

## CHAPTER ONE

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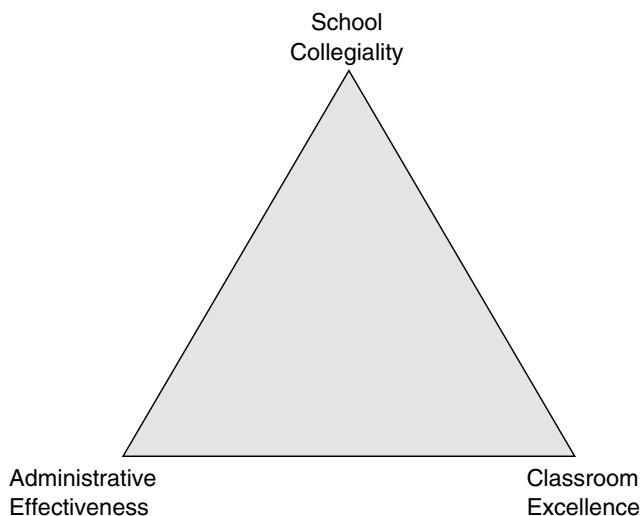
# *Successful Teachers, Successful Schools*

**T**he relationship between and among professionals in any organization is critical to its success. A successful school is one in which teachers work well together and with their administrators. McLaughlin and Talbert's (2001) study of high school teachers found that collegial support and interaction influence how teachers feel about their jobs and their students. These authors found that collegiality also influences the motivation and career commitment of teachers and the extent to which they are willing to modify classroom practice.

### **BUILDING QUALITY RELATIONSHIPS**

School collegiality concerns the quality of the relationships between and among professionals in a school environment. Few resources directly help teachers build the human relations skills necessary to build a collegial school environment. Most books, training sessions, or college coursework in this area are aimed at the administrative audience. The majority of development and growth opportunity for teachers addresses curriculum and instruction and how teachers can create effective learning environments inside the classroom. While administrative effectiveness and classroom excellence are critical to school success, so too is school collegiality, as shown in Figure 1.1. *Teachers Working Together for School Success* focuses on the tools

## 2 Teachers Working Together for School Success



**Figure 1.1** Successful Schools

that teachers need to improve school collegiality, thereby providing a resource in an area that has received relatively little attention.

### **COLLEGIALITY FOR PERSONAL SATISFACTION**

Today's teachers must interact with each other more than ever before. The traditionalist claim is that interaction among teachers is of little consequence since the majority of teacher time is spent in the classroom. This claim is no longer accurate. Teachers certainly continue to derive tremendous satisfaction from their classrooms, and they still spend a majority of the day in classrooms. Interaction among teachers has steadily risen, though, and as McLaughlin and Talbert (2001) have convincingly demonstrated, collegiality greatly impacts teachers' morale, happiness, and satisfaction. A collegial school environment is one in which teachers are able to

- Work well with other teachers;
- Work well with administrators;

- Manage conflict with others, including teachers, administrators, parents, and students; and
- Match their educational strengths and preferences with an appropriate school.

## COLLEGIALITY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

The majority of teachers today, whether at the primary or secondary level, are expected to work with other teachers, coordinators, or administrators at some point during the school year. Teachers may team teach or participate in schoolwide initiatives or campus improvement plans. The success of a new reading program in an elementary school or the installation of a technology lab in a high school both depend on the technical and interpersonal skills of teachers. These are just a few of the many examples whereby success depends on effective working relationships among teachers.

Collegiality contributes to every successful change, and effective administrators purposely draw on the expertise of teachers to discuss or implement new initiatives and programs. And if a change were to be implemented without teacher input, concerns about that change can be most effectively expressed by teachers with strong interpersonal skills. Schools with strong collegial environments are better able to assess and implement changes than schools with weak collegial environments.

Collegial relationships among teachers are a prerequisite for school improvement and make knowledge sharing and innovative practice possible (Fullan, 2001). The success of broad school change also improves when faculty and administrators work well together. In one southwestern state, this working relationship was largely responsible for a middle school successfully transforming into a magnet school. Today, the demand for the art and science curriculum at the school is so high that enrollment is determined by lottery.

An organization cannot realize its full potential without clear and cooperative interaction among employees. This is also true for schools. In the words of one staff development specialist, “children cannot effectively learn until adults effectively get along.” Topics of

#### 4 Teachers Working Together for School Success

leadership, teamwork, change, and conflict resolution are not just reserved for administrators. School success depends on every teacher's ability to work with others.

### **COLLEGIALITY CAN BE LEARNED**

People in general, whether in social or work situations, are influenced by their relationships with others (Aronson, 1992). In one of the classic studies in organizational behavior, Roethlisberger (1969/2003) found that worker satisfaction and productivity are influenced by social interaction. Teachers make important career decisions based on collegiality or whether there is positive social interaction in their schools. In the best case, collegiality is high and teachers are fulfilled in their careers. In too many other cases, teachers leave the profession because of difficulty with coworkers and administrators, not because they dislike teaching.

Clyde was a very effective teacher and coach in a large junior high school. After nearly ten years of exemplary service to the school and the district, he quit teaching and took a job as a financial consultant. This was a great loss for the children. Clyde loved teaching kids and even volunteered for committee work on a regular basis, which added to his teaching and basketball coaching duties. During the last two years of his teaching career, he felt that communication among teachers and between teachers and administrators was ineffective. The town Clyde lived and worked in was very small, so he chose not to transfer to another school but to begin another occupation. People in every profession leave their jobs for similar reasons—the people they interact with, not the actual job.

Teachers who work in poor school climates can easily lose sight of why their jobs are important. It is hard to be satisfied and happy in a teaching career when people do not get along. The good news is that there are things that every teacher can do to strengthen collegiality. Working with different teachers and administrators requires skills, and these skills can be learned.

Collegiality is important in any organization, as evidenced by the millions of dollars business and government managers spend to train their professionals to improve working relationships. *Teachers Working Together for School Success* is for teachers who have a dual concern for the classroom and the well-being of their schools.

If you are a teacher who has achieved mastery in the classroom, it is likely that your willingness to contribute extends beyond your classroom. You are in an opportune position to build the skills taught in this book. If you are a teacher just learning your craft, you may also be interested in building collegiality if you can simultaneously master the demands of the classroom.

Evans (1996), an expert on school change, says there are naysayers, who he calls *Cryogenics* (p. 274), who are not open to learning new things. They are not committed to new skill development. Cryogenics complain about inservice sessions, mandatory staff development days, and even faculty meetings. Other teachers are what Evans refers to as *Red Hots*. These teachers are hungry for and receptive to new knowledge and information that will help build successful schools and classrooms. They are eager to grow, to improve, to change, and to learn. Teachers who have retained their natural curiosity for learning will find this book a useful guide for self and school improvement.

## CONCLUSION

Every chapter in this book has already found real-life application for teachers across all grade levels. All of the information, assessments, and lists throughout the book have been delivered to teachers in various settings: at seminars, full-day inservice sessions, conferences, and college classrooms. The feedback from the many teachers who have already applied this material is that it is needed, it works, and it is fun to learn.

A successful school is built around teachers who are successful inside and outside the classroom. Every teacher is either contributing to collegiality or presenting barriers to achieving it. If you embark on a learning experience to build collegiality in your school, you will help build a successful school, and it will also make you better in the classroom. Skills in this area can reinforce the momentum your school already has or help improve a negative situation. Either way, if you are willing to build skills to improve collegiality, you will be making it easier for children to learn since you will be contributing to a positive school environment. People working together are more effective than a collection of individuals working alone.