

Hopewell Elementary School
Taunton, Massachusetts



TRANSCRIPT: “EMPOWERING STAFF”

CANDYCE WALTERS, TITLE I READING SPECIALIST: I do believe the leadership in this building is *critical* to its success. With the grade level meetings, if we have a problem, he is right there to help us solve it, so that we are able to get to the task of teaching. He takes all those issues that may take away from teaching, and he handles it so that we don’t have to waste our time with our students handling those difficult situations. The fact that he trusts us to do the best for our students means an awful lot. He values our professionalism in that we work together to maintain the highest level for our students and it continues to go higher and higher.

JANET CARMO, TITLE I READING SPECIALIST: The success of this school isn’t just the programs. Yes, we have great programs here. But I think it’s the way that our staff uses these programs and how we have just an immense amount of enthusiasm. Here if someone says, “Do you want to try this?” You don’t hear moans of “Oh no, another thing to do.” If we say do you want to try this, usually someone’s saying, “Well, I think I can do that. I’ll run the lead on that.” And we have extremely strong leadership. We have a leader who will say to us, if you have an idea and you can show me its merit, I will let run you with it. We always know we have him in our corner. Mr. Quigley has a wonderful immediate staff, he has a guidance counselor who is just so excellent at her job; he has a wonderful assistant principal who puts in many, many extra hours, and he has an administrative assistant who helps him run the building effectively, and I think that team of four really shows its worth here.

“Staff” Means Everybody

THOMAS QUIGLEY, PRINCIPAL: I know I’m the boss but when people talk to me, I say I’m their colleague. I know I can pull rank. I know I can be the boss when I need to be their boss but I just try to create this truly collegial community family, if you will. I offer up everybody to go to staff meetings. And by the way, they are round table meetings we will actually sit in the round like the knights of old. I will just tell them what’s out there, maybe something coming from central administration, maybe something we need to consider, discuss, and maybe vote on. And then there will be open forum. There can be anything put out on the table for discussion and everybody is invited to that meeting.

In terms of staffing, you can call it support staff but really we have teachers and then we have quote unquote teachers, and let me explain. There's a group of individuals in the building called paraprofessionals or teacher assistants. They've been through some professional development. Also, there are offerings throughout the year they may get involved in. You have these individuals who come into a classroom, typically in the second, third, and fourth, there are one to two teacher assistants per grade here at Hopewell and we're going to treat everybody like first-class citizens, and not second class. That became a little controversial, because I wanted to see two teachers in the classroom, if there's a teacher assistant available—and by the way I roll lunch and recess aides into this too. There are some times when they are not at lunch and recess, so what I've been able to do is the put them in the classroom from when they first arrive and until the last minute they leave.

So rolling these two sets of individuals into one, I told my staff they are going to be considered teachers. And the controversy became where, remember, you have a degreed teacher and all of a sudden you may have somebody's that's only taken some paraprofessional courses. And I think initially that there, you know, there wasn't a big upset, but there was—you could hear a little grumbling, a little rumbling. What happened was—a blessing. I think everybody swallowed hard and said, "Let's try this." In terms of the teachers, all of a sudden they realized, "Oh, this individual is gonna be a tremendous resource for me."

My ultimate goal was to take away those menial chores that they used to do. And let's face it, it's reproduction, it's lamination, and things to that effect. If need be, *I'll* do it, or we'll get volunteers in here to do it, to free you up, to get you in the classroom and you work side by side with that teacher. And it's just been fascinating to see the personal and professional growth of these individuals.