Principal magazine presents

LEADING LESSONS

USE THIS GUIDE WITH YOUR STAFF

Creating a Climate for Change

While change is never easy, it helps to engage everyone involved in a new scenario to explore the potential solutions. Whether you are embarking on a new initiative to improve parent engagement, prevent teacher burnout, or bolster student engagement through culturally responsive strategies, use this guide to create the kind of open dialogue that produces change.

1 Set the Stage
Frame the change as a problem to be solved. Here is an example problem to be solved: "Families and students repeatedly report that the transition from elementary to middle school is difficult and stressful. What can we do to improve that?"

Key consideration: Make sure that you narrow down the "problem" so that you are working on only one issue at a time.

Reflection: What are some "problems" we want to address as a school community?

Structure an open conversation. All stakeholders, including students, should be involved and able to say what they think about the issue. Use a structured activity to foster open conversation. Regardless of which activity you choose, it should:

- Maximize reflection and participation;
- Acknowledge feelings and validate others' motives and needs;
- Address misperceptions and assumptions; and
- Set the parameter that some action plan must be made by the end of the process.

Reflection: Who should be involved in this discussion? Stakeholders may include school leadership, teachers, and representative students, as well as school staff such as bus drivers, afterschool providers, and others.

Look for allies inside and outside the school. In addition to teachers and school staff, other allies can include central office staff, parents, and community members.

Reflection: Who do we believe will be an ally for this initiative?

2 Plan
When a critical mass is onboard the initiative, make an action plan. Make sure it includes a strategy for ongoing dialogue and support for the initiative. During this planning stage, the group should define the initiative, as well as determine how to:

- Integrate the initiative into existing structures;
- Fund the initiative;
- Make time in the schedule for the initiative; and
- Provide training and assistance, if needed.

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Plan for longevity. Troubleshoot potential complications and keep a realistic eye on available resources. For example, refrain from implementing the change if there are too many competing agendas or key resources are missing.

Reflection: What are competing initiatives to this project? How will we prioritize this change in relation to others that are on our plate?

Reflection: How will we build capacity to sustain this initiative?

3 Test

Try out a pilot. Depending on the nature of the initiative, this can take many forms. Regardless of how you choose to test your plan, you must finish this essential step before you fully implement the initiative.

Have a dialogue. Before full implementation, make sure you discuss what you learned from the pilot stage and make adjustments to your plan. For more on this point, see "3 Ways to Structure an Open Conversation."

Contributed by John Saphier, who is the founder and president of Research for Better Teaching in Acton, Massachusetts.

3 Ways to Structure an Open Conversation

Use these formats to get everyone contributing in a nonjudgmental and safe environment. A plus: You'll record all the ideas and opinions for future use.

1. *Structured Interview Design* is a fast-paced, knee-to-knee protocol that gives each participant a chance to share their views on an issue. It structures each person listening to others and creates a large database for discussion and decision-making. Detailed directions can be downloaded from the Research for Better Teaching website at: **http://rbteach.com/products-resources/downloads/all.**

2. *World Café* has participants move around to different tables that feature different questions or issues. A facilitator records participants' thoughts on chart paper and is available to interpret them to the next group that visits the table. Movement is free and by choice and allows lots of interaction. Use the activity to get everybody's voice in the room and all ideas down on paper. **www.theworldcafe.com**

3. *Carousel Brainstorming* asks participants to first circulate—individually or in groups—to make their way to different stations and record their responses to questions or issues with markers on each chart they visit. Then, a facilitator leads a processing discussion of the comments on each chart. **www.smore.com/5xegq-strategy-carousel-brainstorming**

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