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Learning as Leadership

Community Challenge

For San Juan College High School, it's all about the timing—accelerated timing. Students can receive a high school degree and an associate degree in four years. For Seth Martinez, the timing was crucial as well. Hired in January, he was to take the principal job in May—only by then a pandemic exploded and students move to a remote learning model, while still needing to maintain the accelerated course study.

Action Taken

“As a principal, you're the principal teacher of teachers.” That lesson has always stuck with Martinez, and he believes a key to leadership is meaningful conversation and developing “habits of the mind.” In the past, the principal's role was more directive, he says. A lot of pushback comes from misunderstanding, and he's learned to keep an open ear.

He recalls a Harvard case study delivered in PPE that “the best leadership is one that is able to pull from all different styles of leadership.” Martinez met with every teacher on his staff to figure out what kind of leadership he needed walking into the building.

They knew internet access would be a problem for some students, and the district offered up approximately 500 hotspots. And they learned to simplify the curriculum. “We have discussions as a staff about not minimizing, but lessening teacher talk and encouraging more student talk and collaboration.” The school was able to progress to clubs and activities like a science fair that allowed students to talk online, outside the virtual classroom.

Key Takeaway

Effective change takes leadership and leadership means influencing others. “PPE really afforded me the opportunity to get a grasp” on remote learning and troubleshooting the nuances of that ahead of time, says Martinez. He estimates 200 have taken part in the PPE program and he's seen an association in the training of leaders and academic progress. In talking to other leaders about an issue, he's heard ideas that hadn't occurred to him. “Professional learning,” Martinez

said, “truly is the backbone of, and kind of the clockwork of, how you can create change and systemic change.”