

## BUILDING TRUST IN YOUR SCHOOL COMMUNITY



Schools that effectively engage their stakeholders - parents, families, students, educators and other constituents - are places in which people know they play a role in advancing student achievement. One of the most important characteristics of these schools is trust, established with stakeholders by school leaders. Here are strategies to help you build trust with your school groups.

- **Listen, listen, listen.** It is necessary to know what others are thinking and understanding, and it means listening without judgment or comment. A nod or a "thank you" instead of a comment can suffice after someone speaks. Trust is more about emotions than facts or figures. Be aware of verbal and nonverbal emotions.
- **Know people's names.** Addressing people by name pulls them in and enables others to do the same. In meetings, use very large tent-cards placed on tables.
- **Use stories.** Initiate storytelling as the facilitator of group discussion. Make the practice visible and conscious by incorporating a specific activity eliciting stories, and model how to listen and respond with respect and acceptance.
- **Use what people say.** When stakeholders see their contributions are incorporated into a plan, used to address an issue, added to a list of ideas, or discussed further, their trust increases. Build people up whenever you can by incorporating their ideas.
- **Establish eye contact.** Connecting personally through eye contact sends a message of interest and listening. Enable people to see each other face to face.
- **Accept verbal contributions as they are.** Don't respond to the story of what happened to someone with an ego-driven story of your own that is intentionally deeper or better. It quickly puts people off and shuts them down.
- **Start where stakeholders are, not where you are.** Elicit conversation, including stories. They will tell you where participants are coming from, as they begin to relate to one another in a group. Do a check each time a group meets.
- **Be open, not defensive.** Engagement is not about defending the organization. It is to encourage collaboration in finding answers and resolutions. Attack the problem, never the people.
- **Show genuine care for people.** Learn who people are. Learn what they care about, believe in and feel passionately about.

*From the workbook, "The Politics of Authentic Engagement: Tools for Engaging Stakeholders in Ensuring Student Success", available for purchase from the NSPRA Online Store, at [www.nspra.org](http://www.nspra.org).*