

## **A Positive Learning Culture is the Foundation for Effective Feedback**

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*“In a positive and productive school culture, students, staff, parents, and community members are respected and deeply valued and their wellbeing is at the heart of all actions and decisions.”*

Effective school cultures are conducive to a healthy exchange of feedback. In order for quality **feedback** to be effectively provided and gratefully and graciously received from student to student, educator to student, student to educator, and educator to educator, the culture of the school needs to be positive and growth oriented.

The **culture** of any organization, including schools, is shaped by the underlying norms, assumptions, and beliefs held by the people in the organization. Culture is developed over time. In *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, Edgar Schein (2010) defines culture as patterning and integration:

The culture of a group can be defined as a pattern of shared basic assumptions learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, which has worked well enough to be considered valid and therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems (p.18).

Culture is difficult to change and is reshaped slowly by variations in practices and beliefs. An entrenched counterproductive culture can be changed for a dynamic and positive culture, but it is done gradually by leaders who “send important signals about what behaviors they value.” (Childress, Elmore, Grossman, Johnson, 2007).

**Relational trust** is at the heart of a positive, productive culture. Relational trust is also essential for feedback to be well received and thoughtfully provided. In schools, educators can engage in the following practices to help establish a positive, trusting culture:

- Develop a vision of what trust looks like, especially respect, communication, and appreciation.
- Look at organizational setbacks as temporary and focus on solutions and next steps — develop language that is proactive and not blame centered.

- Be honest about errors and mistakes as a leader — apologize and focus on solutions and next steps. Celebrate new learning.
- Build personal relationships with colleagues, students, and members of the community while setting goals and doing the important work of educating students together.
- Listen to the comments and concerns of colleagues. People who feel they are being listened to begin to shift the culture.
- Emphasize cooperation and sharing versus competition and favoritism.
- Develop the capacity of colleagues by providing opportunities for them to be strategically involved with the work of school/district improvement.
- Trust colleagues to make decisions and give them a voice in issues of consequence.
- Structure opportunities for interpersonal interaction so that teachers build relationships around meaningful work.
- Give colleagues credit for their hard work and specifically recognize the contributions they are making to the overall success of the school/district.

### **QUESTIONS to CONSIDER**

1. Why is feedback more effective in moving learning forward in a positive school culture?
2. Describe the culture of your school.
3. What have you done to build relational trust?
4. What are your next steps for improving and sustaining a healthy school culture where feedback is effectively provided and positively and productively received?