

UPBEAT Case Study



How Chicago International Charter School Bucktown Campus [CICS Bucktown], managed by Distinctive Schools, used Upbeat to increase teacher engagement and retention.

*“It is clear that thousands of dollars walk out the door each time a teacher leaves...Low school performance and high poverty were correlated with high teacher turnover in Chicago Public Schools. In Chicago, the average cost was \$17,872 per leaver...”**

BACKGROUND

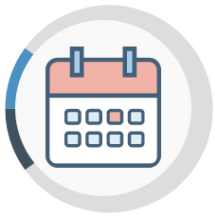
CICS Bucktown is centrally located in Chicago, serving over 700 students, some of whom travel a great distance to attend, and has approximately 50 teachers. Six years ago, CICS Bucktown came under new management by Distinctive Schools. Going into the 2016-2017 school year, Distinctive Schools wanted to gauge staff culture and better understand how staff felt about working conditions in the schools. As the teacher turnover rate over the past years has been high, hovering around 30 percent across all the school management operator's campuses, Distinctive Schools' leaders were looking for ways to increase teacher retention rates within each of its schools. Distinctive Schools was also looking to measure school culture outside of surveys used within Chicago Public Schools (CPS), such as the District's 5 Essentials Survey, which is one of their accountability measures and the extent of teacher engagement measurement within its schools.

Distinctive Schools chose the Upbeat survey, because it brought a new and objective perspective, as well as provided deeper and broader data points on school culture and overall happiness of teachers.

Upbeat gave them a deeper and broader set of data points on school culture and the overall happiness of teachers.

UPBEAT AT CICS BUCKTOWN

Distinctive Schools introduced the Upbeat survey to CICS in the 2016-17 school year (SY) in order to begin survey implementation in November 2016. Distinctive Schools shared details of the survey to the leadership team early in the SY, highlighting how it would be used as an opportunity for growth within the school, and provided context on how to use survey results. The director of CICS Bucktown, welcomed the survey as, historically, teacher retention had been a challenge for the school.



Dissemination of Survey

- The survey was introduced at an all-staff meeting with a brief overview.
- Leadership personally reached out to every member of the CICS Bucktown staff via email.
- Teachers were allotted 10-14 days and built-in time during meetings to take the survey.
- Teachers reported that the survey took between 20 and 30 minutes.

“Sometimes it’s hard for teachers to speak their mind and this survey helps admin understand where teachers are coming from, teachers will give honest feedback”

—Distinctive Schools Administrator



Review of Results with Upbeat

- The school director met with Upbeat staff to review survey results.
- Upbeat offered an objective and open-minded analysis of the results.
- They looked for areas of strength, areas of growth and for a balanced perspective.
- Upbeat coached the director on how to review the results with her leadership team.
- For areas of improvement, action items were developed.

“How do you celebrate and share success....don’t rush where there is red, go and celebrate.”

—CICS Bucktown Administrator



Review of Results & Developing Actions Steps with CICS Bucktown Leadership

- The school director met with her leadership team to review the Upbeat survey results.
- The goal of the meeting was to co-create plans for improving leadership.
- The school director shared the main results and trends.
- Leadership took the time to analyze the results to come up with creative and teacher-centered solutions.
- From these conversations, the team identified areas of strength and areas of improvement.
- For the areas of improvement action items were developed.

Areas of Strength:

- Instructional Co-Planning (+2 above network Avg)
- Career Path (+5 above network Avg)

Areas of Improvement:

- Teacher Influence (-7 below network Avg)
- Parent/Teacher Engagement (-8 below network Avg)



Action Steps Shared with Teachers

- Leadership shared its action steps with teachers during an all staff meeting within a PowerPoint document.
- The PowerPoint presentation included celebrations and areas of improvement.
- The survey and the subsequent actions steps showed that the leadership team wanted to be transparent and open to getting feedback from teachers.
- Previously teachers felt that administrative actions were top down and there wasn’t much teacher feedback.
- The teacher appreciated talking about the positives and celebrations.
- While most teachers said that the survey results were unsurprising, they felt it was transparent and their voices were heard.

“Such a great way to get a ton of information and hone in on support....The team changed and they want teacher feedback ... they are great about listening.”

—Mentor Teacher

SAMPLE QUESTIONS FROM THE UPBEAT SURVEY

7. EMPLOYEE INFLUENCE IN SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION

Q20

Employees have input into the school's policies.

Q21

Employees have influence over hiring of professional staff.

Q22

There are opportunities for employees to take on leadership roles at this school.

3. PARENT/EMPLOYEE COMMUNICATION

Q7

Employees at my school are committed to building trusting relationships with parents.

Q8

Parents and staff at my school think of each other as partners.

Q9

Parents at my school have confidence in the expertise of employees.

Q10

Parents at our school provide a great deal of support for the work that I do.

AREAS OF IMPROVEMENT

Teacher Influence

“Teachers felt that their voices were heard more... People who used to not voice their opinions, are voicing them now”

— *Teacher*



Based on survey results, the leadership team identified resources, hiring and budget as areas in which teachers desired more input in decision-making.

ACTION: Distinctive Schools visited the school and gave a presentation regarding the budget to the faculty. They also facilitated a feedback session at the school. Based on that feedback, Distinctive Schools made decisions on where the funding would be used, including air conditioning and classroom supplies. This created a collaboration between the school and network.

The leadership team addressed the need for teacher influence by providing outlets for teachers to be heard. The leadership needed to get a stronger sense of what was working in terms of professional development and how to incorporate teacher voice into professional growth plans. Survey results indicated that teachers previously felt all decisions were coming from the top down.

ACTION: The leadership team implemented mentor check-ins with all the teachers to make sure teachers were being heard, noting that mentors could pass feedback on to administrators on behalf of teachers who were reluctant to speak up. In an effort to increase collaboration, they also implemented an open door policy and allowed staff to be in each other's classrooms and PD sessions. Finally, they invited teachers and staff to be part of interviews and the hiring process when necessary.

Parent Engagement

“Best parent engagement this year over the last 8 years that I have been there” — *Teacher*

Because many students at CICS Bucktown live in other neighborhoods, family engagement is difficult. The leadership team identified the need for strategies to help teachers engage and communicate better with parents and get them more involved within the school.

ACTION: The school rebranded the parent group and called it PALS (Parents are Life Savers) in order to get a fresh start. Teachers were very supportive of the group and participated in advertising it to their students' parents. The leadership team assigned a teacher who had previously participated in parent engagement efforts to lead workshops on teacher-parent communication. The teacher worked as a liaison between parents and teachers and helped organize events, led meetings, and kept parents updated on happenings in school. There were at least 12 parent events including:

- Bilingual Literacy Club for Parents
- Cultural Nights
- Doctor Seuss' Birthday Party

In previous years, fewer than 20 parents had attended events. In 2016-17, more than 30 parents attended, with many more teachers participating. The school also implemented a contest for teachers, whereby for every five instances of positive feedback given to a parents about his or her child, the teacher would receive a reward.



MAY SURVEY AND RESULTS

The Upbeat survey was administered again in May 2017 to gauge how the actions items were received within the school and whether there were improvements. Overall, teachers felt that they were being listened to in a systematic way. Teachers felt the survey ensured that all teachers were being heard and the entire community was prioritized. Teachers felt validated and that they were part of creating the answers to improving their school.

Survey Results

November 2016 to May 2017

Results by Question Category

% Positive % Neutral % Negative

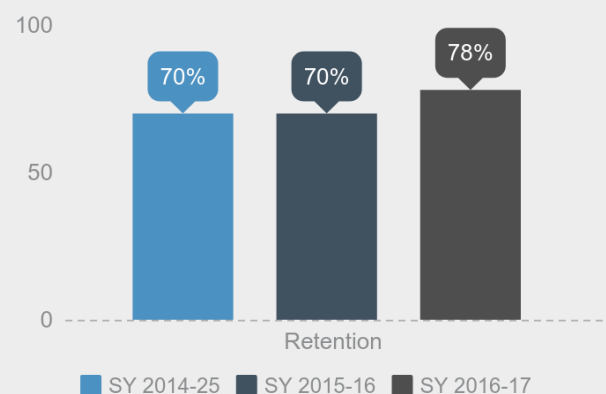
Teacher Influence in School Admin

- **Positive:** increased by 62%
- **Compared to Network Avg:** increased by 13 points
- Teachers have influence over hiring of professional staff: increased by 25%
- Teacher have input into the school's policies: increased by 8%

Parent/Teacher Communication

- **Positive:** increased 17%
- **Compared to Network Avg:** increased by 11 points
- Parents and teachers at my school think of each other as partners: increased by 14%
- Teachers at my school are committed to building trusting relationships with parents: increased by 12%

Historical Teacher Retention Rates



The data shows that retention rates have been improving. The school experienced a 70% retention over the past two previous years and in SY 2016-17, the retention rate increased to 78%.

The NCTAF reported that in Chicago, the average cost of a leaver is \$17,872*. Based on this, Bucktown was able to spend \$71,488 less on costs related to leavers compared to previous years.

“Any kind of change based on teacher feedback is an important change.” — Teacher

“This was a way to band together teachers and eliminate favoritism, ensuring all are being heard and the entire community prioritized.” — Teacher

The 5 Essentials Survey (5E) is a survey that is used in Illinois to measure school culture.

The 5E survey is used as an accountability measure for school performance. Staff and students take the survey every year on similar measures as the Upbeat survey.

For CICS Bucktown, the 5E survey also showed growth in the areas of improvement identified and acted upon. In the 2016-17 SY, CICS Bucktown increased to “Very Strong” in both measures.



*<https://nctaf.org/wp-content/uploads/CTTExecutiveSummaryfinal.pdf>

The content of this case study was provided by five CICS Bucktown teachers, the Director and Assistant Director of CICS Bucktown, and a representative from Distinctive Schools.



Bucktown

CHICAGO INTERNATIONAL CHARTER SCHOOL



DISTINCTIVE SCHOOLS

COMMIT. CREATE. COLLABORATE.