

“League for Excellence”: Improving School Climate - One Step and One Child at a Time

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Mission: To build student connections to the community of Columbia High School by rewarding, recognizing and treating every student at Columbia High School with respect and kindness. We want to provide a positive school climate for all students, staff and faculty at CHS. We respect diversity, will accept others and promote integrity among everyone. When we recognize, validate respect, reward and reinforce EVERYONE at CHS, we will get results! Overall this is a climate/culture initiative to make CHS a better place for ALL!

Why? Students are under an incredible amount of stress in high school. More students were being treated for depression, anxiety disorders and other mental health issues. Test anxiety, and increase in 504 plans and IEP referrals for students who were struggling academically, physically and emotionally. Teachers becoming more stressed due to the drive for higher test scores; decreased funding in education caused more tension in our building in all staff areas. Morale was on the decline so I recognized a need to address these issues as soon as possible!

How? The Assistant Administrator and I met to review what we would like to see this group to become. Combination of the Josten’s Renaissance program and Positive Behavior and Intervention Support (PBIS) <https://www.pbis.org/> programs implemented in elementary and middle schools. Didn’t want to only recognize academic achievements but wanted to focus on the social-emotional well-being of students!

The Beginning: Invited a group of students from a wide variety of ‘groups’ at CHS to brainstorm ideas of what we can do to improve school climate. The student council advisors and administrators also attended this session. The end goal was to come up with ideas that could possibly recognize every student in our school. We also wanted to find out what students perceive as a ‘reward’. Students agreed that food and t-shirts would please all students!

Funding: Utilizing Student Council funds as this group is a committee under the Student Council Organization.

Year 1: We want to reward students at different levels for behaviors that we would like to see displayed and become habit forming on a daily basis at school.

- 1) Focus on behaviors: tardies, attendance and office referrals. Will also focus on morale and school climate issues by implementing as many positive programs as possible!
- 2) Improve positive behaviors between students to students; students to teachers; and staff-ulty to staff-ulty. **Weekly** recognition every Friday with nominations made for the **‘You Rock’** Award for the week. Read over the announcements and students choose a gift (candy, gift card, food item, etc.)
- 3) Students who receive no tardies, no office referrals and attend school 95% of the time each **quarter** are **Zero Heroes**. They will earn a food bar during lunches at the end of each quarter. Students chose which bars they wanted: Build your own ice cream sundae bar; Holiday Movie “Elf” & popcorn; Nacho bar; and Cookie Bar

	1 st Quarter	2 nd Quarter	3 rd Quarter	4 th Quarter
2013-2014	52% Ice Cream Sundae	47% Holiday Movie & Popcorn	45% Nacho Bar	45% Cookie Bar
2014-2015	51% Ice Cream Sundae	47% Nacho Bar	34% Krispy Kreme Donuts	45% Soda Float Bar
			18% Off Campus Lunch	14% Pizza Bar
2015-2016	54% Ice Cream Sundae	Krispy Kreme	Nacho Bar	Dessert Bar

4) Students who earn **Zero Hero** for all **4 quarters** will receive a t-shirt at the end of the year! (1st Year)

5) **Soaring Eagle Ceremony – Annual recognition held in May:** Teachers choose 1 student for any reason they see fit to have earned the title of “Soaring Eagle”. They write a paragraph about why this student is their selection which is read at the ceremony. Students do not know which teacher has selected them until the ceremony. Teachers and students get a 5x7 picture and the booklet filled with the written paragraphs. Cookies and punch/water were served for a short reception following the event.

Successes: Students LOVED it! Parents LOVED it! Staff LOVED it! Felt that numerous students were recognized including many that do not get recognized academically or fall through the cracks....

Challenges: Still not recognized by everyone... some students still thought it was only for the smart people! Also more adult driven than student driven this year. Being under Student Council did not give it an entity of its own. Funding – more expensive since most programs were start up this year. Had \$1000 from Student Council but needed more by the end of the year.

New Initiatives in 2014-2015:

1) **Academic Incentives:** Recognize academic achievements for all students

- Honor roll locker banners at end of the semester
 - 3.0gpa and above – ended up with 578/740 students earned a 3.0 so students changed it to a 3.33 gpa to receive a locker banner
- Academic letters awarded to Senior students who earned a 3.33 gpa and above their Senior year
 - Cost of letters were above our budget for all students.

2) **Staff-ulty Incentives:** Improve staff-ulty morale and build camaraderie

- Staffulty committee formed to help make decisions and encourage positive activities to take place throughout the year to build camaraderie
- Staff Lounge – was dingy, messy and unorganized! Decided to clean it up – added paint to the walls; new curtains made by an administrative assistant; and added a wall to share personal accomplishments/celebrations by sharing pictures, articles, announcements, etc.
- Departments take turns preparing a breakfast, snacks, appetizers, etc. each month so all staffulty can come together for a brief period of time and be treated with awesome food! We held potlucks at Christmas and at the end of the year during final exams when everyone shares the same lunch periods. Also put together a recipe booklet of all recipes shared throughout the year!

- Last day of school held a “Christmas Vacation” Happy Hour event at a historic schoolhouse in town. Huge success!
- No funds are used for any of these events... staff share costs.

3) **CHS Motivational Speaker:**

- Scheduled Judson Laipply’ “The Evolution of Dance” motivational speaker to hold an assembly at the end of the school year! Every student attended and enjoyed his presentation! It truly promoted a positive climate closing out the school year.

4) **School Climate Survey:**

- Students helped write a 40 question survey to collect data identifying needs and problems as well as successes at CHS. Once we identify problem areas or can understand why some students have chosen not to be engaged in school, then we can provide programming to capture these students.

Successes: More recognition to students; League for Excellence perceived as an organization separate from student council; students more excited about Zero Heroes; much more student driven this year; Krispy Kreme fundraising was a success! Everyone continues to love the food!

Challenges: Many students involved in many activities limiting times available to hold meetings at school; Climate survey was difficult to calculate – did by hand this year! Unable to purchase academic letters for all students due to limited funding. Locker banners did not work too well! Students moved them, etc. Need to find a different way to recognize students!

Funding: Received a \$1000 grant from PTA and we sold Krispy Kreme donuts 4 times

2015-2016 Initiatives:

Plan to continue all the above incentives and programs. Plan to refine many of the events and build upon what we have. Will meet to provide more recognitions throughout the year.

- Student ID’s and lanyard pins – Recognitions for lanyards
 - Silver stars for honor roll; pins for weekly You Rock winners; pins for student of the month, etc.
- Post large list of Honor Roll Students for everyone to see instead of locker banners
- Utilize bar codes and scan for attendance at extra-curricular events
- DREAM – Train 3 staff for Link Crew to implement next fall 2016
- Recognize staff monthly birthdays
- Celebrate community service / service learning projects
- Implement the RSVP program through NASC
- Leadership 101 Class complements the program!
- Funding: Received a \$1000 grant from PTA and still sell Krispy Kreme
- Working on private donation letters to local businesses who have seen the program in local papers!

Will continue to address more issues – social media is on our list as well!

League for Excellence has made a significant impact on our school environment and has improved the climate of our building for both staff and students! We look forward to new developments and love the ideas that students bring to the table!

RESOURCES

Videos used in presentation:

- 1) Engagement + Activities = A Roadmap to Student Success / Alliance for Student Activities
"Do the Math" <http://engage4schools.com/>
- 2) "Are you a World Changer?" Share the Power of Kindness – Intro to RAK Week
<http://rakweek.randomactsofkindness.org/Home>
- 3) "Kindness in the Classroom" Program – Free lesson plans! <https://randomactsofkindness.org/lesson-plans-pilot-program>
- 4) Ideas and resources for all ages on Kindness! <http://randomactsofkindness.org>
- 5) "The Leader in Me" Program – 7 Steps – <http://edu.franklincovey.com/martin-petitjean>
- 6) Congressional Medal of Honor Character Education Program - FREE lesson plans!
<http://www.cmohfoundation.org/> "Legacy of Service" video

Textbooks and/or websites:

- 1) "[David and Goliath](#)" - Underdogs, Misfits, and the Art of Battling Giants – Malcolm Gladwell
- 2) "[You're Perfect... and Other Lies Parents Tell](#)" - The Ugly Truth about Spoiling Your Kids – Loni Coombs
Discusses how to develop a Mental and Moral Core (MMC) in youth and many more great ideas!
- 3) All Malcolm Gladwell Books
- 4) GreatKindness.Challenge.org "A Kids for Peace Experience" January 25-29, 2016