

Teacher Real Talk: Is this School Right for Me?

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What is School Culture?

IS

- › One vision systematically implemented
- › Consistency of systems and language
- › Virtue building
- › Details
- › Staff culture

Is NOT

- › Motivational speeches
- › Statement of values
- › Mission and vision statements

'Culture hacks' to Analyze School Culture

Data (ask for it from the main office or ops mgr!)

- › Attendance and uniforms
- › Homework (completion and accuracy)
- › Teacher retention
- › Academic achievement
- › Family and community engagement events

Aesthetics

- › Walls and outside showcases
- › Floors, hallways, and bathrooms
- › Bulletin boards (inside classroom)
- › Teacher workspaces and offices

Tactic 1: Conversations

Scholars

- › If you could change one thing about your school, what would it be? (**red flag**: systemic functions that are broken vs 'school starts too early')

(**red flag**: they talk mostly about the kids)

Teachers

- › What makes you want to come here everyday?

School leaders

- › Describe your leadership (**good**: people & teacher-centric; authentic & honest)
- › What are your top, foundational priorities? (**good**: teacher quality/retention, continual improvement)

Tactic 2: Observations

Student-teacher 'talk ratio'

- › Are students taking ownership of learning? Are they controlling and leading the conversation?

Five star customer service

- › Is there an atmosphere of hospitality and courtesy? How stressed are teachers and how do they treat colleagues?

Student-teacher interactions

- › Sit back in the hallway and watch interactions. Is the tone positive/understanding? If it's discipline-related, is it warm and strict?

Walkthrough with school leader

- › What does a typical day look like? (**red flag**: no mention of in-classroom feedback, being present for arrival-lunch-dismissal, or ignores real-time issues that arise during walk)

Top Drivers of Teacher Satisfaction (June 2016 survey of 150 teachers)

1) Leadership, 2) School culture, 3) Academic Excellence, 4) Teacher Autonomy, 5) Teacher Development

Recommended Resources

- › *School Culture Rewired: How to Define, Assess, and Transform It* by Steve Gruenert and Todd Whitaker
- › *Practice Perfect: 42 Rules for Getting Better at Getting Better* by Doug Lemov
- › *Leverage Leadership: A Practical Guide to Building Exceptional Schools* by Paul Bambrick-Santoyo
- › *Driven by Data: A Practical Guide to Improve Instruction* by Paul Bambrick-Santoyo
- › *Real Talk for Real Teachers: Advice for Teachers from Rookies to Veterans* by Rafe Esquith
- › *The ONE Thing: The Surprisingly Simple Truth Behind Extraordinary Results* by Gary Keller
- › *Crucial Conversations Tools for Talking When Stakes Are High* by Kerry Patterson