

Small Wins to Celebrate and Ways to Celebrate Them

The ROSE Award

A district-wide initiative to celebrate the efforts of all stakeholders in Appleton Area School District, Wisconsin, resulted in many ROSE Award certificates posted on bulletin boards in classrooms, front offices, cafeterias, custodial offices, and homes. As shown below ROSE stands for Recognition Of Superior Effort. This process, like many of the others described here, engaged staff members in celebrating one another rather than simply recognition from the administration.



Celebrations!

McNair Elementary, Fairfax County Public Schools, Virginia

A Letter to the Staff Following a State Visit

Dear Teachers,

I would like to thank all of you for making today an exceptional day.

We began the day in my office with our School Improvement Team. At that time we shared the binders that our team has worked so hard to collect. The binders included your team minutes, agendas, pacing guides, common planning, common assessments, and data collection. They included information regarding staff development activities, conferences, consultants, and included my emails, letters, and correspondence with faculty members. In essence, the binders were a collection of McNair's activities, and specifically the work which you have produced this year.

After listening to the team and asking clarifying questions, our visitors Dr. Maureen Hajar and Dr. Calanthia Tucker, spent time in my office reviewing the binders and time observing teachers and teams throughout the building. At 2:00 they met with the cluster director and me. I want to share their comments with you. **The comments in bold are my thoughts tacked on to comments made by Dr. Hajar and Dr. Tucker.**

- The School Improvement Team did an excellent job. They modeled the epitome of organization and the samples of evidence should be commended. **(Awesome job team!)**
- When observing classroom practices they noted that the professional development highlighted in our binders was carried into practice. **(This is what it is all about!)**
- They noted that the lesson plans collected in binders mirrored the lessons they saw in classrooms.
- They were very impressed with the use of technology. The SMART Boards (SB) were being appropriately used. They described one class where a teacher posted an eCart question on the SB and students were answering it on a white board. After the students said this was very easy, the teacher ended with a display of data showing the actual class data when responding to this question. Students spoke about distractors in their answers. **(This is great stuff!)**
- They were impressed with the level of differentiation used in classrooms, they described another lesson where after the warm-up there were four separate student activities depending on the needs of the students, including going to

Celebrations!

the blackboard, use of manipulatives, and a separate review group. (**The LEARN model and careful planning rule!**)

- They described a lesson with co-teaching and a lesson with instructional support being provided by a SUM teacher. (**Go team!**)
- In sixth grade, there was proper use of calculators. A teacher had laminated formula sheets for use with tests taped to student desks. They found this impressive! (**This continues to be so cool!**)
- One thing that particularly pleased them was that the amount of teacher talk was low. After describing the two classrooms above, they shared that other classes were equally impressive. (**Best practices are evident at McNair!**)
- Classroom management was a strength as our teachers demonstrated great classroom management and students behaved appropriately! (**Woo-hoo! Go PBS! Go Fred Jones! Way to go McNair teachers!**)
- They told us they could see just how smart our kids were. They were discussing variables/independent variables/graphs/test taking skills. (**Our kids are impressive; thanks for bringing out the best in them!**)
- They were impressed with the levels of thinking. They were impressed with all observed. In one classroom, when working on word problems a child asked the teacher, “What are the key words to use with multiplication problems?” The class brainstormed this and came up with some ideas. Then the teacher asked students to look at the word wall to see if they had any other ideas. Knowing that word walls were part of our school plan, they liked seeing it in action. (**I liked hearing about it in action; thanks so much for putting this into practice!**)
- A huge compliment was paid to McNair when they said that what they saw in writing, and then our School Improvement team verbalized with them, was seen in your practice. The paper translates to your work! (**In research, they could say there is triangulation of the data. I can't tell you how proud I was to hear this!**)
- The agendas and team norms showed that you still know how to have some fun and they appreciated this, too. Especially our kindergarten team who has 'bring chocolate' as a norm! (**I like chocolate!**)
- They made a comment saying that they could tell things at McNair were well in place. Students followed procedures, knew where to look, knew how to work in groups, and knew when to get to their work. Evidence of your work up to now was noted as this is not something that is pulled together in a day! (**Hard work pays off!**)
- The work that Nanette has done with new teachers was great and the agendas showed that she focused on instruction, but also other facets of life that affect

Celebrations!

new teachers. It was clear that we worked in conjunction with the PLT office and had a variety of support for new teachers. (**Thanks to Nanette for planning and our new teachers for participating!**)

Next Steps

- Keep up the good work!
- We will need to continue data collection of lesson plans, team minutes, team agendas, and pacing guides for final submission at the end of the year.
- Go home and sleep well tonight; you should all be very proud!

Final Comments

I can't think of anything more fitting during Teacher Appreciation Week than recognizing and applauding the work you do. They gave us very specific examples and I have to say that we are thrilled with what is going on in your classrooms. It has been emotional around this building lately. I have to tell you that I listened to this report with a deep thrill that so much of what teams at McNair have put into place has come to fruition and been recognized. Everyday you work so hard, and today, our visitors from the Virginia Department of Education have seen the fruits of your efforts. They eagerly await our SOL results. I know we will do well. Thanks for being so flexible, thanks for working so hard, and thanks, above all, for putting our kids first!

Happy Tuesday!

Theresa

Theresa West, Ed.D.
Principal
McNair Elementary School
Herndon, Virginia

Celebrations!

Faculty Meeting Kudos Theresa West

We begin each faculty meeting with appreciation for each other. The administrative team kicked this off with animals which are passed from teacher to teacher. Now, teachers bring the animals to faculty meetings and pass them along to someone else!

Animals include:

- El Toro of Love, for someone who has shown a lot of caring.
- Thankful Turkey, for someone we are thankful for.
- Wise Owl, for someone who was wise about a decision.
- “Purrrfect” Cat, for someone who did something perfect.
- Dynamite Dinosaur, for someone who was just dynamite.
- “Beary Special” Three Little Bears, for folks who did something very special.
- Turtle, for “shellebrating” something good.
- Purple Monkey, because they did not “monkey around.”

The Crystal Apple Award Bruce Oliver

I wanted to create the norm that the adults in our school would come together regularly to celebrate the successes we created. In my efforts to expand my repertoire of strategies for supporting the development of that norm, I read about an award that could be presented to faculty members in recognition of good teaching practices. A clear, glass apple on a tiny pedestal was purchased and christened the “Crystal Apple Award.” It was inscribed with the words, “Instructional Excellence.” The faculty member who received the award would keep it for a month and display it in his or her room. To initiate this tradition, I began my recognizing a faculty member who had recently demonstrated excellence in the classroom. I readily acknowledged that any number of faculty members were worthy recipients but that in order to get the tradition started, one particular teacher was selected. It was the responsibility of each recipient to pass on the award and recognize a fellow faculty member at the next monthly faculty meeting. In order to make a valid decision, it was necessary for the current holder of the apple to visit classrooms around the building. That tradition, which began so long ago, still continues today. At each meeting, the Crystal Apple presentation is the last item on the agenda. Faculty members give this portion of the meeting their undivided attention, and when the new recipient’s name is announced, there are always cheers and an enthusiastic round of applause. The award keeps a constant focus on the fact that teaching young people is our most important mission.

The Principals' Perspective Celebrations!

Treasure Hunt Bruce Oliver

As teachers arrived at a faculty meeting, they were asked to draw the name of another faculty member from a container. I explained that during the next month, each teacher was to visit the classroom of the person whose name they had drawn, to spend time in that person's classroom and complete a short piece of writing that depicted the "treasure" that he or she had found in a fellow teacher's classroom. At the following month's faculty meeting, everyone brought their completed **Treasure Hunt** form. We filled the two bulletin boards in the faculty lounges with the **Treasure Hunt** forms so the entire staff could see the expansive repertoire of ideas, the caring attitudes, and the place of learning we had all collectively created.

Snapshot Theresa West

To: Heather Whitis
From: Theresa West
Date: November 3, 2011

When I was in your room I noticed...

You left great substitute plans today. Your substitute was working with an interactive SMART Board activity. All of your students were engaged as she used the decimal/fraction lesson that the rest of the team was also teaching.

Thanks for making sure that learning was taking place even when you were out of the building. I hope you feel better soon.

cc: School File

Celebrating Our Year!

Scavenger Hunt for Ten Great Ideas

This scavenger hunt was a part of the end-of-year celebrations held for new teachers in Alexandria City Public Schools, Virginia and for new teachers in Greece Central School District, New York. In each district senior district leadership, mentors, and student musical groups joined in the celebration of the accomplishments of the new teachers in their first year in the district. The inclusion of the instructionally focused scavenger hunt helped to remind all participants of the primacy of student learning.

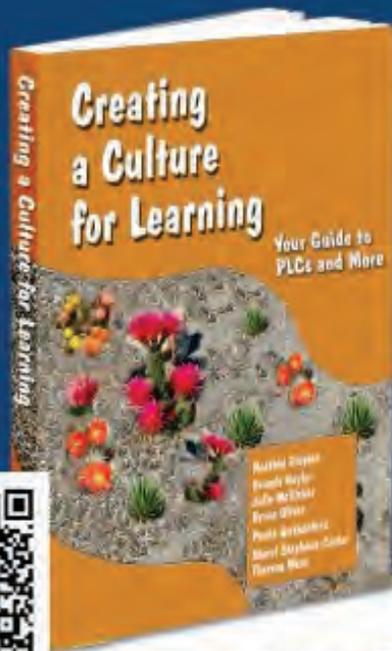
Directions:

As we gather to celebrate the completion of your first year of teaching, let's celebrate the ways you have impacted student learning. Have the colleague who provides information on an item sign your sheet and then you write a brief summary of what that person tells you.

1. Find someone who has used several different ways to **check for student understanding** this year. Have him explain what he did, why he did it, and what the impact on learning was.
2. Find someone who can explain how she has integrated **literacy** across the curriculum.
3. Find someone who can name three **organizational systems** that she plans to put into place at the beginning of the next school year. Have her explain the systems and why she plans to use them.
4. Find someone to share a story of a **struggling student** who turned the corner. Have that person explain what happened and how he felt about it.
5. Find someone who can share a **parent communication system** that worked well and that she plans to use again next year. Get the details so you can use it too!
6. Find someone who can share a great **collegial relationship** that developed this year.
7. Find someone who used a new **active learning** strategy within the last month. Have her describe the activity and its impact on learning.
8. Find someone who can share three great ways to **put students into groups**.
9. Find someone who can tell you how she has successfully **integrated technology** as a learning tool for students.
10. Your own biggest accomplishment this year.



Contact Just ASK to have one of the authors work in your district to help you use these successful culture-building strategies.



Creating a Culture for Learning

Your Guide to PLCs and More

by Heather Clayton, Brenda Kaylor, Julie McVicker, Bruce Oliver, Paula Rutherford, Sherri Stephens-Carter, and Theresa West

This book is based on the belief that in order to succeed in their commitment to the achievement of high standards by all students schools must create cultures of learning that promote professional growth.

It includes self-assessments, reviews of the literature, numerous practitioner examples, and online tools and templates to help you answer these questions:

- What are the characteristics of schools fully engaged in professional learning?
- What structures need to be in place to promote and support learning cultures that result in high levels of student learning?
- What knowledge, skills, and attitudes are needed to create, implement, and maintain cultures for learning?
- How can schools best use data to inform practice?
- What are the non-negotiables in such schools?



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