

GREENHOUSE SCHOOLS

How Schools Can Build Cultures Where Teachers and Students Thrive

2012

SUCCESSFUL TEACHERS MAKE SUCCESSFUL SCHOOLS.

Yet some schools are better than others at accelerating student learning by developing and keeping great teachers, even compared to schools that serve the same population of students and have access to the same resources. We call these schools “greenhouse schools”—schools with carefully fostered cultures that help teachers and students reach greater heights. What are they doing differently?

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The short answer is that greenhouse schools accomplish what others only claim to do: they prioritize great teaching above all else.

That’s our conclusion after surveying more than 4,800 teachers in almost 250 schools across the country over the past two years. Although other surveys have helped describe certain elements of school culture, we focused on two questions that we felt had not yet been answered: What kind of school culture is most likely to increase retention of the best teachers and improve student learning? And what concrete steps can principals take to create that culture in their own schools?

In the report we explain what we have learned from greenhouse schools across the country, and how principals can put those lessons to use in their own schools right now.

HERE'S WHAT WE FOUND:

- 1 Teachers want schools with a strong instructional culture—a culture that fosters great teaching.** They value schools where the entire faculty shares a clear vision of excellent instruction, and where school leaders focus on helping all teachers reach their full potential in the classroom.
- 2 Schools with strong instructional cultures retain more of their top teachers.** This is especially true among traditional public schools (as opposed to charter schools), where a weak instructional culture means a school could expect to lose twice as many effective teachers as greenhouse schools.
- 3 Schools with strong instructional cultures help students learn more.** Compared to schools with weak instructional cultures, the average student proficiency rates at greenhouse schools were 21 percentage points higher in math and 14 percentage points higher in reading.
- 4 A stronger instructional culture is within reach of any committed school leader.** School cultures don’t develop by accident. In examining the practices of schools that have developed strong instructional cultures, we identified several specific steps school leaders can take to build a stronger culture in their own schools, from hiring early and selectively to observing teachers at work more frequently.
- 5 Dramatic improvements in instructional culture are possible—sometimes in just one year.** We know this because we’ve seen schools do it during the course of our research. The keys are to diagnose areas for improvement in instructional culture, create and consistently implement an action plan based on the successes of nearby schools, and monitor progress throughout the year.