Assessing Our Learning Community:
Staff Perceptions

May 9, 2017
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Introduction

A key aspect of Saskatoon Public Schools’ strategic planning process is to provide stakeholders in our organization (i.e., students, parents, staff, and the community-at-large) with an opportunity to offer their advice and input regarding the operation and direction of the division.

This report focuses on the results of the 2016-17 staff perception survey.

The Survey

This is the seventh systematic survey of our employee learning community. This biannual survey is important because staff members are provided with an anonymous venue to voice concerns and offer suggestions as well as a voice to contribute to the board’s strategic plan.

Traditionally, learning communities have been conceptualized in terms of small teams of professionals gathered together for a common interest (e.g., a book club, a professional growth network, grade-alike or department grouping, etc.) or as an individual school community. However, this survey sees all employees of Saskatoon Public Schools - members of the Saskatchewan Teachers’ Federation, Canadian Union of Public Employees, and out-of-scope personnel - as contributors to one large learning community focused on supporting student learning.

About half of the survey items ask respondents to reflect upon the frequency of certain behaviours among their workplace colleagues that would be typical in effective learning communities. The remainder of the survey invites respondents to rate their level of agreement with a series of statements referring to personal experiences that would be common among employees in effective learning communities. (Note: The margin of error is ±5% - meaning that differences from one year to the next must be at least 5% to be considered significant)
Our Results:

The results are reported in two sections: Behaviours and Workplace experiences.

Behaviours: this year and trends over time

Staff members were asked to indicate how frequently their workplace colleagues engage in eleven behaviours typical among learning community members. They were asked to rate the statements according to the following scale:

- Staff members rarely engage in what is described in the statement.
- Staff members engage in what is described once in a while.
- Staff members sometimes do what is described.
- Staff members do what is described fairly often.
- Staff members do what is described very frequently or almost always.

This year, statements related to a focus on student learning and assistance to each other received the highest ratings by respondents (see Figure 1). Note: results are expressed as the percentage of respondents whose response was (i) fairly often or (ii) very frequently or almost always.

- 92% felt that staff members are quick to provide assistance to each other when the need arises.
- 91% have a shared purpose focused on student learning.
- 87% also felt that staff members take collective responsibility for student learning.

Figure 1 – 2016-17 Staff Perceptions Survey Results (Behaviours)
Employee perceptions of six collegial and reflective behaviours saw statistically significant improvement in the percentage of respondents who said that key learning community behaviours happen very frequently or almost always this year as compared to 2015 in the items listed below. (See Figure 2) Note: 2017 results are very similar to 2011 and 2013 statistics – 2015 appears to have been an anomaly.

- Staff members use electronic resources and tools effectively.
- Staff members see failed initiatives as learning opportunities.
- Staff members’ informal staff room and/or hallway conversations are professional.
- Staff members have a shared purpose that is focused on student learning.
- Staff members view conflict as a learning opportunity.
- Staff members are trained adequately for implementation of new technologies.

Over the six years highlighted below, statistically significant changes in the frequency of learning community behaviour (very frequently, or almost always) include (see Figure 2):

- Staff members take collective responsibility for student learning. (5% increase)
- Staff members engage in reflective practice. (7% decrease)
- Staff members consider how their practices affect each other. (7% decrease)
- Staff members’ informal staff room and/or hallway conversations are professional. (6% decrease)

Figure 2 – Trends in staff ratings of the frequency of learning community behaviours over time (very frequently or almost always)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behaviours (very frequently or almost always)</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>2013</th>
<th>2015</th>
<th>2017</th>
<th>Difference from 2015</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Staff members make effective use of electronic tools and resources</td>
<td>30.9%</td>
<td>32.7%</td>
<td>21.5%</td>
<td>33.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff members see failed initiatives as learning opportunities</td>
<td>22.7%</td>
<td>22.2%</td>
<td>14.4%</td>
<td>24.7%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff members’ informal staff room and/or hallway conversations are professional</td>
<td>43.7%</td>
<td>42.3%</td>
<td>27.2%</td>
<td>37.3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff members have a shared purpose that is focused on student learning</td>
<td>61.5%</td>
<td>63.2%</td>
<td>51.2%</td>
<td>61.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff members view conflict as a learning opportunity</td>
<td>17.4%</td>
<td>17.2%</td>
<td>9.0%</td>
<td>17.3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff members are adequately trained when new technology is introduced</td>
<td>14.1%</td>
<td>11.9%</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>13.2%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff members are quick to provide assistance to each other when the need arises</td>
<td>67.7%</td>
<td>64.1%</td>
<td>59.1%</td>
<td>63.1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff members take collective responsibility for student learning</td>
<td>58.2%</td>
<td>54.6%</td>
<td>50.3%</td>
<td>53.4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff members believe that they make a difference in the school division</td>
<td>35.1%</td>
<td>33.6%</td>
<td>27.7%</td>
<td>30.4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff members regularly reflect on their professional practice to make sure that they are as effective as possible in their role in the division</td>
<td>43.0%</td>
<td>37.1%</td>
<td>34.6%</td>
<td>35.6%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff members consider how their practices affect each other</td>
<td>29.4%</td>
<td>23.4%</td>
<td>21.7%</td>
<td>22.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Workplace experiences: this year and trends over time

Staff members were asked to rate the extent to which they agree with each of nine statements regarding their experiences in the workplace. They were asked to use the following rating scale:

- Strongly disagree,
- Disagree,
- Don’t know,
- Agree, and
- Strongly Agree.

This year, employees tended to be positive about many aspects of their workplace experience (see Figure 3). For example,

- 96% agree or strongly agreed that they enjoy working at their workplace.
- 89% agree or strongly agreed that they have had the opportunity to learn and grow professionally.
- 72% agree or strongly agreed that they have access to the support and materials necessary to perform their duties.
- 71% agree or strongly agreed that they have sufficient opportunities for professional development.

There were two statements that used a reverse scale designed to elicit strong levels of disagreement (we hope that employees strongly disagree with them).

- 93% of staff disagreed or strongly disagreed that they do not know what is expected of them at work, and
- 82% of staff strongly disagreed or strongly disagreed that their supervisor seems indifferent toward them as a person.

Figure 3 – 2016-17 Staff Perceptions Survey Results (Workplace ratings)
One workplace experience item saw a statistically significant change this year as compared to 2015. (See Figure 4)

- Over the last year, I have had the opportunity to learn and grow professionally. (11% decline)

Since 2011, staff ratings of their workplace experiences have tended to decline or stay about the same in all areas with respect to those who strongly agree with the statements in this survey (Note: two items in this section used a reverse scale and a decline in ratings means there has been an improvement in employee perception). (See Figure 4) The items for which there were significant changes include:

- I have had the opportunity to learn and grow professionally. (9% decrease)
- I enjoy working at my workplace. (6% decrease)
- There is adequate funding for professional development. (13% decrease)
- I have sufficient opportunities for professional development. (9% decrease)

Figure 4 – Trends in staff ratings of their workplace experiences over time (Strongly agree or agree)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>2013</th>
<th>2015</th>
<th>2017</th>
<th>Difference from 2015</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Over the last year, I have had the opportunity to learn and grow professionally</td>
<td>43.5%</td>
<td>43.9%</td>
<td>45.5%</td>
<td>35.0%</td>
<td>↓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have access to the support and materials necessary to perform my duties</td>
<td>25.9%</td>
<td>23.9%</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>21.1%</td>
<td>←</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I enjoy working at my workplace</td>
<td>60.3%</td>
<td>61.7%</td>
<td>58.8%</td>
<td>54.4%</td>
<td>←</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is adequate funding for professional development</td>
<td>17.0%</td>
<td>11.2%</td>
<td>8.5%</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>←</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The stress level in my workplace is high</td>
<td>20.3%</td>
<td>27.1%</td>
<td>25.5%</td>
<td>22.1%</td>
<td>←</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have sufficient opportunities for professional development</td>
<td>26.7%</td>
<td>23.1%</td>
<td>20.6%</td>
<td>17.5%</td>
<td>←</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the last seven days, I have received constructive feedback about my work</td>
<td>15.3%</td>
<td>11.9%</td>
<td>18.8%</td>
<td>17.8%</td>
<td>←</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My supervisor seems to be indifferent about me as a person</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
<td>←</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do not know what is expected of me at work</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
<td>←</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Reflections on Staff Satisfaction:**

Overall, Saskatoon Public Schools’ staff members are generally positive about the quality of their work lives. While there has been a decline in strong agreement in some areas, employees tend to enjoy working at their work places and they have a shared purpose that is focused on student learning. However, they also identified some challenges in terms of ensuring that all staff members feel that they have a voice in school division decisions and that they are equipped with the knowledge and confidence that they can cope with the ever-increasing pace of change.

This year, our staff members indicated that they were satisfied with the collaborative atmosphere and see themselves and their colleagues as having a shared responsibility for student learning in their workplaces. However, they were concerned about the level of support available for self-directed personal and collective professional growth. We must also continue to encourage everyone to see themselves and others as both teachers and learners and to value both conflict and unsuccessful initiatives as learning opportunities.

Over time, we have seen statistically significant declines in strong positive opinions about seven elements of a learning community. Two of these declines are connected to interpersonal and working relationships (considering how actions affect each other and ensuring that informal conversations are professional). The remainder of the declines focus on the resources available for professional growth.

In the future, we will be challenged to find creative solutions to the perceived shortfall in opportunities for professional learning. Currently, we are reviewing the professional learning structures and processes we followed in 2016-17 and considering alternatives for the 2017-18 school year. As has always been the case in Saskatoon Public Schools, we see challenging times as opportunities for improvement and growth. We are confident that the positive relationships we have with our employee groups and the collaborative nature of the planning processes we follow will continue to enhance our growth-oriented professional learning community.

We must continue to build trust and to communicate with our staff members not only to improve their experiences as employees in the division but also to encourage them to grow and learn together as colleagues. We must also continue our work toward enhancing leadership capacity at all levels of our organization to support employees and Board priorities. Nevertheless, many respondents are looking forward to the opportunities ahead as we strive to meet the changing needs of students as they adapt to the conditions of the 21st Century information age.