

NEASCD Ideas for Community Development or Intervention

(From The Skillful Leader II; Confronting Conditions That Undermine Learning 2008)

Community Development

1. **Build trust.**
 - ✓ Open meetings/work sessions with community and relationship-building activities that allow individuals to get to know one another better. Be explicit about the research behind your choice or the rationale for investing time in this way.
 - ✓ Model listening and defining problems and invite participation in finding solutions. This reduces compliant and technical responses to problem solving
 - ✓ Create shared experiences that allow participants to practice taking risk and being open to feedback (e.g. off site retreats with a facilitator or process coach)
 - ✓ Identify and acknowledge the role of external forces about which teams have little control but reframe challenges in terms of what is under their control.

2. **Establish and enforce norms (see Norms Handbook).**

3. **Collect data about the quality of teaching and learning and use data-focused decision-making structures.**
 - ✓ Provide training in easy-to-use tools and assessment strategies that help communities determine where improvement is needed (see www.baldrige.com)
 - ✓ Publicly examine data about student performance and find ways to collect data about the effectiveness of group decisions
 - ✓ Focus conversations on ”worrisome” patterns across departments, grade levels, curriculum areas or schools

4. **Communicate your beliefs, values and “non-negotiables.”**
 - ✓ Make your convictions clear and explicit. Share your core values about standards, expectations, motivation, and persistence and help groups identify their core values.
 - ✓ Develop goal oriented chants and refrains by repeatedly restating what you believe about students’ capacity to learn, the power of teaching to transform students’ lives, and the importance of collaboration.
 - ✓ Avoid reproaches and guilt trips. Focus communication on concrete pictures that help others see what your personal vision of a better future has to encompass.

5. **Hire with collaboration in mind.**
 - ✓ Recruit teachers who have a track record of effective collaboration, self assessment, and self correction
 - ✓ Hire teachers with Conviction in place (see Hiring for Conviction at end of this document)

6. Inspect what you expect.

- ✓ Give life and clout to standards related to collaboration by collecting evidence about individual contributions or non-contributions and by providing feedback about unmet expectations.
- ✓ Design and implement a system that allows leaders and team members to assess how well teams are functioning and set improvement goals.

7. Make your leadership team a model.

Community Intervention

Approaches for tackling toxic communities

- ✓ Identify the past or present causes for the toxicity (e.g. previous authoritarian leadership, residue from strikes and contract impasses, a track record of broken promises from the district.)
- ✓ Build bridges before lighting fires (Lencioni 2002). Listen to and acknowledge previous conditions and past contributions to the current situation before asking for changes.
- ✓ Give feedback to individuals when expectations for effective collaboration are not met but avoid attacking or labeling statements. Instead focus on the importance of pooling knowledge to better help students and name the consequences for students when adults are unable to collaborate.
- ✓ Adopt and consistently use structures that equalize participation in discussion and minimize opportunities for haranguing and bullying. Use transparent, data-based processes for identifying student-learning problems and setting priorities for action rather than unstructured decisions by acclaim or assertion.
- ✓ Honor contract provisions consistently but persist with clear non-negotiables and expectations. Do not let grievances distract from your focus.
- ✓ Remove the most negative individual or a destructive ringleader from the group.

Approaches for intervening with laissez-faire communities

- ✓ Identify the practices and forces that are supporting autonomous actions, deal-making, secrecy or low expectations
- ✓ Determine when and how the group interacts well to solve a problem (even if it is low-level) and build on established structures or norms.
- ✓ Establish clear, problem solving structures and make problem solving a central part of meeting agendas; use time efficiently.
- ✓ Assess how much time is wasted on unimportant topics; be judicious in identifying the most important problems for the focus of collaborative action.
- ✓ Monitor how time is spent during group meetings; collect agendas and minutes.
- ✓ Help the team use standards and feedback to identify a change goal for itself, set out the ways it will monitor its own performance

- ✓ Create a teacher/leader institute or invite leaders to attend conferences and institutes that present tangible evidence of the value of collaboration (e.g. Dufour et al workshop)

Approaches for intervening with congenial communities

- ✓ Lead with relationship building and the need for acceptance and affiliation not data
- ✓ Help congenial groups be more accepting of conflict by adopting protocols that assist members in managing conflict. (See *National School Reform Faculty* www.nsffharmony.org)
- ✓ Invest in training that helps members to identify their own preferential styles and conflict aversive behavior and to analyze the consequence of “burying” difficult information or important disagreements.
- ✓ Invite community members to examine their own performance against criteria for a collaborative and accountable community and identify goals for growth.

Hiring for Conviction

Probing for the ability to learn belief

Sample Question:

How do you or might you respond to a colleague who attributes his or her lack of success with a particular group of students to the students' low ability and/or poor home life? Cite an example of how you followed up your conversation with that colleague.

Look for:

examples of confronting colleagues and knowledge of attribution theory (describes different causes for success and failure)

Probing for beliefs about how expertise develops

Sample Question:

Can you tell us about a new approach, or strategy that required you to substantially change your classroom practice in an effort to improve students' performance? What changed and how did it affect your subsequent thinking and practice?

Look for:

the ability to identify and analyze a change in practice that caused a reexamination of belief or a change of mind set, not just an adjustment of time spent or a change of routine.

Balancing individual autonomy and collective commitments

Sample Question:

Can you think of a time when you were being pressured to conform to the thinking of a committee, an administrator or union leader? What did you do? Why did you choose to do that?

Look for:

A willingness to resist pressure to conform to an authority figure coupled with clear evidence about how the individual determined that the request was not in the best interest of students.

Determining ownership and responsibility for results

Sample question

What do you do when you are not successful with an individual learner or group of learners? Please give us an example of specific steps you took to address this situation when you determined it was happening.

Look for:

Clear evidence that the candidate has had experience with taking responsibility for low student performance, is able to reflect on potential school -controlled reasons for that performance and can name at least two or three alternative approaches to working with the learner that logically fit and do not sound like more of the same.

Checking on a sense of urgency and hope

Sample Question

What sustains you during challenging times? Think of a time in your career when

you were feeling discouraged or unsuccessful. How did you turn that around?"

Look for:

signs of resilience, willingness to reach out for