

Bridging the Communication Gap Between Students & Faculty - A School Climate Survey

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ABSTRACT

A school climate survey was implemented at a rural high school in North Carolina. Students were given the opportunity to share their thoughts and concerns on the school environment.

Results showed a discrepancy in student and staff perceptions. Students reported a primary need for intervention surrounding drug and alcohol use among peers.

The utilization of a school climate survey can help to bridge gaps in communication among students and staff. The current survey provided this high school with a more student specific approach for future interventions.

INTRODUCTION

Students spend upwards of 40 hours per week at school. The environment that schools create have the opportunity to greatly affect students' well-being and overall experience. It is good practice to ensure that students are given a voice when it comes to their school climate. This creates an opportunity for the school counselor to provide students with a chance to give their input.

A needs assessment was implemented at a rural high school with approximately 800 students. The survey was aimed at discovering students' perceptions of their school climate. The goal was to give students the opportunity to voice their thoughts and opinions on the school environment and culture. These results inform school administration and staff of the potential areas for growth in order to direct a plan of action.

Communication between student and faculty is not always clear and direct. Another intention of this survey was to ensure that student and staff perceptions of the current areas in need of growth aligned. This gave students the platform to directly express their outlook on the current school climate to the rest of the school community.

RESULTS

The results provide much needed information on student perception of the current school climate. The most notable responses provided a strong focus on drug and alcohol use. 61.7% of students reported drug and alcohol use as a top presenting issue at their high school (Figure 1). This surpassed other common school issues such as bullying, pressure to fit in, and getting good grades by a significant percentage.

A follow-up question revealed that 71.6% of students believe that their peers are turning to drugs and alcohol as an outlet for stress relief (Figure 2). We feel that these results correlate to another response of 46.4% of students reporting they believe that more de-stressing activities at school would be a helpful support. Another notable factor is that 45.9% of these students believe that greater school support from teachers and staff would greatly benefit their success in school.

The combination of these results create a clear connection for this school climate. Students believe that they are lacking stress relieving activities at school and are, therefore, turning to drugs and alcohol as their own source of stress relief outside of the school walls. Through the survey, the students have identified both a problem they are facing and a potential solution.

DISCUSSION

At this high school, the student services department is working hard to provide students with resources that will help them to be focused and motivated on their academics. The staff perceives anxiety and depression to be major barriers for students, and have therefore prioritized connecting students to mental health resources.

Staff is aware that students use drugs and alcohol, but did not realize that it was in response to stress. In this sense, student services is on the right track with increasing mental health resources for students. However, efforts could be more concentrated to drug and alcohol abuse.

There are two key limitations to this study. The first is that the survey was school specific. This particular student body seeing drug and alcohol interventions as the biggest need at school does not mean that students at every school will have the same results. Second, the survey was given on a voluntary basis in the cafeteria. Not all students eat lunch in the cafeteria. It is possible that the more socially inclined students were the only ones filling out the survey, potentially creating additional bias.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

The data collected includes responses from 194 students at a high school in rural North Carolina. This 194 included students of any grade level.

In order to ensure honest feedback, the survey was anonymous. It did not ask for the participant's name or any demographic such as gender, age, or ethnicity, that could compromise the confidentiality of their answers.

Participation was voluntary, as students were invited to answer questions about school climate via Google Form during their lunch periods in the school cafeteria. The survey took most students less than five minutes to complete.

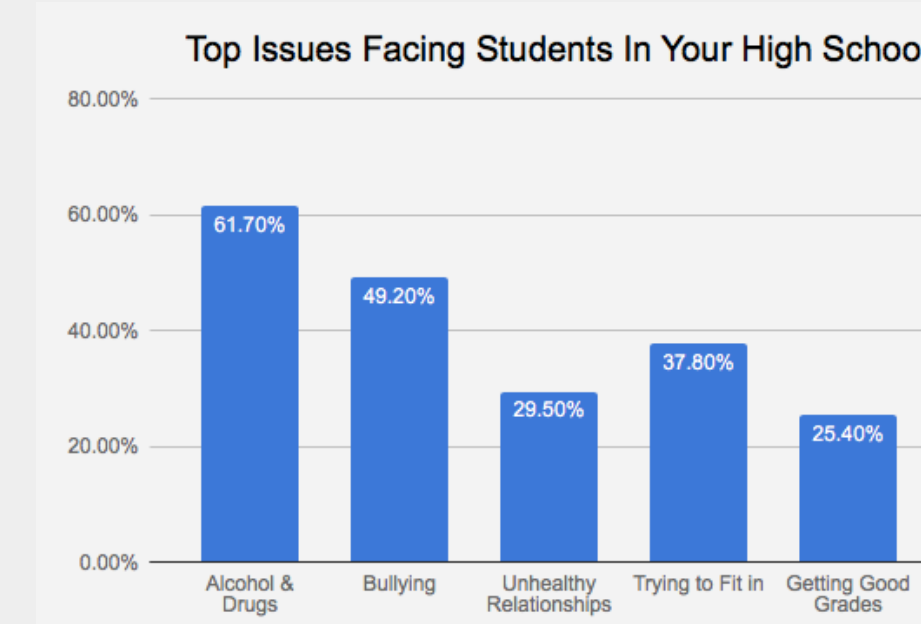


Figure 1. Survey Results A

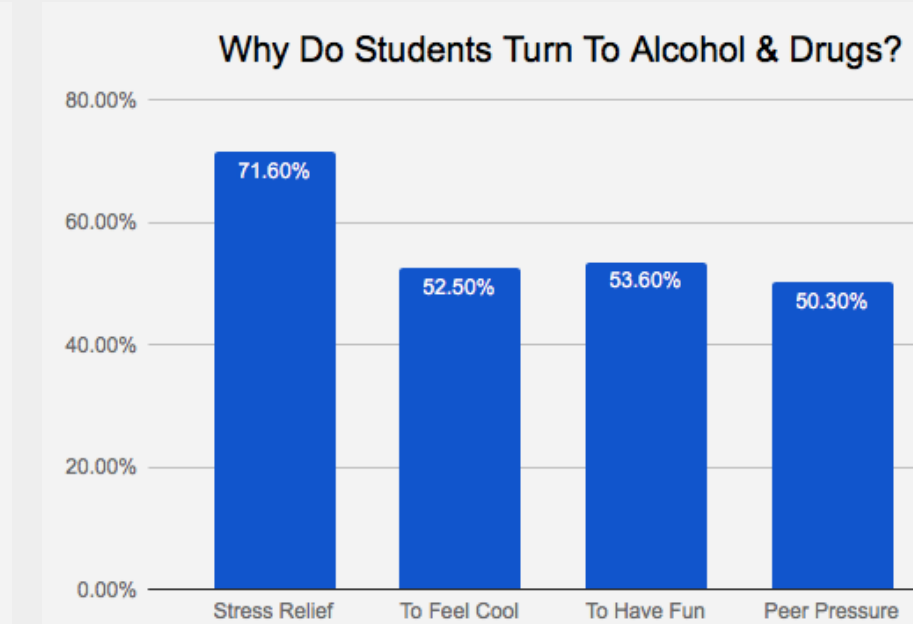


Figure 2. Survey Results B

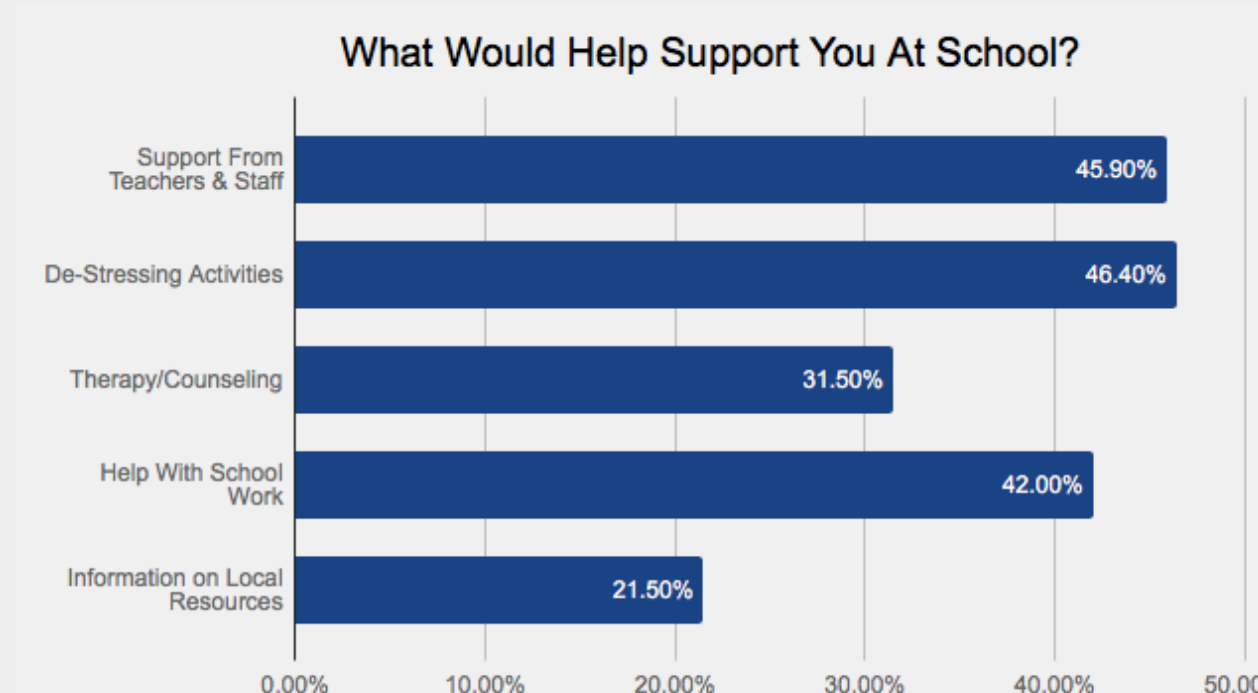


Figure 3. Survey Results C

CONCLUSIONS

Student voice is crucial to a well-functioning school. It is highly encouraged that schools utilize a survey such as this one. Giving students a safe place to share their opinion on their everyday surroundings will increase their feelings of support and belonging at school, leading them to better academic performance.

By directly asking students what they need, school staff can strengthen understanding with students. From here, school staff can identify what interventions need to be prioritized within the school. Next, they can create and action plan and implement programs to reach the goals that students identified. Overall, this will create a more student-centered environment.

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