

Event 9

Analyze consistency with values

Synopsis. This activity entails self-evaluation by conducting many “conversations” in which as many stakeholders as possible can gain a deeper understanding, in small heterogeneous groups, of (a) what other stakeholders believe to be important about education and (b) what he or she believes to be important about education. You (the Core Team) should have reviewed and redesigned this whole process (in Event 7) before you begin doing it. Also, having the whole process in mind is important, because each activity has meaning only in relation to the entire design process.

Goals

- Enhance level of commitment to, and motivation for, systemic change in the district.
- Enhance all stakeholders’ understanding of how educational values (importance statements) are changing for their community.
- Identify discrepancies between values and what the schools currently do.
- Promote mindset (mental model) evolution.
- Promote self-examination.
- Identify potential obstacles and trouble spots for a systemic change process.

Activity 9.1 Conduct conversations on values

Convene many small-group “conversations” throughout the community, involving as many stakeholders as possible. The most important result of this activity is the evolution of mental models that encourages all stakeholders to advocate for systemic change.

1. Plan the “conversations.”

The Core Team must plan all the logistics and carry out the preparations, including such things as:

- how to recruit participants, especially disenfranchised stakeholders,
- where the conversations will be held,
- when they will be held,
- how many site coordinators for each conversation and how to train them,
- what sort of ice-breaker activity should be used.

The following are some **considerations** you may want to take into account:

- It is important to make each conversation group as heterogeneous as possible, so that participants will be exposed to differing perspectives on what is important in education.
- It is important that significant numbers of people from all stakeholder groups participate, for any omitted groups will likely become powerful forces of resistance to any changes you make. The more people you involve, the less resistance you will likely encounter.

- It will be difficult to recruit disenfranchised stakeholders. You will need resolve and a good plan. It is helpful to choose locations that are familiar and comfortable to the disenfranchised. That is unlikely to be a school location.
- Conversation groups should be small so that all participants will have ample opportunity to contribute, and so that shy or intimidated participants will feel more comfortable speaking.
- It is beneficial to have several conversation groups in the same place at the same time, so that groups can share their ideas with each other. This requires facilities where a number of groups can converse without disturbing each other, and where they can all get together to share their ideas.
- It is helpful to make the atmosphere for the conversations fairly relaxed and comfortable. Having refreshments available, dressing casually, and introducing the conversations in a relaxed, informal manner are several ways of creating a conducive atmosphere. All of these require planning and preparation.
- It is helpful to have some conversations in the evening, for those who work outside the home, and some during the day, for those who don't want to leave their families in the evening or who don't like to go out at night. It may also help to have some on weekends.
- You should prepare (train) the site coordinators, who will be introducing the activity and handling the logistics at each site. Site coordinators don't have to be Core Team members, but serving that role will expose you to valuable perspectives and will make you more visible and accessible to the participants.
- Conversations should last at least an hour and a half, because it often takes a while for group members to warm up and become comfortable with each other. Conversations should not last more than two and a half hours, especially in the evening, because people get tired and anxious. Two hours usually works pretty well, but the site coordinator should monitor participants' moods and be prepared to draw things to a close earlier if warranted.

(Time: 1-2 hours)

2. Conduct each conversation.

The site coordinators should be prepared to do the following:

2.1 Introduce the "conversation."

Thank participants for being there.

Hand out a Participant Briefing Sheet (see sample below).

Introduce the **activity**: goals, rationale, importance, and how it fits in the larger picture of the district's improvement efforts.

Emphasize the importance of **all stakeholders** being involved.

- They have valuable experiences and perspectives to contribute.

Emphasize the importance of good **listening** skills.

- Listening is crucial to reaching consensus.
- Try to understand why they believe what they do.

Emphasize the importance of **respecting** all stakeholders' input.

- It's their school system, too; they should approve any changes that are made.
- They have valuable perspectives and experiences to contribute.

Then discuss the **rules of behavior**. Ask if they would like to make any changes or additions to them.

- Don't interrupt, no put-downs.
- When you disagree, try to understand why the other person believes what they said.
- Ask for clarification when you don't understand why.

Discuss the **responsibilities** for each role:

- Record keeper, time keeper, and referee.

Give a brief **presentation** on Toffler's three waves of change, the key markers that distinguish the information age from the industrial age, and the concept of a learning-focused paradigm versus a sorting-focused paradigm of education.

Overview the activity. Say how long they can take for each part (introductions, self-organizing, discussing the question). Provide categories of values, such as how they would like to learn if they were to become students again, what kinds of things are important to learn, school climate, school administration, school-community relationships, and so forth.

The entire introduction shouldn't take much more than 15-20 minutes, but you should anticipate having to start a few minutes late. Those first minutes before you begin the introduction can be valuable for establishing an appropriate, relaxed, caring atmosphere.

(Time: 15-25 minutes)

2.2 Form heterogeneous small groups.

Form participants into groups of about 4-5 people. Groups should be as heterogeneous as possible regarding stakeholder group, ethnicity, socio-economic status, gender, age, and so forth. One way to do this would be to have different colored name tags for the different stakeholder groups (though some people might need two or three colors). Then ask people to form into groups with as many different colors as possible. We strongly recommend that you insist on no more than six people per group, with a preference for four?. (Facilitator at each table?)

(Time: 5 minutes)

2.3 Participants introduce themselves.

Instruct the participants in each group to introduce themselves, saying:

- their name,
- what stakeholder groups they are from (often more than one),

Then conduct an icebreaker activity, followed by asking them to explain:

- why they are interested in being involved in this effort, and
- what perspective they can contribute to the effort.

(Time: 10 minutes)

2.4 Participants discuss the first question.

Each group should appoint a time keeper and a record keeper to take notes. Then each participant should:

- Take a few minutes to write down the values they would like to see the Decatur schools live up to for each category. Sample values should be included in the Participant Briefing Sheet.
- For each category, take turns describing to the group the most important (remaining) value on his or her list, with discussion only as necessary to understand the value being described.
- For each category review the whole list of values, then poll participants on each value and prepare a ranked list on newsprint of all values that at least two members of the group hold, putting the values most widely held at the top.

You should circulate and try to listen from afar to each group. Focus on group process, making sure that people are listening well and staying on task. Make sure that the record keeper, time keeper, and referee are all doing their jobs well.

(Time: 15-25 minutes)

2.5 Small groups report on their discussions.

Each small group's record keeper should summarize their values for each category on some newsprint (one sheet for each category). Have each group's record keeper briefly describe each entry on their newsprint. Encourage questions of a clarification nature.

As you proceed to other groups' reports, discuss and synthesize them with the results of the previous group(s), and at the end try to come to consensus on some values for each category. Encourage discussion whenever any two values are in conflict. Probe the reasons underlying the conflict, and try to reach common understanding, if not consensus.

Have a record keeper make a record of the final synthesis, to share with the Core Team and eventually (probably after this activity has been completed with all the participants you can get) the broader community.

(Time: 20-30 minutes)

2.6 Participants discuss the second question.

Each group should:

- Discuss the extent to which the values identified are currently exhibited or violated in the Decatur schools for each category.
- Prepare a list on newsprint of all gaps (values that are currently not well exhibited).

You should circulate and try to listen from afar to each group. Focus on group process, making sure that people are listening well and staying on task. Make sure that the record keeper, time keeper, and referee are all doing their jobs well.

(Time: 15-25 minutes)

2.7 Small groups report on their discussions.

Each small group's record keeper should summarize on some newsprint the values that are not well exhibited in Decatur for each category (one sheet for each category). Have each group's record keeper briefly describe each entry on their newsprint. Encourage questions of a clarification nature.

As you proceed to other groups' reports, discuss and synthesize them with the results of the previous group(s), and at the end try to come to consensus on the values for each category. Encourage discussion whenever there are important differences between any two groups. Probe the reasons underlying the differing positions, and try to reach common understanding, if not consensus.

Have a record keeper make a record of the final synthesis, to share with the Core Team and eventually (probably after this activity has been completed with all the participants you can get) the broader community.

(Time: 20-30 minutes)

(Time for Step 2: 1.5-2 hours)

(Total time for Activity 9.1: 4-6 weeks)

Activity 9.2. Survey all stakeholders about the values and gaps.

1. Synthesize the results of the different conversations, and prepare a list of values about education that may serve as a foundation for any future school improvement efforts.
2. Prepare a survey instrument to send out to all stakeholders. Think about asking questions such as, "What do you value more, A or B?"
3. Prepare a 1-page introduction to the survey that will motivate the recipients to respond and will help them to understand the context for the questions that follow.
4. Develop and implement a publicity plan to help motivate stakeholders to complete the survey when they receive it.
5. Send out the survey to all stakeholders in the school community and allow several weeks for the responses to come in.
6. Analyze the results and publicize them.

(Total time for Activity 9.2: 3 weeks)

Sample Participant Briefing Sheet

About this Activity

Values:

- Importance of all "stakeholders" being involved
 - valuable perspectives and experiences to contribute
- Importance of good listening skills
 - try to understand why they believe what they do
- Importance of respecting all stakeholders' input
 - it's their school system, valuable perspectives

Goal: To explore ways in which our community and society in general are changing, and should change.

Importance/rationale: 1. Education has to meet the needs of our community in order for the community to continue to support education. 2. Changes in our community influence how well our schools are working. 3. Our schools can help our community to change in positive ways.

Rules of behavior

- No put-downs
- Don't step on others' words or ideas
- Try to understand why others believe what they do
- Write down points of consensus

Introductions

Take turns going around the table, and say:

- your **name**,
- what stakeholder **groups** you represent (often more than one),
- **why** you are interested in being involved in this effort, and
- what valuable **perspective** you can contribute to the effort.

Before you Begin

- Appoint a **record keeper** to take notes.
- Appoint a **time keeper** to keep the discussion moving.
- Appoint a **referee** to make sure everyone has an opportunity to express their views.

Round 1: Question to address

Identify the values you would like to see the Decatur schools live up to for each of the following categories:

-
-
-
-

Sample values

Education should be customized to meet the needs of each individual learner.
Students should become self-directed learners.

Round 2: Question to address

Discuss the extent to which the values identified are currently exhibited or violated in the Decatur schools for each category.