

A Most Effective School

Visit a school with a consistent learning environment in the **Going Beyond** folder for the *Epilogue* at EffectiveTeaching.com. Discover what procedures this school uses.

The subtitle of *The First Days of School* is **How to Be an Effective Teacher**. By now you know that student learning is directly correlated to teacher effectiveness. The effective teacher is a constant learner, thriving every day to become more effective. As the effectiveness of a teacher increases, the first group to benefit is the lower-achieving students.

Just as we have effective teachers, we have effective principals. This story is about **Bridget Phillips** and what happened while she was principal of her school. Her story confirms the value of an exceptional principal.

The Primary Role of a Principal

The primary role of a principal is to establish and nourish a culture.

Imagine being part of a faculty where every teacher succeeded in the classroom for ten years. The only reason for leaving this school was either spousal relocation or to further educational growth.

Since the teachers succeeded, it was quite obvious the students succeeded. This was the case at Bridget's school, GES.

When new teachers come to teach at her school, a culture of success already exists under the leadership of Bridget Phillips.

Culture is defined as the core beliefs of a group and the practices and procedures they use to reinforce those beliefs. Simply put, effective schools have a leader who creates a culture of people working together to achieve a set of beliefs. An ineffective school consists of a group of people isolated in their own classrooms and doing their own things; there are no beliefs or practices to benefit the students.

To understand the value of having a culture, refer to page 282 in *The First Days of School* and read how new teacher, Julie Kunitada, was seamlessly and lovingly accepted into an existing grade level team that had existing objectives, goals, and a protocol of how to help other teachers to help the students.

Also, read page 283 and the protocol a school uses to formally work together in teams. When a new teacher joins such a staff, a culture already exists and it is the students who benefit from continuous help.

It's the same at GES. The **teachers help each other** and that's why the teachers make GES an effective school.

A Culture of Success

There are consistent, school-wide procedures at GES. The students, themselves, can teach the procedures to the new teachers and the substitutes.

Yes, that's correct. **The students teach the procedures to the new teachers and substitutes!**

Also, on page 324 read about the consistent procedures used at a successful school.

Students like being in a consistent environment where everyone knows what to do and where they can get on with learning. **All effective schools have a culture, and it is the information one gets from a culture that sends a message to the students that they will be productive and successful.**

The procedures at GES appear on a 17 x 22-inch color poster that is posted in each classroom, in hallways, the cafeteria, and library. A new student, even a new teacher, can see that the school-wide procedures are already being practiced by many of the returning students. The poster is shown on page 328.

Here are some of the procedures printed on the **Success Trail** poster:

MORNING PROCEDURES

- FREEZE BELL: Freeze or walk to the blue line when appropriate.
- SECOND BELL: Walk to line up quietly. Enter building quietly.

HALL PROCEDURES

- Walk in single file.
- Walk on the right side.
- Walk quietly.
- Walk with hands at side.
- Use hall pass when not with an adult.

LUNCH ROOM PROCEDURES

- Walk in quietly.
- Have lunch card ready.
- Talk in quiet voices.
- Raise hand to be helped.
- Respond to paycheck/high five.
- Stay seated until excused.
- Clean up your area.
- Walk carefully to the playground.

DISMISSAL PROCEDURES

- Walk on campus at all times.
- Walkers exit at the gate by the bike rack.
- Cross street and parking lot at designated areas only.
- Wait for rides at the gate.
- After 3:30 p.m., come to the office to wait or call home.

BATHROOM PROCEDURES

- Use the restroom quickly and quietly.
- Remember to flush.
- Use towels and soap sparingly.
- Clean up after yourself.
- Use hall pass when not with an adult.

Developing the GES Success Trail

The consistency at GES did not happen overnight, nor did Bridget Phillips mandate the school-wide procedures. Rather, the teachers worked for more than a year to agree on a set of core procedures.

To develop and refine these procedures, a staff planning committee organized a retreat for one day. Many of the procedures were already in place because they had been started four years earlier, when several other schools were instituting the same process based on materials from the book, ***The First Days of School***. By the second year, there were two pages of procedures and routines. Each year the staff revisited many of the procedures and tweaked them until they were firmly in place.

During the retreat the procedures were placed on several large charts for discussion. In August the finalized procedures were presented to the staff, including all new teachers, for discussion and implementation. These procedures form the basis for the poster, which the district's graphic arts department designed and produced.

How This Culture Was Developed

As we showed in the GoBe on page 327, some schools do nothing for new teachers. Others give the new teacher a mentor; resulting in ten new teachers matched with ten different mentors and resulting in ten different ways to teach. No team or company would ever do this, but it is commonly done in schools.

Effective schools are a learning community, a place where teachers and administrators study, work, and learn together with the mission of improving student achievement.

Effective schools are distinguishable from ineffective ones by the frequency and extent to which teachers learn together, plan together, test ideas together, discuss practices together, reflect together, grapple together—with the fundamental vision and focus of developing students to their fullest capacity.

Thus, the function of a principal is not to count how many buses are needed, who has lunch duty in the cafeteria, and when an assembly is to be held. These must be done, but **the principal must rise above managerial duties and become an instructional leader.**

Arthur Levine, president of Columbia University Teachers College, says, "Too often, administrative education programs prepare managers, not the educational leaders schools so badly need today."

Ineffective principals hire teachers because they have slots to fill. Then the teacher is given an assignment and told to go and teach, or in the case of many new teachers to go and survive. The message is *figure it out yourself, do it yourself, and keep it to yourself.*

Not at GES. **Bridget Phillips takes all of her first-year teachers through an in-house induction, training program for one semester.** A cadre of administrators and teachers teaches the induction program. The purpose of this training is two-fold:

1. to train, support, and retain effective teachers, and
2. to acculturate new teachers to how things are done at Goldfarb and continue to ensure a vision of student achievement.

During the other semester, all student teachers from the local university are taken through a very similar training program. Thus, the student teacher gets more than one master teacher. The student teacher gets many master teachers. If a vacancy is expected at the school, Bridget Phillips can draft one of these teachers for the staff before the teacher applies for a job elsewhere. It's like a coach who can pluck off a first-round draft choice before the player is even allowed to enter the draft.

Even more impressive, the student teacher, when he or she begins as a regular teacher, goes through the first-year induction program given to all beginning teachers at Goldfarb.

Can you understand now why we strongly recommend, when you go for a job interview, that you ask if the district has a new-teacher induction program? And if not, to move on to another interview. An induction program is how a district reinforces that they care about you and want you to succeed and stay by giving you training and support.

Because of the existing induction training at Goldfarb, many of the new teachers have been trained in what to do and how to teach the school's procedures. It's comforting to have everyone "on the same page." It makes it easier for the veteran teacher to help the new teachers fine-tune their classroom techniques. If necessary, sometimes a sub is hired for a new teacher so the teacher can shadow a veteran teacher for a day. **Watching and being part of a common culture helps to quickly bring everyone up to speed with the rest of the staff.**

If you are a new teacher, do not be so naïve as to believe that you can succeed on your own. **Find a school district and a school that will support you and help you to realize your full potential in affecting the lives of young people.** Then, have a mindset that you want to work together and learn together with the other teachers and administrators at your school. This is the only way to improve student achievement in a culture where there is a laser focus on student success.

Mentors are no longer really used at GES. Instead, student teachers and new teachers are surveyed about their needs. The list is publicized, and "tons" of teachers respond with willingness to answer, help, or present sessions at in-house training sessions. This is a true learning community of educators sharing with and helping fellow educators.

Working Together As a Family

Mike Schmoker's book, ***Results: The Key to Continuous School Improvement***, says schools that show positive results in student achievement have a staff that exhibits "**meaningful teamwork.**"

Roland Barth says the same thing in his book, ***Improving Schools from Within***:

"The **nature of the relationship** among the adults at the school has more to do with the school's **quality**, its **character**, and the **achievement** of its students **than any other factor.**"

Mike Schmoker and Roland Barth say what has always been known:

**People who work together always achieve greater results
than people who work alone.**