Leaders of Relationship Building

The primary responsibility of curriculum leads is to develop the collective capacity of the organization to assure that all students are successful. One of the functions of these individuals' work to assure the capacity of the system and the success of the students is *the development of relationships of stakeholders focused on student learning.*

"Location, location, location" may be the mantra of realtors, but "relationships, relationships, relationships" is the foundation of any successful organization.

Susan Scott, author of *Fierce Conversations*, advocates that the conversation *is* the relationship. As leaders of relationship building we must ensure meaningful, two-way communication among all stakeholders for increased student learning. We are the ones who set the expectations and provide the examples of positive internal and external communication.

As we seek to build our own competency in relationship building as well as others' skills, we must remember to . . .

- Live by the vision, always focusing those conversations on student learning.
- Listen! Listen! Listen! Seek first to understand and then to be understood.
- Build skills in coaching (e.g., Fierce, Cognitive, Crucial, Peer) and master the ORID questioning skills shared in evaluator training.
- Build cultural competence.

We must reduce isolationism and open up practice in our buildings to direct observation, analysis, and criticism. Richard Elmore encourages us to center group discussions on the instructional work of the organization. To do this, direct observation of practice, analysis, and feedback must become a routine feature of our work – at every level. Our job is to help building leaders and teachers to work more collaboratively on instructional practices, to set up conditions to facilitate collaborative teamwork among adults, and foster personalized learning communities for students. As educators work together to improve their respective competencies, trust develops and simultaneously develops consistent and increasingly effective standards of practice.

At the same time, we must increase opportunities to engage stakeholders, reflecting the demographics of our community. As we seek out ways to develop working partnerships in the community, we need to leverage their contributions (e.g., time, dollars, expertise, experience) to expand and deepen learning opportunities in order to achieve increased learning of our students. Questions we might answer include these:
- Do we have broad representative stakeholder groups involved in making decisions that are significant?
- Do we participate in public conversations to understand our stakeholders' perspectives and concerns?
- Do we as a community address anticipated changes within our community?
- Do we value student voices through authentic opportunities for their involvement in the organization?
- Do we work to build trust in our schools?

Helping parents become engaged requires us to assure the development of our teachers' competency in meaningful two-way communication, first honoring the fact that all parents want

their child to succeed. We must provide opportunities for the educators to learn about the different cultures in their buildings. We need to structure home visits with a focus on getting to know the child – and developing meaningful relationships with parents around the child's learning.

It is our obligation to build the skills in ourselves and in all stakeholders to assure meaningful two-way communication that impacts student learning. It is a tremendous obligation that results in tremendous rewards – where all stakeholders are working together to increase learning.

Bottom Line: Relationships! Relationships! Relationships! The conversations we have *are* the relationships that we build!