

## THE SIX KEYS TO COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

Six keys to community engagement suggested by interviews with over 40 community school principals:

### **1-Know Where You're Going**

Create a vision of what your school should look like and develop a plan for how to get there. Begin by seeking input from school staff, families, partners, and community residents. Any vision must incorporate the diverse interests of all members of the school and community. Make sure that the vision's goals and objectives are broadly owned.

### **2-Share Leadership**

Invite those partners from the community who share your school's vision to also share resources, expertise, and accountability for targeted objectives. Work deliberately with staff, families, and the community to reach established goals.

### **3-Reach Out**

Learn about the community and become a visible presence in it. Listen to what families say they want—not just what others think they need. Respond honestly. Make changes that advance the school's vision.

### **4-Don't Ignore the Elephant in the Room**

Acknowledge and address issues of race and class and define diversity as a strength. Create opportunities for honest conversations about differences from the earliest stages of vision building. Distinguish between assumptions and facts.

### **5-Tell Your School's Story**

Know how to make your school's vision come alive. Use stories and data to engage all kinds of community groups in conversations about why public education matters and what they can do to help. Create the political will to support school efforts.

### **6-Stay on Course**

Only engage in partnerships that are demonstrably aligned with your school's vision, goals, and objectives. Regularly assess your progress. Focus on long-term sustainability.

## USING THE SIX KEYS TO ENGAGE STAKEHOLDERS

Each key to community engagement informs the strategies principals use to engage stakeholders in their schools. The following chart (see Figure 1) shows the relationship between the hard work of engaging community members and the benefits of using the Six Keys to overcome barriers and to build engaged community relationships.



## Using The Six Keys To Engage Stakeholders

### STAKEHOLDERS

### WHAT MAKES IT HARD?

### WHAT MAKES IT WORK?

#### FAMILIES

- ◆ Negative experiences
- ◆ Language and cultural differences
- ◆ Issues of race and class
- ◆ Lack of preparation

- 1- Know Where You're Going: **Define vision for family engagement broadly**
- 2- Share Leadership: **Encourage families' contributions and leadership**
- 3- Reach Out: **Meet families where they are**
- 4- ID Elephant In Room: **Create a welcoming environment and have honest conversations**
- 5- Tell Your School's Story: **Be visible in the community**
- 6- Stay On Course: **Continually assess progress**

#### STAFF

- ◆ Isolated and overwhelmed staff
- ◆ Poor implementation
- ◆ Lack of fit

- 1- Know Where You're Going: **Ensure staff are involved in planning the school's vision**
- 2- Share Leadership: **Begin with the Golden Rule and expect the best from staff**
- 3- Reach Out: **Use early adapters and positive results to bring staff along**
- 4- ID Elephant In Room: **Ensure staff are culturally competent**
- 5- Tell Your School's Story: **Talk about the school's vision constantly with staff**
- 6- Stay On Course: **Make learning part of teaching**

#### PARTNERS

- ◆ Accountability
- ◆ Space and facilities use
- ◆ School culture versus business culture

- 1- Know Where You're Going: **Look for mission match and build formal agreements**
- 2- Share Leadership: **Collaborate across boundaries; fund a full-time coordinator**
- 3- Reach Out: **Distinguish between school culture versus business and CBO culture**
- 4- ID Elephant In Room: **Be aware of power differentials**
- 5- Tell Your School's Story: **Share students' successes and the challenges they face**
- 6- Stay On Course: **Don't be afraid to say "No"**

#### THE PUBLIC

- ◆ Lack of training
- ◆ Politics
- ◆ Minimal contact with residents who don't have children in school

- 1- Know Where You're Going: **Ask for input from the community**
- 2- Share Leadership: **Use staff to communicate and be proactive**
- 3- Reach Out: **Encourage an ongoing dialogue about education**
- 4- ID Elephant In Room: **Create a community "hub" where all are welcome**
- 5- Tell Your School's Story: **Share stories of successes**
- 6- Stay On Course: **Use data effectively**