Unlocking What Matters

Strategic Ways to Strengthen Teacher Morale
and Elevate Your Team

District Leadership Forum

The District Leadership Forum

Helping Leaders in Public Education Tackle Today's Most Complex Challenges

Best Practice Research

Shared Learning Network and Professional Development

Strategy and Implementation Support

Find innovative, proven solutions to public education's 'up-at-night' challenges

Equip leaders to discuss complex issues with their community and make evidence-based decisions/investments

Turn research results with expert guidance, planning facilitation, and implementation resources

Requests From Superintendents Consistently Align With Two Priorities

Student Success

Signature Research Areas:

• Raising early literacy and math
• Reducing absenteeism
• Creating conditions for positive behavior
• Supporting student mental health
• Closing college access gaps
• Scaling career readiness

EAB helps districts to…

☑ Identify common pitfalls to progress

☑ Implement and scale new, evidence-based practices

☑ Save time with ready-made resources and templates

Organizational Excellence

Signature Research Areas:

• Reimagining strategic planning
• Improving central office capacity and alignment
• Developing highly effective principals
• Boosting morale, retention, and recruitment
• Preparing for generative AI integration
• Strengthening initiative design

EAB helps districts to…

☑ Prioritize investment of time and resources

☑ Identify and target root causes to key challenges

☑ Align leadership teams around shared goals

Today's Speakers

Wheaton-Warrenville
Community Unit School District 200, IL

Downers Grove
Community High School District 99, IL

Jeff Schuler
Superintendent

Matt Biscan
Assistant
Superintendent
for Administrative
Services

Hank Thiele
Superintendent

Travis McGuire
Assistant
Superintendent
for Learning
Resources

Today's Agenda

1 Six Things Every District Leader Should Know About Morale

2 District 99: A Journey From Discovery to Focus

3 District 200: Four Years of Continuous Improvement

4 Audience Q&A

We are in A Precarious Moment for Progress

Recent Polls Increase the Risk That Districts Will Lose Focus on Morale

Recent Surveys Show Positive Momentum in Teacher Sentiment

2024	2025
-13	**+18**

EdWeek Teacher Morale Index, US average score, -100 to +100

22%	16%

Share of teachers planning to leave their job, RAND State of the American Teacher Survey

64%	54%

Percentage of educators who feel negative about the education profession (HMH)

But Data Show We Have a Long Way to Go in 2025/26 and Beyond

Teachers score worse on all measures of wellbeing than similar working adults (RAND)

Just 1 out of 5 (22%) would recommend teaching to a friend or family member (EdChoice/MorningConsult)

26%

of teachers feel optimistic about the national direction of K-12 education (EdChoice)

Kurtz, H., Lloyd, S. C., & Solis, V. (2024, March 6). *Introducing the Teacher Morale Index*. Education Week. https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/introducing-the-teacher-morale-index/2024/03 (Education Week); Doan, S., Steiner, E. D., Woo, A., & Levine, P. R. (2025). *State of the American Teacher Survey: 2025 technical documentation and survey results* (RR-A1108-17). RAND Corporation. https://doi.org/10.7249/RRA1108-12 (RAND Corporation); EdChoice, & Morning Consult. (2025, April). *Teachers and K-12 education: National polling report* (Report No. 19). https://www.edchoice.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/Teacher-Polling-2025.pdf ; HMH. (2025). *2025 Educator Confidence Report*. https://www.hmhco.com/educator-confidence-report (HMH)

Morale is a Requirement for Raising Achievement

Highly Effective Teachers Have the Greatest Impact on Student Achievement

Additional Months of Annual Academic Progress Attributable to Teachers and Principal sat the 75th vs 25th Percentile of Performance

Teachers | **+4 Months**

Principals | **+3 Months**

What Makes a Teacher Effective?

Individual Abilities

Subject expertise + Instructional skill + Classroom/ relationship management

x

Conducive Conditions

Personal health + Morale and engagement + Ability to focus on core work

70% of relevant studies concluded that **teachers with the lowest morale also had the lowest academic student outcomes** across core subjects.

Sources: Buttner, Annie, Frontline Education, The Teacher Shortage, 2021 Edition, 4.19.21; Gallup, The Powerful Relationship Between Employee Engagement and Team Performance, 2020; Madigan, Daniel, Kim, Lisa, International Journal of Educational Research, Does teacher burnout affect students..., November 2020. Will, Madeline, Education Week, As Teacher Morale Hits a New Low, Schools Look for Ways to Give Breaks, Restoration, 1.6.21; EAB interviews and analysis.

It's Easy for Districts to Miss the Mark

With Key Demands Out of Reach, Leaders Default to Surface-Level Solutions

Beneficial, But Hard to do Enough

Achievable, But Ineffective

Hire more teachers	Increase salaries	Promote self-care	Increase Appreciation
▼	▼	▼	▼
Nearly 30% of teacher education programs saw **a decline in enrollment** this year.	A 23.5% average teacher pay gap makes **competitive pay a long way off**	The #1 strategy for improving teacher morale for **80% of districts**	Cited as one of the top two strategies for raising morale by **95% of districts**

Self Care: An Important, But Often Tone Deaf, Message

"One day soon we're going to have a conversation about how the term 'self care' is being weaponized against teachers. No amount of yoga or massages will fix this. Educators are operating in full crisis mode and need structural changes from the top."

Dr. Tracy Edwards
@tracyrenee70

Me, trying to make it through the 2020/2021 school year

Them: "Don't forget to practice self-care!"

The Process is (a Large) Part of the Solution

Strategies for success may vary....
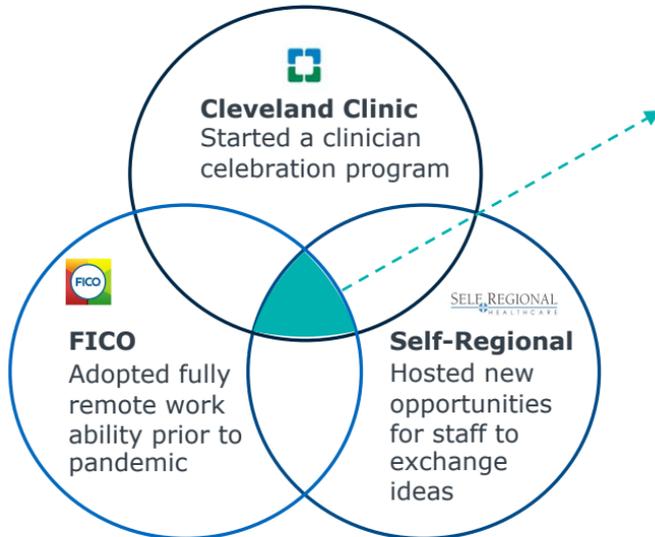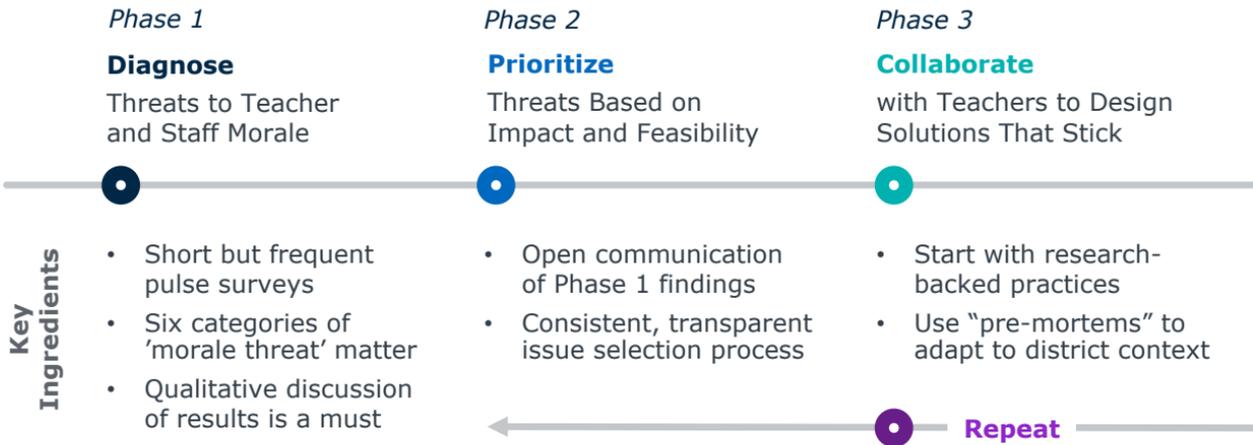
...but the underlying process remains consistent

Cleveland Clinic
Started a clinician celebration program

FICO
Adopted fully remote work ability prior to pandemic

Self-Regional
Hosted new opportunities for staff to exchange ideas

The Morale Doctor

- Diagnoses organizations' unique **root causes** of low employee morale

- Focus on 1-2 impactful but feasible issues to address at a time

- Designs approach and solutions in **partnership with employees**

Sources: Durr, Jeff, Gallup, How Cleveland Clinic Engaged Its Employees and Transformed the Patient Experience, 29 May 2013; FICO, FICO Recognized as Number One on Forbes List of America's Best Mid-Sized Employers, 9 Feb 2021; EAB interviews and analysis.

The 'How' Matters as Much as the 'What'

Success of the System is Contingent on Adherence to Key Ingredients

Phase 1

Diagnose

Threats to Teacher and Staff Morale

Phase 2

Prioritize

Threats Based on Impact and Feasibility

Phase 3

Collaborate

with Teachers to Design Solutions That Stick

Key Ingredients

- Short but frequent pulse surveys
- Six categories of 'morale threat' matter
- Qualitative discussion of results is a must

- Open communication of Phase 1 findings
- Consistent, transparent issue selection process

- Start with research-backed practices
- Use "pre-mortems" to adapt to district context

Repeat

Every Resource, Ready to Use

- ✓ Survey and Interview Guide
- ✓ Survey Data Analysis Tool
- ✓ Communication Templates
- ✓ Prioritization Guide
- ✓ Morale Booster Compendium
- ✓ Project planning document

95%

Of participants would **strongly recommend** the Teacher Morale Collaborative to other districts (n=100+)

This is The Cog That Drives the System

Raising Morale and Engagement Makes All Other Investments More Effective

The Eight Hallmarks of a
High-Performance District

Shared vision and goals

Role and ownership clarity

Hardwired accountability

Balance of non-negotiables and autonomy

Data-driven decision-making

Outsized investment in leadership development

Continuous Focus on Teacher Engagement

Practice of sourcing and scaling innovation

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Turning Research Into Reality

A Journey From Discovery to Focus in District 99

Commun|ty HIGH SCHOOL District 99

One Step Forward, One Step Back

Progress in Schools Can Be Frustratingly Difficult to Sustain

	October 2023 Scores (n=392)		February 2025 Goal		April 2025 Update (n=412)	
Personal Safety and Belonging	Satisfied	4	Satisfied	4	Satisfied	4
Time and Resources	Satisfied	4	Satisfied	4	Satisfied	4
Ownership and Input	Neutral	3	Satisfied	4	Neutral	3
Recognition and Value	Neutral	3	Neutral	3	Neutral	3
Leadership Trust and Alignment	Neutral	3	Neutral	3	Neutral	3
Professional Growth	Neutral	3	Neutral	3	Neutral	3
Measurement and Progress	Neutral	3	Neutral	3	Neutral	3

Staff Morale Metrics: **5 = Very Satisfied, 1 = Very Dissatisfied**

Three Pillars of Feedback

District 99 Spring Survey

CSCI Climate and Culture

EAB Morale Survey

Multiple Feedback Loops = Lots of Priorities

Measure

Assess

Adjust

Act
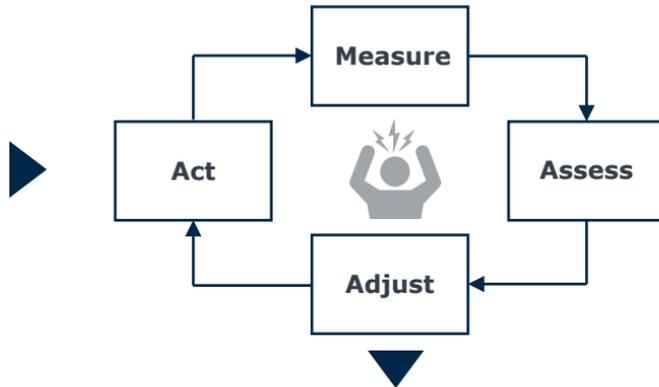
Only One Thing Can Be a Priority

"What's the ONE thing [we] can do, such that by doing it, everything else will be easier or unnecessary?"

~Gary Keller, Author, The One Thing

Leadership Survey

Attendance
= #1 Issue

**EAB
Morale Survey**

Ownership
and Input decline

Desire for student
accountability

**CSCI Climate
and Culture**

Rules and Norms

Teacher-Student
Relationships

Admin + Leadership
Effectiveness
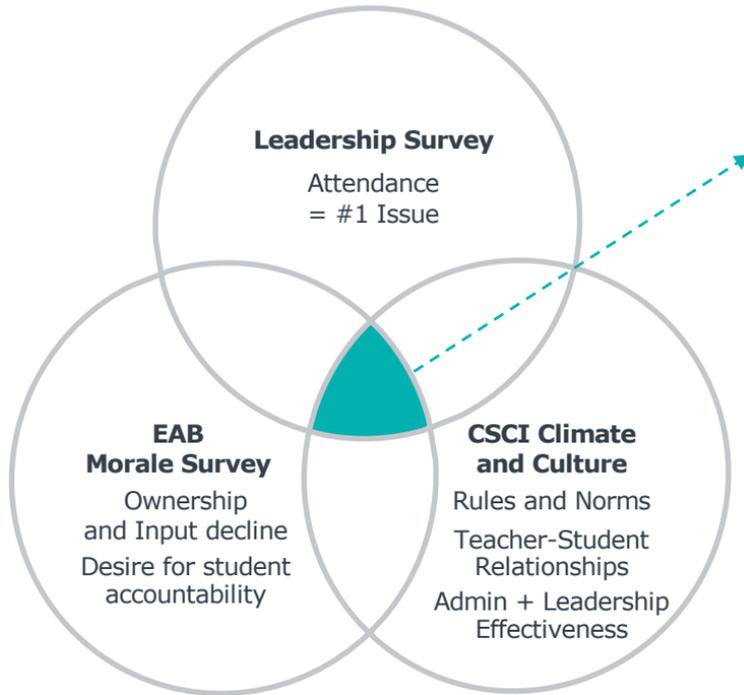
Statement of Work

For the 2025-26 school year the primary focus of our work and measure of success will be improvement in the area of **attendance.**

- Improvement will be driven by increased **accountability and consistency** in consequences, paired with interventions and supports

- Through this work we believe that student **academic performance** will increase along with **staff morale**

- This will be demonstrated through our **Strategic Plan indicators and measures**

District 99 Attendance KPIs and Strategy

KPI 1 = % of students who regularly attend school

KPI 2 = % of students who are supported to regularly attend school

Improve Attendance Data Quality

- Infinite Campus adoption
- Building entrance scanning
- Classroom and office scanning
- Unaccounted for report
- Weekly and monthly data reviews
- Monday/Thursday reports emailed to teachers

Establish Consistent Expectations

- 5 Tier 1 + 5 Tier 2 expectations for all stakeholder groups

Improve Student Engagement and Relationships

- Student Handbook changes + classroom support
- Personal device storage policy to decrease distractions
- No verbal warning for non-compliance

Approach to Solving Absenteeism Made Teachers and Staff Feel Heard

My opinions are heard and valued by **school leaders**

| | 2023-24 | 2024-25 | 2025-26 |
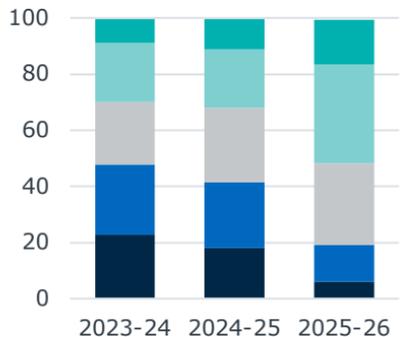
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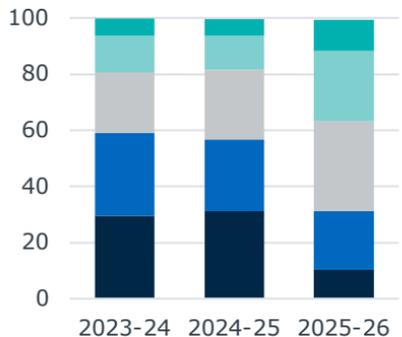
What is **one positive change** you have noticed so far this year?

53% cited cellphone policy

46% cited attendance, accountability, discipline

Progress in Schools Can Be Frustratingly Difficult to Sustain

	October 2023 Scores (n=392)		April 2025 (n=412)		October 2025 (n=359)	
Personal Safety and Belonging	Satisfied	4	Satisfied	4	Satisfied	4
Time and Resources	Satisfied	4	Satisfied	4	Satisfied	4
Ownership and Input	Neutral	3	Satisfied	4	Satisfied	4
Recognition and Value	Neutral	3	Neutral	3	Neutral	3
Leadership Trust and Alignment	Neutral	3	Neutral	3	Satisfied	4
Measurement and Progress	Neutral	3	Neutral	3	Satisfied	4

Staff Morale Metrics: **5 = Very Satisfied, 1 = Very Dissatisfied**

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Turning Research Into Reality

Four Years of Continuous Improvement for District 200

D200 Achieves Across the Board Improvement in Morale Contributors

Morale Diagnostic Survey Results Per Category, Spring 2022 (left) vs Spring 2025 (right)

Color = Very Satisfied   *= Satisfied*   *= Neutral*   *= Dissatisfied*   *= Very Dissatisfied*

+[xx]% = Increase in respondents citing 'Very Satisfied'

	+19%	+12%	+16%	+18%	+14%	+19%	+16%

Categories: Overall Satisfaction, Safety and Belonging, Time and Resources, Leadership Trust and Values Alignment, Ownership and Input, Recognition and Value, Professional Growth
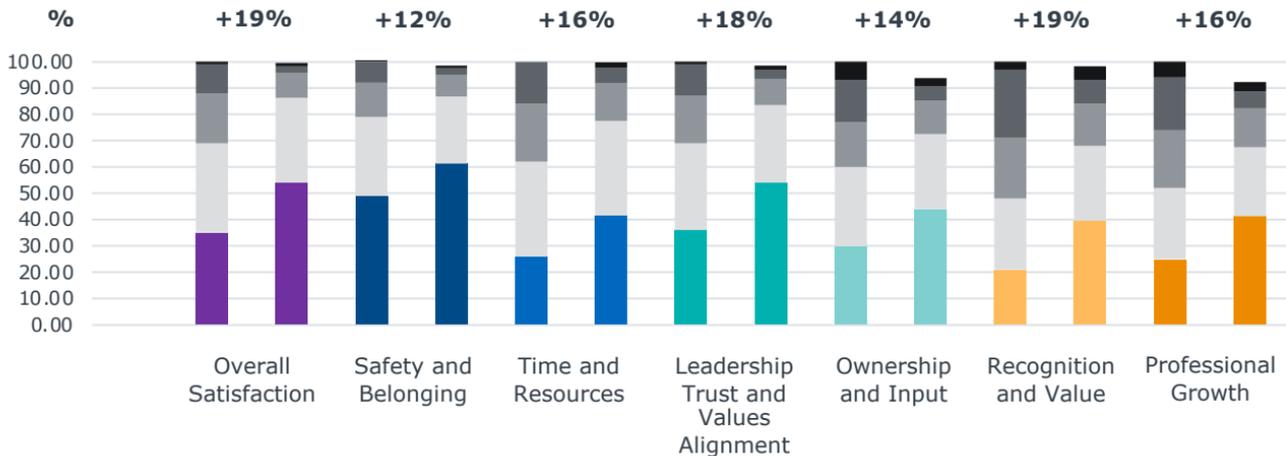
Record Participation in 2025

67% All staff   **73%** Certified   **52%** Classified or Exempt

Process Enhancements

DLT Improvements

2021-22

- EAB Morale Collaborative participation
- Immediate transparency with results
- Used Thought Exchange to explore issues in survey
- Built morale process into strategic plan to elevate importance

Value and Recognition Investments

2022-23

- Added demographic question for school level data
- Gave school teams autonomy over process with two requirements
    - Share data with staff
    - Identify a culture team to review and build an action plan

Launched 'Stay Interviews'

2023-24

- Developed a 'hot spot' report
- Expanded feedback loops (student feedback sessions, discipline conversations, instructional material feedback opportunities)

New Teacher Mentor Program Enhancements

2024-25

- Implemented staff feedback process
- How are the children? (Principal Highlights)
- Connection to the school improvement/building inquiry process

Visible Recognition of Staff

Student Experience

+6%
Increase in HS **athletics/activities** participation
(3 years)

-4%
Decrease in **chronic absenteeism**
(2 years)

+7.5%
Increase in students **feeling connected** to school
(3 years)

Top 4%
Ranking for **student safety** on Illinois 5Essentials

Student Achievement

+16%
Increase in HS **Math proficiency** rate
(3 years)

+15%
Increase in **HS English proficiency** rate
(3 years)

+12%
Increase in **elementary ELA IAR**
(4 years)

+32%
Increase in **middle school ELA IAR**
(4 years)

Curriculum Work

New K-8 core resource adoption, Math + ELA

Dual Credit + Early College expansion

Career Connected Learning Framework

MS Electives review and development

Q&A

First Questions

1 What is the **most valuable lesson** that you have gained as a leader through this work?

2 What **advice would you give** to another district starting to implement the morale improvement process?

3 What would you have **done differently** in your first year of implementation if starting again?

Nationwide Series Back By Popular Demand

Implement a Proven, Repeatable System to Raise Teacher Morale

What You'll Come Away With

Teacher Morale Collaborative
Summer-Fall 2026

- Survey to identify root causes of low-morale
- Catalog of proven morale-boosting solutions
- Communication guides and templates
- Customized results and reporting

Speak with our team to
SAVE YOUR SPOT for the Teacher
Morale Collaborative

2026 Executive Roundtable for District Superintendents

Washington, DC: May 12-13, June 16-17
Chicago, IL: July 14-15

Debuting EAB's latest research on:

Student Readiness and the Workforce in the Age of A.I.

Financial and Operational Stability in a Volatile Landscape

Speak with our team to
SAVE YOUR SPOT by April 30th

Let Us Know How We Can Help

Scan the QR code to...

1 Learn more about the **Teacher Morale Collaborative**

2 Save your spot for the 2026 **Executive Roundtable** in DC and Chicago

3 Get an invite to our upcoming **virtual coffee chat** for district leaders to discuss teacher morale
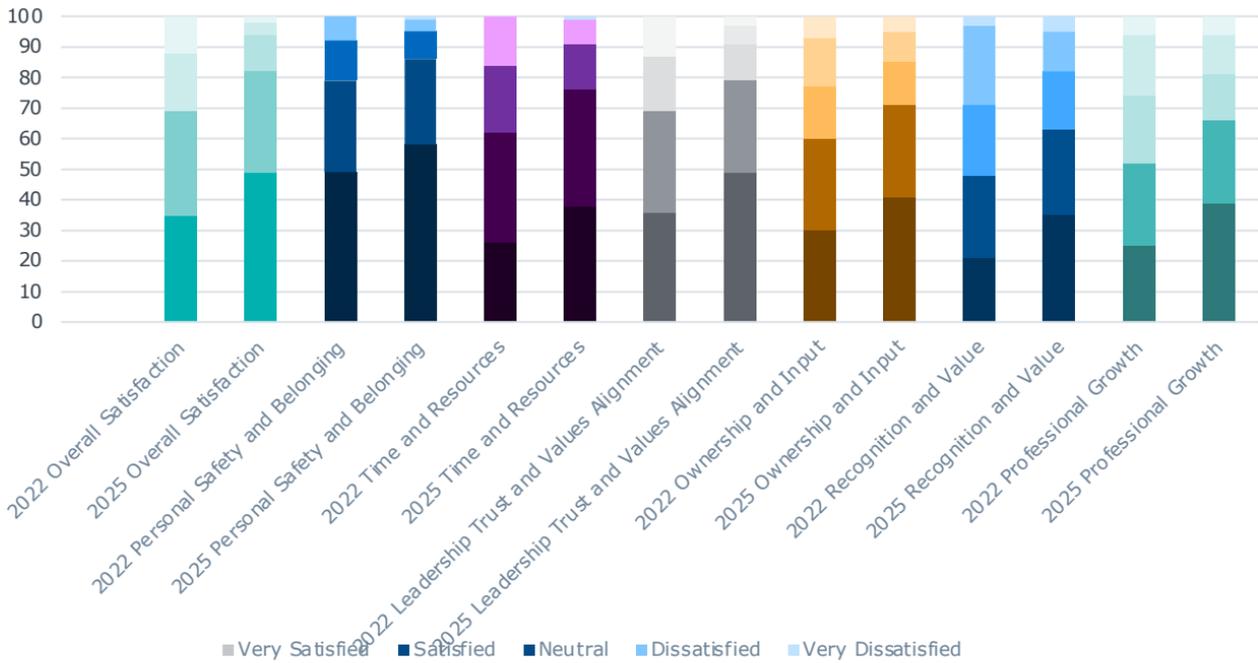
Cocktails & Conversation
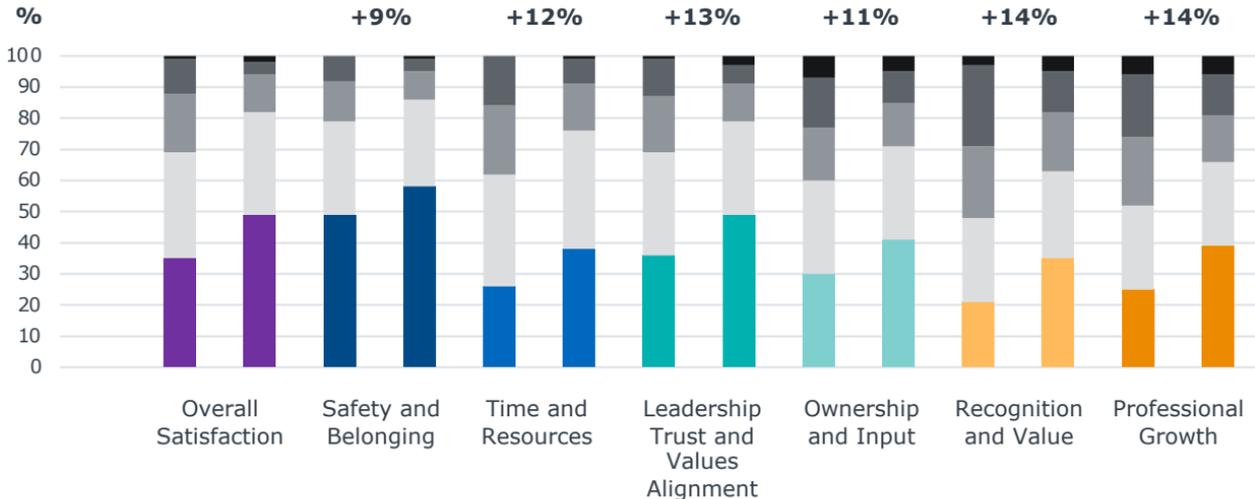Join us for a drink at **NashHouse** tonight
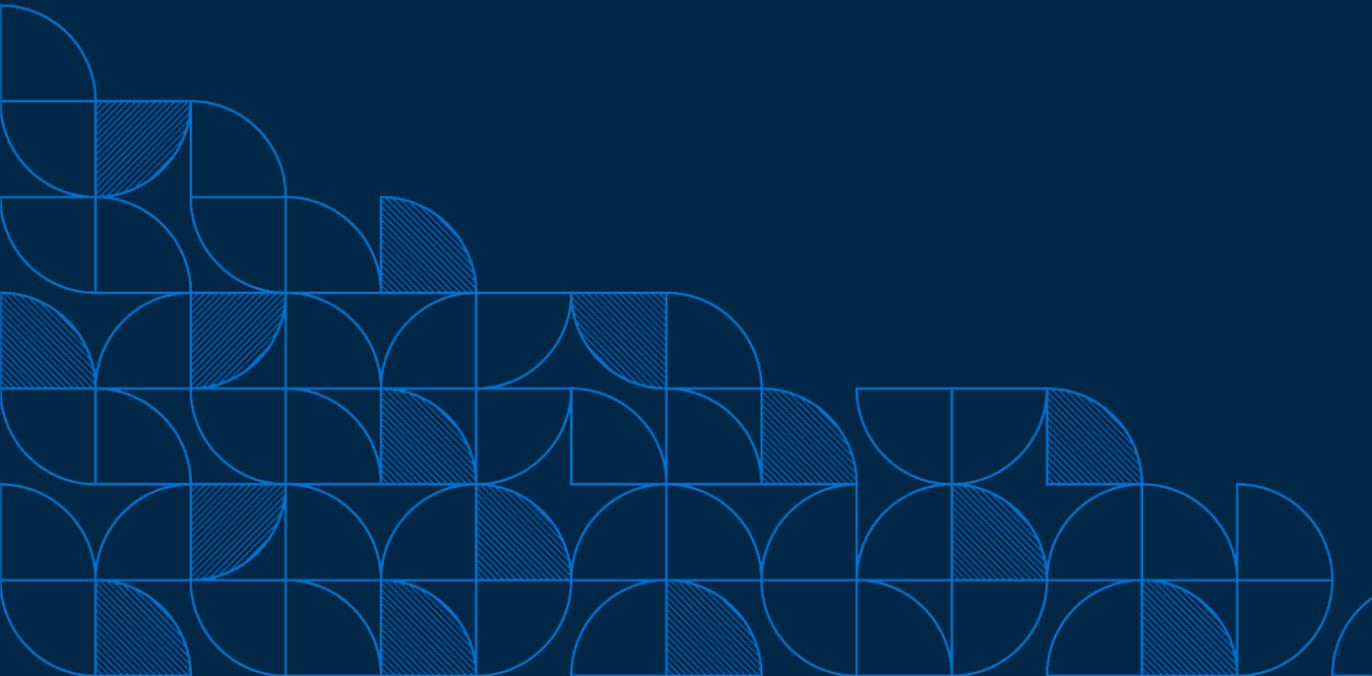
A Journey of Continuous Improvement

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Color = Very Satisfied | Darkest = Very Dissatisfied | +[xx]% = Increase in Very Satisfied)

Record Participation in 2025	63% All staff	71% Certified	71% Classified or Exempt