



Kern Community College District

Workplace Culture Survey

Spring 2024

Report on Survey Results



“Culture is not an initiative. It is the enabler of all initiatives.” —Larry Senn

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Introduction

In spring 2024, newly appointed Kern Community College District Chancellor Steven Bloomberg requested a districtwide qualitative survey of the workplace culture within the district. The survey was conducted by the Office of Institutional Research and Reporting, sent out to all employees via email on Tuesday April 9th, with a reminder sent on Monday, April 15th, and a final reminder sent on Tuesday, April 23rd. The survey was closed later that week, having received a total of 453 responses.

In addition to three open-ended questions on workplace culture, the survey included only two additional questions on workplace location and employee type. The survey was conducted anonymously, with the Institutional Research office not keeping track of who responded in any way. The table below shows the distribution of most responses.

5. Please tell us your main employee type. * 4. Please tell us your main work location.						
Crosstabulation						
Count						
		4. Please tell us your main work location.				
		Bakersfield College	Cerro Coso Community College	Porterville College	District Office	Total
5. Please tell us your main employee type.	Classified	79	31	16	30	156
	Adjunct part-time Faculty	15	11	3	0	29
	Full-time Faculty	87	18	29	0	134
	Confidential/Management	38	8	13	14	73
	Student Worker	17	5	1	0	23
	Temporary Employee	7	0	1	0	8
Total		243	73	63	44	423

In addition to the 423 employees represented in the table above, another 30 respondents left blank the question on their work location or the one on their employee type, or both. These 30 respondents are included in the overall results. In the raw results, included as an appendix to this document, beginning on page 24, those missing their work location are listed at the beginning under each question and those who provided a work location, but not an employee type, are listed under their work location, with it noted that they provided no employee type.

The Questions

The three open-ended survey questions were as follows:

Current Culture:

1. Please share examples of specific behaviors, practices, or norms within the Kern Community College District that either support or hinder collaboration, innovation, and employee well-being?
2. In what ways do you think the level of trust (between employees, groups, colleges, colleges and the district office, etc.) could be improved or transparency strengthened?

Future Culture:

3. Please share what changes or initiatives you believe could enhance the overall organizational culture at the Kern Community College District? (Things that would positively impact employee morale, engagement, and performance.)

These questions were designed to gather information on what positive and negative practices currently exist in the workplace culture across the district, including those that may help or hinder institutional effectiveness and what things might be implemented to improve on what currently exists.

Methodology for Coding Survey Responses

This survey was analyzed utilizing a qualitative approach to understand Kern CCD employees' lived experiences and perceptions. Qualitative research is not linear; rather, it is an interactive process used to uncover the lived experiences and perceptions of those who answered the survey (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Ravitch and Carl (2016) believe that qualitative research "has the potential to provide interruptive and ultimately transformative experiences as a result of its ability to generate local knowledge, its potential for informed action, and how it attends to the complexity of lived experience" (p. 25). In addition, Maxwell (2013) and Patton (2015) agree that qualitative research is a methodological pathway in which to centralize and explore the complexity of both lived experiences and values.

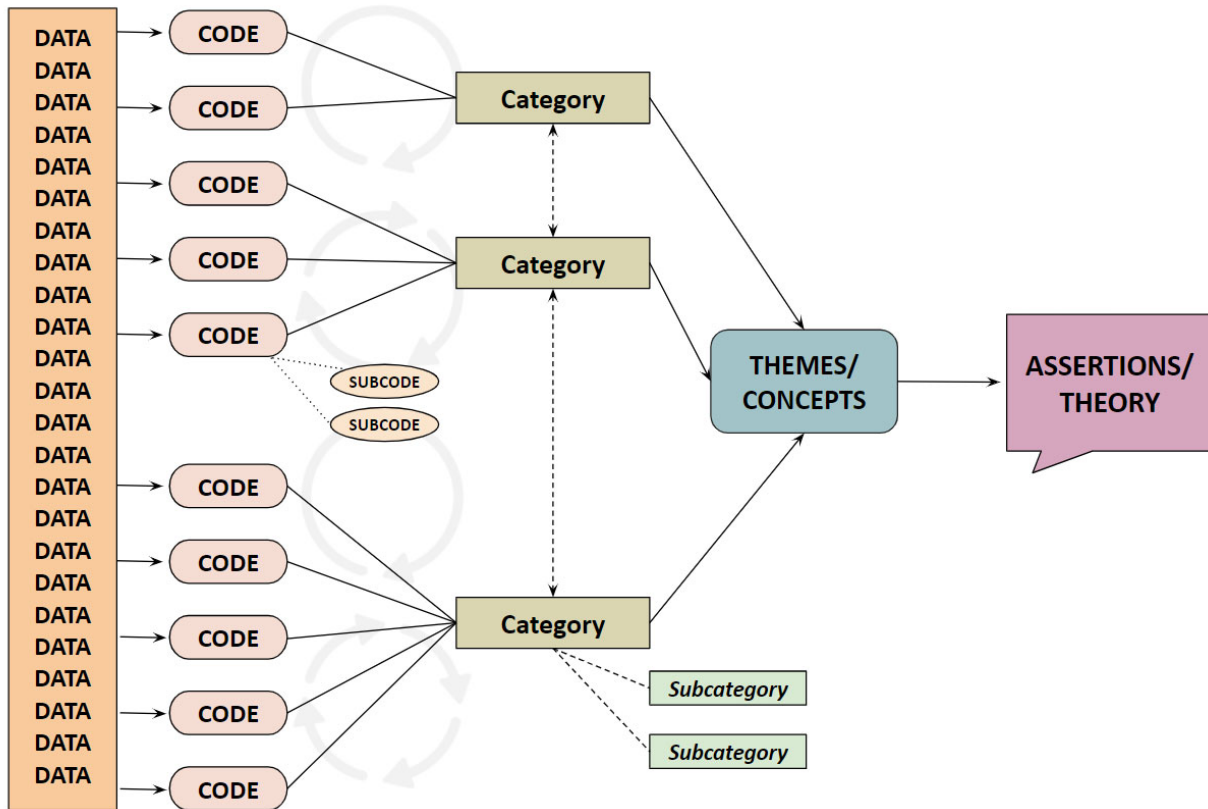
Analysis Process

Qualitative researchers utilize theoretical frameworks, thematic analysis, and the process of coding as a tool to derive meaning from collected data (Creswell, 2013; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Data were analyzed using the qualitative analysis computer program Atlas.ti (version 9). We uploaded all of the survey responses and created a code book. We did the initial reading and then an in-depth level of descriptive and conceptual coding. A code is a word or short phrase that assigns an essence-capturing attribute for a portion of language-based data. Researchers generated to "symbolize or translate" data. The descriptive coding, also known as open coding, was a line-by-line analysis that looked at frequency and perceived importance in identifiable phrases or words (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). The conceptual coding was more interpretive as we used an adaption-innovation lens and looked for a deeper level of meaning and emergent themes of each employees responses. This last level of coding worked to capture the lived experience and to derive the essence of the lived experience of the Kern CCD employee.

To analyze data in order to understand this phenomenon, we created a code book and used coding to deconstruct and to construct knowledge to give voice to the Kern CCD employees lived experiences. The process of coding involved the creation of a code book that organized, defined, and refined codes in order to explain the overall emerging themes (Creswell, 2013; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Each code was a word or phrase assigned to a distinct category by the researcher to describe the lived experiences and perceptions of those employees who answered the qualitative climate survey (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

The process of coding gave me as the researcher the tools needed to break down and to interpret and analyze emerging contextual relationships within my data (Creswell, 2016; Smith et al., 2009). Each code was either inductive, emerging from the transcript, or deductive, coming from prior research or the theoretical framework (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Additionally, the codebook we developed was a mix of both inductive and deductive codes. They survey responses

are broken down to codes, the density of those codes help define categories and subcategories. Below is an diagram of the coding process as outlined by Johnny Saldana in the book “The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers” (2021):



Results

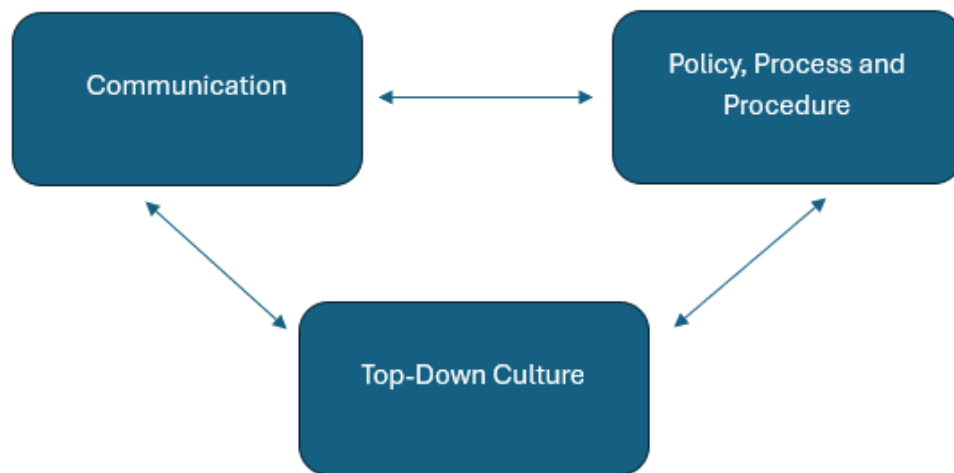
Categories and subcategories

This survey was done to explore levels of trust, behaviors, practices, and norms within Kern CCD that either support or hinder collaboration, innovation, and employee well-being. From this survey, three main themes arose that explore the lived experiences of Kern CCD employees. First, the need and desire for meaningful communication. In the roles of faculty, management, and student workers, there is a deep need for communication within each department, college and across the district. The communication being sought needs to be transparent, foster collaboration and human relationships, and create a culture that can listen and provide a meaningful feedback loop. Second, the need for all constituents within Kern CCD to function with adequate and clear policy, process and procedures. Currently, there seems to be inadequate

policies and procedures across departments, divisions and the colleges. Policies, process, and procedures includes certain departments' pay scales, the recognition of employees and the both remote work policy and the influence of COVID. Finally, the influence of a top down culture which includes a perceived bias in hiring process, favoritism, and retaliation. This top down culture also includes a top heavy administration, work intensive initiative, social and political agendas, and the influence of past leadership. Analysis of data revealed that these three fundamental categories help us understand the current climate throughout Kern CCD.

Theme Dimensions that influence Kern CCD culture

The overarching themes were identified from analysis of the data gathered through this qualitative research. Together, these themes help to describe the current climate culture through Kern CCD. In this report, each theme is described in detail: (1) Communication, (2) Policy, Process and Procedure, and (3) Top Down Culture. The graphic below depicts the interactions of each theme and how each influences the others.



In this document, these three themes are used to describe the current culture throughout Kern CCD. Each theme is supported by subthemes that describe the specific factors that describe the Kern CCD employees' lived experiences. Through these three themes, a comprehensive picture emerges of the culture throughout Kern CCD. The table below provides an overview of each theme and subtheme.

All codes were examined; this table only highlights the most used codes in each category. These are some of the main themes used when looking at the co-occurrence table for overlap of codes within the same passages. This list is not inclusive as the co-occurrence looked at overlap

within and between codes to help frame all three themes and their subthemes. Codes such as EIC - Effects on students, R - Respect for differences/beliefs/job title, and WC -Mistrust are examples that showed up in multiple areas and helped shape each theme. The overlap between the codes and themes were instrumental in shaping the discussion.

Theme	Sub-theme	Main Codes and frequency of Codes Used
Communication	Within and across the district	PP - Lack of continuity between colleges/districts/departments (144)
	Transparency (lack of)	R- Communication (226)
	Feedback loop	CD - Lack of Transparency (106)
	Human to human relationships	AD - follow through, feedback and evaluations of programs/outcomes (114)
	Need for Collaboration	R - Human to Human Connection (positive (112) and negative (40)) CD - Creating opportunities for communication/collaboration (214)
Policy, Process, and Procedure	Inadequate/department based	AD - Inadequate processes (136)
		AD - Classified Pay Scales (64)
	Pay and Policy	AD - Training (104)
	Lack of training	AD - Lack of Management Training (45)
	Recognition of employees	PP - Lack of defined expectations/processes and policies (90)
	Remote work/influence of Covid	AD - Rewarding and recognition of performance (101)
		PP - Remote Work Policies (44)

Top Down Culture	Hiring process/favoritism	PR- Hiring Committee Bias/Hiring practices/promotions (131)
	Use of Resources	PR- Favoritism (76)
	Retaliation	AD- Use of Resources (56)
	Disconnection	PR - Retaliation (75)
	Social and Political Agendas	
	Heavy initiatives/grants with overworking employees	WC - Social and Political Agendas (131)
	Top Heavy	SI - Initiatives/grants (79)
	Past Leadership	OR - Lack of consequences to bad behavior/accountability (157)
		SCM - Top Down Leadership (85)

Communication

The first theme emerging from analysis from this survey explains the need for human connection and communication through every level of the Kern CCD organization.

Communication within and across the district

A common theme within the data is the communication within every department, division, and college across the district. Many Kern CCD employees are seeing a “disconnect with district and the colleges” (Bakersfield, Full time Faculty). Employees across the district feel that open communication is lacking and only reaches certain individuals, “If major issues are occurring, having open communication with ALL concerned. Bringing all parties to the conversation to be an active collaborative group working towards a resolution for all would be amazing. Working resolutions can never happen when there is isolation and division.” (Porterville, Full time faculty). There is a want to be connected as a functional team.

There seems to be acknowledgement that there is a communication breakdown between the colleges and the district, “We should meet and communicate as a Community College system with 3 divisions, not 3 distinct and separate colleges with a District structure that is perceived as an obstacle by the colleges (District Office Confidential Management). Unfortunately, there seems to be a struggle to know how to fix it, “Overcoming the "Us" vs. "Them" complex between

colleges and the district in general. Not sure how to do that (Cerro Coso Community College Confidential Management).

Importance of Transparency

Across the board there seems to be an understanding that, “We need to be more intentional in our communications, and the need for authentic transparency” (Bakersfield College Adjunct Faculty). Currently there are feelings of “Lack of transparency in decision-making processes, leading to distrust among employees” (Bakersfield College Classified Employee). There is a consistent thread of mistrust that is tied to the lack of transparency, even more so that even makes some employees wary about filling out this survey, “There first needs to be a level of transparency so one can be strengthened. This will then lead to a level of trust. The fact that I am hesitant to complete this survey should inform you of the level of trust with the college/district” (Cerro Coso Community Full time Faculty). Many employees feel that the lack of transparency trickles down from the district office, “The district is not very transparent about the inner workings of departments. We should be able to work together” (Cerro Coso Community College Full Time Faculty).

There is also doubt by many employees across the district if transparency is even possible, “I don't know if it's possible for leaders to be truly transparent or honest when they believe their roles are to rule over others. Leaders treating the workplace like a Game of Thrones kingdom makes this impossible” (Bakersfield College Temporary Employee). Fortunately, many employees believe that the trust can be rebuilt if transparency is strengthened across the district, “Sharing of information could help. The goal of being transparent overall, in all things, I believe would help build trust. In the past there was a sense of some colleges receiving preferential treatment; if data could be shared or specific reasoning / logic in decision making shared, I think that would help district-wide with this sense” (Porterville College Confidential Management). The need for straightforward communication and increased transparency feeds also into the feedback loop, which allows employees to have buy-in.

The Feedback loop

With the need for clear communication and strengthening transparency, there is also a need for a feedback loop that facilitates employee input into district and college wide decisions, “Intentionally consider the needs of the campuses at the front-end of district planning. There is a tiny window for input AFTER the AURs have been developed. Even so, the colleges take the time to provide genuine input that rarely ever changes anything or shows up in the final document” (Cerro Coso Community College Confidential Management). The employees at Kern CCD want to see that leadership values their input and feel that by taking them into consideration, that morale can be built through a functional feedback loop, “It would be good to see some true leadership that addresses the issues straight on and isn't afraid to clear the deadweight out of the way. Clear vision, clear communication, and follow through would create much needed transparency and would lead to improved morale” (Bakersfield College Confidential Management). The ask for accepting feedback is related back to communication and the transparency of the district and colleges.

Employees at Kern CCCD want a formal way in which to continually offer feedback and to stay involved in the process, “Implement formal feedback mechanisms, such as surveys, suggestion boxes, or anonymous reporting systems, to gather input from employees about their experiences, concerns, and suggestions for improvement. Actively listen to feedback, acknowledge concerns, and take appropriate action to address issues raised by employees” (Bakersfield College Confidential Management). Some employees would like these feedback mechanisms to be anonymous, “Establish feedback mechanisms where employees can provide input anonymously if necessary. Act on feedback received to demonstrate a commitment to improvement and transparency” (Cerro Coso Community College Classified Employee). Kern CCD employees are also asking for follow through as part of the feedback loop.

Need for collaboration

The need for collaboration is reflected in the survey responses across all three campuses and the district, “The isolated culture maybe stem from the decentralized operation. There are other factors/ reason for this arrangement, especially when each Campus needs may differ; But there’re also inefficiency when the process is repeated 3 times should there’s a way/product/services that’s maybe beneficial across the District when it is being reviewed by each campus over different course of time, and also the other Campus misses out on the opportunity/delayed in the process to better serve the students with this better/advance options available” (District Office Classified Employee). This lack of collaboration is seen as hindering both the colleges and the district as a whole by multiplying efforts.

Many suggestions for creating opportunities for collaboration were suggested within the survey. Several employees feel that college events and places to get together would help foster a sense of community and collaboration, “There are so few opportunities and locations to interact with employees socially. I think that once people get to know each other as people, barriers and distrust lessen, and people are willing to see people as human beings. In my opinion, a permanent, dedicated faculty club or employee club (room) would welcome people to hang out from all over campus” (Bakersfield College Full time faculty). Employees through every facet of the district are looking for human to human connections.

Human to human relationships

The need for transparency is not just at the college and district level, but also in the everyday interactions between employees, “Leadership needs to devote time to getting to know staff and becoming familiar with what they do. Manage by walking around theory, need to get out of the office more. Much can be learned by going to where the staff are and talking with them” (Bakersfield College Classified Employee). Also, many employees say that by establishing relationships, the students also are able to benefit, “Administration needs to have less meetings with one another and spend more time with the individuals they are supposedly leading, finding out from them what their needs and concerns are and what the students most need” (Bakersfield Full Time Faculty). When communication, transparency, collaboration and human relationships are built across the district, trust and a positive work culture develops.

Summary of theme one

The first theme is focused on the different facets of communication, which involve connections across the district, transparency, a function feedback loop, the need for collaboration and human to human connections. One way to start achieving communication is to begin streamlining district wide policy, process and procedure.

Policy, Process and Procedure

The second theme emerging from analysis from this survey explains the need for adequate and clear policy, procedure, and processes within every department, division, college and the district office.

Inadequacies across the district

The disconnect within the district is not just communication, but also filters into policy, process and procedure. There is a collective plea from Kern CCD employees toward “Streamlining administrative processes and reducing bureaucratic barriers to innovation and efficiency” (Bakersfield College Classified Employee). Employees feel like there are too many barriers, which negatively impacts trust, “Less red tape. Less hands involved in minor decisions. Streamline approval for faculty and requests for students. The more that need to be involved - proves a lack of trust” (Bakersfield College Full Time Faculty). Not only is it difficult to navigate the processes, but the processes are continually changing with little to no communication, “It seems there are times when policies change, but there are discrepancies or roadblocks that make the intent of the change difficult to maintain work efficiency” (Bakersfield College Full Time Faculty).

The difficulties with policy, process, and procedure also impacts how employees see their workloads, “we could really reduce the bureaucratic workload. Sometimes there are things we want to do in our department that would involve getting many people involved to approve a purchase or to coordinate something. This lends to a feeling of helplessness. "This needs to get done by this time, but due to bureaucratic delay, it won't get done, so we'll be a bit behind and we'll have to work faster to catch up". Great, now I really feel like coming in to work and that things are going to go well. I get it, every job has its ups and downs, and no job is perfect, but it more often than not feels like many of our problems here are caused internally rather than something "out of our control" (Bakersfield College Classified). These struggles are continuous and impact how employees feel as they try to do their work each day, “Getting so caught up with the day-to-day task, tackling each challenge only as it comes, does not improve productivity especially when they are repetitive issues. The lost sight or in taking a step back to look at the bigger picture and reevaluate, or simply because of “always been this way” or perhaps the fear of not being able to cope with the change/unknown seems to deter improvements/ innovation overall” (District Office Classified).

The lack of coherent work processes across the district makes employees feel that, “There is no identity for Kern Community College District - it is just separate entities all doing the same work without having a viable, strategic plan to partner together to achieve goals” (Porterville

College, Confidential Management). A streamlined process may help create unity across the district, "I think that all three colleges should work closer together to streamline the process so all of the staff feel like they are doing the same work across the district. This would help since all three colleges have their classified do different functions and some do not do any of their job description. This would boost the employee morale." (Bakersfield College, No Employee Type Provided). Even with these challenges, there is still a supportive undertone where KCCD employees can see the district move forward with collaborative policies and processes, "I believe that overall, we have employees that are supportive of our overall goal of supporting students and our community. I do think that we need to re-evaluate some of our policies in terms of departments to ensure we can be effective, work quickly, and keep momentum while also being responsible and thoughtful. Some of the policies in developing partnerships through grants and funding can take so much time that we get delayed in completing projects and plans. I think the more we can get together and understand each department and employee, we can develop meaningful and effective policies that have the students as the priority" (District office Confidential Management). By streamlining Kern CCD policies, processes, and procedures, it creates the space to be less overworked and more innovative.

Pay and Policy

One line item that came up several times throughout the survey is discrepancies in pay, "Equal Pay for Equal Work A critical aspect of employee morale is ensuring fair compensation. There are clear discrepancies in pay among employees who perform similar roles, leading to a sense of inequality and unfair treatment. Addressing these disparities through a commitment to "equal pay for equal work" is essential for promoting a culture of fairness and respect" (Bakersfield College Classified Employee). Several employees feel that, "Our pay is very low for the district and in fact does not meet inflation rises, fast food now makes more than many employees here. Pay should go up for all" (Bakersfield College Classified Employee). Many employees referred to turnover and low morale when referencing their pay.

Many employees feel that there needs to be a, "Review of salary schedules - Certain classified positions have annual salaries that are less than the annual benefits that KCCD covers. There used to be a market survey of salaries every 3 years for the management salary schedule. Faculty has a survey built into their contract" (Bakersfield Classified Employee). There is concern that promotions and pay have inadequate policy that hindered employee morale, "Current employees who are promoted should be given the opportunity to negotiate their salaries, particularly if they are taking on additional responsibilities. Currently, promotions only begin at Step 1 of the new pay scale, regardless of the employee's experience and dedication to the company. However, new employees who have not been part of the campus community for long and are trained by current employees are able to negotiate their starting step. This creates frustration among dedicated employees, who may have been with the company for years, but are potentially being paid less than a new employee" (Bakersfield College Confidential Management). Many employees referenced these inconsistencies, along with issues of job descriptions and pay between college and district, lack of compensation for terminal degrees, COLA increases, and issues with the Job Analysis Questionnaire (JAQ) process in updating positions and pay.

Employees are asking for more transparency in the JAQ process, “Looking at the statistics the success of the JAQ process is incredibly low. Classified staff are not supported at a district level. Recently, a JAQ received full support from my supervisor, VP, and President and yet a person in a level of authority who has no concept of the functions of the job in question, denied it. When the President pressed for the decision to be reconsidered the first answer was a "hard no". The job position was eventually reclassified but only under the condition that there would be no backpay provided despite the individual having worked out of classification throughout the entire JAQ process. It is discouraging situations like these that make classified staff not even want to try and better themselves” (Cerro Coso Community College Classified Employee). Many employees across the whole district feel that this process needs to be updated and more transparent.

Lack and Need for Training

The absence of a comprehensive orientation and training was repeated throughout the survey document, “We need a districtwide employee training program. Aside from procedural onboarding during hiring, we have no official employee onboarding training. An employee should not have to start a job only to realize that they need to "recreate the wheel" in their role. Employees should be guided through onboarding and job role training. KCCD needs an employee training department to facilitate this districtwide. A robust training program is an amazing opportunity for KCCD to really help employees deliver on outcomes for students” (District Office Classified Employee). Kern CCD employees are starting their roles, but are left to “sink or swim” (Bakersfield College Classified Employee) in order to learn the skills needed to do their jobs, “I think there should be a mandatory training program for new employees. When I started at BC I had to reach out to other support staff for training and sort of teach myself. I think the employees of KCCD would greatly appreciate real training program” (Bakersfield College Classified Employee). The lack of training puts employees at a disadvantage when starting at KCCD.

There is also a consensus among classified that promotional opportunities into leadership are slim to nonexistent. Kern CCD employees want a path to move into leadership, “There should be a training program for classified employees that may want to move into management. Almost every management position on campus requires previous management experience which is impossible to get if one can't get into management in the first place. 2. There should also be a pipeline from education advisor to counselor. Many ed advisors meet the minimum qualifications for counselors but the perception (right or wrong) is that they will never be able to get a counselor position since ed advisors are overused and much cheaper than faculty. 3. More development programs overall to help people move up the ranks would be desirable” (Bakersfield College Classified Employee). Though the leadership academy is available to be classified, they have to have been with the district for three years before applying.

For a management perspective, classified would benefit from a comprehensive orientation, continued trainings, but also from cross-training and apprenticeships, “I also recommend activities that would encourage cross-training and open communication between departments so we know how to best lead our students and not be siloed into our own departments” (Bakersfield College Confidential Management). Additionally, employees are asking for almost any type of trainings that may be possibly available to them, “Offering additional training to all departments throughout the course of the year by sharing virtual opportunities, workshops and

conferences that could benefit both the employee and the department. Since there is no clear training plan for learning new roles or positions this would allow for gaps to be closed” (Porterville College Classified Employee).

There are also calls for more management training, especially with soft skills and communication, “There are times when as an employee I am walking around eggshells in my office. There are ways to give employees constructive criticism without them feeling belittled or like small children who are being scolded. We are all adults. Maybe managers need to take courses or attend training on how to better communicate with their staff” (Bakersfield College Classified Employee). Beyond management training, there is also the request for trainings to be offered to adjunct and full time faculty, “Treat adjunct-faculty with more respect and not like the step-child. Provide them with more resources and training that meet their busy schedules (such as in the evenings), as this is likely a second job. That will improve their morale” (Bakersfield College Full Time Faculty). Many employees recommended creating a training center to service all employees within the district.

Recognition of employees

Many employees across the district do not feel like their hard work is recognized or appreciated, “Employees want to feel valued and that can be accomplished several ways. Acknowledgement and recognition would be a start” (Bakersfield College Classified Employee). Overall, many classified staff feel that they are less appreciated than other groups on campus, “Please appreciate classified staff more. The campus always puts management and faculty on a pedestal but we come into work as well. We are year long employees and are always here supporting the goals of the campus. It is hard to have a good morale when all the praise goes to others. It would be nice to get to go home a little early before the holidays. As an example, the Wednesday before Thanksgiving everyone is just waiting for 5:30 so a little bit of a break would be nice” (Bakersfield College Classified Employee). Many employees asked for little ways to be appreciated that did not necessarily require resources from the district, such as getting off a little early for holidays.

Many employees felt that their hard work was not ever recognized by the district as their pay scale does not reflect their effort. Some employees feel unseen when it comes to their work, “We are just a number like students, just a ID number. There is no employee appreciation, consistency of achievements, or empowering the teams in all levels” (Bakersfield College Confidential Management). Employees across the district believe that “there should be more recognition for individuals and departments that are required to work continuously” (Bakersfield College Classified Employee) and that the district needs to “recognize and appreciate employees for their contributions openly and regularly. Feeling valued and acknowledged enhances trust and strengthens relationships within the organization” (Cerro Coso Community College Employee) . It is a common feeling among KCCD employees that they do not feel appreciated.

Remote Work Policies and the influence of COVID

In March 2020 remote work was introduced on a large scale across the globe. Since employees have been brought back to the workplace and remote policies have changed, many Kern CCD

employees feel that remote or hybrid work should be part of the educational landscape, “Taking away remote work has been detrimental. The ability to work remotely has taken away flexibility for employees and forces them to use sick/vacation time” (District Office Classified Employee). Employees talked about their well-being, morale and creating a work life balance through flexibility and remote work.

For some Kern CCD employees, the ask for remote work was connected to more than well-being, but also being a potential benefit for working at Kern CCD that may also help retain talent. “The hybrid work environment needs to continue in order to retain talent along with promoting well being. As long as teams are able to effectively work in the hybrid environment it should continue. With the hybrid approach we can continue to service the departments and others just as effectively as we have over the last 4 years” (District Office Confidential Management). There are also many employees who feel that being allowed the flexibility of remote work would help feel appreciated, “Flexibility with schedules. It’s 2024, we’re set up for remote work, give us the trust and let us have more work life balance. We do not need 10 hours in a day to complete our work if we know what we’re doing. We’re overworked and underpaid. Life is so expensive and we spend it at a desk. It’s draining, depressing and we’re all just working to live and living to work. We can barely afford to put food on the table but we love what we do. You have good employees but it’s a matter of time before we start looking at all these remote jobs that give us the pay and flexibility, benefits and training we need. Please start recognizing the amazing classified you have” (Cerro Coso Community College Classified Employee). Many employees put in suggestions for different hybrid models and ways they would still efficiently serve students while gaining more of a work life balance for themselves.

Though the majority of employees are wanting remote/hybrid models for remote work, there are different policies across the district when it comes to remote work, “There appears to be a significant disparity in the opportunities for remote work among employees within the same union, role, and title. While some individuals are granted the privilege of working from home or even remotely from another state, others, despite holding identical positions, are required to report to campus regularly. The lack of uniformity in remote work arrangements not only fosters feelings of resentment and inequity among employees but also undermines morale and productivity” (Bakersfield Confidential Management). Currently, there are disparities between departments, colleges, and the district for remote work.

Summary of theme two

The second theme is focused on the different policies, processes, and procedures across the district. This theme focused on the inconsistencies across the district, pay, training, recognition of employees, and remote work policies.

Top Down Culture

The third theme emerging from analysis from this survey explains how Kern CCD’s organizational structure has influenced and shaped the culture throughout the district, including key issues such as morale and trust.

Hiring process/favoritism

Many employees feel that the hiring process at Kern CCD is biased, “Favoritism in hiring and promotion decisions, where personal connections matter more than qualifications or merit” (Bakersfield College Classified Employee). The hiring bias that employees perceive reach outside of just new positions, but also in promotions, “People are promoted or placed in positions not because of the skills or expertise they possess, but who they know. It is deflating to those who constantly and consistently put students first and put in the hours” (Bakersfield College Confidential Management). There are collective worries of not just favoritism, but also hiring or promoting individuals who do not have the skills or expertise for the role they are assuming.

This perception of favoritism in hiring is most reflected in the hiring of managers within the survey responses, “The tendency for the District to create new management positions at the drop of a hat for no clear reason, with no explanation, has eroded trust from the colleges in the District” (Cerro Coso Community College Classified Employee). This is not just an isolated issue that is perceived at one location, but across the district, “The lack of transparency and level of manipulation has been difficult. The number of District management positions seems to have exploded, with no transparency or collaborative discussion. It is tremendously unclear what they even do for jobs and several were blatantly favor-hires” (Porterville College Confidential Management). Beyond the perceived favoritism, many also feel that their skills are not being developed to where they are able to be promoted within Kern CCD, “I have observed and experienced a pattern of favoritism in KCCD as I have worked in several locations. KCCD does not foster promoting individuals. Since hiring committees are formed by the Chair (Admin), it is difficult for an employee to have an opportunity if the committee is stacked against them from the beginning. Employees are not encouraged to develop skills to prepare them to move into other positions” (Bakersfield College Full Time Faculty). Many employees within the survey expressed feeling locked into their current position

Beyond hiring and promotions, some feel that policies around the creation of positions contributes to difficulties in the hiring process, “Department leaders are forced to hire from a pool of existing positions that don't necessarily fit with the work being done, because the process for creating new positions is overly complex and can't respond to the rapidly changing landscape of actual needs” (District Office Classified Employees). Some see the organizational structure as a contributing factor to the perception of biases within the hiring process, “The current organizational structure is very nepotistic with individuals receiving job opportunities without the positions posting; there is a lack of transparency in all hiring on all three campuses and within the District Office. This can be seen with the (job title redacted) position and many of the associate vice chancellor job opportunities at the District level that did not post or posted for a very short-time frame. At Porterville College hiring decision-making is nonsensical with positions being advocated for that are unable to make faculty load due to not having the metrics to back up the need for the position or management positions being added but the job duties are not defined so the individual ends up not having regularly assigned work” (Porterville College Confidential Management). Many of the issues with the perceived bias in the hiring process circles back to transparency.

Use of Resources

When it comes to budgeting and finance, there seems to be speculation about where resources go, “Sometimes we at PC get the feeling that we are an afterthought within the district and that most of the time and resources are spent on BC. For instance, in the decisions of faculty hiring, it seems that BC has overhired and the other campuses are left without needs met. We have room for growth in many areas on campus, but we can't do so because we don't have enough faculty. This hits PC harder because we aren't near a major metro area where adjuncts are more plentiful. In one discipline within my division, we routinely have 20-25 sections, but there are only 2 full time faculty members. In other disciplines another divisions it is even worse. This ends up harming students because the classes fill and we don't have enough instructors to staff more sections. This creates bottlenecks and keeps students from graduating on time” (Porterville College Full Time Faculty). Beyond speculation, many Kern CCD employees feel that there is an, “Unequal distribution of resources and support, exacerbating disparities between different departments or campuses” (Bakersfield College Classified Employee). With this speculation is the need for transparency for where resources are distributed.

When it comes to resources, there were also several mentions of infrastructure, “At Porterville College, buildings and classrooms are reallocated for other uses without consultation of faculty and staff and then presented as if there were discussions when they were not” (Porterville College Confidential Management). There seems to be a mistrust about where resources are going, “It also seems that large amounts of money are being sent from the college to the district and not much is returned, yet program review reports from departments across campus demonstrate a need for funds to purchase tools, machines, technology, and models to increase student learning and course offerings” (Bakersfield College Full Time Faculty). With this mistrust, there is a call for more accountability and transparency to where resources are going, “If there were an easily accessed record, reflecting all denials and acceptances of budget requests, one which shows the departments and locations being approved or denied, it would be straightforward to see whether certain locations face more frequent denials than others. If the same locations are consistently denied, or budgets reduced from the original requests, then KCCD should require an explanation from the college. This record should also reflect details on the use of “supporting all college locations” when a budget request is made and approved – how much is designated to “support” these locations, were the locations supported with the approval and if so, how” (Cerro Coso Community College Classified Employee). With improved transparency, more collaboration and communication can take place in order to make sure that resources are appropriately distributed.

Retaliation

A common theme in the survey results across Kern CCD was a fear of retaliation. Kern CCD employees expressed fears of voicing opinions, “I have seen the college administration and the district railroad individuals voicing a different opinion than that of the status quo. The climate in the last few years has been the worst. Previous to these last maybe 5 years working at BC was pleasant and everyone respected differences of opinion” (Bakersfield College Full Time Faculty). The code retaliation showed up 75 times while coding the data, “Some Classified have

fear to speak up on issues with management based on retaliation that have happened over and over rather in office setting, focus groups, committees etc.” (Porterville College Classified Employee). This makes many employees fearful for their jobs, “everyone is here because they need their jobs. I believe there is a general sense that if one speaks up on issues/concerns they could be retaliated against or passed over for future growth opportunities” (Bakersfield College Confidential Management). The fear of retaliation has hurt the morale of Kern CCD employees and created a fear for employees to ask questions, or to show initiative.

The district is working to strengthen feedback and transparency, and to do so “Honest feedback requires non-retaliation” (Porterville College Full Time Faculty). There is a consensus throughout the survey that, “Retaliation against employees by management, faculty, and staff has to stop. (District Office No Employee Type Provided), and that there needs to be a process for “Implementing mechanisms for employees to provide feedback and address concerns without fear of retaliation” (District Office Classified Employee). This fear of retaliation is through every college and contingency group, including student workers. One student worker suggested “Open forums of discussion. Clearer channels of communication and reporting. Without reprisals” Bakersfield College Student Worker). The effect of retaliation has hindered the climate across Kern CCD and has caused mistrust and tension.

Feelings of Disconnection

With the lack of coherent policy, process and procedure across the district, there is also a sense of disconnection, “For a couple of years since we came back from the pandemic, it feels that the District office has detached from Bakersfield College. It seems the District has other priorities that are being executed through the district and those take priority over the needs of the college” (No College Selected, No Employee Type Selected). This disconnect is associated with overworking employees, tension and turnover, “There is a disconnect between the District and the Colleges. Managers at the campuses are overworked until they resign, which has increased the turnover of admin. We have lost some good individuals over work stress. It also seems like the admin is against the faculty” (Bakersfield College, Full Time faculty). This disconnection is not just between colleges and the district, but also on each college campus.

This sense of disconnect trickles down the Kern CCD organization, “I feel that there is division between departments on campus, there is also disconnect between management and employees, “My supervisor knows very little about what our office staff does on a day-to-day basis, the time it takes, and the processes they involve. I have been here a couple of years and that has always been an issue” (Porterville College Classified Employee). This disconnect is a hindrance to communication, “There is a disconnect between those at the top and those responsible for the day to day work. When changes are made, the reasoning behind those changes is not always communicated to those employees impacted by the changes. It would be nice to feel like our input/voices mattered” (District Office Classified Employee). This radiates between divisions also trickles down to the relationships between managers and employees, “Many in upper management seem extremely disconnected from those of us on the front line and the impression, right or wrong, is that those at the management level can operate with impunity” (Bakersfield College Full Time Faculty). The sense of disconnection is a hindrance to communication and to strengthening collaboration and transparency.

Social and political agendas

With the issues of transparency and trust, there also comes both social and political agendas, “We have moved so far away from being able to have productive conversations with each other due in part to a lack of trust. This was created by the executive branch district wide and faculty representatives. There is too much political posturing, backstabbing, infighting, and flat out lying by employees to advance their hidden agendas” (District Office No Employee Type Provided). This lack of trust has led to “too many back-door deals made with certain administrators and the kool aid drinking co-workers” Bakersfield College Full Time Faculty). The nature of these political and social agendas has been described as, “A culture of 'yes men' has been being built for years. If you have different thoughts, or dare think beyond 'their' box, you aren't taken seriously and have no chance at advancing your career at KCCD. Fall in line or find somewhere else you "fit in". There is no room for difference of opinion” (Bakersfield College Confidential Management). The social and political agendas are a hindrance to trust, transparency, and to the overall campus climate.

There is a consensus across the district that “The culture and mindset of "good old boy club" needs to stop. The you are either "in" or "out" approach needs to stop. This will begin to build a level of trust” (Cerro Coso Community College Full Time Faculty). Employees from across the district want to see trust restored and “the admins up above need to make sure that their decisions are not based off self interest, but instead in the best interest of college as a whole” (Bakersfield College Classified Employee). Employees and managers alike would like “An administration that doesn't ignore reality in favor of maintaining a narrative that supports an agenda (Bakersfield College Full Time Faculty). If the district wants to strengthen transparency and trust, the social and political agendas have to be addressed.

Some of the political and social discourse has fallen under the umbrella of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI), “There is a culture of resistance to change and growing with the growth and change of the students that are served. There is discussions of equity and inclusion, but this is not practiced in the staff, faculty and leadership that is hired” (Bakersfield College Classified Employee). There were a number of comments for and against DEI initiatives, primarily, but not exclusively on the Bakersfield College Campus. Many believe that, “BC needs to enforce/implement/improve/educate all KCCD and BC employees about diversity, culture, background, etc. more classes or trainings to support BC's mission and vision statement (Bakersfield College Classified Employee). There is also the belief that, “DEI initiatives on campus have become highly divisive. DEI has become an ideological religion. There is no tolerance for honest academic debate” (Bakersfield College Full Time Faculty). The debate around DEI initiatives has led to a social and political divide that is disrupting the ability of employees to collaborate.

Heavy initiatives with overworking employees

Kern CCD, like many community colleges across California, has become very initiative heavy over the last several years. Many of these initiatives are top down from the state chancellor's

office, but many are conceptualized and implemented by Kern CCD for their campus. Though there is a need for initiatives, there seems to be a common theme where, “Initiatives are launched with enthusiasm, but they often lose momentum or are sidelined due to time constraints. With numerous initiatives ongoing simultaneously, there’s little opportunity to focus on any one task. How can we ensure that all campuses are aligned with the same initiative, considering the diversity of personalities and perspectives? Perhaps discussing these initiatives collectively could help us reach a consensus and ensure everyone is on the same page” (District Office Classified Employee). This influx of initiatives has impacted the morale of Kern CCD employees.

Though many initiatives are seen positively, there is also a hefty cost of time and energy to implement them, “KCCD always seems to be piloting a ton of programs. Innovation is great, but at what cost? We do A LOT of new things, but we don't do any of them well. I would rather see us do fewer initiatives, focus resources on those, and do them well” (Bakersfield College Confidential Management). There are also strong feelings about the way in which initiatives have been implemented, “When the state mandates changes to our curriculum that could negatively impact students and faculty, the administration has rushed to implement changes without any discussion with faculty as to how to best approach implementation. BC had to be first. Not the best, but first to implement change. Let's stop and evaluate things that come up before rushing to implement. Let's not always have to be first” (Bakersfield College Full Time Faculty). Many departments would like to see fewer initiatives and more concentration that they can focus on their current roles, “It would be beneficial for the departments to have the opportunity to concentrate on their programs, which could significantly boost morale, engagement, and performance levels. The team members have been overworked for a long time due to the "all-hands-on-deck" approach, which requires them to work overtime for their current positions.” (Bakersfield College Confidential Management). Though the conceptualization of initiatives comes with good intentions, the implementation has heavy costs and needs more evaluation and planning behind implementation.

Top heavy Administration

Over the last several years the amount of administration within Kern CCD has increased substantially. Many employees feel that “We need to address the excess number of administrators on campus” (Porterville College No Employee Type Provided). The top heavy administration is seen throughout the district, “The District Office is too heavy on administration, and they don't work well with the colleges. (Cerro Coso Community College Full Time Faculty). For example at Porterville College, “In 2019-2020 we had 66-Faculty 111 - Adjunct 71-Staff Admin - 19 FTES - 1,603 Today we have 70 - Faculty 102 - Adjunct 70 - Staff 27 - Admin (with more to be hired) FTES - 1,552 We should be spending that money on additional staff as most departments are understaffed. Some areas are so understaffed that people can’t attend meetings without bringing a laptop to the meeting to continue doing their jobs. How is it that we have 42% increase in Admin from 2019 - 2020, with less staff, less adjuncts, and fewer FTES? We had a 6% increase in full time faculty over the same time period. Administration does not create FTES, but faculty does, so why are we increasing admin? This is a problem with all higher education <https://thesenateforum.wordpress.com/2023/05/09/administrative-bloat-in-higher->

[education-is-this-now-a-higher-education-industrial-complex/](#)" (Porterville College Full time Faculty). These same patterns with hiring more administration are also observable at the two sister colleges and the district.

Past leadership and lack of consequences

With the increase of administration, the culture has also changed, "Historically, the culture between the district and each college has varied between not-so-good and good over the many years I've been working for the district. Recent leadership changes and a blurring of college / district roles appear to have contributed to a dip in relations. Individual trusted relationships persist. At the same time, there is also a level of push and pull between individuals looking to advance an agenda of division" (District Office Confidential Management). With the trajectory of a top heavy administration, the culture had changed to a place where many people lacked accountability. "For years, there has been a divide between different groups of people. Our actions and behaviors are a way of communicating with others. Unfortunately, we often do things that hinder our progress and success. The trust between people has been broken, and it's time for those in leadership positions to take responsibility for the culture they have created. There are cliques and signs of favoritism in all departments. I have personally witnessed management belittling and embarrassing their subordinates in front of their colleagues" (Bakersfield College Confidential Management). The employees within Kern CCD are hopeful about the future and looking forward to strengthening trust, transparency, and collaboration, "Honestly, the most recent hires (the new Chancellor and the new BC College President) give me hope. As people NEW to the district/campus, I am counting on each to arrive with a foremost goal of supporting the work at the district and at BC rather than feathering their own nests. I'm a fan of interest-based bargaining, open door policies, fair treatment of employees and a genuine drive to better students' lives" (Bakersfield College Full Time Faculty).

Summary of theme three

The third theme is focused on top down culture throughout the district. This theme includes hiring process and favoritism, use of resources, retaliation, social and political agendas, initiatives and influences of past leadership.

Discussion

The purpose of this qualitative study was not only to examine what has been creating breakdowns of trust and collaboration across the district, but also to find ways in which to help bridge the gap to create a more cohesive environment for all employees and students.

Repairing the breakdown of trust

Trust is something that cannot be mandated but something that needs to be developed. According to a full time faculty member at Porterville College, "Trust takes time to restore once lost. A one-time event will not repair years of distrust. More district presence at the "other two campuses" would be a great start". The call for participatory governance and inclusive interactive feedback is being proposed throughout the district, "Enhancing trust can be achieved by

refraining from making decisions on behalf of the college; instead, colleges should consistently be included in the decision-making process before any determinations are finalized” (District Office Confidential Management). Through creating transparent practices through communication and feedback, trust can be rebuilt.

Creating collaboration

Collaboration was continually referenced as a cornerstone to trust and community, “I think collaboration, innovation, and employee well-being are of utmost importance to me and how we do our jobs” (Bakersfield College Full Time Faculty). There were several references to informal communication to generate organic empathy and humanity between groups. Several Kern CCD employees suggested cross-collaboration teams, “Create opportunities for cross-departmental collaboration and teamwork. When employees work together towards common goals, it fosters trust and mutual respect” (Cerro Coso Community College Classified Employee). Collaboration is very closely related to building interpersonal relationships and respect for one another.

Restoring respect and helping tensions

Even though there is a history of tension and lack of respect across the district as a whole, many Kern CCD employees believe it can be overcome, “Respect to one another regardless of culture brings harmony and peace between employees, groups, colleges and the district offices could be improved or transparency strengthened” (Cerro Coso Classified Employee). Communication is also seen as a tool to use to help foster respect, “I believe communication is key, especially between staff and management. Communicating on a level where everyone, although is not equal, we are all treated with respect” (Bakersfield College Classified Employee). There is still work to be done in order to grow respect and to lessen tensions across the district.

Creating well-being across the district

Wellness and the need for work life balance was also a recurring theme across the district. For classified Kern CCD employees, this included “Prioritizing employee well-being through wellness programs, mental health resources, and flexible scheduling options would support work-life balance” (District Office Classified Employee). Several classified employees mentioned remote/hybrid work policies as being beneficial to their well-being. For management there were suggestions to “reduce Managers Load to smaller divisions to be more effective. Use wholistic approach to decision making and implementation. Workload should not be limited to faculty” (Bakersfield College Classified Employee). As the district moves forward, wellness and work life balance should be a topic of consideration as a way to support the Kern CCD employee workforce.

Positively affecting students

The goal of education is the transmitting of knowledge and skills. The reason each person within the Kern CCD works within the educational system is to put students first, “The reason I have a job is for the students. I want to see students succeed and be successful in their journey. I enjoy the smile on a student's face when they are able to reach the goal they've made. This should be our number one focus” (District Office Classified Employee). Sometimes there needs to be the reminder to “Focus on student needs and ensure each conversation, event, or meeting

begins with a positive affirmation of our mission and values” (Bakersfield College Full Time Faculty). Kern CCD employees understand their role in student lives, “We have been placed in positions to serve students at each and everyone of those levels” (Cerro Coso Community College Classified) and how our work also benefits our communities, “We are placed in positions that help positively impact the students we serve, which also trickle down to our communities in which we serve” (Cerro Coso Community College Classified Employees). As the work at Kern CCD continues, the district and the colleges will continue keeping students as their top priority moving forward.

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