

Task 2: Recognizing and Managing Complexities

The problem that I am addressing within my school, and the vision that I hope to achieve, is to address the low academic expectations that currently exist within my school. This goal will primarily be achieved through the infusion of rigor with digital resources in order to facilitate an academic curriculum that adequately prepares students for success in the 21st century. I have employed systems thinking protocols with the intention of identify the underlying causes of these persistent problems, as well as propose lasting and impactful solutions to alleviate these concerns. These problem components are the anchor for our current state of academic stagnation, and must be analyzed, understood, and addressed in order to move our school forward with a shared vision for progress and achievement.

One of the primary components of our low academic expectations is centered around the fact that we are a very rural school in which the socioeconomic status of our students and families is relatively low. As with most schools, these characteristics bring with them a number of problems that manifest themselves within the school community. For example, students oftentimes come to us with poor reading skills and come from families where the resources are not present to make significant gains with regards to these issues. Oftentimes, this results in teachers, who might lack the professional development or resources to work with these realities, becoming discouraged or ineffective in bridging the achievement gap. Having a community that lacks financial resources has also resulted in a lack of digital and computing resources which stagnate our students' ability to develop digital literacy skills. While neighboring school districts provide and maintain one-to-one technology for all of their students, our school currently has about three hundred individual laptops (which are fairly old)

for approximately seven hundred and fifty students. This reality makes it very difficult to fulfill and develop the technology skills outlined in “Profile of the SC Graduate.”

Another factor which contribute to, and exacerbate, these issues is by a culture of complacency where faculty and teachers, many of whom attended our school and grew up in our community, almost feel satisfied with what they are doing because that is the way things have always been done. In general, there is no urgency or aspiration to do anything different as some more than likely believe that there is no issue. In addition, we have a very insular teaching staff and school district community where loyalty and being from our county is prized and valued to a significant degree. While this can present several advantages and positive outcomes, this can (and does) also led to several problems when innovation and vision are both needed and lacking. Lastly, there seems to be some indefinable culture of entitlement within the community that manifest itself in students just focusing on getting work done, and prioritizing completion over actual learning. This degree of “entitlement” exist among both parents and students and can oftentimes make it difficult to challenge students or hold them accountable.

Within any system, even fruitless systems, cause-and-effect relationships develop which create loops that exacerbate and perpetuate issues and problems (Senge, 2012, pgs. 134-135). One of these feedback systems, reinforcing processes, seemingly exacerbates the issues and reinforce our culture of low academic expectations. Taken as a whole, all of the issues and causalities elaborated on here feed these reinforcing processes. If we look closely at the “This is how we’ve always done it culture” that exist within my school, reinforcing processes are evidenced here because the desire to change or evolve is essentially non-existent among

administrators, teachers, and many stakeholders. Senge (2012) asserts that “A reinforcing process, by definition, is going to end. Whether virtuous or vicious, a cycle cannot grow forever” (p. 136). With this in mind, it is fairly clear to see how this persistence will inevitably burst, so to speak. Over time, as we remain stagnant our culture will become one that is so underdeveloped and ineffective when compared to our neighboring schools and districts.

A separate type of feedback, balancing processes, also exist within our system and again reinforce and exacerbate our problem at my school. Balancing processes preserve a sense of homeostasis by ensuring that no matter how you try and change, your problems will keep bringing you back to the center (Senge, 2012, p. 137). Once again, while all of the factors described here contribute to these problems, an example of a balancing process would be the low-SES and rural nature of our school district and county. Essentially, no matter how much we try to change, or how innovative we become, there will always be this factor of poverty and rurality which will keep us from progressing too far away from our “center.”

References

Senge, P. (2012). *Schools that learn: A fifth discipline fieldbook for educators, parents, and everyone who cares about education*. New York, NY: Crown Business. ISBN 978-0-385-51822-2

