feedback from our staff that these opportunities have helped them to feel valued and a more significant part of our team.

One of the most significant outcomes of this effort is that paraprofessionals are more engaged and take greater ownership of our students and our school. All of our staff have developed a better understanding of students' needs and it is exciting to see them interact with students in a more responsive and proactive way. These books have given our staff the opportunity to all focus on the same thing, building student relationships. As our staff has increased their abilities to develop better relationships and connections with students, they are able to more successfully teach them. We have seen our overall negative student behaviors decline this year in a measurable way. This opportunity has helped unify our school in some common time together learning about strategies and mindsets that help us all to accomplish our academic and social/emotional goals.

I would encourage any school no matter where you are in your journey to incorporate a Lunch and Learn into your efforts to unify and strengthen your school.