

The Survey Says: Conway is Getting Better

In 2006 the principal of Conway Elementary in Conway, New Hampshire registered his school to complete the School Community Survey and awaited the return of their data. The information in the School Community Index would reveal the school's Achilles heel in terms of how they were functioning as a school community. In April 2010, the survey was repeated, and the results were welcome news to the principal, his staff, and the families whose children attend Conway Elementary.

"When the first survey began in 2006 we were going through a challenging time as a school," the principal reported, "...and that challenge brought out the best in us as a school...When I was playing hockey [my dad] would say, 'Do your talking on the scoreboard, put the puck in the net.'" Believing in what the research says about student achievement and family engagement, Conway Elementary wanted the honest perceptions of teachers and families about the school in order to know what needed to be fixed. The principal stated, "What the survey does is give you an idea of what you're doing well and what you're not doing well. One of the things we identified was that we needed to be more consistent with homework; that was one of our improvement targets." Based on the results of their 2006 survey, Conway Elementary developed a strategic plan focused on homework, student achievement, and staff collegiality and morale.

Their plan involved all staff and included committees for math, science, social studies, technology, welcoming, and respect and responsibility. For the next few years the school went to work. They provided families with educational opportunities that helped them understand how they could support their children's academic success. Conway began using events already on the school calendar and gave them a fresh focus on literacy and intentionally linked the events to learning.

When Conway repeated the survey in 2010 they were clearly doing their talking on the scoreboard. Conway's principal said, "I was thrilled with the gains that this school community has made over the past couple of years." He continued, "The survey indicates stronger family support and a large boost in many areas including student achievement in reading and math along with morale among staff. In many ways, this is our report card as a school. Surveys completed by 90 percent of families and 100 percent of classroom teachers tell the real story. This is something you can't fudge - it is what it is." When asked about his proudest moment regarding the survey results, he replied, "There were a lot of positive things...The initial survey showed a lot of strengths, but it flushed out lots of issues." Conway dealt with the flushed out issues strategically, and the payoff was a strengthened school community, elevated assessment scores, elevated staff morale and an overall improved support system in which children can learn. "We kept the needs of our students first. When you make decisions in the students' best interests, everybody wins...This was a complete team effort. People in our building have worked their tails off trying to make this school better for the students, and this shows the hard work has paid off. I'm very proud of this staff and the work we have done together...We're not done yet by any means, we're just getting started."

Jones, L. (2010, April 7). The Survey Says: Conway El. is Getting Better all the Time. Conway Daily Sun.

School Community Network Resource Spotlight



Building Block: Connections

Resource: Family Night

Activities that bring school communities together while also reinforcing one or more of the school community's goals are especially valuable. A school-wide effort to elevate math scores or improve study habits doesn't mean that something else should be added to the plate - it means an existing framework can be used to do something we've always done in a little different way.

With the focus on achievement, schools can use existing events as opportunities to help parents learn how to better support their children's education. Families respond favorably to these opportunities and appreciate the school's efforts to include them in the learning processes of their children. School Community Network resources offer templates and suggestions for planning Family Nights that help connect families to families, families to schools, and families to their children's academic success.

The **School Community Network's** Family Engagement Tool (FET) is an online family engagement program developed by the Academic Development Institute and is part of the suite of services offered through the School Community Network. The Building Blocks referenced are the framework components common to School Community Network programs and the resources described are available to subscribers of any of the School Community Network programs. For more information visit our website, www.schoolcommunitynetwork.org.