

Year of Awesome

Katherine Minster

Principal/Chief Administrator

Freeman Academy

Freeman Academy is experiencing a shift in its student body. As a school rooted in the Mennonite faith we have traditionally seen Mennonite students attending the Academy. However that demographic is changing and we are becoming a much more diverse population, with the inclusion of international and non-Mennonite students. Many of the recently enrolled students are coming because public school did not work for them. With this trend in mind and that struggle that Freeman Academy has with change I decided that I would focus my project on culture and climate.

I entitled this project The Year of Awesome, a title that was borrowed from a YouTube video by The Kid President. The focus of the video is a challenge to other students to make this year awesome for someone else.

Over the summer I continued to have the verse Colossians 3:12-17 presented in several situations as the epitome of how Christians should treat each other and what the ideal school culture would be. I used that verse as the basis for my opening convocation presentation as well as the basis for opening chapel.

During opening chapel with the younger students I also read the book "Have You Filled a Bucket Today?" This is a great book and helps students see the importance of "filling each other buckets" not and not "dipping into each other's bucket". With the older students we used the idea of them being the light for the new students and that they have the power to make fear and anxiety disappear for the new students. (This was a great use for Mychal's disappearing ink object lesson)

Throughout the rest of the year I worked with the staff to continue to build communication with administration, board, and faculty. As a staff we worked to praise the students for what they were doing well and not focusing on areas of struggle. We spent time trying to clean up and make the physical surrounding a place that students could be proud of. There was progress in a positive way and it could be seen with the students.

Through the year there continued to be struggles with the board administration and staff. We continued to struggle to be on the same page, and sometimes even reading the same book. We attempted to work through these issues but could not come to a resolution. In January it became clear that I was not making the impact that I had hoped and I resigned. I did not think that this would be the best thing that ever happened to Freeman Academy but I look back and see that it has been. As a result of this decision Freeman Academy is taking a look at so many structures, policies and procedures that it would not have otherwise.

This project has not turned out how I has hoped but I think that I was able to make an impact and move the school in the direction of having the culture that I envisioned at the beginning of this process.