

Building Positive School Culture: 20 Ideas From Principals

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School or work environments are like home environments—it doesn't take long to figure out if you are in a happy, productive place or not.

Last week I was in Oklahoma City for a meeting with our principal association when we were each asked to share at least one idea on building positive environments from each of our schools.

It was so encouraging that I wanted to share them with you. Here are 20 ideas from 20 principals to inspire you to try something new in your school or organization:

1. Enjoy a Cheeseburger Day for teachers.

On National Cheeseburger Day, the school secretary called Sonic HQ and had 90 cheeseburgers and drinks donated for staff. They loved it! —*Chris LeGrand, Guthrie High School*

2. Start a book club.

Teachers meet at a local restaurant one night a week to discuss ideas/chapters from their book. At the first meeting, to discuss [Teach Like a Pirate](#), the teachers all dressed up like pirates! —*Alan Baker, Cleveland High School*

3. Have fun together.

Playing team building games to improve school culture. “Two Truths and a Lie” bring out some hilarious and insightful information about one another. —*Liz Burns, Central Middle School, Broken Arrow*

4. Film your classes and play the footage back on your lobby TV.

Students love to see themselves on camera and it showcases good practices happening throughout the building. —*Lorraine Caldwell, Poteau High School*

5. AVID ideas are great.

Design an “Acceptance Letters” bulletin board and display copies of senior letters each time one is accepted to college or post-secondary opportunities. Have each teacher display college banners by their classroom doors. —*Renae Dozier, Grove High School*

6. Tweet at least one positive image a day.

It is a way for everyone to showcase great things happening at your school. —*Rob Miller, Jenks Middle School*

7. Provide a free service (like a masseuse) for your teachers.

Sulfur Oklahoma's Artesian Hotel sends a masseuse to the school throughout the year. Teachers love it! —*Clete Cole, Sulfur High School*

8. Encourage teachers to be in the halls between every class greeting students.

This simple step increases a positive environment for the whole school. —*Gary Ferguson, Tahlequah High School*

9. Reward students.

A local bank hands out gold coins to every student who make advanced scores on EOI's and popsicles for every student who passes. –*Clay McDonald, Piedmont High School*

10. Model for students.

Each Friday, teachers are encouraged to wear something that is related to their previous college experience to encourage students; teachers decorate doors with alma-mater paraphernalia. – *Debra Thomas, Extended Educational Services Oklahoma City*

11. Provide off-campus lunch rewards.

Each week the office awards off-campus lunch passes for students who are passing all classes, have no discipline referrals, and have perfect attendance. –*Alan Bryant, Idabel High School*

12. Use teacher leaders to present building priorities at meetings and in teams.

Grow leaders from among your own teachers. Teachers love to learn from one another. –*Teresa Wilkerson, Mustang High School*

13. Share a good book.

[Entertaining an Elephant](#) by William McBride inspired a discouraged veteran teacher to recommit to a positive attitude about students and teaching. –*Keith Campbell, Kingfisher Middle School*

14. Hand out positive behavior referrals.

Teachers “write up” students for good actions. They are called into the office for kudos and parents are called for positive feedback. –*Brett Hill, Freedom Public School*

15. Team up students.

High school students pair up with elementary students in need to take shopping and to McDonald's at Christmas. –*Scott Lowrance, Byng High School*

16. Give door prizes.

Have drawings for students and teachers to win door prizes throughout the entire year. –*Joe Billington, Yukon High School*

17. Professional dress-day-of-the-week.

One day a week, students and teachers come extra-dressed up to demonstrate professional behavior. Also when asked about your school, you should say, “Every day is a great day!”. –*Debbie Pearce, Altus High School*

18. Start a hospitality team.

This year when adding 18 new teachers, a hospitality team of veteran teacher created a monthly theme and provide treats each month to all new teachers to make them feel welcomed and appreciated. –*Cathy Walker, Stillwater Middle School*

19. Build relationships.

It reduces disciplinary challenges; choose students of the month. Each year a student of the year is rewarded with an IPAD. –*Doug Davis, Burns Flat Junior High*

20. High-Five Fridays.

Every Friday, student leaders are stationed at every door to greet every student to school. It's a great way to start their day and celebrate Fridays! –*Emily Steele, Edmond Memorial High School*

Conclusion

Thanks, fellow principals, for the great ideas!

Plenty of research, [like this one from the New York Times](#), supports the fact that happier work environments result in more productivity.

When it comes to the culture of any organization, it really is the small actions over time that increase positive experiences for everyone.

Now It's Your Turn

Let's build the list by adding more ideas. What are some actions you are taking this year to build a positive climate with your team or school?

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