

EME 5601

INTRODUCTION TO INSTRUCTIONAL SYSTEMS

DR JOHN KELLER

**NEEDS ASSESSMENT OF “TEACHER
TURNOVER” AT VAN BUREN MIDDLE
SCHOOL.**



SUBMITTED BY:

Jesse Gentile

October 22, 2007

Overview

The following document includes a needs assessment plan designed to address the problem of the high rate of teacher turnover at Van Buren Middle School in Hillsborough County Florida.¹ Van Buren has experienced a historically high level of teacher turnover through the years which has contributed to the low performance of the school. Van Buren received a D in 2006-07 on an A-F rating of Florida schools. Teacher turnover is a peep-hole and litmus test for many of the issues that affect school achievement. This assessment is being conducted on behalf of a Hillsborough County community action group concerned about improving the lowest performing schools in the county. The assessment is being funded by state level grants and some funding from Hillsborough County schools. If the needs assessment leads to solutions at Van Buren it will serve as a pilot for other low performing schools (characterized by high teacher turnover) in the county.

Rationale

Many schools in the Hillsborough County School district have received low and failing grades (from state departments of education) multiple years in a row. Community opinion suggests, they are unproductive, unpleasant to work at, and therefore undergoing a constant state of employee (teacher) turnover. Van Buren Middle school is one of several such schools in Hillsborough County, Florida.

For several years now, the bulk of Van Buren students have failed to make adequate yearly progress on mandated state assessments of language arts, math, and science. Teachers working at Van Buren are stressed, irritable, and engage in regular complaining about “the way things are.” Parents report classroom and hallway climate to be tense; and order is tenuous at best. Arguments between teachers and students inside and outside of classes can be heard regularly through the day. Teacher absenteeism is high. Multiple teachers quit mid way through the year, and between the last and first days of school each year, Van Buren loses 23% of its teachers on average. This problem is a reflection of the national crisis in the US where it is reported that 50% of teachers leave the profession in the first five years of teaching.²

This needs assessment addresses the issue of teacher turnover. The gap between the Hillsborough County School’s (HCS) ideal of a 5% yearly teacher turnover and Van Buren’s 23% turnover rate is an indicator of a probable spectrum of other problems in the school. High teacher turnover is a serious problem for the following reasons: (1) Unnecessary stress is placed on administrative shoulders to find and hire an abnormally high amount of staff each summer. (2) New teachers do not do as well in their first years of teaching in a new environment. With a quarter of the school composed of new teachers each year, the school can not maintain a cohesiveness or school wide culture from year to year. (3) Teaching teams are constantly being readjusted and old staff

¹ NOTE: some of the data and specific issues in this assessment plan are imaginary. This document is intended as a class assignment only and not for use outside EME5601.

² From: www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/05/08/AR2006050801344.html -

are forced to spend an abnormal amount of time coaching and supporting new staff. (4) The constant turnover of teachers hurts student moral (students continue on at the school for 3 years), as they sense yet another adult in their life leaving them. (5) Most importantly, teacher turnover is a major factor in the larger issue of Van Buren's low performance. Ending its low performing history involves, in part, putting an end to "teacher flight" from this school and developing a staff willing to commit multiple years to school improvement.

Finally, looking at Van Buren middle school as a system reminds us that the factors which lay beneath the teacher turnover are connected to other problems plaguing the school. A needs analysis addressing teacher turnover is very likely to address many of the other school problems. From this perspective, this analysis of teacher turnover should prove useful in multiple discussions regarding improvement at Van Buren.

Feasibility

The cost of the analysis itself will be close to the cost of hiring one or two teacher aids to work at the school for a year. The impact of an analysis of this sort could bring returns far greater than its worth when viewed in terms of solving the problems that lead to high teacher turnover.

Calculating the cost of teacher turnover is difficult. When teachers leave a school, the county will simply fill the positions with new teachers each year at the same salary rates. While there may only be a slight increase in budget requirements due to hours spent by the principal to interview more teachers each summer, the real cost of teacher turnover is in terms of student achievement. Calculating the cost of a school full of low achieving students is nearly impossible. Yet the ripple effects of pouring hundreds of frustrated, undereducated, unprepared young adults into our cities high schools every single year is undeniably grave. When looked at from a mega (societal) level, the impact of low performing schools may cost a community hundreds of millions of dollars in terms of violent crimes, failure of neighborhood families to pull out of poverty (through the academic success of their children), decreased property values (thus decreased taxes), higher drop out rates, higher unemployment, and increased drain on city resources. Unlike certain products, business departments, or even companies, schools remain in societies for generations and play a key role in the quality of life for that society. (i.e. Families decide to move into or abandon a community solely on the performance of its schools.) Unlike companies, where needs analysis may translate into increased profits for the year, solving the problem of an underperforming school produces benefits that increase algebraically as hundreds of its students spread out into society and impact hundreds of other schools businesses and organizations one year after another.

The Plan

Objectives

- (1) Identify the leading causes of teacher turnover in the minds of all stakeholders (admin, faculty, staff, and parents). I.e. why are teachers quitting?
- (2) Trace these causes back to deficiencies in teaching skill, administrative/environmental problems (like paper work, in-service requirements, extracurricular demands, space/supplies), and social behavioral problems the students bring to school from the community.
- (3) Prioritize causes from greatest to least while eliminating false and insignificant causes of teacher turnover.
- (4) Discover the attitudes of current faculty and staff towards the possibility of improving Van Buren such that teachers want to stay on from year to year.
- (5) Determine what interventions have failed in the past.
- (6) Determine what resources might exist for solving various aspects of the problem (including identification of unused or neglected resources already available to Van Buren). This includes eliciting realistic solutions and suggestions from all stake holders.
- (7) Identifying the ideal resources that can/should be applied to the leading problems prioritized in objective 3.

Target Audience

The target audience of this needs analysis can be clearly divided into two groups: *Faculty*. Van Buren's approximately 75 faculty form the primary group who's behaviors and environment are being addressed and who will most significantly be impacted by any changes implemented. *Administrators*. Van Buren's principal and two assistant principles (as well as some administrators from the county level) will be crucial to the success and implementation of any changes resulting from the needs assessment.

Sampling procedures

Five primary groups of people interact at any given school: (1) administrators (2) faculty (3) staff (4) students and (5) parents. Each of these groups is a valid source of data for the needs assessment and will be sampled with a *stratified sampling* method according to the table below:.

(see next page for Sampling table)

Sample Group	Data Collection Method	Percentage to be Sampled (in parenthesis)
Administrators	In-Person Interview	3 (100%)
	Direct Observation	3 (100%)
Staff – one from each category (office, food services, janitorial)	Questionnaire	3 (10%)
Parents (parents of low, middle, high performing students from grades 6-8)	Phone interviews	9 (1<%) depends upon availability
	Questionnaire	NNA (100%) As many as will respond.
Students (two low, middle, and high performing students from each grade 6-8.)	Interviews	18 (2.3 %)
Faculty	Questionnaires	75 teachers (100%)
	Focus Groups	12 teachers deemed to be successful, moderate, struggling. and elective 3 each. (16%)
	Direct Observation	9 teachers deemed to be successful, moderate, struggling ; 3 each (12%)
	Exit Interviews (phone)	NNA – any staff that were formerly employed or quitting soon and are available for questioning.

Note. *NNA= number not available but will be determined during preliminary phase of the needs assessment

Data collection strategies and tactics

Interviews: due to the sensitive nature of certain issues that affect teachers quitting, including the reality that some of the reasons involve criticizing colleagues, parents or administrators, at least one category from each portion of the sample group will be spoken to one on one in private about why they believe or know teachers leave Van Buren at such a high rate. Where one on one interviews are not possible, phone interviews will be used. (Note: students and parents may need to be interviewed individually because they will be influenced by meeting in mixed ability focus groups and peer pressures).

Direct Observation: Both faculty and administrators will be observed for behavioral clues that will shed light on previously made comments about why teachers are leaving. Teachers will be observed in their classrooms as well as in

the halls. Administrators will be observed in the halls and in their interactions with faculty.

Questionnaires (Surveys): As many faculty, staff and parents as are willing will be given questionnaires designed to do the lions share of data collection about what has led to teachers quitting, their attitudes to the overall situation, as well as opinions on solutions to the problem.

Focus Groups: only teachers who have left Van Buren will be interviewed one on one over the phone. The rest of the teachers will be guided through a focus group session designed to reflect on some of the answers given in questionnaires and gleaned through interviews.

Instruments and protocols

The primary instruments created for the Van Buren needs analysis will be:

- (1) *Teacher questionnaire*
- (2) *Parent questionnaire*
- (3) *Faculty questionnaire*

(All three questionnaires will be given in the form of one easy to use online survey that uses survey logic to ask specific questions of each of the three groups depending the answers they give. Survey will be created and hosted online at SurveyMonkey.com – Survey monkey produces legible graphs and downloadable data of survey results from any location with an internet connection. Survey results can be printed out and used during interviews and focus groups. Parents will be motivated to participate in the survey through the offering of a \$100 best buy gift certificate to two parents who answer the survey.)

(4) *Interview outline form* for parent, exit, and student interviews. Phone interviews will be recorded. Students will be given a letter to take home to parents alerting them to the interview and the survey in #2.

(5) *Administrator observation rubric:* created from teacher comments about administration behaviors as well as county printed “best practices” literature.

(6) *Teacher observation rubric* created from already existing “best practices” documents available from Hillsborough County Schools.

If possible the right to video teachers instead of observing them will be highly sought after. The presence of a physical observer in the classroom most definitely affects the behavior of teachers for the better and thereby lowers the validity of in person observations as a measurement tool.

Protocol mandates that the administration pass through the approval of the Hillsborough County School system before arriving on the desks of Van Buren administrators. The director for middle schools permission will be required to approve the assessment. The buy in of administrative staff on campus is

clearly needed as the project will take a certain amount of time on campus and disrupt a certain level of day to day activities. . Cooperation of teachers will probably be the easiest to gain during the assessment due teacher culture. Most teachers are more than eager to share their frank opinions with anyone that will delve into the subject of teachers leaving schools like Van Buren. Good teachers have some of the highest job security anywhere, and teachers who are about to quit have only to gain from an assessment like this.

Van Buren administrators will need to be consulted for advice on where and how to go about the assessment in the least disruptive manner. Approval letters for phone and student interviews will need to be provided by the school.

Procedure (implementation plan)

(1) Briefly survey educational literature and needs assessments for explanations and ideas about why teachers leave the profession. This will create a broad outline for the assessment and provide various topics to begin exploring when the assessment begins on campus. Contact the county with assessment outline and request approval. Speak with the most appropriate county administrator about factors leading to teacher turnover in Hillsborough County schools. Get their guidance on the best way to go about the assessment.

(2) Conduct planning meeting with Van Buren administrators about the schedule and execution of the assessment. Request guidance on how to contact necessary students, teachers, staff, and parents at various points in the assessment. Review the assessment outline with administrators and seek agreement on assessment calendar.

(3) On another day, conduct administrator interview using questions created from research in step 1.

(4) As early as possible, hold a brief faculty meeting or use school email to inform teachers of the presence of assessment staff on campus and a general calendar of assessment events on campus. Consider passing out a friendly postcard and “treat” in all teacher boxes as means of communication. It is vital to communicate to teachers that these observations are being used to study why teachers quit Van Buren and not to secretly “spy on them” so as to see if they are measuring up to state standards.

(5) Contact county for assistance in contacting former employees of Van Buren. Hold anonymous phone interviews with as many former employees as possible or until no new information is gleaned. Look for clues in these interviews to build teacher interviews from

(6) Using information from former staff interviews, administrator interviews and early research, create an online survey for faculty, staff and parents.

(7) Test the survey once or twice with a teacher and volunteer parent (one that is often on campus and easily contacted without a letter). Following adjustments to the survey, advertise it to teachers, staff, and parents via school email, newsletters, and take home letters. If possible seek for administrator approval to make survey mandatory for staff. Push for survey completion over a one or two week period. Send a reminder form home with students during week two for parents reminding them of reward gift card.

(8) Use data from teacher survey's (in addition to all previous data) to craft observation rubrics for observing administrators behavior towards teachers. Arrange to shadow administrators (multiple times during one week) during hallway times and to sit in on faculty/admin meetings in order to make observations. Avoid "following the administrator around" if possible.

(9) Conduct brief student interviews during the week teacher/parent surveys are being collected. Questions for this interview will have to be created generally from early research and administrator interviews.

(10) Use student/administrator interviews and county best practices pamphlets (along with any survey data coming in) to create teacher observation rubrics.

(11) If video permission is granted, teacher observations can begin early on in the project calendar and be saved for analysis after rubrics are created. If permission to video is not granted, observations will have to be conducted by assessment staff only after rubrics have been created.

(12) At some convenient time contact parents by phone to conduct phone interviews. Consider adding a question to the parent online survey requesting volunteers for a phone interview. *Seek out parents that have had multiple children attend the school and have a history with the school and thus more insight into past events any why some teachers may have left.*

13). Scan all data collected thus far to create effective focus group questions for teacher focus group. Provide motivational rewards, and incentives if possible to all teachers who attend the focus group. See if permission can be granted to allow it to count towards teacher in-service points.

14) At all points along the way in questionnaires, interviews, and observations, seek information on potential strategies, failed strategies, and unused strategies for addressing the problems leading to teacher turnover.

15) Schedule independent or joint meetings to review and analyze all collected data with county administrators and Van Buren administrators. Ask if any crucial sources of data or information have been left out.

16) Write up a friendly, easy to read report explaining the purpose, structure and findings of the needs analysis. As is recommended by the Program Evaluation Standards, provide print or PDF copies to Hillsborough County Administrators, Van Buren administrators, Van Buren faculty, and concerned parents (all being stakeholders to the teacher turnover issue).

17) Schedule a county, school, and possibly community level meetings to discuss what steps should be taken to act on the findings of the needs analysis.