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5 Ways to Empower Your School Community

1. Transform Teacher Parent Relationships

Teachers are highly influential figures in their students' lives. To ensure student success, it is essential for teachers to construct a positive and professional relationship with the parents and guardians of these young people. When educators effectively manage this teacher/parent relationship, they establish alliances that will not only further the development of their students, but will also invigorate their own lives as teachers and strengthen the vitality of the parent community.

To build the best possible relationships with parents, teachers need to have an organized, professional, and proactive approach of communicating with them. Teachers should use practical and positive collaborative leadership methods to create alliances with these parents. Additionally, they will benefit from sharpening their superior listening skills to increase their understanding of the parents' perspectives.

Parents also need to embrace a healthy working relationship with their child's teachers. Parents should share information, support a professional course of communications, and embrace the long-term nature of the teacher parent relationship.

2. Create a Culture of Listening

Listening is a cherished skill and the ability to truly listen to others is a quality that most admire. We ask our students to listen every day, both to the adults and to one another. How many adults at your institution are truly doing the same? Understanding that the most successful leaders and problem solvers require superior listening skills, it logically follows that listening needs to be part of the cultural fabric of our school communities.

The combination of perspectives, the complexity of organizational power dynamics, and the diversity of world views and cultural narratives all make true listening extremely challenging. Add in that individuals and groups are spread throughout different parts of the building or campus and it can seem impossible at times.

Despite these challenges, it is imperative that the adults create and model a culture of listening. In fact, some might even say that it is more important now than it has been in recent memory.



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With all of the platforms available for each of us to make our points known, we sometimes forget the two way nature of constructive communication.

3. Develop Department Heads as Managers

How often does someone who has great rapport with students and an excellent track record in classroom teaching get appointed or promoted to the role of Department Chair only to find that the new set of challenges and necessary job skills is daunting and unmanageable?

As many of us know, managing colleagues and peers demands a different skill set than furthering the educational development of young people. Some educators thrive in this new role while others struggle or even resent their new responsibilities.

To have empowered department heads, each of them needs to have a solid foundation of management skills. They must be adept and confident in their abilities to mentor colleagues, anticipate and address conflicts, conduct sensitive meetings, and advocate for their department.

Empowered Department Heads will both represent the interests of the faculty more effectively and relate to one another more efficiently. They will also improve faculty performance and engagement throughout the school community.

4. Design a System for All Disputes

Every school has a system for handling academic and other serious violations. There is a code of conduct, some type of discipline committee, an office or dean of climate and safety, and/or an honor code. These essential parts of the system handle much of the conflict load. They are not always responsive, however, to the seemingly smaller, more subtle situations that can have very large impacts if not handled sensitively and with skill.

In a situation which requires those in conflict to feel safe and secure in sharing their concerns, the school community must provide the proper space. In a conflict that has asymmetrical power dynamics, includes an intercultural component, or involves special attention to privacy, the school must provide an expert to guide those involved through the appropriate process.

By including these important elements into the dispute system design, both conventional and unconventional conflicts can be managed and resolved, individuals all over the school community can feel cared for, and the school can serve as a model for the larger community.



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5. Cultivate Conflict Intelligent Students

Isn't it great when students work things out amongst themselves constructively, and/or when they initiate cooperative behaviors in conflict situations? Wouldn't it be even better if this were the normal course of events?.

We assume that adults have conflict intelligence yet these are not innate skills. Similar to math formulas and verb conjugations, conflict intelligence is comprised of skills that should be taught to be mastered. We need to teach our students when to cooperate and when to find compromise. They should know when it is appropriate to stand up for themselves, when to let someone else have their way, and when to simply not get involved. Certainly, we all learn some of these skills through trial and error. When the adults in the building, however, take the time to enhance that experience with actual lessons around conflict management, the students are fast tracked to becoming successful advocates for themselves. Furthermore, they become more capable of handling adverse situations, which, in turn, aids them in ALL interactions personally and professionally, both within their communities and beyond.

Did these ideas resonate with you? If so, please contact The Bardsley Group for a FREE CONSULTATION. You can reach us at:

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The Bardsley Group works with schools and other organizations to help them succeed in conflict by maximizing their collaborative skills. When organizations reduce conflict, they increase productivity and everybody wins.

Clymer teaches conflict resolution, negotiation and mediation at Columbia University Teachers College and Temple University College of Education. The Bardsley Group has worked closely with public and private schools and universities, trained municipal organizations like the police and children and family services, and assisted human resources departments and other human capital consultants.

How can we help you?