

Tracking and improving the culture and climate in our district

Satchel Pulse is designed specifically for school districts. Pulse provides school and district leaders with powerful insights regarding the culture and climate of their schools. Real-time feedback is gathered and reported in a user-friendly manner. Pulse solutions and services are designed to give leaders the information, tools, and resources to make meaningful improvements to their culture and climate.

Background

Hickman Mills C-1 School District (HMC-1) is a school district headquartered in Kansas City, Missouri, with 15 schools serving 5,600 Students and 460 Staff. The district has been using Pulse for 18 months, since July 2019, and have found that their teacher turnover rate has reduced since implementation. We spoke with Casey Klappmeyer, the Associate Superintendent, HR & Accountability.



Casey Klappmeyer,
Associate Superintendent,
HR & Accountability.

Hickman Mills C-1 School District

What was the main challenge that led you to speak to Pulse?

As an urban district, one of the things we experience is an annual high turnover of certified teaching staff. We had tried to improve this and refine our exit surveys to get better insights from staff when they leave the district. However, we didn't know the issues they had until they left the school and by that time it was too late to fix it. When we made the changes in the next school year and then still had a continual high turnover we were constantly dealing with a different population of employees that had different issues. We were going on what they felt like when they left but that may not be the issue now in the classroom with different teachers employed to replace them.

I had it on my radar to find ways to make the school environment better and I was asking myself "How can I

gather more real-time information?" and "What are the staff really feeling about the school culture and climate?" Culture and climate were constantly cropping up as one of the top three factors that played into the staffs' decision to leave the district.

Multiple vendors were out there that provide those services but to me, I was drawn to Pulse. I had a detailed comprehensive walk-through of what Pulse can do for us. To me it is very user-friendly and not just for me, I was looking at this from a building perspective and something that is easiest as possible for them.

Day to day I knew I needed something for my building principals to get into, they need to know what feedback they are getting and how to change that in their building. The interface for Pulse was the most user friendly I had seen out of all the vendors. I didn't want to feel like I was piling more on to my building level Principals but the payoff was well worth the investment and time.

"Last year, we had the least amount of resignations"

What made Pulse stand out compared to other vendors?

We love the ongoing support we receive, the immediate responses and you make the effort to check in on us even when I don't reach out. The support has improved

throughout our time with Pulse. We appreciate your responsiveness to feedback and you are constantly refining the product to make it easier to use. When you have a true partner when you purchase a product you are more likely to keep using it and to see its relevance. The Principals have taken well to it and are able to self learn through the web series. I find that within our current long term vendors, Pulse really does stand out because of the ongoing support we receive, the immediate responses and you make the effort to check in on us. You constantly reach out to support our working partnership and make the tool even better for us.

What were the main goals that you wanted to achieve with Pulse?

We wanted to address the issues that crop up with our school culture and climate and to reduce the teacher turnover rate. We also wanted to improve the overall school environments from an HR perspective, so staff feel like there is a positive atmosphere in their workplace. We want staff to be happy to come into work, and if there are issues they know we are responsive to their feedback and we change things when staff feel a certain way.

“The Principals love to share data with us.”

How would you describe the onboarding process?

Everything was set up for us in the system, we had a really good reach out here and lots of helpful information to use. I built powerpoints to inform District level leaders, Principals, and Teachers about Pulse and most of the information I used for this was provided by Pulse. That level of support was great, Pulse sent me lots of information for the rollout and built it up so our staff were fully informed.

What are your highlights from working with Pulse in your second year?

Many of my building leaders are really taking this on and are engaged with it. Principals are looking at the data on Pulse and asking if they make certain actions would they see a change, creating conversations we would have never had before Pulse. This lets me know the staff are seeing it as a useful tool. Principals are saying that they love having this data now because before Pulse they would be trying to guess the feeling in the school and have informal conversations with staff to get a feel of what staff were thinking. Having the data now allows us to know exactly what we need to do to make the building feel like a better place for staff to work in.

The majority of Principals that I address at each leadership meeting are always presenting the district picture of where we are at with the Pulse data, they highlight lowlights and things we need to focus on. The Principals love to share their data with us and get excited about the increase in participation rates!

You never know when you buy a product at the district level how the Principals will take it, overall 90% of my administrators see this as a useful tool that gives them vital information about their staff that they didn't have before Pulse.

How did the district adapt to using Pulse?

They adapted very well to Pulse. I sent out an email everyday building it up to the staff, giving them snippets of information. We rolled out a communication protocol before starting sending out the surveys telling staff how the data will be used, how this is going to make a difference, how it influences informed decisions, and how to understand the data. Staff knew exactly what it was and how it would help, why it's important, and what we will do with the time you invest with the data to make changes.

In the time that you've been using Pulse what have been your results?

Building by building, we were provided with great insights, showing how the leadership was, if there was a disconnect between the leadership and staff. The supposed disconnect that we felt at the district level, I now have data to sit and talk with the building Principal and discuss this. That has helped us to address this and have critical conversations with the building leadership. With the feeling of disconnect, we now have the data in front of us, here's what your teachers are saying, how they feel, and now we can agree on the changes needed to make progress.

We can now keep a mental Pulse on our building staff. Due to the current pandemic, Pulse has been really informative for us, to know how teachers are feeling working from home. Some of the lowest scores are related to personal things such as exercising, not being able to go outside as much and what Pulse has done for us has shifted the way we look at the staff. We are reminding staff that we have employee assistance programs, the Pulse data has triggered us to continually remind staff that programs are out there. Pulse has helped us to be more targeted with the emails and the resources that we send out because we are now aware of how they are really feeling. When our staff are feeling stressed and anxious, we send out resources focused on self-care and well-being.

Has Pulse helped solve your initial challenge with high teacher turnover?

With the 1 year of data that we do have, last year we had the least amount of resignations and retirements within the last five years. I'd like to think there are multiple moving parts that contributed to this, actions that the Principals put into place and these changes made teachers stay with us. We have only seen positive results with Pulse, we are now moving in the right direction.

Did Pulse change the way you worked in the district?

The Pulse data allows us to set priorities in terms of which issues need addressing first because the data shows which issues are most pressing and shows us different teacher perspectives that we didn't even have before.

Pulse gives you a clear view of how your staff are really feeling about the district, we never had this insight before. When making leadership decisions we can now look at a Pulse Pillar that is linked in with the topic we are discussing and see exactly where we are at it with it.

It provides school and district leaders with a human perspective to our decisions, we're making decisions based on data about how our staff are feeling. We would not have this information before Pulse, we just went off how we thought they were doing, we didn't really know. Pulse provides us with a perspective that we did not have before. We now know how our staff are really feeling and can make improvements to the school/district based on this.

“The payoff was well worth the investment and time.”

What are you most impressed with when using Pulse?

The responsiveness is great, even when it comes down to tiny issues that become the more important things for me to solve, Pulse is always on hand. The monthly reports are great, I've just shared this with the Superintendent and he loves how helpful these are. Throughout the partnership, things just keep getting better.