



# A Baker's Dozen: 13 Tips for Better Board Culture

## 2015 OSBA Capital Conference

Monday, November 9, 2015



# What is school culture?

- School culture is the set of norms, values and beliefs, rituals and symbols, ceremonies and stories that make up the “persona” of the school.

Dr. Kent Peterson, faculty member and researcher,  
department of Educational Administration at the  
University of Wisconsin-Madison



# Another take...

- School Culture is the total of the behaviors and interactions of all adults and children, their attitudes and norms, and the extent to which the school is safe, supportive, healthy, engaging, inspiring and challenging for all.

**Maurice Elias, Professor of Psychology, Rutgers University**



# Is a District's **Culture** different from its **Climate**?

- The terms are often used interchangeably, but...
  - **Culture** is more about perceptions and values, and is built over the long-term
  - **Climate** includes many of the physical or behavioral aspects within the district, often symptoms of the culture



# School Climate

- The perception of how well as school provides suitable and safe conditions for learning, for staff to grow professionally, and for parents and community members to become engaged.



# A District's Culture

- May not be written in policy or otherwise formally conveyed
- Within one district, it could vary from building to building, but changes there are more often about climate
- Is intangible, but can often be “felt” immediately upon entering a building



# What are the assumptions your staff members make each day about things like...

- Meetings
- Teaching Philosophy
- Change
- Technology
- Professional Development



# Signs of a **Positive** School Culture

- An active informal grapevine
- Values that support PD
- A positive, caring atmosphere
- A responsibility for student learning
- A common focus and understanding of the district's key goals





# The Baker's Dozen: Tip #1

- Have a board or community conversation to talk specifically about your district's/school's culture



# The Baker's Dozen: Tip #2

- Place a higher, more systemic priority on celebrating success
  - Groups, individuals, progress, personal, operational. Share!



# The Baker's Dozen: Tip #3

- Develop, learn and use a clear, shared language to foster and build commitment to staff, student (and board!) learning



# The Baker's Dozen: Tip #4

- Emphasize Communication and Collaboration
  - Examine your channels!
  - Focus on all collaborators!



# The Baker's Dozen: Tip #5

- Know one another
- Students and staff. Your level, up one level, down one level at a minimum.



# The Baker's Dozen: Tip #6

- Address the “whole enchilada” of cultural improvement, not the individual ingredients.



# The Baker's Dozen: Tip #7

- Insist on accountability and credibility at all levels of the organization
- Monitoring and evaluation are your allies here.



# The Baker's Dozen: Tip #8

- Empower administrators to improve district and school climate
- The way things look and feel inside and outside buildings





# The Baker's Dozen: Tip #9

- Consider starting a series of study or curriculum circles to address culture's specific ingredients.
- Study Circles can exist for a brief or long time, but usually have a somewhat narrow focus.



# The Baker's Dozen: Tip #10

- Learn about, understand and then use your district's diversity to your advantage
- Find ways to make each diverse group feel special, included and a key part of why you're successful.



# The Baker's Dozen: Tip #11

- Be consistent and fair about discipline.
- Review policies and encourage administrator collaboration and consistency



# The Baker's Dozen: Tip #12

- Consider conducting a school culture and climate survey
- Resources include OSBA, the Center for Improving School Culture or the National School Climate Center.



# The Baker's Dozen: Tip #13

- Discuss your district's "motto" or logo. If it's still relevant, figure out how to make it come alive. If it's old or tired, energize around renewing it and then use the new vision and motto to spur other activities.



- Teach it! Learn it! Live it!
- When we work as a team, our success is extreme!
- We walk through all doors together.
- Work hard and be nice.
- We are all learners and we are all leaders!



As always,  
remember  
why you're  
here. Have a  
great  
conference  
and thanks  
for being with  
me this  
morning!

