

# FROM TIPPING POINT TO TURNING POINT



**PRINCIPAL**  
**STEPHANIE WEINHEIMER**  
Roy Elementary School  
Bethel, WA



**District Enrollment**  
**20,669**

**School Population**  
**300**

**Grades Served**  
**K-5**

**Students of Color Enrolled**  
**43%**

**Economically  
Disadvantaged**  
**53%**

**P**incipal Stephanie Weinheimer had built a strong teaming culture at Roy Elementary School, a small school of 300 in the Bethel School District. Shared leadership and a focus on best practices indicated things were headed in the right direction until the onset of a global pandemic (February of 2020). By mid-year of 21-22, significant shifts in staff morale, cohesiveness, and the overall culture challenged the staff as well as their leader.

“There was definitely a survival leadership approach based on what was best in the moment.” Pre-pandemic momentum around effective teaming and establishing a PLC culture had seemingly disappeared.

## THE TIPPING POINT

By March 2022, the tipping point had arrived. Well-intentioned efforts by many to ‘survive’ created a range of disjointed outcomes from heroic servant leadership by some, selective withdrawal by others, and increased union advocacy. Something had to change, but what?

“We needed to have an accurate picture of what exactly had shifted in the culture and how best to move forward in addressing it.” The culture had frayed and was in need of a solution as comprehensive as the problem. “It just felt like their voice was gone and that shared leadership was gone.”

The decision was made to partner with CEE to administer the CEE Educational Effectiveness Surveys (EES) to develop that picture collaboratively.

## THE DATA POINTS

With the results of the first administration of the EES Surveys in hand in Spring of 2022, CEE’s executive coach Roni Rumsey facilitated a data debrief session providing Stephanie and her staff a way to visualize and interpret their data. As Stephanie recounted,

*“We discovered that just going back to some of what was working pre-pandemic wasn’t good enough. We needed to get back to trusting one another as the foundation to everything else.”*

*“We got a big ‘aha’ when we got the data back. Among the biggest of aha’s was how staff had attributed all of their ‘leadership issues’ to their principal, when in reality everyone helps to create the leadership culture of an organization.”*

## TOOLS AND SUPPORTS USED



### Educational Effectiveness Surveys™ (EES)



### Leadership Coaching

*“It restored everyone’s  
confidence in their principal -  
including my own.”*

-Principal Stephanie Weinheimer

“I know some of it was just them seeing themselves as leaders and realizing that when you talk about ‘effective leadership’, it’s not just one person. It’s really a team of people.”

Closely related to this revelation, staff learned their trust in one another as a staff was low. This gap in trust, the “I vs. They Gap”, was very telling. “We discovered that just going back to some of what was working pre-pandemic wasn’t good enough. We needed to get back to trusting one another as the foundation to everything else.”

## THE TURNING POINT

Over the next 12 months, Roni walked through an intentional process to help rebuild staff’s trust in one another, in their leader, and even their leader’s confidence in herself. The process included developing norms collaboratively, establishing a ‘code of collaboration’, and making space for tough conversations – and then having them as professionals even when there were big emotions.

Receptivity to modeling of these professional conversations played a central role in the process for both staff and Stephanie. Central to the positive shift in culture was understanding the essential question, “What would someone need to see, hear or experience for them to change their perception?”

“For me, just being aware of myself and being aware of my responses. I stopped giving them that ‘confirmation bias’ moment I had been giving when I was in ‘crisis leadership’ mode. Staff was like ‘this isn’t going the way it used to’ and saw how their principal really is curious about staff perspectives.”

**The impact? Readministering the EES Surveys again in March of 2023 helped complete the picture even more.**  
***“There have been some huge gains, especially around effective leadership. You know, ‘my principal cares about me as a person’ was a survey question that saw some large gains. We saw some shrinking of the “I vs. They” gap as well.”***

Stephanie summarized her optimism in the work ahead at Roy, “Partnering with CEE didn’t just restore what we had pre-pandemic. It helped us get to the root causes of our challenges and build something much stronger moving forward. It restored everyone’s confidence in their principal - including my own.”

## Let’s Connect!



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