

## Want to launch a tour like Dr. Blackburn's? Here are his top five recommendations for getting out in the community and hearing their voices:

- 1 Go where the people are.** Dr. Blackburn built his list of “who” by starting with his key stakeholders: students, parents, and educators. From there, he looked at all the large and small groups that represent people in his community—from political organizations to community groups. He recommends asking people who have been around longer than you: How does this list look to you? Who has influence here? Who else should I talk to? As part of his tour, he spent time sitting in teacher's lounges—literally waiting for teachers to walk through the room so he could introduce himself. Don't expect the people to come out to you; find them in their spaces.
- 2 Use social media.** Everywhere he went, Dr. Blackburn asked folks to use Twitter, Facebook or LinkedIn to connect with him, and then he kept those accounts up to date with information about upcoming opportunities to meet with him. He also notes the importance of social media for being transparent with the community about what's happening in the district—successes, challenges, and next steps.
- 3 Code your data.** When you talk to thousands of community members, as Dr. Blackburn did, you're likely to hear a lot, and without a system to organize and code that information, it can be overwhelming or unhelpful. Dr. Blackburn used his spreadsheet to figure out which issues came up repeatedly as he spoke to stakeholders, and then his team was able to identify where the district's objective data either supported or refuted the community's concerns. Together, subjective and objective data helped Dr. Blackburn and his team figure out their core priorities for the year ahead.
- 4 Share back what you hear.** Talking to stakeholders once is good, but not enough. Authentic community engagement is an ongoing conversation. Dr. Blackburn wanted to ensure that he had heard his community's priorities loud and clear, and that they agreed with his interpretation. Using social media and a wide outreach strategy, he asked them to come to an open meeting with the board, where he presented what he'd learned throughout the listening tour. Community members had the chance to weigh in before the district pushed further with the work, and Dr. Blackburn was able to confirm that the work ahead would truly meet the needs of the community.
- 5 Repeat.** The year after his first listening tour, Dr. Blackburn focused on doing the work that he'd prioritized as a result of the tour. But now he's scheduling another tour, because it isn't enough to ask once and then plow ahead; instead, he's going to return to those teacher's lounges and community organizations to find out how his stakeholders are perceiving changes to their schools, and what else they want to see in the year to [come](#).