

Building a Culture of Success

School culture describes the learning and working environment for students, staff, and the broader school community. Culture forms the atmosphere of your school; it is essential, pervasive, and largely invisible. Leaders can deliberately nurture cultures that allow their communities to pursue the same vision of success. These environments bring visions to life, and put them into action.

To change, a school community must be both supported and motivated. This can be accomplished by:

- Setting inspiring goals;
- Establishing clear, consistent expectations for both students and staff that are aligned to these goals - and sticking to them;
- Empowering community members to take ownership of the new expectations.

Defining School-Wide Expectations and Consequences

Setting clear, rigorous, school-wide expectations for students is the first step in establishing a strong learning environment. To create these expectations:

- Involve the school community in defining the new system. School leaders may ask for universal input, create a leadership team, host community meetings, or form a group of committed teachers, students, and families.
- Define your community expectations for student conduct and the consequences for exceeding and not-meeting expectations.
- Establish a community expectation that all adults will be accountable for implementing and upholding the new system.
- Student expectations apply to conduct *anywhere* in the school - from classrooms to cafeterias. The best student expectations are:
 - Clear and observable (for example: “follow directions” vs. “behave well”)
 - Explicitly taught, modeled and practiced
 - Consistent for every student, in every class, everyday
 - Enforced by all staff members in common spaces (lunch room, morning meetings, etc.)
 - Positively framed (for example: "listen respectfully" vs. "no eye-rolling")
 - Enforced with logical rewards and consequences

Strong culture is a unified whole, greater than the sum of its parts. The components of a culture are deliberately chosen and interconnected - so link each of your choices to your vision. For example, you may decide that all students must walk in straight, silent lines because your culture values disciplined action and respect for other students' learning. Or your students are encouraged to chat in the hallways between classes to emphasize community and unity. All choices should be intentional and connected to specific school visions.