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## Onward! – Cultivating Trust and Building Relationships through Culture and Climate Change

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Cohort Year: 2018-2019

SHUANG WEN SCHOOL, P.S./M.S. 184M  
327 CHERRY STREET  
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## **ABSTRACT**

This project describes our process of building relationships of trust with students, teachers and parents while acknowledging each other's strengths and preferences. Through the course of action, we are working to strengthen the entire school community, by empowering everyone to shine and succeed within a culture and climate of compassion and social – emotional resilience.

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **School Situation and Opportunity**

The school went through changes of school principal and direction of education model (from monolingual program to Chinese English Dual Language model in the day school) starting from 2011. During the period of change, the school's climate, trust and relationships suffered due to a sudden and top-down change in school leadership and the push-back from the parents against the changes. The turmoil in the school environment provoked by negative media exposure, public protests, differences in opinions amongst parents and staff caused huge distrust in the school community. Once the trust is broken, it takes time to slowly rebuild the trust in the community through forgiveness and courage. In our most recent school survey (2017-2018), only 41% of teachers felt they can trust the school leaders to be willing to initiate any new initiative or to take on any leadership role to enhance the overall development of the school community. Only 49% of teacher's who responded to the school survey expressed positively in their trust in the school principal compared to the citywide average of 81%. This lack of trust hinders the development of the teachers' capacity and the student's achievement and overall school growth.

In order to improve the level of trust and overall school climate, we first need to know who we are, what our strengths are, what our preferred working styles are, and then support each other by learning the reasons behind our decisions. We need to improve our communication and our working relationship in order to build trust. Only if there is trust and a positive working relationship can the leadership and professional growth be effective, so we can all move forward.

We initially thought of using surveys after each of the professional learning activities to track and measure the changes in the level of trust by teachers. However, due to the fact that our professional learning activities were not linear and did not all relate to the topic of trust, the information collected was not directly connected to the project or the objective of this project. Therefore, we conducted a mid-year and an end of the year "Trust survey" to see if there is any change in the level of trust throughout the year in the process of enacting change. We also

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compared the data from school surveys from school years 2015 to 2018 to see if there is a longitude change on the topic of trust and school climate.

### **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

#### **Initial Conditions and Reasons for Project**

Context:

- Founding Principal was removed for various allegations and DoE decided to “reinforce” the Dual Language school mission by implementing a Dual Language program during the day school in the Fall of 2011, which was met with push back from the parents, including large scale public protests and negative media coverage.
- School Mission since inception: *Shuang Wen School incorporates a dual language and dual culture approach with parental involvement and community support to prepare our children to attain the highest standard in an increasingly global society.* However, up until Fall of 2011, the school only offered Chinese Language instruction as an afterschool enrichment program, which was not aligned with the Dual Language educational model.
- Size: 685 students, Pre-K to 8th grade
- Location: Lower East Side, Manhattan, New York City
- School Surrounding: Low Income Government Housing Projects
- Demographic: 68% of the students qualify for reduced or free lunch (Low Income). More than 50% are current or former English as New Language Learners. 20% are Students with Disabilities. 69% are of Asian descents, mostly 1st or 2nd generation new immigrants whose home language is one of the Chinese dialects from Mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong or Singapore. 1-2% are 1st or 2nd generation of immigrants from South Korea and Japan. 14% are of Hispanic descent, 7% are White, 4% are Black and 6% are self-claimed multi-racial.
- School Culture: Chinese English Dual Language Program is implemented across all grades from K-8. No English monolingual track. Students and staff are encouraged to speak Chinese at every opportunity. All school announcements are given in both Mandarin Chinese and English. We stress the value and culture of Confucius which is “Respect for All”. We celebrate major Chinese holidays and festivals as part of school wide celebration, along with grade wide and department wide multi-cultural celebrations per the Social Studies curriculum.

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- The image of the school in the neighborhood and with respect to other schools: Shuang Wen School has been one of the highest performing schools in the district and has been recognized as a “Reward School” by New York State 5 years in a row from 2014-2018; however, many residents in the neighborhood have the impression that this is a “Chinese School” and thought it is privately run. We have been proactively reaching out to the community to reimage the school as a Dual Language public school and have been actively recruiting students and families without Chinese language background from across the entire borough of Manhattan. Hence our enrollment of students with non-Chinese ethnic background has been steadily growing in the past 7 years from less than 10% in 2011 to more than 30% today.
- Special curricular focus: Along with school wide Social Emotional Learning curricula, all students are required to study Mandarin Chinese beginning in Kindergarten. In Elementary School, we do not accept mid-grade transfer or new admission students who do not have any knowledge or background in Chinese to prevent disruption of the fidelity in the Chinese English Dual Language Program. We also pride ourselves in our accelerated programs where most of our students attain Regents credits across three curriculum subjects at the time of graduation. Students have the opportunity to earn High School Regents credits in Integrated Algebra, Living Environment and Chinese Language Proficiency prior to entering High School.
- Special accomplishments and records of achievements: Shuang Wen School has been recognized by New York State Department of Education as the “Reward School” five years in a row from 2014-2018 for its high student academic achievement and the ability to close achievement gaps amongst different student demographic sub-groups.
  - Student attendance: 98% vs. citywide 94%
  - Improvement on State Tests – 8<sup>th</sup> grade test scores compare to when they were in 5<sup>th</sup> grade
    - English - 96% scored Levels 3 or 4 (Comp group 94%), 75% scored Levels 3 or 4 from Level 2 (Comp group 56%), 77% scored Levels 3 or 4 from Level 1 (comp group 71%)
    - Math – 95% scored Levels 3 or 4 (Comp group 90%), 29% scored Levels 3 or 4 from Level 2 (Comp group 38%), 62% scored Levels 3 or 4 from Level 1 (Comp group 39%)
- We also have a high Regents passing rate on a yearly basis which is in the range of 98%-100% in all 3 Regents – Integrated Algebra, Living Environment and Chinese Language Proficiency tests.

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- Characteristics of teaching staff: Majority of teaching staff are Asians with bilingual teaching certification, aligning with the Chinese Dual Language educational model. Distributed leadership and collaborative teaching teams are structures that we have developed and continue to refine to strategically pair staff to support and complement each other. The school schedule and teaching assignments are designed to support collaboration and teamwork among all teaching staff, both within each grade and across the grade levels. Several School Governing Committees are set up to support and manage school organizations and operations.

### **METHODS**

- Phase I: Get to know yourself and each other
  - EQ1: How do we do things in terms of our core values and social emotional agility? What are our preferences in making things happen?
  - EQ2: What can we do to adjust our mindset or actions, so we can be more effective in working with each other as a team?Evidence: Charts of Brain Profiles per teachers' self-selected NBI Quadrants Brain Profile
- Phase II: Working together, Building our team
  - EQ: How do we build our relationship while supporting each other's strengths and preferences in our working styles?Evidences:
  - Interim Staff Survey on School Leadership
  - Sharing our work through presentations: What worked? What did not work?
  - How many staff members take initiatives to start something new? How many staff members step up to the plate and take on the leadership role?
- Phase III: What worked?
  - EQ: How are we doing?Evidences:
  - New initiatives initiated by the staff (Examples see below)
  - New Leaders volunteered by the staff
  - Community building event initiated and organized by the staff
  - Student achievements
  - Reduction of student incidents as the evidence of any changes in school culture and climate

### **Diagnosis / Deeper Understanding**

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What we have done to engage the school faculty and staff in learning so that we could address the “Trust” issue more effectively.

- We were able to develop a better understanding of our “Trust” issue through the following activities – Know ourselves and know our team members
  - Through reviewing and analyzing the school survey data for the 2017-2018 school year, we began to engage in reflective and meaningful discussion about the issue of Trust in our school. We discussed about the importance of trust, and why trust matters. We evaluated school data in terms of the “trust” between teachers and the principal, the “trust” between families and the principal, the trust between teachers, and the trust between students and teachers. The data analysis showed there was significant growth in the trust between families and the principal but not so for the trust between teachers and the principal. When asked why for the lack of trust between the teachers and the principal, and the lack of trust between the teachers, teachers responded that they felt overwhelmed with the workload in the Dual Language program (lack of time and resources) and lack of professional capacity in supporting the increasing number of Students with Disabilities (SWD). Teachers also felt not safe on the job and lack of clarity about their job performance per their Advance evaluation/observation reports.
  - Through a school wide PD on Election Day, “Building Trust through Self-Knowledge and Open Communication”, faculty/staff identified their top three “core values” and shared their core values with their grade team/department team members. Through the sharing activities, faculty/staff dug deeper in identifying their own abilities, strengths, and preferences in their working styles per the NBI Quadrants Brain Profile, and their surprises regarding their finding about their colleagues/team members as well as themselves. Through the discussion and self-revelation, faculty/staff learned about their emotional triggers, their success factors, and their own ability to adapt and adjust to each other’s preferred working styles. A co-established goal, both among the faculty and between faculty and the principal/administration is to be more adaptive and considerate when working with each other; thus, be able to enhance the trust and to build collaborative working relationships amongst the faculty and with the administrators.
  - We continue to collect information about teachers’ sense of “trust” via their individual and anonymous Exit Slips after each PD session and the school-wide surveys via Google Drive.

### **Actions and Steps Taken**

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We initiated several new programs to enhance and build team relationships and collaborations.

- For Teachers' Social Emotional Learning and Self-Care
  - Involved two teachers to co-lead the Professional Learning Committee and presented "Breathe for Change" Social Emotional Professional Learning sessions.
  - Introduced Yoga sessions for staff by staff on "Parent Teacher Conference" afternoons.
  - Coordinated with the PTA to provide Potluck / Feast for both teachers and parents to build understanding and form informal relationships during the break time on Parent Teacher Conference Days.
  - Implemented more non-evaluative classroom observations and debriefings before entering an evaluative observation report in Advance, giving teachers more opportunities to adjust and improve their instructional practices in the classroom, giving them the "safety net" in instructional practices and improvement.
  - Hired instructional coaches in both Literacy and Math through "Generation Ready" for grades 3-8 and the "Universal Literacy Coach" program for grades Pre-K to 2/Early Childhood to improve teachers' capacity and instructional practices.
  - Launched "Coffee/Tea with Principal", allowing teachers to share their concerns or struggles in a more relaxed, non-judgmental setting.
  - Maintained Weekly "Thank you and Shout-out" messages to all staff to highlight and celebrate teacher's contributions and initiatives.
  - Invite the Department of Mental Health consultant to provide workshops to our teachers and parents, as well as provides recommendations for the schoolwide Climate, Cultural and Equity Committee.
  
- For Students' Social Emotional Learning and Character Building
  - Initiated monthly school Culture Climate and Equity Committee to analyze and identify issues of student performance and school wide climate amongst different sub-groups of student demographics, and collectively come up with action plans to address any disproportionality among different ethnic groups.
  - Established "Champions" program using the Mood Meter. 10 teachers/staff volunteered to mentor 10 at-risk middle school students for daily check-in one-on-one mentoring program.
  - Implemented Yoga class in Middle school and Mindfulness practice in Elementary School
  - Started Community Service and Character Club for 30 Middle School students during the after-school hours for leadership/character building and community services.

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- Introduced on-line Social Emotional Learning curricula – EVERFI Social Emotional Learning for students K-8, and Suite 360 SEL online courses for grades 6-8.
  - Created a “Debate Team” starting in February, funded by the school PTA, targeting the middle school students (30 students) to allow students to have open discussion about their concerned current events and issues.
  - Created an After-school Girls’ Volleyball Team and Theater Club
  - Created “Black and Hispanic Student Union” for boys and girls of Black and Latino descent to socialize, network and build a sense of belonging in gender separated lunch meetings.
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- For Community and Family Relationship Building
    - Rolled out “Parent Square”, a mobile app for teachers/staff to share information on daily school and classroom activities with parents, and to enhance communication between the school and parents. We have 98% of sign-up/registration rate from parents.
    - Parent Workshops and Language Classes
    - Parents/Families Game Nights and Make Fair
    - Students Performances and Publishing Parties to celebrate students’ achievements

### **Challenges Encountered and How we addressed them**

- Teachers continue to feel and expressed not having enough time to do what they need to accomplish. Due to the fact that teachers of both languages (English and Chinese) in the Dual Language Program and ICT classes (General Education and Special Education) are required to team teach in their daily lessons, the common planning time scheduled during the weekly schedules is not sufficient for the teachers to meet and plan their lessons together. Although we have set aside many hours of per session from the school budget for teachers to co-plan during the hours before and after school, most teachers are not able to take advantage of the opportunity because of their obligations for after-school tutoring, graduate school requirements, and/or personal family obligations such as child-care.
- Teachers felt they do not have enough knowledge or training to deal with some severe mental health issues or ACS/Family issues when trying to support or mentor some of the at-risk students. We have difficulty in finding time and the appropriate professional development resources to train our teachers/staff on how to deal with mental health issues or family crisis in our students’ lives. We have reached out to the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene for assistance, and they have sent a School Mental Health



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Consultant to assist in providing workshops for our school parents and staff. However, the work has just begun, and the impact is yet to be measured.

- The Social Emotional Learning curricula offered so far, either Morningside 4R curriculum, Sanford Harmony curriculum and/or EVERFI On-line Social Emotional Learning, all have limitations in addressing some of the middle school students' social, emotional and mental issues, or how to deal with their family crisis, such as becoming homeless, lack of parental support, and/or sudden death in the family. In the Spring semester, we added one more SEL online course Suite 360 for teachers to implement in their classes.
- There is an inadequate number of Social Workers or Guidance Counselors that can offer at-risk counseling to the high need at-risk students and families. We desperately need more personnel resources in this area. We've reached out to local hospitals such as Gouverneur Hospital and Charles B. Wang Community Health Center for support. Some students and families do take advantage of the services and have begun offsite counseling services, but many have not. The impact of their services is yet to be determined.
- Through our work in the School Climate Cultural and Equity Committee, we identified that our Black and Hispanic students are the lowest performing subgroups in both Math and ELA. We discussed how this group of students seem to be floating around in the school building, not truly engaged in the school culture and learning, and seems to lack a sense of belonging. Some suggestions that come up in our Equity Committee to address these concerns are:
  - Form a focus group of Black and Hispanic students to find out how they feel, and learn what are the challenges they face in a Chinese English Dual Language school – initially named as **Taking Responsibility in Ourselves (TRiO)** club, later renamed as **"Black and Hispanic Student Union"**– where our Middle School Teacher Ms. K. Laurent meets with 8 targeted students with highest needs during lunch recess to discuss feelings, social emotional issues and concerns at school.
  - Expect all teachers to go deeper in examining their practices and see if there are differentiations of their practice or precepts of the students' needs through implicit bias training. All teachers were encouraged to attend District wide organized Implicit Bias Training. Per sessions of their time for participation are offered.
- Teachers tend to gravitate toward the staff of their own ethnic background, creating divided clusters of teachers, with limited interaction across-ethnicities and culture. To address this issue, our "Sunshine Committee", organized by teachers, hosted staff birthday parties 4 times a year, Mid-year Holiday parties after school, and an End of Year party after school for teachers to socialize and network in a less formal setting.

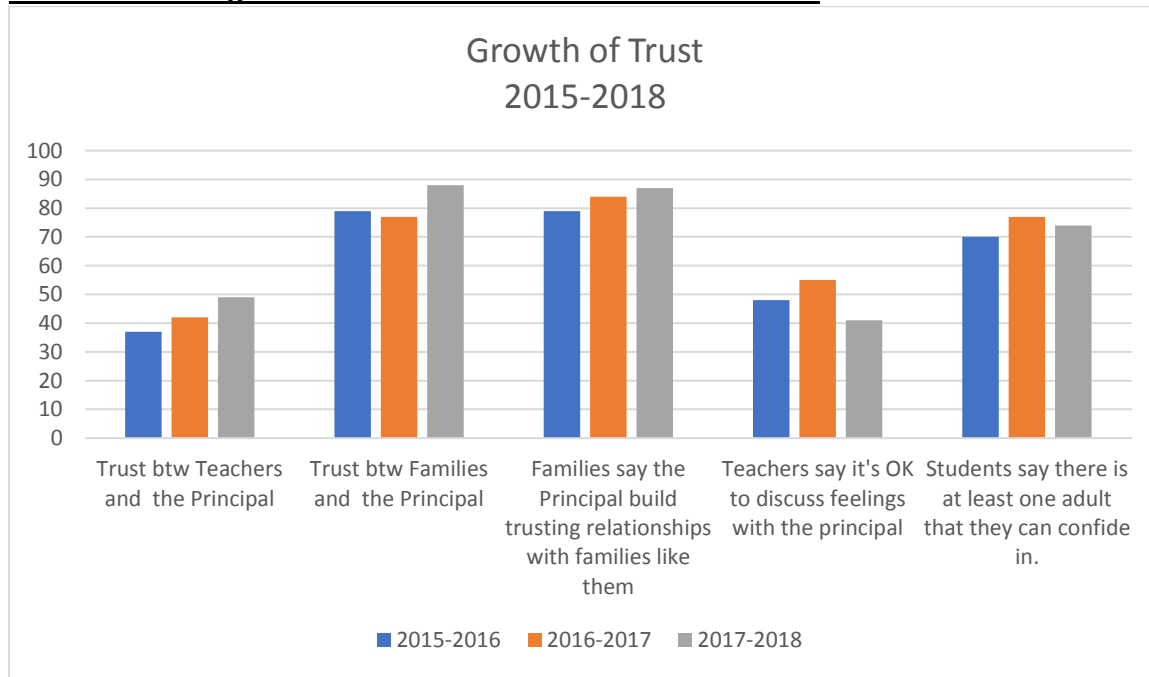
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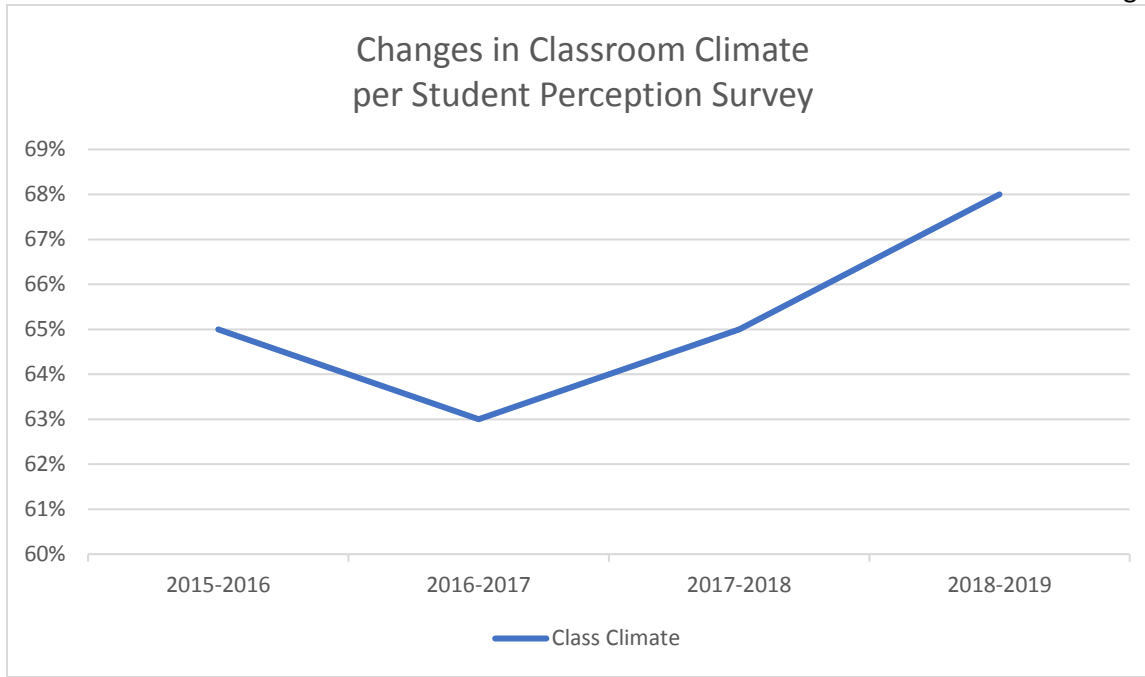
Outcomes, Monitoring and Planning

Outcomes

There is evidence of growth in the outcomes of the action plans. The data shows an increasing level of trust and confidence in school principal and leadership, especially the trust from the families/parents throughout the years. However, the trust from the teachers to the principal still needs to be worked on. I also attribute the decrease in teacher’s trust of the principal in 2017-2018 to the fact that the principal successfully consulted and removed some of the ineffective teachers. I see this decrease of trust as a temporary loss for a future of better good, because by successfully charging the UFT Chapter Leader through the 3020A process, I’ve also set clear expectations and set an example regarding staff performance. By eliminating the “bad apples”, I sent the message to the rest of the staff, that we are responsible for setting high levels of standards and academic rigor so that hard work, contribution and commitment to the purpose of our shared common goals are reiterated, valued, respected, and protected.

Evidence on the growth of Trust and Climate from 2015-2018





### Staff Surveys on School Leadership and Trust

For the question of “Teachers say it’s OK to discuss feelings with the principal”, 53.8% (January 2019) agreed or strongly agreed, which is an increase of 12.8%. 50% of the staff confirmed that they feel confident to initiate any new idea, project or school wide activity for the betterment of the school community, with is an increase of 9%.

### Evidences of New Initiatives and New Leaderships in School Staff:

**Total of 15 initiatives this year, compares to less than 5 last year**

Following are some of the projects initiated by the teachers (not in chronicle order) as evidence that the teachers are more comfortable in taking risks and initiating action plans that can lead to schoolwide improvement (New Initiative → New Leaders):

- Yoga lessons to 7<sup>th</sup> grade students and the staff.
- Fundraising campaign to raise funds for 6<sup>th</sup> grade students to visit Museum of Math (MoMath) on DonorsChoose. The funding goal was met in 2 days.
- PE teacher started a Girls Volleyball Team for middle school students.
- Teacher assumed the role of Lead Teacher for school wide Professional Learning Community (PLC).
- Two teachers initiated “Community Service and Character Club”
- Teacher initiated “Pen Pals Project”

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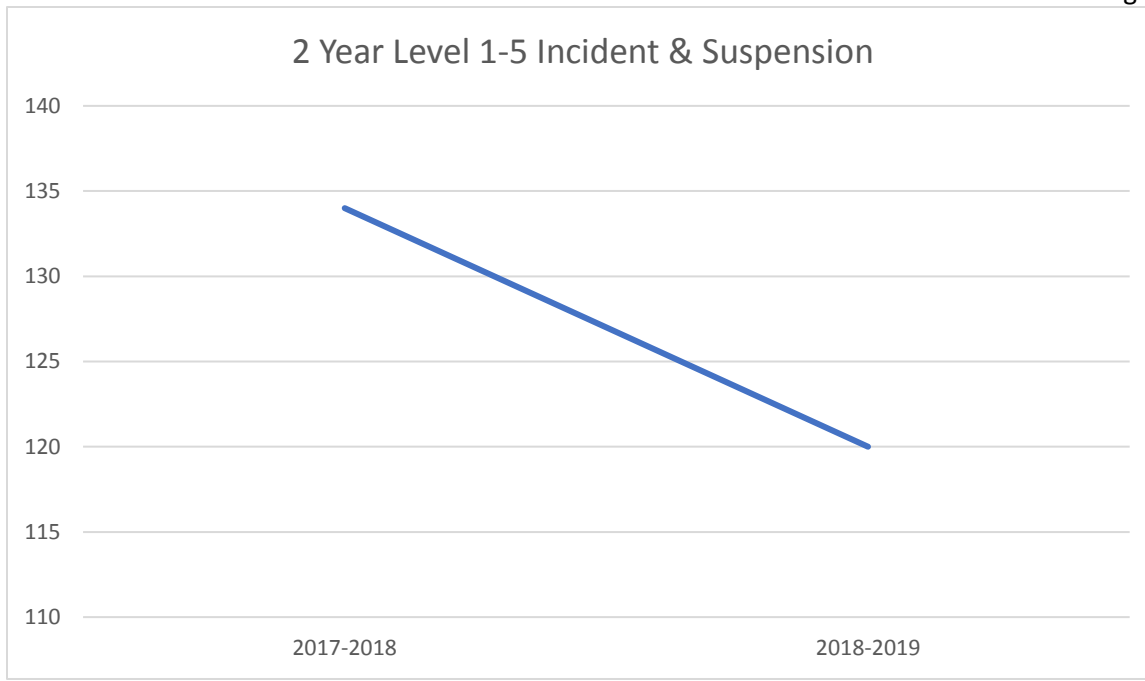
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- Teacher initiated and led the “College Access for All” activities
- Teachers initiated “Computer Science for All” activities and courses
- All middle school teachers volunteered to be the “Hall Monitors” on Halloween Day
- Teacher initiated Field trip to visit the World Observatory at the Freedom Tower
- 10 teachers/staff volunteered and initiated a student mentoring program for the at-risk students in the middle school, called “The Champions Program”, which provides a consistent adult figure for each targeted individual student someone who cares about them in a personal level at school.
- The middle school Dean initiated and led the Early Relationship Above Prevention Program (RAPP): Healthy Relationship Education in Middle School.
- A 3<sup>rd</sup> grade teacher led the Professional Learning and implementation of online instructional tool “Imagine Learning” for K-5 teachers
- A teacher initiated and led a student supporting club “Black and Hispanic Student Union” in the middle school, where students meet once a week to talk about their feeling and experience as Black and Hispanic minority in the Chinese Dual Language School. The goal is to build relationship and a sense of belonging for the black and Hispanic middle school students at Shuang Wen School.
- Math Teachers in the middle school initiated “Movie Trip” as an incentive to reward and encourage students to study hard in preparation of NYS Standardized Math Exam.

### **Evidences of Community building event initiated and organized by the staff**

- Charts of Team profiles of preferred working and communication styles
- Positive feedbacks collected from professional learning sessions of self-care and social emotional wellness for educators
- Positive feedback regarding Sunshine Committee events, birthday parties, and Teachers Appreciation Week, and luncheons for staff during Parent Teacher’s Conferences.

### **Reduction of incidents as the evidence of any changes in school culture and climate**



### **REFLECTIONS**

I plan to continue the journey by continuing the activities/professional learning on Social Emotional Learning for Educators (Breath for Change), the School Culture, Climate and Equity Committee, the “Community Service and Character Club”, and the “Champions” mentoring program. To building trust in a school community, we need to nurture self-compassion/self-care for the educators via SEL PD; we will continue to take the pulse of the teachers by having conversations and forming a committee that will bring school administrators teachers’ concerns; we need to increase cultural competence by respecting the diversity of our school community and building an environment of inclusiveness; we need to address conflicts by developing empathy, Social Emotional Intelligence, and characters from the “Community Service and Character Club” and the “Champions” mentoring program to support students’ growth in Social Emotional skills and intelligence. We will continue to lead the school community and ride the waves of changes, which will build our resilience, confidence and trust, not only in ourselves but also among students, between students and teachers, between teachers and the school leaders, and between the school leaders and the parents/families, so everyone is empowered to shine and succeed in a culture and climate of compassion and social-emotional resilience.

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**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I'd like to acknowledge my Partner, Assistant Principal and Ally Ms. Yvonne Chin for co-leading and going through this journey with me. I'd also like to acknowledge the Chairs of my school's Professional Learning Committee Ms. Treena Thibodeau and Mr. Ryan O'Leary. I also like to thank my middle school Assistant Principal Ms. Mee Jenny Kwong, Dean and UFT Chapter Leader Mr. Kevin Yuhas, Guidance Counselor Ms. Jia Yu, and all the teachers who embraced the initiative to lead the specific projects to improve our school climate and culture as a whole.