citizens for civic renewal

Community Engagement

for

Ohio Public Schools

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An Engaged Community…

- Affects how educational services are provided;
- Partners with the district, schools and other citizens to solve problems;
- Participates meaningfully in policymaking;
- Contributes to the success of their district, school and community.

The Impact of Engagement

1. Public policies and services…

   - Are 'smarter' because they are informed by citizens' knowledge and information;

   - Better meet community needs because resource allocation is defined by those receiving services;

   - Enjoy broader political support because citizens co-created them.

The Impact of Engagement

2. Citizens contribute more time, talent and treasure to improving their schools;

3. Citizens take responsibility for solving problems;

4. Businesses and institutions increasingly partner with schools to make change.

How Citizens Experience Board Meetings

Citizens seated in rows	*I'm isolated*
Board on raised dais	*They have the power, not me*
A solution is being discussed	*My problems don't matter*
Presentations by experts	*They have the answers, not me*
Two minute time limit	*My voice doesn't matter*
No conversation	*There is no relationship*
No acknowledgement of input	*I didn't make a difference*
Board votes, debate ends	*I don't like being bossed around*

In the end, citizens mistrust government.

What are your beliefs about Community Engagement?

Knowing "why" animates your program decisions.

Small Group Discussion

1. Circle the statements you agree with on the document titled "Beliefs about Community Engagement";

2. Discuss your top two priorities in groups of three.

Paradox Alert!

Community engagement starts on the INSIDE:

1. Recruit the right leaders;

2. Align leadership around a common "why";

3. Avoid internal blockages by continuing to engage leaders throughout the evolution of the program.

Initial Steps

Identify a champion (or two):

1. If not you, who—board member, superintendent?

2. Know your own beliefs;

3. See a range of possibilities;

4. Don't get too detailed or attached—you are just setting a direction **so that you can...**

Initial Steps

Enroll other key leaders:

1. Anyone whose support you need or who could slow the process;

2. Superintendent;

3. All board members;

4. Entire executive team (HR, assistant superintendent);

5. All principals.

Initial Steps

Meet individually to explore their motivations:

    1. Why engagement might help students/district;

    2. How engagement will benefit that leader's work.

Small Group Discussion

In groups of three, discuss whose support you need and how engagement might benefit them.

Initial Steps

Meet as a group to set a basic direction:

1. Why you are starting an engagement program;

2. The basic structure and possible goals;

3. The role this leadership group should play:

   - How to stay informed;
   - When to be consulted.

The Key Engagement Question

What doubts and reservations do you have about starting a community engagement program.

1. Uncovers potential resistance early on;
2. Allows you to frame the program within those concerns (by turning them into requests);
3. Essential to generating long-term support.

Launching the Program

*Form a team of **stewards** to build the program:*

1. **Gather elements of the whole system:**

   In Lakota we included…
   - **Board members**
   - **Teachers;**
   - **Administrators.**

   Might have added:
   - Parents;
   - Community members;
   - Students?

The Core Team

1. "Staff" for the process and stewards—plans meetings and does support work;
2. Communications director, facilitator, one board member, one parent, one principal.

Launching the Program

Form a team of stewards to guide the process:

2. **Create the structure of the program:**

   In Lakota we…

   - Engaged the community as a district;
   - Focused on parents and non-parents;
   - Framed it as a school board listening project;
   - Used a strategic question ("What do students need to succeed in the 21st Century?");
   - Named the program "Community Conversations".

Launching the Program

Other structural options:

A. Engage the community <u>as schools</u>;
   - <mark>What is the identity and mission of our school?</mark>
     - **This question works to deeply engage parents, staff and students!**
   - How can we involve more parents in the PTA/O/SO?

B. Focus on <u>different stakeholders</u>:
   - Just parents;
   - Include staff;
   - With and through students.

Launching the Program

Other structural options:

C. Frame the process to:
- Create <u>strategic plan</u>;
- Resolve a <u>tough issue</u>(s);
    - o Should we build magnate schools?
    - o What should we fund through an increased levy?

Launching the Program

Other structural options:

D. Examine <u>daily questions</u>;

- How can teachers and parents better communicate?
- How can we better support children through testing?

Launching the Program

Form a team of stewards to guide the process:

3. **Define the outreach process:**

    In Lakota…

    - We used a 4-quadrant matrix to identify target groups;
    - Stewards recruited meeting hosts;
    - Meetings were generally held off-site;
    - Meeting hosts recruited attendees;
    - Communications director supported hosts.

Launching the Program

Form a team of stewards to guide the process:

4. **Build a discussion format:**

   In Lakota, we…
   - Used an independent facilitator;
   - Created an interactive discussion format;
   - Identified two key questions:
     - What challenges student learning?
     - What are students' 21st Century needs?
   - Board members and some staff attended to listen only.

How to Truly Engage People

Traditional methods have a place:

1. Newsletters;
2. Websites and Facebook;
3. Surveys;
4. Open houses;
5. Curriculum night;
6. Robo-calls;
7. Fun events.

How to Truly Engage People

Standing alone, these are not engagement.

1. Why?

2. What is the core of engagement?

How to Truly Engage People

People support what they co-create.

Therefore engagement requires…

1. Empathy and understanding;
2. Trust;
3. Joint decision-making;
4. Ongoing relationship;
5. **And therefore face-to-face conversation.**

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How to Truly Engage People

Co-creation does not mean abdication.

1. IAP2: engagement is a continuum;
2. Weigh efficiency vs. benefits of co-creation;
3. Information alone is not engagement;
4. Err on moving further right on the continuum.

How to Truly Engage People

How people feel matters most:

1. Modern neuroscience shows that feelings dominate decision-making;

2. People need to FEEL like they are in a partnership to own the end product;

3. Presentations and feedback focus on ideas and do not build relationships.

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How to Truly Engage People

What happens when people feel like co-creators?

1. They support that result;

2. They volunteer to implement it;

3. They enroll others in supporting it;

4. They trust leadership.

How to Truly Engage People

Therefore, Lakota Community Conversations:

1. Were held where attendees were comfortable:
   - Homes;
   - Churches;
   - Businesses.
2. Began with a personal question:
   - "Why was this meeting important enough for you to choose to attend?"
   - Everyone spoke within 10 minutes of the start.

How to Truly Engage People

Therefore, Lakota Community Conversations:

3. Utilized small groups for discussion of questions:
    - Groups of 3-4;
    - 10-12 minutes;
    - Self-facilitated, though facilitator supported them;
    - Asked personal, ambiguous questions;
    - Question one: What challenges student learning in the 21st Century?

How to Truly Engage People

Therefore, Lakota Community Conversations:

4. Debriefed small group discussions together:

- Groups shared insights only;
- Facilitator used flip charts to capture information;
- Answered were probed;
- Themes were identified.

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How to Truly Engage People

Therefore, Lakota Community Conversations:

5. Varied the dialog format:
    - Question two was first answered as a "**headline**" written on cards;
    - "What do students need to succeed in the 21st Century?"
    - Each participant read their headline aloud;
    - Small groups then discussed "the picture of 21st Century education that was emerging from the headlines".

How to Truly Engage People

Therefore, Lakota Community Conversations:

6. Kept people informed:
    - Core team;
    - Board;
    - Stewards;
    - Community (meeting summaries put on website);
    - District leadership (staff, parent, community).

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How to Truly Engage People

Therefore, Lakota Community Conversations:

7.   Included over 40 similar meetings;

- Average attendance was 22;
- Every meeting was different!

8.   Lead to a thematic summary that informed;

- The subsequent strategic plan;
- The focus of the levy campaign.

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Lakota Year One Results

1. Connected with:

   - Hostile audiences (No Lakota and Tea Party);

   - Diverse audiences;

     - Low SES, minorities, seniors;

     - Businesses and Chamber of Commerce;

     - Churches;

     - All neighborhoods.

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Lakota Year One Results

2. The district's relationship with the community became far less toxic and pointed;

3. People wanted to get involved—they were inspired;

4. The community set a clear vision for education: students had critical needs beyond what was being tested;

Lakota Year One Results

5. District leaders learned much more than the final themes;

6. Principals took a four-part training in how to design and facilitate engagement;

7. The themes informed the levy and the strategic plan;

8. The levy passed in the fall.

Engagement Challenges

1. Keeping a long process "front and center":

    - Using social media and district/school websites;

    - Connecting to everyday work of district;

    - Deeply utilizing parent organizations;

    - Linking to broader community dialog.

2. Building community ownership of the process.

3. Engaging principals and school communities.

Engagement Challenges

4. Including teachers and staff in the process.

5. Finding meeting hosts.

6. Engaging more voiceless people.

7. Showing the community how their input was utilized.

8. Incorporating community input into strategic decision-making (and proving it to parents).

Keeping People Interested

Maintain and expand the stewards group:

- Personal connections;
- Strategy adjustments;
- Influence with district leadership;
- Allocation of work load;
- Connections to broader community leadership.

Keeping People Interested

(a few)

Build an engagement infrastructure—options:

1. Build a strategic plan;
2. Create advisory boards;
3. Present key issues, respond to hot issues;
4. Work with special interests;
5. Shift role of district parent council;
6. Work through school buildings.

Keeping People Interested

Year two in Lakota we:

1. Encouraged hosts to choose an issue;

2. Worked with special interests:

   • Parents of gifted children;

   • African American parents;

3. Tackled hot issues;

4. Refreshed DPC.

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Keeping People Interested

Year three in Lakota we:

1. Continued special interest work;

2. Discussed a key administrative issue (modernization) with parents and staff;

3. Hosted conversations in each school building;

4. Began "revitalizing" parent organizations through the Presidents' Council.

Keeping People Interested

Year four in Lakota we:

1. Worked with five pilot schools to build parent capacity to support teachers and students;

2. Built a stakeholder-driven mission statement for one of the high schools;

3. Facilitated hot or key issues at the district level.

Keeping People Interested

Lakota year five (2016-17 school year):

1. The board has identified <mark>key issues</mark> for which they want public input and discussion;

2. We are focusing on <mark>community organizations</mark> to build attendance;

3. The facilitator is generating <mark>video content</mark> to improve our <mark>social media</mark> promotion.

Keeping People Interested

1. Identify THE GAP between student needs and school capacity;

2. Discover the SPECIAL GIFTS parents can contribute;

3. Brainstorm small EXPERIMENTS to fill The Gap;

4. Build SUPPORT STRUCTURES to connect and inform teachers and parents;

5. Keep LEARNING TOGETHER and trying new things.

Keeping People Interested

Long-term lessons:

1. An active stewards team builds program capacity;
2. Leadership (board and staff) must own the program by identifying key questions for discussion;
3. Topics and questions must evolve;
4. Conversation must lead to action/decisions;
5. The 80/20 rule (building vs. district engagement);

Keeping People Interested

Long-term lessons:

6. There is much untapped capacity to help schools;

7. We need non-traditional, creative ways of involving parents and community;

8. Principals/teachers can get people involved;

9. Engagement must be part of district culture;

10. Show people how they have made a difference.

Community Engagement for School Districts

Beliefs about Community Engagement

1. Stakeholder engagement is essential to long-term financial sustainability.

2. Hearing from all parts of the community will help us more effectively educate every child.

3. Many different stakeholders can help us better resolve specific issues, problems, or controversies.

4. School districts should serve the non-parent community.

5. Collaboration with stakeholders will lead to more innovation and a better school district.

6. Stakeholders can help professionals design and implement better programs.

7. Stakeholders must support any significant change for it to really happen.

8. Engagement will lead to more non-financial support through volunteering and in-kind contributions.

9. Tough decisions and trade-offs should be made by those who are affected by those decisions.

10. A school district can play a lead role in uniting the community behind a common purpose.

11. Because it takes a village to educate a child, non-parent community members can elevate student learning.

12. Engagement will increase parent involvement in both their child's education and the school community.

13. Engagement will lead to more community-based educational experiences that augment the curriculum.

14. Collaboration of all stakeholders is essential to maximize district effectiveness.

15. Engagement can make our staff culture more collaborative so that we better meet our needs as professionals.

16. Stakeholders can help us better determine strategic priorities that meet everyone's needs.

17. Engagement will help heal and reconcile the community over past disputes concerning the schools.

18. Engaging stakeholders will generate support for educational modernization.

19. Students should be involved as key stakeholders in community engagement.

20. Engaging stakeholders early in decision-making reduces acrimony, anger, and push-back.

Citizen Engagement Values

Right to Involvement: Those who are affected by a decision have a right to be involved in the problem-solving/decision-making process regarding that decision.

Careful Planning and Preparation: Actively pursue citizen groups, through adequate and inclusive planning and outreach, ensuring that the engagement design and the needs of the participants are met. Citizens are provided with the information they need to participate in a meaningful, that is, consequential way (see the IA2P Spectrum of Public Participation and Health Canada Public Involvement Continuum below), and are involved in designing how they participate.

Inclusion and Demographic Diversity: Actively reach out to equitably incorporate diverse people, voices, ideas, and information to lay the groundwork for quality outcomes and democratic legitimacy. Seek out and facilitate the involvement of those potentially affected by or interested in the decision.

Collaboration and Shared Purpose: Support and encourage participants, including government, community institutions, and other key stakeholders to work together to advance the common good. Promote sustainable decisions by recognizing and communicating the long-term needs and interests of all citizens.

Openness and Learning: Help all involved listen to each other, explore new ideas unconstrained by predetermined outcomes, learn and apply information in ways that generate new options.

Transparency and Trust: Be clear and open about the process and provide a public record of the organizers, sponsors, outcomes, and range of views and ideas expressed. Annually report on and rigorously evaluate citizen engagement efforts and activities for effectiveness.

Impact and Action: Ensure each participatory effort has potential to have a real impact and that participants are aware of that potential. Communicate to all participants how their input affected the decision making.

Sustained Engagement and Participatory Culture: Establish and maintain a culture of ongoing and quality citizen engagement (see the Spectrum and Continuum below) within departments, offices, programs, local agencies, business partners and institutions.

Accountability for Results and Financial Support: City leaders and staff are held accountable for ensuring meaningful citizen engagement in the policy making and work of city government and providing the resources to ensure ongoing success.

Community Engagement for School Districts
Core Engagement Principles

1. **The entire district executive team needs to "own" the engagement program** from the beginning for it to be successful.

2. **Involve leaders of all stakeholder groups in designing the engagement program.**

3. **Know where the engagement program is going—and tell people:**
   a. Leadership should define why engagement is important, what issues will be addressed, and what goals will be achieved;
   b. Engagement needs to be connected to the district's (or building's) core goals and plans.

4. **Engage anyone who is *touched in any way* by the issue at hand.**
   a. The whole system must be involved to truly solve a problem.
   b. Teachers should be key stakeholders of the engagement program—in design, implementation, and input.
   c. Integrating students into adult dialog and engagement processes almost always increases attendance and improves the conversation and results.

5. **Use existing district and community relationships and structures to engage people:**
   a. Board and staff relationships, especially teachers' relationships with parents;
   b. Building leadership teams (BLTs), which should open their decision-making to parents;
   c. Parent organizations, which need help building capacity to support student achievement;
   d. "Community connectors" and community organizations (non-profits, churches) to reach their followers and members;
   e. Businesses and chambers of commerce.

6. **Plan meetings with leaders of those who will be present, especially when emotions run high.**

7. **Connection before content**—without trusting relationships, commitment will be weak regardless of great ideas or plans.

8. **People support what they co-create.**
    a. You will get further with good questions than you will with great answers.
    b. The earlier you can include people in the decision-making process, the less "push-back" and the more "buy-in" you will get.
    c. Affected stakeholders should define for themselves the problems to be solved.

9. **Stakeholders need to see the difference their participation has made**—and it's the job of leadership to show them.

10. **Engagement should be embedded into district culture to have long-term impact.**
    a. Incorporating small engagement practices into regular meetings can build a more collaborative culture over time.
    b. Build an ongoing engagement program with a clear structure that ties to district and school-building decision-making processes;
    c. Balance efficiency with the benefits of engagement;
    d. Consistently foster conversations between people who haven't met before;
    e. Determine the proper role for various stakeholders to play in making specific decisions;
    f. Balance "live" with "virtual" engagement techniques;
    g. Put 80% of parent effort into building-level work, 20% into central office strategy.

11. **Engagement should be part of your internal leadership culture** because your relationship with external stakeholders will ultimately mirror your internal culture;

12. **Complaining is good** when it is within an engagement structure because it can be transformed into something productive. Would you rather hear it at a board meeting?

13. **Getting people to show up is an art and science:**
    a. Pick issues that matter where citizens will see the impact of participating;
    b. The more personal the invitation the greater the attendance;
    c. Use students to inspire adult participation;
    d. Tell people they are partners, and how showing up will make a difference;
    e. Make people feel special by participating (a special topic or process; their special gift is needed);
    f. Go THEIR community meeting before inviting them to come to YOUR district meeting;
    g. Embed engagement into the overall communication plan—engagement will provide great content for the local paper and district/school newsletter.

IAP2's Public Participation Spectrum

Increasing Level of Public Impact

	Inform	**Consult**	**Involve**	**Collaborate**	**Empower**
Public participation goal	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision-making in the hands of the public.
Promise to the public	We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.
Example techniques	■ Fact sheets ■ Web sites ■ Open houses	■ Public comment ■ Focus groups ■ Surveys ■ Public meetings	■ Workshops ■ Deliberative polling	■ Citizen advisory Committees ■ Consensus-building ■ Participatory decision-making	■ Citizen juries ■ Ballots ■ Delegated decision

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