

Engaging the School Community

Listening and Being Present: Listening and observing is often more important than speaking. Take the time to walk around your school, check-in with students, staff and families, and hear what people have to say in order to stay connected to the realities of your community. The best way to learn about the progress of changes to your learning environment is often taking five minutes to observe a passing period or stopping by a classroom to chat with a teacher. This practice also makes you visible and connected, which helps your school community learn to trust your ideas.

Asking for Input: As you plan for change, establish formal and informal ways to obtain feedback from your community. Feedback from students, teachers and families can be gathered in a number of ways. Consider talking with your leadership team about areas where changes are working well or require improvement, using surveys or exit tickets at the end of meetings, or holding open meetings and office hours. Community surveys of teachers, students, and families provide other valuable means to obtain this feedback.

Communicating Expectations: An informed community is more likely to feel included and invested in the school. To communicate expectations:

- Be **proactive**. Open communication builds trust and respect; take initiative in providing clarity, guidance, and support to your staff.
- Be **specific** about the new expectations. Explain what people can expect from the environment in your school, and when and how the change will occur. Define any new roles or routines.
- Be **transparent** - explain *why* changes are happening.
- Be **consistent** - follow-through with your promises and use the same expectations for everyone, in all situations. "Walk the talk" - others will look to you to understand how to behave in the new culture.
- Be **comprehensive** - use a variety of methods to communicate, both formal and informal. Methods of communication range from large meetings to individual conversations - and even your behavior. Empower your school leaders to explain new practices and acknowledge community members for trying the new strategies.
- **Encourage feedback**. Learn from the experience of all staff – ask for suggestions, questions and ideas. Seek out and make changes based on feedback often.

Building Relationships: School leaders work to build positive relationships *with* members of their community and *between* members of their community. Different leaders take different approaches to strengthening relationships in their school; methods for building relationships must be authentic, so they will depend on your leadership style and personality.

These methods can include:

- One-on-one and group meetings with families, teachers, and students to have a conversation about the upcoming changes to the learning environment.
- Establishing regular office-hours.
- Forming teacher-led advisory groups or leadership teams to address school needs and/or creating a committee of families, teachers, and students to collaboratively set expectations.
- Asking staff leaders to locate *other* key voices in the school community.
- Using formal and informal methods to build community and teamwork - ranging from scavenger hunts to assigning coordinators for grade-level collaboration.