

Formula for successful leadership in Crowley calls for collaboration and motivation

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There are a lot of moving parts in a large district like Crowley Independent School District, which is home to almost 16,000 students and 1,000 teachers across 24 campuses, as well as about 800 administrative staff.

In order to ensure that students succeed, Crowley ISD Superintendent Michael McFarland says it's important that district leaders take the time to ensure they've set their teachers and administrators up for success, too.

"Everyone plays a critical role in moving the district forward," McFarland explains. "I think that everybody has value, and so when I'm having conversations with people, one of the things I'm trying to do is assess what their aspirations are and what they value, and really, what they're passionate about. Once I can figure that out, my job is to try and place them in positions where they can help to achieve our district goals by following those passions."

That can manifest in a number of ways, he says. Some people in the district are really good with parents and love to be out and engaging with folks in the community. Those are the ones McFarland says will serve as liaisons who work to remove barriers for kids and parents to make sure students are getting to school every day.

Others in the district are great at making kids feel welcome, and enjoy creating activities and clubs for students. That's important, McFarland says, because when kids feel connected to school they show up. And if they don't feel connected for whatever reason, they're going to fall behind.

"You need to have people in the building who understand that, and who have a passion for creating opportunities for kids to connect," he says. "It could be teachers who want to head afterschool clubs, or counselors, or principals who welcome kids each morning. We want to find the people with those skills who are passionate about using them, and put them in a place where they can."



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Dr. Michael McFarland, Superintendent

In order for things to work, the whole system has to be working in concert, McFarland explains. And in a perfect world, as long as everyone is playing their role and everybody is doing their part, then it works.

Breakdowns are bound to happen, however, and when they do it's important to seek out help to get things back on track.

When McFarland found that too many children were falling behind in their classes, it was determined that part of the problem stemmed from a lack of regular and expedited communication with absent students' families.

To help mitigate the issue, McFarland says the district is implementing The Achievement Initiative featuring Attention2Attendance (A2A). The program, developed by School Innovations & Achievement (SI&A), is an early warning and intervention system which tracks student attendance and sends letters home to families in a timely manner when their child is trending toward becoming chronically absent.

"Dr. McFarland is already ahead of the curve because he understands the importance of tapping into individual talents and passions," says Susan Cook, COO and Leadership Coach at School Innovations & Achievement. "When individual talents are combined with others' unique talents, they become unstoppable. Attendance has a direct connection to student achievement, and it takes a team with many different talents to ensure student success."

Indeed, collaboration is the cornerstone to decision-making in Crowley ISD, McFarland says.

"I always say that the answer is in the room," McFarland explains. "So often there are people within the local school community that have solutions to the challenges you're facing, and as leaders our job is to be good listeners and good talent scouts."