

Change Matrix or Lack Thereof

It is difficult to single out one particular change at my school to which I can apply the “change matrix”. It has been a year of change and turmoil. It began last summer with a district-wide, school board-led, strategic planning initiative. That strategic planning storm of change spawned many peripheral storm cells. The aftermath of change was evident in the hallways, and classroom, and on the faces of teachers building-wide. For the purpose of this assignment I will focus on one of the seemingly more trivial changes that took place as a result of the strategic planning discussions. No more casual Fridays.

Our school had always allowed teachers and support staff to wear blue jeans on Fridays. Often those jeans would be accompanied by sweatshirt or t-shirt supporting some school sport or extracurricular group. Many surveys, town hall style meetings, special school board meeting, and google documents gathered data on what teachers, students, administrators, school board members, parents, and community leaders saw as areas to sustain or improve. And the first change that was published at summer’s end was an end to casual Fridays. No more blue jeans on Fridays.

Had an explanation been given. Had this edict come from a genuine concern for improving student achievement. Had there been any data to support ending casual Fridays it would probably have been received better by teachers and staff coming to school this year. But it appeared to have come from a dismissed comment at one of the many strategic planning that was picked up by local media. The comment had implied that in order for the community to take our teachers more seriously, our teachers should dress more professionally. This

apparently was the basis for the new policy. There was no discussion about how teachers present themselves to their students. Also absent was the discussion about how the perceived gap between our generally upper-middle class teachers living outside the generally lower-working class community of our school, a topic that was raised in the strategic planning process, would be helped or hurt by asking teachers to dress even more unlike our students.

This seemingly simple decision was void any part of the change matrix provided in our class materials. And as such, this single decision fostered all of the negative products of the change equation. Confusion, anxiety, resistance, and frustration were palpable every Friday. It made the very real changes that are necessary at our school difficult to “buy into” because teachers and staff no longer trusted the process. Had vision, skill, incentives, and resources led to an end of casual Fridays, we could have all moved forward and affected change. But a change for the sake of change not only fails but undermines the foundation needed for future, meaningful change.