

Resources for Creating a Culture of Trust in Schools

Trust is recognized as a critical factor in developing dynamic, high-performing schools. A well-established culture of trust that permeates a campus makes it possible for students and teachers to maintain momentum, focus, and engagement so that they can improve instruction and increase achievement. Indeed, the level of trust among parents, teachers, and administrators is a clear predictor for student achievement and only exists within education settings where the adults put the needs and interests of students above personal and political matters. Too often, the pressure of academic accountability overshadows the development of trust within a school and causes administrators and teachers to become impatient and anxious. This in turn increases fear and tension amongst teachers and students, and such a climate diminishes student achievement. Therefore, the process of establishing and maintaining a trusting culture on a campus should be deemed as important as any other professional development or schoolwide effort to improve the quality of instruction and the student learning.

Main Ideas	Additional Information	Resources
Leaders Establish a Culture of Trust		
<p><i>Administrators lead the charge in establishing a culture of trust on a campus.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The way in which an administrator interacts with the students, parents, teachers, and staff at a school has a direct effect on how loyal, connected, and appreciated they will feel on a campus, which directly affects student achievement. When administrators lead with encouragement, rather than intimidation, teachers and staff feel supported and cared about and are inspired to work through challenges and make a little more effort to do their jobs well. This, in turn, directly affects what happens in the classroom and increases student achievement. The implementation of schoolwide programs aimed at elevating students' academic performance cannot create the intended change alone, but requires a culture of trust on a campus. Administrators sets the tone for the culture of a school, for better or worse. If teachers do not trust the administration, they are less likely to trust each other, and they tend to engage in self-protective behaviors characterized by disengagement from the educational process, which diminishes student-learning experiences (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015a). Indeed, a lack of trust is debilitating and shuts down communication. In contrast, when teachers have trust in their administrators, they have confidence that the administrator will follow through on commitments that are in the best interest of the teachers and the students. Current research suggests that one of the most important responsibilities of school administrators 	<p>Principals, Trust, and Cultivating Vibrant Schools</p> <p>Trust-The Cornerstone of Relationships</p> <p>Strong One Lasting One: An Elementary School Principal's Ability to Establish a Positive School Culture by Building Trust</p> <p>Trust is the On-ramp to Building Collaboration and Collegiality</p>

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	<p>is to establish and maintain a culture of trust on their campuses that encompasses not only earning the trust of their teachers and the community, but also cultivating trusting relationships between teachers and students (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015b).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● There are specific ways in which an administrator can lead the effort in creating a trusting school culture where people feel unified, valued, and needed, where they have room to make mistakes, discuss and address their challenges, and feel supported in their efforts. Administrators can establish and sustain a trusting culture on their campuses by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Celebrating the strengths, achievements, and successes of the students, teachers, and staff on campus, extending beyond the sole recognition of academic success; ○ Fostering a collective sense of responsibility for all students and all staff members; ○ Establishing high expectations for every learner on campus--students, teachers, and administrators alike; ○ Creating a common language that conveys shared, research-based beliefs about learning and achievement; ○ Providing continued, meaningful professional development opportunities for teachers and staff that directly impact student achievement; ○ Implementing a rich and useful curriculum that is fully supported with rich resources; ○ Providing considerate and useful feedback that encourages teachers and students to continue to grow and progress; ○ Modeling and encouraging meaningful coaching that leaves teachers and students inspired and motivated to meet their goals; ○ Promoting ongoing assessment that is primarily formative; ○ Using data in sensible ways to make informed instructional decisions (Routman, 2015). ● Administrators who have successfully established trusting cultures that promote high academic achievement demonstrate the following specific traits (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015b): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Vulnerability: “Trust is most relevant when two or more parties are dependent on one another for something they need or care about. Trust is characterized by the extent to which one is willing to rely upon and make oneself vulnerable to another and to do so 	

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	<p>with a certain sense of ease or comfort” (p. 259)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Benevolence: “Benevolence is characterized by a generalized spirit of good will and a willingness to extend oneself in support of the well-being of the other” (p. 259). ○ Honesty: “Honest behavior is anchored in moral principles and is cultivated through behaviors that demonstrate integrity of character, authenticity, and accountability for one’s actions” (p. 260). ○ Openness: “[Administrators] win the trust of their faculty through their willingness to extend trust, which is evident through openness with information, influence over organizational decisions, and professional discretion” (p. 261). ○ Competence: “Competence is the ability to perform a task as expected, according to appropriate standards. When [administrators] demonstrate the ability to get the job done, whatever that job may entail, teachers are more inclined to trust in the [administrator]” (p. 262). ○ Reliability: “Reliability means following through on decisions and promises. It entails a sense of confidence that one can rest assured that another person (e.g., the administrator) can be counted on to do what is expected on a regular, consistent basis. Reliability combines a sense of predictability with elements of benevolence and competence” (p. 263). ○ Trustworthy Leadership: “[Administrators] work with and through teachers to pursue the educational mission of their schools; therefore, the relationship between [administrators] and teachers must be one that facilitates the myriad judgments, decisions, and actions that occur within schools” (p. 264). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Administrators who embrace and demonstrate these behaviors (vulnerability, benevolence, honesty, openness, competence, reliability, and trustworthy leadership) engage in specific practices: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ They regularly visit classrooms, engage in fun and positive activities with the students and the staff, verbally recognize the teachers’ strengths and good work, are consistently kind, see themselves as learners, and lead by example. ○ They respect confidentiality, get to know their teachers and staff personally, do not play 	

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	<p>favorites, and work through difficult conversations with compassion and wisdom.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ They are informed and their staff knows it. They know how to teach, they know what works, they know what the research says, and yet, they are humble and open to learning from others. They make sound and competent administrative decisions for academic programs that reflect research-based evidence and a clear awareness of the needs of the students. ○ They establish professional development teams or professional learning communities, work with their teachers to implement what they are learning, provide time for teachers to work with and learn from each other, and act as their teachers' biggest champions. ○ They listen to their teachers' concerns; they run interference with difficult parents; they provide support via resources, schedule changes, coaching, and co-teaching; and they help teachers and staff deal with challenging students. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Creating and sustaining a culture of trust within a school community requires that not only administrators and other school leaders exhibit vulnerability, benevolence, honesty, openness, competence, reliability, and trustworthy leadership, but it also demands that the other members of the school staff and faculty emulate those behaviors in how they deal with one another, students, and parents. 	

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A Culture of Trust Empowers Growth Through Evaluation		
<p><i>The teacher evaluation process can be a consistently positive experience when teachers trust the administrator.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The teacher evaluation process can be very stressful for teachers, depending on the parameters of the process and teachers' relationship with the administrator. When administrators work to establish a culture of trust on a campus, this extends to their relationship with their teachers and directly affects the evaluation process positively. ● Administrators who have established trust on their campuses and improved the evaluation experience do so by engaging in the following actions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Practice transparency – It is imperative that administrators are open and forthcoming with information about the evaluation process so that teachers can feel comfortable asking clarifying questions. Transparency is also supported when administrators provide timely and accurate feedback after an evaluation. ○ Establish well-defined expectations – Provide teachers with access to the evaluation rubric and give them time to interact with it in grade-level or content teams. ○ Employ compassion – Convey the perspective that the evaluation process is meant to identify teachers' strengths and support growth by helping them refine their instructional skills. Emphasize that the evaluation processes primary intent is not to dismiss underperforming teachers. This sort of compassion will ease teachers' concerns, especially as the evaluation process occurs. ○ Exercise flexibility – Embrace flexibility in responding to the lesson in focus during an evaluation observation. Acknowledge that sometimes lessons don't go as planned and teachers may have to deviate from their lesson plan for a number of reasons during an evaluation. ● Establish and support a professional growth plan as part of the evaluation system. Administrators should check in with teachers frequently about how they are progressing on their growth plan and about where additional support can be provided. 	<p>Teacher Evaluations: The Role of Principal Leadership and Trust</p>

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Build Trust with Parents and the Community		
<p><i>Establishing a trusting relationship with stakeholders, including parents and other community members, has a powerful impact on the unity and success of a school.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Principals are critical in establishing a trusting relationship with parents and the community. They are the public face of the school in many ways, and the success of the school tends to ride on their shoulders. Successful principals work to incorporate parents and other community members in meaningful ways on their campuses, and in doing so create relationships built on trust and respect. Consider engaging in the following actions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Invite parents to work as regular volunteers at the school or at school events or visit the school as guest speakers. ○ Involve parents personally by inviting them to participate in the parent-teacher organization or to facilitate after school clubs. ○ Solicit (and implement where possible) parents' input in establishing programs on campus that meet the needs of the students and the community. ○ Invite parents to establish and run a school garden or greenhouse that becomes an outdoor classroom for students to learn about earth science and more. ○ Work with parents and the community to write grants to support programs that are important to the families and the community. ○ Work with the community to invite professionals (e.g. artists, musicians, community service personnel, medical workers, and people who work in STEM professions) to regularly visit the school and do lessons and activities with the students. ● School leaders need to be present, visible, and available to meet with parents and community members to listen to their concerns and suggestions and involve them in the solutions when appropriate. 	<p>How Do We Build Effective Parent-School Partnerships in Inclusive Schools?</p> <p>Why Principals Must Build Relationships with Parents</p>

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Connecting Trust to Other Factors in the School Culture		
<p><i>Trust does not operate on a campus independently, but rather works in tandem with other components of a school culture aimed at high student achievement.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● As open and sincere communication is a central component to creating a culture of trust, clear lines of communication need to be established to strengthen the relationship among the stakeholders at a school. Consider the following questions regarding communication: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What is the best way for a parent to communicate with a teacher, the principal, a school counselor, the nurse, a school board member, etc.? ○ What is the best way for a teacher to communicate with the principal, a school counselor, a community member, a parent, all the parents of his students, all of the students in certain classes, etc.? ○ What is the best way for the principal to communicate with the parents, students, and community? ○ What is the best way for a coach or club sponsor/advisor to communicate with the students and their parents; with the administrator who oversees their sport, club, or activity; with a school counselor; and with the students' teachers? ○ How can teachers, students, and parents access district and school information when they have questions? ● A schoolwide culture of trust does not occur in isolation, but rather is the result of a collective effort of the professionals on a campus. Research has determined that three constructs on a high-achieving campus correlate with a schoolwide culture of trust: academic press, collective teacher efficacy, and teacher professionalism (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015b). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Academic press is characterized by an environment where teachers create a learning experience that is engaging and focused. The teachers on these campuses not only believe that students can perform at high levels of academic achievement, but take the time to work with students who are struggling. In turn, all the students work hard and respect the efforts and performance of their high achieving peers. ○ Collective teacher efficacy is characterized by the efforts of the entire faculty having a positive effect on the students. When a high level of trust is present at a school, the teachers tend to believe in the ability of their students to meet their academic goals – regardless of the students' backgrounds or socioeconomic status – and the teachers 	<p>How to Build Trust in Schools</p> <p>Fostering a Culture of Trust Within and Outside a School System</p> <p>Building Trusting Relationships for School Improvement: Implications for Principals and Teachers</p>

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	<p>make the extra effort to help students succeed. The students in turn believe in their own ability and work harder and smarter, and so a virtuous cycle emerges comprised of trust, success, and collective efficacy.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Teacher professionalism is characterized by a commitment to the students' needs, the use of appropriate assessment tools, and the implementation of interventions that help students succeed. Where professionalism is present, teachers respect and seek the input and experience of their colleagues. They see their colleagues as not only competent, but also cooperative and supportive. ● Schools that have established and sustained trusting cultures tend to have some of the following practices and ideologies in place: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The values are shared by all – What is important to one is important to all and what is important at school is also important outside of school. ○ The mission and vision are shared – The adults and the students have contributed to the mission and vision of the school. Everyone knows his or her purpose and understands what everyone else has committed to contribute. ○ Leadership is open and authentic – All leaders (Principals, assistant principals, level chairs, department chairs, teacher leaders. etc.) are sincere, competent, and open to listening and learning. ○ Everyone enjoys their work – Being an educator is hard work, and sometimes exhausting, yet at the end of the day, the faculty enjoys being part of the school community and participating in the important work of educating young people. ○ The work is enjoyable and engaging – Even if it is difficult sometimes, the faculty and staff find ways to have fun with their students and with one another. ○ There is a pervasive desire to learn, not blame – No finger pointing occurs, but rather, heads are put together to address and resolve problems. ○ Conversations are honest and sincere – The faculty and staff respect confidentiality, give each other the benefit of the doubt, are kind and considerate in their communication with one another, and speak directly to one another (rather than through other people) to resolve difficulties that may arise (Sinay, Presley, Douglin, & De Jesus, 2016). 	

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When an act of distrust occurs within a school community that is working to build trust, it is important that communication, structural arrangements, accountability, and reparations occur. Nothing can be more damaging to the creation of a trusting culture than an act of distrust that is unaddressed and unresolved. Likewise, incompetence needs to be addressed firmly, fairly, and thoughtfully. Incompetence cannot go unaddressed as it breaks down trust within a campus. 	

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Relational Trust and Educator Collaboration		
<p><i>Relational trust is foundational to building effective educator collaboration.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Relational trust is at the core of effective educator collaboration. It occurs when there is a alignment with how the members of the school community see their roles and the roles of others, and recognize the interrelatedness and importance of one another's contributions. ● Relational trust occurs when individuals in the school community treat each other with respect and personal regard and when they act with integrity and competence in their role responsibilities. Creating relational trust cannot be mandated, but is rather a voluntary process. And, when incompetence or negligence are permitted to occur over time, this breaks down relational trust as do high student mobility and educator turnover rates (Relational Trust, n.d.). ● Experts have argued that collaborative teams, sometimes referred to as professional learning communities, are a critical component to any school improvement efforts and that relational trust is key to making them successful (Cranston, 2011). The relationships that matter most within professional collaborative teams are those among the faculty members, including the administration, as those relationships connect the school to the community as well as the teachers with the students. ● While there is not one agreed upon definition of professional collaborative teams or professional learning communities, they share some common traits, which include the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ One of their purposes is to develop adult relationships on campus that support individual growth in a classroom and across the entire school. ○ The principal plays a key role in nurturing and sustaining these relationships. ○ Collaboration is a critical component to meeting overall professional development and school improvement goals. ○ The teachers and administrators who participate in collaborative teams do so trusting that all involved will make research-based decisions that benefit all students. ● The relational trust that is critical to effective collaboration ranges from teachers having compassion and caring for each other to being able to withstand feedback and personal critiques without being personally hurt or retaliatory. 	<p>Trust in Schools: A Core Resource for School Reform</p> <p>Relational Trust</p>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● When trust permeates the relationships among faculty in in collaborative teams, the following results occur: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Teachers are committed to each other and their students. ○ Feedback is not seen as threatening, but rather refining and helpful. ○ Teachers can disagree about and discuss ways to improve their teaching practices. ○ Teachers can challenge each other to try different strategies that benefit the students. ● Establishing these sorts of trusting relationships in collaborative teams requires leadership from the principal, but it also requires that department or level chairs also lead by example in how they treat one another and respond to challenges. ● Teacher leaders naturally emerge within a campus, even if they are not formally named as such, and it is important that those who have influence over others are united in their effort to build a trusting culture within collaborative teams as well as within the school community. ● In order for relational trust to develop in collaborative teams, it is necessary for the following practices to occur: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Teachers and administrators must observe one another's efforts to fulfill agreed upon expectations and responsibilities. They need to see one another in action, doing and saying what each has committed to, which means they need to have time to interact with and observe one another. ○ Group norms need to be established around risk-taking and change orientation in order to foster a safe climate conducive to professional growth (Cranston, 2011). In other words, there needs to be a climate of trust in place that supports change before any change can actually occur. For example, teachers need to trust each other enough that they can come into each other's rooms offering and seeking feedback about their teaching practices that will contribute to their professional growth. ○ Teachers need to have the opportunity to discuss important matters related to what is happening in their classrooms and in the school at large as trust will build as they interact with one another and understand one another's perspectives. Note the following suggestions: 	

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ This collaboration can be achieved by having regular staff meetings and level and/or department meetings where teachers provide input and discuss in smaller groups what concerns them and what they see as working well. ■ Likewise, this collaboration can be achieved by having meaningful and ongoing professional development meetings where teachers are able to discuss what they are learning about the impact of their practices as they examine evidence of student learning and reflect on their next steps in supporting students. ○ Principals and other administrators need to be engaged with faculty interactions, encouraging, discussing, listening, and connecting people and ideas. 	

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Establishing Trust Within the Classroom		
<p><i>There are specific practices that teachers can implement in order to build trust with students in their classrooms.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● In order to create trusting relationships with students, there are specific instructional practices that teachers can employ that provide emotional support to students. This effort will also yield classrooms where students are not only encouraged and supported, but also feel safe and secure. Such strategies include the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Model treating everyone in and out of the classroom with trust and respect. ○ Acknowledge your mistakes with your students and commit to do better in the future. ○ Work as an activator of learning with your students, helping them learn, and learning from them. ○ Make the effort to connect with each student by greeting him or her at the door each day or during attendance, or by scheduling a regular conference for a few minutes each week or every other week depending on class size. ○ Validate students' comments and experiences when they share them in private or with the class. ○ Paraphrase what students say in class in order to allow them to clarify any misunderstandings and to show them that you are listening. ○ When students are struggling to answer a question, give them some time to think about their response, and let them know you'll come back to them. Validate their experience by letting them know that it can be tricky to come up with an answer on the spot. ○ When students share their concerns or ask questions that may take some time for you to answer, let them know that you'll work on it and get back to them. ○ Be sensitive when you know students have dealt with challenging experiences that may come up in a lesson. Talk with the student prior to the lesson and determine a plan of action so that the student is comfortable with what happens and feels supported in the classroom, or even consider excusing the student from that part of the lesson if needed. ○ Create a way for students to privately signal you if they are dealing with challenges in their lives that make it difficult to focus on what is happening in the classroom. ○ Know the protocol at your school for reporting concerns about students' mental or physical health to a school counselor or administrator. ○ Make accessible a list of community services that might address some of the challenges 	<p>Developing Students' Trust: The Key to a Learning Partnership</p> <p>Building Classroom Trust</p> <p>Building a Classroom Culture of Trust and Collaboration</p> <p>Shared Mindfulness: Building Supportive Relationships in the Classroom</p> <p>Building a Positive, Trusting Classroom Environment</p>

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	<p>students in your classroom might face (suicide hotline, domestic violence hotline, etc.) so that they can access them for themselves or for a friend.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Encourage students who are dealing with unusually strong emotions and feelings to talk with a counselor or other trusted adult. ○ Create a means for students to share their concerns with you privately or anonymously. ○ Begin each class meeting with an mindful or reflective activity where students can be focused, peaceful, and recognize the power of kindness in their lives. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● There are specific instructional strategies that teachers can employ to support the students academically and while building trust. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Be an active part of and support to students' project planning. ○ Make certain that students who may struggle with a certain task have the support they need or adjustments made so that they can be successful. ○ Provide visual and/or written discussion questions for students to have access to ahead of time so that they can prepare and avoid being caught off guard. ○ Post instructions for tasks, projects, or other classroom activities so students can make reference to them while they work. ○ Provide students time to ask questions before assessments to clarify their understanding about the concepts being tested. ○ Allow students to discuss their ideas with partners before they complete written responses. ● There are specific instructional strategies that teacher can employ to create better group dynamics while building trust: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ At the beginning of a course, let students get to know each other through games and other activities. ○ Allow students to define the rules for class discussions. ○ Provide clear expectations about what language, tone, and behaviors are appropriate within the classroom, and especially when students are having a class or group discussion or collaborating on a activity or project. 	

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Be thoughtful when grouping students together, always considering the desired outcome. ○ Facilitate discussions while allowing students to become physically comfortable if they so desire--sitting on desks, or on the floor, etc. ○ Take time to help students solve problems when they arise. 	

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