

Welcome to Phoenix!!

The Journal of Chelonnda Seroyer

Day 1 – February 2010

Introduction

Today was my first visit to a school in one of the most poverty stricken areas of Detroit. I went to Phoenix Multi-Cultural Academy. When I walked into the building I immediately noticed the constant chaotic energy. Students were running up and down the hallways. I could literally hear teachers screaming at students and doors slamming. I was met at the top of the stairs by a security desk that was missing a security guard. I'm not sure how I felt about this as I seemed to be longing for a sense of security at that very moment. As I walked past the security desk, I found my way to the front office. In the front office there was a parent sitting down waiting to be assisted. She had teardrop tattoos on her face, was clearly frustrated and seemed ready to voice her concerns to anyone that would listen. In an instant, I decided that the front office was not exactly where I wanted to be at that moment. So, I left the office and walked down the hallway to the library because that's where I was scheduled to give my presentation to the faculty during the afterschool faculty meeting.

When I entered the library, I was met by four little boys sitting at a table talking to each other. When they saw me, the topic of their conversation immediately shifted to trying to figure out who I was. The first and most talkative boy (who I later discovered was in the 3rd grade) looked at my necklace and said, "Hey lady, are those pearls real? I know how to check 'em!!" I was speechless. I just looked at him, smiled, and said, "No thanks". Then he said, "You know why we in here? We here for something that we didn't even do!" I responded by asking him to tell me exactly what it was that he "didn't" do. He went on to explain that they had been sent to the library for "tagging" the bathroom. I had no idea what this was, so he went on to tell me that "tagging" is when you use spray paint to put your gang signs on the walls. Although I did not let him know, my heart sank at that very moment. As I sat and looked at those precious little boys that knew way more than they should have known about things that they shouldn't have been exposed to, a reality hit me. The reality was that these children have absolutely no control over their environment and they are simply adapting to the things that they have been exposed to. This was a harsh reality and I knew in that moment that I would never forget their faces.

The After School Faculty Meeting

OK . . . so now I am set up and anxiously anticipating the arrival of the faculty. But while I am waiting, a series of people enter the room from a catering company. Oh my goodness! I couldn't believe it! There were two different types of lasagna, garlic bread, a wonderful salad, several types of salad dressings, dessert, drinks, and even a bowl of mints! I had never seen a spread like this for a faculty meeting and I couldn't believe how nice it was. No boxed turkey sandwiches for these teachers.

So, I anxiously waited for the teachers to arrive for the 3pm faculty meeting. I waited (3:10pm)...and waited (3:25pm) and waited . . . finally around 3:45pm we were ready to start. I could not believe what I saw. Ten teachers showed up . . . and four of them left after they finished eating. The principal did not show up . . . she had a migraine. However, the assistant principal, Shalonda Byas and the special education teacher/planning committee/budget director/curriculum coach, Jeannine Lesch came, stayed the entire time and took careful notes.

Oh my goodness. So, as I sat and looked at a nearly empty library with a handful of teachers, I went ahead with my presentation. The teachers that stayed were so polite and interested. They talked to me after it was over, told me stories about their students, and welcomed me to their school. So, after I finished I packed up, went back to the hotel and prepared for my full day of school observations the next day.

Welcome to Phoenix

My formal observations are included later in this journal. However, I will tell you “off the record” what I observed as well. As the students arrived, I saw preschoolers, elementary students, and middle school students; enter through a single entrance as they were met by a security guard and a metal detector. The metal detector was right in front of the door. So this means that these children had to stand outside in the snow and freezing Michigan air until it was their turn to walk through the detector, have their book bags searched and have a security guard go over their bodies with a wand to ensure that they don’t have any weapons.

After they enter the building they wander around until school officially begins. The only problem...there was no way to actually tell when school officially started. There were no bells, no morning announcements, not even the Pledge of Allegiance to signal that the day was about to begin. The only “beginning” of the school day was the metal detector process. This process along with the black floors, the broken restrooms, the exposed plumbing, and dirty classrooms made this place more reminiscent of a prison than a school.

Now it’s time for me to visit classrooms. Honestly, I don’t really think that I have the words to accurately describe what I saw. My intention upon walking into the room was to begin by sketching the arrangement of the desks. However, I could not do that because the desks were literally moving in front of my eyes. Students were sliding across the room. One student stood up, turned her desk around to face another student, took out a deck of cards, and started playing a card game. Another student was making paper airplanes and throwing them across the room. A group of students in the front were on their cell phones, sitting on the radiators having full voice, profanity filled conversations, and other students were literally straining to hear the teacher who was actually attempting to teach under those conditions.

After I left that classroom, I think that I was officially in shock. I promptly asked where the bathrooms were because I knew exactly what I needed to do. I was in shock and could not believe that schools like this actually existed outside of the difficult to watch yet heartwarming movies like “Lean on Me”. Did places like that really exist? Do teachers really get up and come to schools like this every day? Where is Joe Clark? Where is Superman? There has to be SOMEBODY that knows what to do!! When I was given the key to the faculty restroom, a one stall room on the first floor next to the security desk, I went in, made sure that the door was locked, took out my cell phone (while praying that I would actually have reception) and immediately did what I came to do . . . I called the two people that I knew would snap me out of my state of shock and back into reality...I CALLED HARRY AND ROSEMARY!!!

After my conversation (which had to be short and sweet or else I risked someone realizing that I had been in the bathroom for 20 minutes which would have created an awkward moment that I didn’t need at that point) I promptly hung up the phone and entered the hallway with a new purpose and energy. I realized in that moment that I had to switch my focus and start with the basics.

When I spoke to the Spanish teacher (with the paper airplane student) he looked in my eyes and told me that he had been teaching for most of his career and was ready to retire. However, he continues to come to this school each day because he loves the kids. He said that he knows that if he leaves there will be very few adults that would take the time to help them. The teachers were tired, they were frustrated, yet the one thing that most of them had in common was that they felt compassion for those kids and recognized that the students need positive role models in their lives.

At the end of the day I watched one of most disturbing scenes thus far. When the school day was over, students were literally running into each other as they ran down the halls and out of the building. There were no teachers assigned to help with bus duty. The car line consisted of random cars following no particular pick-up procedures. There were tiny preschoolers trying to avoid being pushed out of the way by the middle school children. It was chaos personified. One of the administrators told me that after school there are adult gang members that literally stand across the street and try to recruit students. So, the result is that these students leave school to be faced with the harsh reality of their neighborhood and are expected to arrive the next morning and learn in the chaos that exists within the school building.

Side Note: When I returned to my classes at Bob Jones, one of my students said, *"Mrs. Seroyer, did you hear what happened at that school in Detroit?"* I was confused as to why they were asking me because they had no idea I had actually visited a school in Detroit. So I said, *"No, what happened?"* She went on to say, *"There was an elementary school student that brought a bomb to school and they had to evacuate the school!"*

No, no way...it could NOT be! After that class was over, I immediately went online to see where this happened. YES!! To my utter shock and disbelief...it was Phoenix!! This was just another sign that my work was not done and I had to commit to going back. After I saw the faces of those children in class trying so desperately to learn and listened to those teachers describing their working conditions...I knew that I could not act as if I had never seen that. I could not move on with life in the same way. I kept hearing Oprah Winfrey's words over and over again in my head . . . ***"Now that you know, you can't act like you don't."*** This is SO true. I had to prepare for my next visit.

My afterschool meeting with the administration went like this. "Thank you for inviting me into your school. It was an experience that I will cherish forever. I can appreciate your efforts to assist your students. However, I would like to suggest that before we target the teachers, that we take a step back and look at the school wide procedures that need to be created." After the meeting, I made the following suggestions:

February 15, 2010

Ms. H.
Principal
Phoenix Multi-Cultural Academy
7735 Lane Street
Detroit, MI 48209

Ms. H:

Thank you very much for allowing me to visit your school last week. I enjoyed meeting your students and interacting with your teachers. I was inspired by the resilience of your faculty and will never forget the faces of your students. They are full of personality and I am confident that they will appreciate your efforts to provide them with a safe and structured school environment.

I have provided you with a list of my observations and suggestions to assist you as you move towards creating a school culture of structure and school unity. You will find that most of these observations were discussed during our meeting on Friday. Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

In addition to the attached information, I would suggest that your entire faculty hear my presentation as many of the suggestions that I have made are a direct reflection of the key points made in Dr. Wong's book.

Sincerely,

Chelonnda Seroyer

Phoenix Academy

Proposed School Culture/ Management Action Plan

Schoolwide Observations/Suggestions:

1) Observation: There does not seem to be an “official” beginning of the school day.

Suggestions: 7:30 – 7:45 – During Breakfast Begin the day with the Pledge of Allegiance (models and teaches good citizenship) and “Good Morning Announcements” from the school principal

- Announcements should only focus on **POSITIVE** items.
- May include the class specific “Caught You”.
 - A class that was observed engaging in an interesting lesson.
 - A class with good attendance that day.
 - Students working hard in the library.
 - Anything that recognizes the efforts of the class. (Singling out specific students at this point may lead to unwanted reaction from other students. You may need to start out by celebrating the efforts that you would like to see repeated such as attendance, student engagement, etc.)
- Once a week, it may include the “Top Pick Teacher” award that I mentioned in our meeting.
 - Choose a student to tell you who their favorite teacher is and why. Then, allow them to mention their teacher and their reason during the morning announcements. Be careful to be proactive with this. In other words, don’t simply tell the students to submit the teachers name and put it in a box in the office. This puts the responsibility on them, and they may not do it. Simply find the student and ask them to share the information with you.
- May acknowledge birthdays. This does not have to be something that requires lots of funding. For the students, it may mean that they get to go to the front of the lunch line. For the teachers, it may a simple treat that is **hand delivered** to their classroom **by a member of the administration (not an aide)**.
- Principal may want to begin to give a teacher a compliment if they are observed doing something correctly. (Face to face. Not via the intercom).
 - Example: I noticed that not all teachers walk their classes down for dismissal. In addition to reminding the teachers that are NOT doing it, to do so. Also let the teachers that are doing it know that you appreciate their commitment to the students and their safety.

2) Observation: Attendance is collected inconsistently

Suggestion: Develop a consistent attendance collection procedure

- Have an aide collect the attendance from EACH classroom during the 7:30-7:45 breakfast time or during last block depending on the grade level.
- Place the attendance sheets in the teacher's mailboxes and advise them that when they sign in, in the morning, they are also signing that they have received their attendance sheets.
- Teachers should no longer be allowed to take attendance on their phones. There should be one consistent way of taking attendance throughout the school.

3) Observation: School aides (university students) do not seem to have defined responsibilities and at times seem to be doing administrative items (example: entering a teacher's classroom to collect a cell phone from a student.)

Suggestion: Develop defined and specific responsibilities for University Students and other Aides. Considering the age of the students in the building and the age of the university students, you may want to reassess their presence in the building. I observed various types of inappropriate and unprofessional interaction between the Phoenix students and the university students. If they are going to remain in the building, their role needs to be clearly defined so that they and the faculty understand the boundaries that they have. They should never be used to "check up" on teachers or undermine the teacher in any way as this will be very counteractive to the positive culture that you are attempting to create.

4) Observation: Lack of teacher supplies – Admin. states that the school has the funding, but the teachers do not request what they need.

Suggestion: Ensure that the teachers get the supplies that they need

- Develop a list with the name of EVERY teacher.
- The administration can **personally visit each classroom** and ask the teachers what they need. Write the items on the list at that time, ask the teacher to sign and date. If they state that they don't need anything, then they should write that down and sign as well.
- Develop a reasonable timeline to get those supplies to the teachers.

5) Observation: School-wide procedures are not visible throughout the school.

Suggestion: Develop and display the school-wide procedures strategically throughout the school building.

6) Observation: Lack of structured class coverage procedure

Suggestion: At least **2 weeks** prior to the field trip the Administration should develop a class coverage schedule and confirm the schedule at least 2 days before the scheduled field trip. Simply telling

teachers to get other teachers to cover their classes is ineffective. Random classes are being combined and little to no instruction can take place. This also causes additional discipline issues.

7) Observation: Excessive classroom interruptions during instructional time

Suggestion: Limit interruptions to include only emergency information.

- Any information that can be relayed via the classroom telephone should be delivered that way as opposed to using the classroom or overall intercom system.
- Classroom interruptions from the office should be minimized. Calling a classroom to inform a teacher that a book has arrived is something that can wait until after school, the book could be placed in the teacher's box, or an aide could deliver the book. Most likely the teacher is unable to leave to classroom to retrieve the book, so it would not qualify as important information worthy of interrupting class time.
- Communicate to the teachers that you respect their instructional time and you will be putting new procedures in place that will minimize classroom interruptions.

8) Observation: Lack of privacy concerning confidential issues

Suggestion: Ensure that all staff and faculty recognize the importance of respecting the student's right to privacy concerning their personal information.

- If a social worker is in the building to speak with a student, the student should be notified in a discreet way by a staff member.
- They should be able to speak in a private area where they will be free from possible eavesdropping.

9) Observation: Inconsistent school uniform policy

Suggestion: Decide if you are going to require students to wear school uniforms or not.

- If students are supposed to wear the uniform, then they should wear it each day. If they do not wear the uniform, there needs to be a consistent consequence.
- It seems counterproductive to "require" students to wear uniforms, but then allow them to come to school in their regular clothes. It creates division among the students.
- Possibly find a way to provide school uniforms for those that cannot afford to purchase them.

10) Observation/Teacher Concern: Lack of teacher evaluations by administration

Suggestion: Administration should conduct regular teacher evaluations and **develop a comprehensive new teacher induction program**

- Conduct evaluations of ALL teachers on a consistent basis.

- Conduct personal one-on-one conference with the teacher and provide them with concrete ideas and resources that will assist them.
- Make them aware of what they are doing RIGHT as well
- Conduct a follow-up observation
- Develop and implement a new teacher induction program that will ensure that the school culture is communicated to new teachers.

11) Observation: School spirit indicators are not readily identifiable

Suggestion: Find ways to display the school mascot and school colors throughout the school.

(Remember that these kids are really searching for something to “belong” to. This is evident by the high number of students that are choosing to join gangs.)

- Maybe purchase school t-shirts for teachers to wear on Fridays (an attempt to promote faculty unity).
- Have a local artist come and paint the school logo in a prominent area
- Repaint some of the hallways using the school colors

12) Observation: Excessive use of student cell phones during school hours. (3rd grader was observed using his cell phone in the library. 6th grader was in class having a full voice conversation on her cell phone in the middle of class)

Suggestion: Restrict cell phone use during school hours.

13) Observation: Lack of organized dismissal procedure. Although teachers are required to bring the students to the dismissal hallway, not all of the teachers do this.

Suggestion: Develop a dismissal procedure that ensures that all children are dismissed in an orderly and safe manner.

- Possibly dismiss the younger children first so that they can be placed on the bus, in the cars, etc. prior to the older students.
- Mandate *administrative presence* every day on the dismissal hallway.
 - Administration will ensure that all students are safely and orderly dismissed from the building.

Classroom Observations/Suggestions:

1) Observation: Inconsistent Bellwork procedure

Suggestion: Require bellwork assignments for all classrooms. *Note: The fact that there is no bell means that you may want to change the wording. I noticed that Mr. Black calls it a “Do Now”. That may be best.*

- Require teachers to place the “Do Now” in the exact same location every day.
- Use state testing books, Daily Oral Language, Daily Oral Math, etc. to provide teachers with a year’s worth of “Do Now” assignments. They may always supplement them, but this way, they will not be overwhelmed with the thought of having to come up with 180 of them.
- Develop a consistent way for teachers to check the “Do Now” assignments. If the students are not held accountable for the “Do Now” assignments, they will not continue to do them.

2) Observation: Lack of seating organization. (In some classrooms the seating actually changed before my eyes. Students were sliding across the floor, moving from desk to desk during class, ordering other students to stay or move according to where their friends were, etc.)

Suggestion: Have assigned seating for the students in each classroom.

- The classrooms are huge! This is a fabulous advantage. Encourage the teachers to utilize this space and vary their room arrangements so that the students are not so far away from the teacher.
- Have the teachers create seating charts so that it will be easier for them to take attendance each period.

3) Observation: Lack of “Getting Your Attention” procedure

Suggestion: Develop a signal for “Getting Your Attention”

- Each teacher will need to decide what signal they will use to get the students’ attention.
- It may be helpful to develop a school wide procedure that all teachers and administrators will use.

4) Observation: Excessive number of students walking around the classrooms. Students that are attempting to listen are unable to do so because of the number of students that are walking around and having full voice conversations during class.

Suggestion: Limit the unnecessary traffic and talking

- Develop a “pencil sharpening” procedure
 - Keep a can for sharpened pencils and one for dull pencils. Students will simply swap pencils instead of sharpening pencils. All pencils will be sharpened at one time.
- Develop a “turning in papers” procedure

- Have the students pass their papers to one side of the room and collect them from each row.
 - Do not have the students pass the papers “up” the rows because this will cause them to poke each other in the back.
- Develop “Need Supplies” procedure
 - If the students need supplies, they will need to signal the teacher so that they can get what they need as opposed to yelling out that they need paper or pencil.
- 5) **Observation: Excessive eating and drinking in class.** Students seem preoccupied by passing candy and gum to each other during class. Teachers have mentioned that this is the case every day.

Suggestion: Restrict eating and drinking to breakfast and lunch times.

Suggested Resources

The One Minute Manager by Ken Blanchard

- Great resource that will give you ideas on how to ensure that management in the workforce will be a positive experience for all involved.

Teachers.net Articles

- [Inner City Is Not An Excuse](#) (Oct 2009)
- **JANUARY 2002—A Most Effective School**
(<http://teachers.net/gazette/JAN02/wong.html>)

Key Idea: Safe and Productive School Culture Leads to An Effective School. Transform your school into an effective school, by creating a school culture that promotes a safe and productive learning environment starting on day one. Goldfarb Elementary in Las Vegas, Nevada, has just such a culture. They developed and maintained a consistent school-wide set of procedures that have become the foundation for the school’s culture. Create school-wide procedures using Goldfarb’s Procedures as a guide, and watch your school blossom into an effective learning environment. (Note: The principal who created this culture is no longer at the school.)

Next Visit...

Day 1 December 1, 2010

Introduction

Today was a good day. It was good because of the visible changes that had taken place since my last visit. Although I understand that change does not always happen immediately, it was amazing to see the dramatic changes in that school building. The changes that I saw are in red. The red text is evidence of how my suggestions were implemented in the building.

UPDATED REVIEW - Phoenix Academy

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- Once a week, it may include the “Top Pick Teacher” award that I mentioned in our meeting.
 - Choose a student to tell you who their favorite teacher is and why. Then, allow them to mention their teacher and their reason during the morning announcements. Be careful to be proactive with this. In other words, don’t simply tell the students to submit the teachers name and put it in a box in the office. This puts the responsibility on them, and they may not do it. Simply find the student and ask them to share the information with you.
- May acknowledge birthdays. This does not have to be something that requires lots of funding. For the students, it may mean that they get to go to the front of the lunch line. For the teachers, it may a simple treat that is **hand delivered** to their classroom **by a member of the administration (not an aide)**.
- Principal may want to begin to give a teacher a compliment if they are observed doing something correctly. (Face to face. Not via the intercom).

- Example: I noticed that not all teachers walk their classes down for dismissal. In addition to reminding the teachers that are NOT doing it, to do so. Also let the teachers that are doing it know that you appreciate their commitment to the students and their safety.

Strategy Implemented

- **School day begins with morning announcements**
- **Administration publically recognizes teachers and students via the morning announcements for various positive behaviors.**
- **Administration has implemented a “Scholar Dollar” process. Students are given scholar dollars and can use them to shop in the scholar store. The only rule...”They can ONLY be earned...NEVER taken away or used as punishment”**

2) Observation: Attendance is collected inconsistently

Suggestion: Develop a consistent attendance collection procedure

- Have an aide collect the attendance from EACH classroom during the 7:30-7:45 breakfast time or during last block depending on the grade level.
- Place the attendance sheets in the teacher’s mailboxes and advise them that when they sign in, in the morning, they are also signing that they have received their attendance sheets.
- Teachers should no longer be allowed to take attendance on their phones. There should be one consistent way of taking attendance throughout the school.

Strategy Implemented

- **Teachers are now required to take attendance using the computer based system.**
- **Teachers are required to enter attendance in a timely manner.**

3) Observation: School aides (university students) do not seem to have defined responsibilities and at times seem to be doing administrative items (example: entering a teacher’s classroom to collect a cell phone from a student.)

Suggestion: Develop defined and specific responsibilities for University Students and other Aides. Considering the age of the students in the building and the age of the university students, you may want to reassess their presence in the building. I observed various types of inappropriate and unprofessional

interaction between the Phoenix students and the university students. If they are going to remain in the building, their role needs to be clearly defined so that they and the faculty understand the boundaries that they have. They should never be used to “check up” on teachers or undermine the teacher in any way as this will be very counteractive to the positive culture that you are attempting to create.

Strategy Implemented

- **“City Year” students are required to wear uniforms and are no longer being asked to do administrative duties.**

4) **Observation: Lack of teacher supplies – Admin. states that the school has the funding, but the teachers do not request what they need.**

Suggestion: Ensure that the teachers get the supplies that they need

- Develop a list with the name of EVERY teacher.
- The administration can **personally visit each classroom** and ask the teachers what they need. Write the items on the list at that time, ask the teacher to sign and date. If they state that they don’t need anything, then they should write that down and sign as well.
- Develop a reasonable timeline to get those supplies to the teachers.

Strategy Implemented

- **Teachers are now asked to fill out a “Supply List” each week and submit it to the office. The supply list will be filled and the supplied delivered to the teachers.**

5) **Observation: School-wide procedures are not visible throughout the school.**

Suggestion: Develop and display the school-wide procedures strategically throughout the school building.

Strategy Implemented

- **A few school wide procedures were attempted. However, due to lack of reinforcement, the procedures did not “stick”. Administration is in the process of developing and displaying the procedures throughout the school building.**

6) **Observation: Lack of structured class coverage procedure**

Suggestion: At least **2 weeks** prior to the field trip the Administration should develop a class coverage schedule and confirm the schedule at least 2 days before the scheduled field trip. Simply telling teachers to get other teachers to cover their classes is ineffective. Random classes are being combined and little to no instruction can take place. This also causes additional discipline issues.

Strategy Implemented

- **Teachers are required to arrange for coverage ASAP upon discovering the need for a sub.**
- **The administration is now aware of the subs that are in the building and immediately begin to find coverage for classes that do not have a sub.**
- **This may include having fellow teachers cover classes during their prep time.**

7) Observation: Excessive classroom interruptions during instructional time

Suggestion: Limit interruptions to include only emergency information.

- Any information that can be relayed via the classroom telephone should be delivered that way as opposed to using the classroom or overall intercom system.
- Classroom interruptions from the office should be minimized. Calling a classroom to inform a teacher that a book has arrived is something that can wait until after school, the book could be placed in the teacher's box, or an aide could deliver the book. Most likely the teacher is unable to leave the classroom to retrieve the book, so it would not qualify as important information worthy of interrupting class time.
- Communicate to the teachers that you respect their instructional time and you will be putting new procedures in place that will minimize classroom interruptions.

Strategy Implemented

- **Telephones were installed in all of the classrooms.**
- **All classrooms phones were tested to ensure that all phones were in working order.**
- **The intercom system is no longer used to communicate with individual teachers.**

8) Observation: Lack of privacy concerning confidential issues

Suggestion: Ensure that all staff and faculty recognize the importance of respecting the student's right to privacy concerning their personal information.

- If a social worker is in the building to speak with a student, the student should be notified in a discreet way by a staff member.
- They should be able to speak in a private area where they will be free from possible eavesdropping.

Strategy Implemented

- **Social workers are now required to speak to students privately at all times.**

9) Observation: Inconsistent school uniform policy

Suggestion: Decide if you are going to require students to wear school uniforms or not.

- If students are supposed to wear the uniform, then they should wear it each day. If they do not wear the uniform, there needs to be a consistent consequence.
- It seems counterproductive to "require" students to wear uniforms, but then allow them to come to school in their regular clothes. It creates division among the students.
- Possibly find a way to provide school uniforms for those that cannot afford to purchase them.

Strategy Implemented

- **The uniform has been redesigned and offered to all students.**
- **There still seems to be inconsistency around the dress code. However, this seems to be more of a district issue than a school based issue. The administration has "extra" clothes available in the front office for any student that is dressed inappropriately. I did not observe one single student dressed inappropriately. It was evident that the administration has addressed this issue.**

10) Observation/Teacher Concern: Lack of teacher evaluations by administration

Suggestion: Administration should conduct regular teacher evaluations and **develop a comprehensive new teacher induction program**

- Conduct evaluations of ALL teachers on a consistent basis.

- Conduct personal one-on-one conference with the teacher and provide them with concrete ideas and resources that will assist them.
- Make them aware of what they are doing RIGHT as well
- Conduct a follow-up observation
- Develop and implement a new teacher induction program that will ensure that the school culture is communicated to new teachers.

Strategy Implemented

- **Shalonda and Norma conducted 1 hour observations of each teacher in the building.**
- **Feedback and conferences followed the observations**

11) Observation: School spirit indicators are not readily identifiable

Suggestion: Find ways to display the school mascot and school colors throughout the school.

(Remember that these kids are really searching for something to “belong” to. This is evident by the high number of students that are choosing to join gangs.)

- Maybe purchase school t-shirts for teachers to wear on Fridays (an attempt to promote faculty unity).
- Have a local artist come and paint the school logo in a prominent area
- Repaint some of the hallways using the school colors

Strategy Could NOT Be Implemented

- **Current school colors are “Blue and Gold.” However, due to the extremely intense gang presence in the community, this needs to be reconsidered.**
- **I have suggested that the administration meets with the local gang task force at the police department so that they can develop a list of school color options.**
- **After the color has been determined, we can move forward with using the colors to create a better atmosphere for the school.**
- **These students desperately need something that they can be proud of!**

12) Observation: Excessive use of student cell phones during school hours. (3rd grader was observed using his cell phone in the library. 6th grader was in class having a full voice conversation on her cell phone in the middle of class)

Suggestion: Restrict cell phone use during school hours.

Strategy Implemented

- **Students are required to turn in their cell phones at the metal detector. They are given a claim ticket and the phones are kept in the front office. Students are able to claim their phones at the end of the day with the ticket.**
- **If a student is caught with the phone during school hours, the parent must come to the school to get the phone.**

Classroom Observations/Suggestions:

6) **Observation: Inconsistent Bellwork procedure**

Suggestion: Require bellwork assignments for all classrooms. *Note: The fact that there is no bell means that you may want to change the wording. I noticed that Mr. Black calls it a "Do Now". That may be best.*

- Require teachers to place the "Do Now" in the exact same location every day.
- Use state testing books, Daily Oral Language, Daily Oral Math, etc. to provide teachers with a year's worth of "Do Now" assignments. They may always supplement them, but this way, they will not be overwhelmed with the thought of having to come up with 180 of them.
- Develop a consistent way for teachers to check the "Do Now" assignments. If the students are not held accountable for the "Do Now" assignments, they will not continue to do them.

7) Observation: Lack of seating organization. (In some classrooms the seating actually changed before my eyes. Students were sliding across the floor, moving from desk to desk during class, ordering other students to stay or move according to where their friends were, etc.)

Suggestion: Have assigned seating for the students in each classroom.

- The classrooms are huge! This is a fabulous advantage. Encourage the teachers to utilize this space and vary their room arrangements so that the students are not so far away from the teacher.
- Have the teachers create seating charts so that it will be easier for them to take attendance each period.

Strategy Implemented

- Teachers are now required to have “Do Now” activities posted.
- Most classrooms observed had these assignments posted and the students were working on the assignments.
- Not all teachers have adopted assigned seating. This is ESSENTIAL as these students should not have to worry about “protecting” their seats from other students.

8) Observation: Lack of “Getting Your Attention” procedure

Suggestion: Develop a signal for “Getting Your Attention”

- Each teacher will need to decide what signal they will use to get the students’ attention.
- It may be helpful to develop a school wide procedure that all teachers and administrators will use.

Strategy Implemented

- Observed several teachers using “Give me Five”

9) Observation: Excessive number of students walking around the classrooms. Students that are attempting to listen are unable to do so because of the number of students that are walking around and having full voice conversations during class.

Suggestion: Limit the unnecessary traffic and talking

- Develop a “pencil sharpening” procedure
 - Keep a can for sharpened pencils and one for dull pencils. Students will simply swap pencils instead of sharpening pencils. All pencils will be sharpened at one time.
- Develop a “turning in papers” procedure
 - Have the students pass their papers to one side of the room and collect them from each row.
 - Do not have the students pass the papers “up” the rows because this will cause them to poke each other in the back.
- Develop “Need Supplies “ procedure

- If the students need supplies, they will need to signal the teacher so that they can get what they need as opposed to yelling out that they need paper or pencil.

Strategy Implemented

- **Observed several teachers using the hand signals in their classrooms so that the classroom traffic was minimized.**

10) Observation: Excessive eating and drinking in class. Students seem preoccupied by passing candy and gum to each other during class. Teachers have mentioned that this is the case every day.

Suggestion: Restrict eating and drinking to breakfast and lunch times.

Strategy Implemented

- **Students are now asked not to take food or drink out of the cafeteria**
- **There are no snack machines**
- **Still working on the classroom “breakfast” procedure.**

Observations...

Arrival

When the first bus arrives, the students hurry to the door (26 degrees with snow flurries). However, only about 8-10 students can enter at a time because they are met by a metal detector and 2 security guards. They must have their backpacks searched and go through the metal detector before they are allowed to enter the school. This looks more like a prison visit than the beginning of a school day. I feel saddened by what has quickly become a reality for the children in this neighborhood.

After they enter the building, they go to the cafeteria and they have breakfast. On Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, they have a nice hot breakfast waiting for them. On Tuesday and Thursday, they are given cereal or some other type of breakfast selection. This is great news to me. It shows me that they understand the importance of meeting the basic needs of the students prior to expecting them to focus on the day's task.

Cafeteria

First things first...Lunch is 45 minutes long! When I asked why lunch was so long, I was told that the union ensures the teachers a 45 minute lunch, so they have no choice but to give the students that long. The teachers do not enter the cafeteria. They send their kids and 3 aides are left to monitor the kids, clean up after the kids, and pray that no fights break out in the midst of it all.

The school aides all seem to be near retirement and overworked. They are paid minimum wage for only 3 hours a day. Anything that they do over the 3 hours is simply volunteering their time. They have no benefits, no union support.

The IRONY . . .

They are possibly the hardest working people in the building! After the arrival, when I walked into the cafeteria...who was there helping with breakfast, tying shoelaces, hugging preschoolers, greeting parents, cracking jokes with the kids, and monitoring the arrival of the students? The AIDES! These are the same employees that are only paid minimum wage for 3 hours a day. Yet they come because the students need them. They come early, they stay late, and guess what else...they attend the 3 HOUR – AFTER school professional development meetings because, as one kind lady told me..."I want to learn everything that I can, so that I can help these students. They need me." These aides are gathering coats and shoes from the community. They are using their limited funds to purchase things that they know the kids need. It is absolutely amazing...

Cafeteria continued . . .

The students eat their lunch but they are not required to clean up after they eat. The aides push the trash can around and throw away plates, sweep under the tables, and wipe down the tables.

After lunch, some of the kids are trying to leave with food, milk, drinks, etc. They are told that they can't take the food out of the cafeteria, but most of the students do it anyway.

There are 3 lunch sessions (45 minutes each).

Dismissal

It's simple . . . The bell rings. The kids run out. School is over.

Memorable Moment . . .

I met Johnny today. Johnny is a child who has come to the front office because he has decided that he doesn't want to be in his classroom anymore and he does not even want to come to school anymore. The secretary says, "You can NOT stay in here today. I have way too much to do!" Then she looks at me and asks if I would please take him back to class. OK...here we go.

I sit down to talk to him and quickly discover that he is not your "average" 9 year old boy. It is clear that he is a child that is frustrated and carrying more on his shoulders than any child should ever have to

bear. I asked Johnny if he would like for me to walk him back to class. He looked at me and said, "I don't care if you come or not. I'm NOT going back in there!" OK...this is not going to be as easy as I thought. So I tried again, "It would really help me if you would show me where your classroom is because I would like to visit, but I just don't know how to get there." He looked at me, he looked at the secretary, and then he said, "OK... I'll show you where it is. But I'm telling you...I'm NOT going back in there."

As we walk down the hall I begin to ask him why he doesn't like coming to school. He stops and leans on the wall and says, "I don't like coming to school because they steal stuff, they break windows, they put gang signs all over the bathrooms, and I'm just tired of it." What could I say? This did not sound like the description of a school building. It sounded more like the description of a prison yard.

Later, I discovered that Johnny has been in several different foster homes. His best friend was hit by a car while they were walking together and although Johnny said he slapped his friend in the face, his friend would not wake up . . . his friend is currently in the hospital paralyzed on the right side of his body and suffering from severe brain swelling. Johnny also desperately needs glasses (I discovered that he cannot see the board at all) and he missed over 100 days of school last year alone.

I am totally committed to making a difference for these children in SOME way.

Day 2

Today I met with the school administration. This consisted of Shalonda and Jeannine. The head principal didn't come.

Shalonda and Jeannine are ready to go! They are so very eager to hear my suggestions and to explain to me how they really took my previous suggestions to heart and made changes accordingly.

They actually seem nervous as we begin the meeting. I notice this and decide to make something clear.

I told them that I could clearly see the changes that they made and I was extremely proud of the effort that they put into this process. I let them know that I understand that they are in a very challenging situation. However, I am also extremely excited because I am 100% positive that we can make a difference. I told them that I am committed to helping them and I am going to show them several examples of other leaders that have been very successful. I could tell by their body language that they were relieved. I think that they are so used to everyone coming in and giving them a laundry list of things that they are doing wrong, that they didn't even realize how many great things they had accomplished since my last visit.

I decided to start the meeting by showing them just how many changes I saw. We went through my list of 13 suggestions. We were able to determine that they had successfully implemented 12 of them and adapted them for their school. This was a great way to start our meeting. They were engaged, ready to listen as I shared the stories of other successful leaders, and "pumped" to continue to make more changes.

Additional Notes:

- Gang members wait for school dismissal and actively recruit students as they leave the building.
- There is no police presence in the school.
- Room 206 has had 3 teachers this year alone. No one else will come to the school. The last teacher had a nervous breakdown at the school and had to be removed from the school via ambulance.
- Ms. C is a Teach for America teacher that has done an excellent job with procedures. I witnessed her doing “give me five”! 😊 She also has classroom jobs, hallway procedures, etc.
- I suggested that the school culture of consistency is essential because these children need to feel a sense of safety and belonging. They are constantly fighting to protect what belongs to them. They are constantly being pushed around from home to home. Many of them have to share everything that they have...their food, clothes, beds, shoes...everything. They have to fight to be first in line, and they even threaten other students not to take their seats when they get up for some reason. They have to protect their lockers and constantly protect their belongings. Many of them have to protect their brothers, sisters, and sometimes even their parents from the violence that they see at home. Their safety is threatened on a daily basis. The chaos around them does not make them feel safe.
- There is no evidence of their school colors because they are blue and gold. They cannot keep the blue because of the gang affiliation. Jeannine said that no one ever wears red. Not even the teachers.
- The Pre-K kids are taught to brush their teeth at school. There is a procedure for that and they are VERY proud to share it with you. 😊
- I discovered the school pledge. It was handwritten on a piece of paper on the wall of a classroom. The school administration didn’t even know that it existed.
 - Phoenix Pledge – I believe in honesty, fair play, and excellence. I will always respect myself and my family. As a Phoenix member, I will strive to do my best and take responsibility for my own success.
 - Shalonda would like to add, “No Excuses – No Regrets”
- I will suggest that when breakfast goes to the classrooms that the process is streamlined so that breakfast has a definitive ending time. Maybe a standard number of meals will be prepared for each classroom and teachers will only call if they need more. At this point, the teachers are supposed to call every morning to say how many they need. This does not work very well. Also, I will suggest that instead of two students from each classroom taking the breakfast bags back to the cafeteria (this is prime time for them to get “lost”), that they assign 2 students per floor to gather the bags and take them down. I will also suggest that there is a certain time that this happens. This will signal the end of breakfast.

- I spoke to Ed (principal in NJ) and suggested that they adapt his dismissal procedure. This would require bus riders to gather in the cafeteria and sit at the table that is assigned to their bus number. When their bus arrives, it will be announced and only that table will leave. I will suggest that since this is a Pre-K-8th grade school, this process be divided. Maybe Pre-K through 4th graders could go to the gym and the 5th – 8th graders could go to the cafeteria.
- Pearson representative showed up unannounced today to do a “walk through”. I was meeting with Jeannine and Shalonda when she finished. She attempted to get her coat and her briefcase and leave. I simply asked her what she discovered during her walk through as I wanted to know what her focus was. She mentioned that she saw “wonderful algebraic connections being made in the resource room” and “a disturbing waste of time as a teacher taught the students step by step how to head a paper” OMG!!!! I thought I was going to scream! But I didn’t 😊 I just told her that I respectfully disagreed with her statement that it was a “disturbing waste of time” as the teacher was simply teaching the procedure.
- School administration has requested that I return. I will return to guide each teacher through the development of their own customized classroom management plans.
- This school is now considered “high priority” in the Detroit Public School system due to the fact that they are the 2nd lowest achieving school in the district.
- The teachers have signed a contract stating that they understand that they will be expected to go beyond what the union requires of them because they have chosen to take a position at a high priority school. However, this does very little. The teachers still refuse to do anything extra. I have asked that the administration get a clear understanding of the terms of the “high priority school” addendum to the original contract so that they will be able to hold teachers accountable.

Second Visit Suggestions

Norma, Shalonda, and Jeannine,

Thank you very much for allowing me to visit your school. I really enjoyed seeing the students again. It was very nice to see some of the students that I saw last year. I couldn't believe that they actually remembered me! That was great! I also enjoyed interacting with your teachers and staff. It is clear that they are open to suggestions and would like to improve in certain areas...this is GREAT news.

One thing that stood out during this visit was very obvious...CHANGE. I was absolutely floored by the changes that were made since my last visit in February. I can't tell you enough how wonderful this is. It shows how serious you are about making a change and providing the students with what they need. I recognize that you are dealing with a number of issues that make it difficult to make changes at times. However, this does not prevent you from finding creative ways to make it work.

There are no words to explain the amount of admiration that I have for the efforts that you are willing to make to get things done. It is the reason that I enjoy working with Phoenix Academy. I am extremely honored to have the opportunity to work with you as we work together to create a school culture that everyone can be proud of. I am 100% positive that we can make lasting changes that will make a huge improvement and create a culture of consistency that will promote student success and teacher effectiveness.

After researching other schools that have demographics that are similar to yours, I have provided you with a list of my observations and suggestions to assist us as we move toward creating school wide procedures that will make the day run as smoothly as possible. As educators, we all know that each day comes with its own set of challenges. This is why my sole purpose is to help you manage the things that we do have control over so that the uncontrollable issues will not seem as overwhelming.

In addition to my suggestions, I would like to remind you that prior to my next visit the 5 school-wide expectations and 3 school-wide signals will need to be developed and posted. I have listed a suggested list for you in the observation portion of this report. Kindly review them and adapt them according to the needs of Phoenix.

I would also like to suggest that as you work with Pearson and other various consultants, that you make sure that they are given something to focus on so that the results can be measured and also so that everyone is on the same page. For example, if I am coming in to assist with classroom management and another consultant talks to the teachers and completely contradicts what we are trying to do, it will be confusing and frustrating for the faculty. I am simply encouraging you to make sure that all of the consultants are in line with your vision that you have for the school so that the process of improvement will be seamless.

I would also encourage you to revisit the school pledge when you meet with your staff. Make sure that it speaks to what you truly would like to instill in the students. It needs to really speak to the things that they need in order to be successful in life. Once the pledge has been

developed, I would like to suggest that it is enlarged, laminated, and posted throughout the school along with the School-Wide expectations and signals. I would also suggest that the students commit it to memory and say it each and every morning. Maybe this can be done during the morning announcements. You may also want to consider having a different student lead the school pledge/mantra each day.

I want you to know that Phoenix has a special place in my heart and I am willing to help you in any way that I can. After you review my recommendations/suggestions, I would like to schedule a phone conference so that we can discuss your thoughts.

Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact me. During the next visits, I will work one on one with the teachers to assist them as they create customized classroom management plans. I truly look forward to seeing everyone again and working together to promote genuine change.

Sincerely,

Chelonnda Seroyer

Phoenix Academy

Proposed School Culture/ Management Action Plan

School wide Observations/Suggestions:

13) Observation: Arrival Procedure

Suggestion: Require students to only carry clear book bags

- This will make the security officers' job easier as they will be able to quickly assess the contents of the book bag
- School funds can be used to purchase these back packs for students that are unable to purchase them

Suggestion: Streamline the classroom dismissal process from the lunchroom

This is a suggested procedure. Please review and adapt it for Phoenix if you choose to.

- Students are ushered into the gymnasium (or playground) to their designated line up spots. WITH their teachers (very important)
 - I would suggest that they line up according to their classes. I would also suggest that their 1st period teachers assign them numbers. The easiest way to do this is to assign them the number as it corresponds to their grade books (alphabetically). (i.e. Jose Benito would be #1 and Jessica Ventura would be #25)
 - Present the "line of the day" with a sign that clearly identifies them so that they will receive positive reinforcement.
 - When the procedure is introduced, clearly explain the expectations during the process and let them know how they can earn "line of the day" status.
- The administrator gives the "Attention/Silence Signal" (to be developed by you. It might be one long whistle, a musical note, a raised hand, 2 fingers, etc.)
- Say "Good Morning" to the students and project a cheerful demeanor for them.
 - This will allow them to have a positive interaction with the administration at the very beginning of the day that does not include a disciplinary infraction.
- Communicate the morning announcements for the day/week of reminders and events.
- Ask the students, "Who Are We?" (or some question that will lead into reciting the school pledge/mantra that was created *specifically* for them.)
- After they are done, the students proceed upstairs with their teachers.

- This creates a separate “beginning of the day” aside from going through the metal detectors and starting their day. We want to create a unified, pleasant start of the day that will set them up for success.

Suggestion: Streamline the classroom breakfast procedure

- Have 1 student go to get the breakfast for each classroom. This will cut down on the “buddy system” that often causes wandering in the halls.
- Send a standard number of breakfast sets to the classroom.
- Teachers will send a note with the 1 student if they need additional food/supplies
- Have a SPECIFIC time for breakfast to end.
 - Communicate this and monitor it to increase instructional time.
- Require the blue lunch bags and unused food/supplies to be placed outside of the classroom door by a SPECIFIC time. Monitor this until it becomes a routine.
- Assign a lunch room aide to collect the bags from each floor. If this is not possible, assign ONLY 2 students (from different classes) for each FLOOR or WING of the building to take the bags back. This will cut down on all of the wandering hall traffic at random times under the guise of returning the breakfast.

14) Observation: Lunch Procedure

Suggestion: Establish lunch time expectations and procedures

- Require administrative presence at least at the beginning of each lunch period. They may need to stay the entire time to minimize conflict until the procedure is firm.
- Ask teachers to stay with their classes for lunch for at least the first 25 minutes to minimize conflict until the procedure is firm.
- School aides will remain the entire time to reinforce the lunch procedure.
- Use the “Attention/Silence” signal in the cafeteria when needed.
- If they take too long to be quiet, you may say something like “When I Wait” and teach them the procedure of answering you with “We wait.” This may mean that time is shaved off of something that they enjoy.
- Use the last 20 minutes of lunch for STRUCTURED activities led by City Year or recess depending on the class.
 - City Year can focus on tutoring in a different core area each week and choose an alternate activity on Fridays. Suggestion: Monday-Math /Tuesday-Language

Arts/Wednesday-Social Studies/Thursday-Science/Friday – Silent Reading (send down leveled books from the library for the students to read and return)

Suggestion: Streamline Seating Procedures

- In addition to having designated tables for each class, you may want to consider having girls eat separate from boys if you think that it might be useful.
- Call them up by table to get their lunch. You already do this, so this is great!

Suggestion: Require students to clean up after they eat

- About 5 minutes before they transition to the City Year tutoring session/recess (specific time . . .) Assess that the students are done eating and signal them to dump their trays and return to their seats. (This signal can be developed by you, but it **MUST** be taught to the students. You may want to use 2 short whistles, etc.)
- First, they walk along side of the walls to dump and then walk around the tables back to their seats (think of when you make your drop in the basket at church).
- Next, students sit quietly in the "Scholar" position (hands folded or something that is appropriate) to show they are ready to go outside or transition to the next activity.
- ***Quote from another principal.*** "During my lunch period, I tell the students 'Enjoy your recess boys and girls,' and they will respond, 'Thank you for the privilege Ms. Green', because I make it clear that recess is a privilege -not a right."
- Once they have had about 20 min of recess/tutoring/reading, use a signal (develop it and teach it to the kids, i.e., blow the whistle 3 short times) for them to return to their lineup spots (line up in classes) that are marked on the ground.
- If they don't go outside for recess, maybe they can stay in a play basketball, or some other ORGANIZED activity.
- Have teachers pick them up from there.
- This is only for classes that have recess. If they will stay in and be tutored, then the same ending procedure will work for them to line up and be received by their teachers.

15) Observation: Dismissal Procedure

Suggestion: Streamline how the students are dismissed

- Administration: Take 20-30 minutes at the end of the day for about a week (or as long as it takes you to firm up the dismissal procedure) to TEACH the dismissal procedure.
- Require teachers to walk students downstairs to the lunchroom/gym as they will have determined where each student should go.
- Designate the cafeteria for bus riders. Have them sit at the table that coincides with their bus number.
- Designate the gym for car riders and walkers.
 - Assign each car rider a “Car Number” to be displayed in the windshield of the car.
 - Assign a teacher to write down the car number and call the student’s number (using the radio) into the gym to have the student dismissed.
 - This will ensure that students are being picked up by the correct people as the school is responsible for getting the students where they need to go.
 - Any parent/guardian that enters to pick up the child will need to sign the child out. You might want ask for ID and document it.
- This may seem tedious . . . but it will keep the students secure. It will also cut down on the amount of time that they are unsupervised outside and exposed to random community members that may be there to cause them harm (i.e. gang members)
- An administrator must oversee this process.
- Have the security officer stands in the school yard to keep the students moving so they don't linger around and assign someone to stand near the bathrooms so that the students don't play in.
- Designate a certain area for busses ONLY so that they will be able to get in and out in a timely manner.
- Ask for teachers to rotate to stand out at the “bus loop” to call the bus numbers and have the students come out to the bus.

16) Observation: School Spirit

Suggestion: Create a sense of unity by including school colors

- Meet with the gang task force at the police department to find out what your options are for school colors.
- Begin to integrate them into the school. Possibly have the hallways repainted with the colors.
- Explain to the students what a PHOENIX actually is and tell them how it may apply to them. Regardless of the situation, they can rise up and determine their futures!
- Have a HUGE Phoenix displayed.
- Include the school pledge/mantra on school shirts using the NEW school colors.

Suggested School-Wide Expectations:

To be developed by you and your faculty, enlarged, laminated and placed in classrooms and hallways. Five is typically a good number.

1. Students are seated and completing the “Welcome Work” by 7:55 (or whatever time you choose).
 - “Welcome Work” is the same thing as a “Do Now” it is simply a bit more inviting.
2. Students will carry and use their agenda/homework notebooks daily.
3. Students will demonstrate respect for other people and property.
 - Understand that each of these children likely have different interpretations of the word “respect”. It would probably be helpful to have the teachers explain their definition of respect to the students. This is not always something that is taught at home.
4. Students will follow the classroom procedures that EACH teacher has in place.
 - Of course, this means that each teacher will need to have a classroom management plan on file.
5. Students will use the Phoenix Academy paper heading in all classes.
 - This will need to be developed with the teachers. Basically, everyone needs to decide what information MUST be on the paper heading. They will also need to decide on the location. Make note of things like, FULL name, legible handwriting, etc.

- This is a procedure that **MUST** be practiced, reinforced, and posted in every classroom as a reminder.
- Note: When the Pearson representative did her walk through while I was there on December 2, 2010 she mentioned that a teacher was “wasting time” by taking the students step by step through the paper heading procedures. I must very respectfully disagree with this perception. The only way that a teacher will be able to effectively teach a procedure is to Teach-Rehearse-and Reinforce it. Once the heading is developed and posted in each classroom, it can be used as a model for the students.
- It is vital that the heading will be the same for all classes because we are attempting to establish consistency.

Please ALSO develop at least 3 school wide hand signals. Enlarge them, laminate them and place them in all classrooms and hallways.

Examples:

1 finger = Needs to use the bathroom

2 fingers = Attention/Silence signal

3 fingers = Have to use the restroom

These are only examples. Please develop signals that will work for you and make sure that they are used SCHOOL-WIDE for consistency purposes.

Third Visit . . .

Introduction

I am excited about the progress that has been made at Phoenix!! This time I have asked Stacey Allred to accompany me so that we can go into the next layer of observations. After my initial visit I realized that as I focused on working with the administration directly, it would be a great asset to have some assistance in order to give detailed attention to the classroom teachers.

When Jeannine picked Stacey and me up this morning I found out that a major change had taken place at Phoenix. The head principal was on medical leave and had been on medical leave for quite a while. What this meant was that Shalonda Byas, the assistant principal, was running the school along with Jeannine and a newly hired academic coach.

This after school faculty meeting was VERY different from my first visit. While we were setting up, there was no flurry of caterers setting up a sophisticated line up of hot dishes. No, this time there were boxes of pizza and cups of soda. My first thought was “Uh-oh...will these teachers show up for pizza after having been treated to a lasagna feast last time?”

The BIGGEST difference between the two meetings happened when EVERY teacher showed up and stayed for the entire time. These teachers stayed long after the pizza was gone. They voluntarily stayed for a 3 hour after school meeting and did not leave until after 6pm. What was the difference? It wasn't the quality of the meal . . . it wasn't the teachers . . . it wasn't the students . . . the one factor that made the positive difference was the new head leadership! When Shalonda Byas was given the opportunity to run the school, the expectation spread through the school like wildfire! It really was pretty amazing.

Arrival

This time there were arrival procedures in place. Shalonda Byas and Mr. W (a teacher) were out in the freezing cold setting up cones and directing the traffic. They took it upon themselves to reroute the traffic so that the buses would be able to drop the students off without having to navigate through the cars. They were doing this in an effort to provide the students with a safe environment and decrease the possibility that the traffic would cause another unfortunate accident. They were being proactive instead of reactive.

In the cafeteria there is a school aide, who is only paid to be at the school for 2-3 hours a day. In spite of that, she was there each morning to watch the younger students that would sit in the cafeteria and eat breakfast while they waited on their teachers. She was also there during lunch time and I she was present at the after school faculty meeting. What does this mean? It means that her commitment to this school and these students superseded the reality that the district was actually only paying her for 2-3 hours a day. Amazing.

It is also clear that the students are now used to turning in their cell phones when they get to school as I did not hear one single complaint from them when they followed the procedure. They turned them in

and continued walking to class. Not running to class. Not standing in the hallways holding conversations and lingering around. They were going directly to class. Was this the same school? Could these be the same students? I am happy to say that YES they were. These students were literally craving the structure and once it was in place they followed it.

As I was walking upstairs to the front office I heard what was like music to my ears..."Good Morning Phoenix! Welcome to another wonderful school day. Here are your morning announcements..." Without realizing that I actually said it out loud, I said, "Yes!!" I was so happy to hear the sounds of improvement. This school has potential because they are open to suggestions and are willing to do what needs to be done. They have potential because they now have an administration that is willing to put the work in and support the teachers. By the way, Shalonda and Jeannine attended the meeting, helped serve the pizza, and stayed the entire time!

During the Day

Yes! I am SO excited! Teachers were using "Do-Now" assignments. They were using "Give me Five." There were hallway procedures, cafeteria procedures; teachers were walking their students to the buses. Could this be the same place? No programs were put in place. The school day had not been extended and the school year was still the same length. Yet, the change that I saw was remarkable and could be totally attributed to the strong school leadership and the power of their high expectations.

Now I must recap the "Room 206" situation. This was the classroom that had run away 3 teachers. Two of the teachers left the field of education all together and one of them actually had a nervous breakdown in the classroom. I was absolutely FLOORED to see that there had been a REAL turnaround in that classroom!!! Shalonda Byas hired Ms. Tabb. Ms. Tabb, the TEACHER was the difference!! The students did NOT change. Superman did not swoop down. The dirty, unorganized classroom was not removed. The curriculum did not change. The TEACHER changed. Oh my goodness!! Was I in the same room? Could this be the same classroom where trash was everywhere? The last time I was in this classroom there was trash and chaos everywhere! The pencil sharpener did not have a cover and there were huge piles of pencil shavings all over the window sill. There were students sitting in the back of the classroom passing a lemon slice back and forth as they each sucked on it and passed it to the next student. I could not figure out what subject was taught in the classroom because there was nothing in the classroom that would give me a clue...including what the "teacher" was talking about.

This was no longer simply "Room 206." This was now "Ms. Tabb's Classroom"!!! It was spotless. The desks were perfectly aligned. The bulletin boards were decorated and the room was organized. There was a "Student of the Month" section in the classroom that featured students that displayed exemplary behavior. The students came into the classroom, sat down, and immediately started working on the "Do Now" that was posted. They were acting like different children! Same students . . . different teacher!

Ms. Tabb walked around the classroom with a work belt on! What? I've never seen anything like this. The work belt had overhead markers, paper clips, index cards, etc. The belt contained everything that she might need as she walked around the classroom. There was no sitting behind the desk or planting herself in the front of the room. She circulated and helped each student individually. The students were

working in groups trying to help each other. It was like a totally different world!! This was even more evidence that the teacher is the difference in the classroom.

Fourth Visit . . .

Introduction

Wow!! A lot has changed over the past several months!

Shalonda Byas is now the principal at Farwell Middle School. However, this year it's a K-8 school for the first time. Why? Because last year DPS decided to close half of their schools for budgetary reasons. So, last year Farwell was a middle school but because the elementary school was closed, it is now a K-8 school. Needless to say, Shalonda has her work cut out for her...

Arrival

I arrived at Farwell School and went to the library to set up for the after school presentation with the faculty. Shalonda has invited me to the school because the only person that was allowed to come with her to this new school was Jeannine Lesch. This means that she has a totally new faculty of teachers. Farwell was previously a very low achieving school. Consequently, the previous administration was replaced by Shalonda. This is GREAT news for Farwell because Shalonda has the tools that they need to set up school wide procedures that will work! She took all of the work that we did at Phoenix and used it to start off "on the right foot" here at Farwell. It was evident from the moment that I walked into the school!

When I walked in the door I noticed that there were strips of blue painter's tape down the middle of the hallways. It only takes me a few moments to realize that these lines were actually "traffic lanes"! Shalonda did this so that each lane would be a "one-way" lane to streamline the increased traffic that would be in the hallways. Going from a middle school to a K-8 school would be challenging and she was clearly up to the challenge.

Remember my suggestions about students lingering in the hallways? That is NOT an issue here as Ms. Byas can be seen in the hallways with a megaphone telling the students where to go and counting down to make sure that they are in the right places. I am so proud of her and excited to see all of the work that we did come to fruition in this new school!!! I really can't accurately describe what that felt like. It's one thing to talk about procedures, but it is a purely magical experience to see them in place!! YES!!! There is hope!

The day of my presentation, Shalonda called the students into an assembly to communicate her expectations once again. The teachers already knew what they were and they had communicated them to their students. However, Ms. Byas took this opportunity to gather all of the students and tell them exactly how she expected them to follow all of the procedures that were in place. It was SUCH an exciting moment! The last time I was with Shalonda at Phoenix, I called Ed (the principal in NJ) and asked him about his beginning of the year assembly and he happily shared with me exactly what he did. I shared that information with Shalonda, and she put it in place at Farwell. Wonderful!!

Once again, as I was setting up for the presentation, the food was delivered. This time it wasn't even a hot meal! Uh-oh . . . will these teachers show up for sandwich wraps and pasta salad? YES! They did show up. Every single one of them showed up and even the teacher's aides, the other paraprofessionals, and the security guard showed up!! The faculty knew what Shalonda's expectations were and they were falling in line. During her faculty announcements, Shalonda mentioned an adapted version of the "Action Plan" that they will be using. She also mentioned the pink slips and the required bellwork. I was SO excited! These teachers stayed the entire time and took notes!

During the Day

I am happy to say that what I saw was nothing short of amazing!

- The students were in lines going down the hallways. They were using the "traffic lanes" and were not running in the hallways.
- When they arrived at school, although they still had to walk through the metal detector, they were met by a very warm and pleasant social worker that smiled and interacted with them as she searched their book bags, said kind words to them, and sent them on their way.
- Mrs. Byas was in the hallway "directing traffic" so that the students knew where to go.
- The older students used different entrances than the younger students so that the younger students did not have to feel intimidated.
- The school was clean! The floors were sparkling!
- The school expectations were posted in the hallways.
- All of the teachers were using "Do Nows."
- They all had agendas on the board.
- All of the teachers were on time.
- The teachers were in the hallways helping to "direct traffic."
- The students were moving with a sense of urgency and purpose. They looked like they knew where they were going and they knew why they were going.
- There were purposeful morning announcements and very few interruptions during the school day.

- Classrooms with over 60 students were still operated in an orderly manner!! Unbelievable!! These 7th and 8th grade students were all seated, following directions, and had their books out. They were working, listening to the teacher and trying their best to focus.
- Teachers are required to send documentation for ANY student that they send out of the classroom and are required to show evidence of classroom consequences prior to sending the student out.
- The principal has provided the teachers with a list of “non-negotiable items” to show her support. This means that she has highlighted certain issues that would be considered justifiable for sending a student out immediately.
- The dismissal procedures are excellent! Again, there are separate exits for the younger children which makes the dismissal process much more orderly. Also, the buses are separate from the car traffic. This means that the traffic can be monitored in a more organized manner. Teachers are also helping with the dismissal process. Not because they HAVE to (per union rules) but because they WANT to. Whew!! This is great!

The lesson in all of this . . .

- It’s not the condition of the school building that makes the difference . . .
- It’s not the money spent on hot meals at faculty meetings that makes the difference . . .
- It’s not the socio-economic status of the students that you teach or the part of town that they live in that makes the difference . . .
- It’s the ADMINISTRATION and the TEACHERS that make the difference in the school building!

I will remain committed to helping these schools as much as I can. Why? Because, like I mentioned earlier . . . Now that I know what’s happening in Detroit, I can’t act like I don’t.

It has been proven by the hard work and effort that Shalonda Byas and Jeannine Lesch have put into these schools, that consistency is the most precious gift that you can give to students who are depending on you every day to provide them with some of their most basic needs. I am inspired by the teachers and administrators in DPS who, despite the unimaginable class sizes, antiquated school buildings, gang infested communities, and inadequate staff, still find the energy and motivation to come to school each day and work hard for the children of Detroit. They are to be commended for their efforts and admired for their strength of character.

My hope for the future is that I will continue to assist the DPS administrators and teachers as they work to fine tune their school-wide and classroom level management plans. However, I would also like to begin shifting my focus towards lesson mastery and specific daily classroom objectives. I would like to help the teachers develop lessons and objectives that will invite the students to follow teachers each day down a path of discovery that ends with a clear understanding of the teacher’s expectations and learning that will help the students meet those expectations.

As a result of the work that I have done with these schools in Detroit, I am confident that, with the support of the administration and the dedication of the teachers, I can duplicate the same success at other schools. I am excited about the work that has been done and look forward to continuing to help other schools in the same way."