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Sounding Off On School Culture | *Five takeaways from this week's School Culture By Design Podcast*

“Kicking off a great school year”

Guest: Paul Lundberg, Principal, Colfax High School, Colfax, CA

- 1) **Set the tone for the school year with a back-to-school pep rally.** We have a “no backpack” day the first day where we focus on what we want to accomplish together as a school. We start with a big pep rally where we have all the sophomores, juniors and seniors create a big tunnel for the freshman to run through. Then our three classes teach them our school cheer. It really helps the new students feel welcome. Then we go into break-out sessions where students rotate to learn about the four core values of our school: respect, support, serve and celebrate.
- 2) **Hold breakout sessions throughout the first week:** it makes the days really fun and interesting and leaves the kids excited for what’s next. We have a day where the students do line-dancing on the football field led by our teachers. We have a day where we have community members come in and talk about how we can partner with them, and how the community also supports the schools. The students still go to their classes that first week, but we shorten them so we have built-in time to talk about these core value lessons that make up our school’s culture.
- 3) **Dedicate an entire afternoon that first week for “club day” where students can see all the different clubs (inside and outside the school) that they can get involved.** We even have the Rotary Club and Veterans groups come in and set up tables. We ask all our students to sign up for at least one club – and lots of kids sign up for multiple clubs. We show our students how to channel things they’re passionate about to give back and connect with more people in our community.
- 4) **We remind our staff how much easier their job is when they have students that are happy to be there!** It spills into everything. The athletics departments are better and more motivated when they have an entire school behind them who have team spirit. The theater group enjoys it more when they know they have hundreds of classmates who will come to watch and support them. It takes effort to build school culture, but having it makes every aspect of school more enjoyable – for the students, staff and teachers!
- 5) **You don’t have to do this all at once:** Build your kick-off program over time. Work with the people who are willing and that buy into your vision. But tweaking things at the very beginning really sets the tone for the entire year. And then teachers who might be more hesitant will see what a difference it makes, and you’ll have less resistance in subsequent years.



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