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. It also builds an understanding of how well our school system currently reflects what they hold as important. 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 the educational values (importance statements) held by 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 heterogeneous 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 coordinate the preparations, including such things as:
• how to recruit participants, especially disenfranchised stakeholders and nonparents,
• where the conversations will be held,
• when they will be held,
• how many site coordinators for each conversation and how to train them,
• what the opening presentation should be like,
• 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 now, the less resistance you will likely encounter later.

- 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 (4-5 people) 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 train the site coordinators, who will be presenting, 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 Register participants and assign to tables.

Find out if they are teacher, administrator, school staff, student, parent, employer, or other community member, and give each a name tag, Briefing Sheet, and Work Sheet.

Assign to tables of about 4-5 people who are as different as possible from each other regarding stakeholder group, ethnicity, socio-economic status, gender, age, and so forth. Separate family members and others who know each other well.

Ask them to (a) get pizza, (b) introduce themselves to each other over pizza at their tables, following the instructions on the Briefing Sheet, and (c) choose roles. Site coordinator and assistant should make sure these get done in a timely manner.

(Time: 20 minutes)
2.2 Introduce the “conversation.”

Thank participants for being there.

Next, introduce the activity: goals, rationale, importance, and how it represents the foundation for any improvement efforts that may follow, and two rounds of discussion.

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.

Emphasize the importance of all stakeholders being involved.
- They have valuable experiences and perspectives to contribute.

Emphasize the importance of respecting all stakeholders’ input.
- It's their school system, too; they should support any changes that are made.

Emphasize the importance of good listening skills.
- They do not need to reach consensus.
- When they disagree, try to understand why others believe what they do.

Discuss the responsibilities for each role:
- reporter (who will present), and facilitator (who will ensure equal time).

The entire introduction shouldn’t take much more than 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: 20 minutes)

2.3 Participants discuss the fundamental values in small groups.

In each group, participants should follow the directions on the “Fundamental Values” sheet, in an effort to understand what fundamental values each member holds and where disagreements exist, to understand why the other person values what they do, and to see if they can reach consensus. Consensus is not necessary.

At the end of the discussion, the reporter should write down tallies for the beliefs of the group members under “Consensus.” When disagreement remains, the differing viewpoints should be described.

The site coordinator 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 reporter and facilitator are both doing their jobs well.

(Time: 10 minutes)

2.4 Small groups report on their discussions.

Taking each fundamental value one at a time, have each group report their tallies of group members’ beliefs. When groups disagree, encourage them to explain their thinking, so that everyone can understand why others value what they do. Repeat this process for each fundamental value.
Have a record keeper make a record of the values reported, along with indication of consensus and disagreement, 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: 10 minutes)

2.5 Participants discuss the second question in small groups.

Each group should discuss the extent to which their fundamental values are currently exhibited in the Decatur schools, using a grading scale of A, B, C, and F.

The site coordinator 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 reporter and facilitator are both doing their jobs well.

(Time: 5 minutes)

2.6 Small groups report on their discussions.

Starting with the first fundamental value, have each group report its grade for how well it is exhibited in Decatur schools. Display the grades on a large screen. If there are big differences in grades, ask the reporters to explain their rationale. Repeat this process for each remaining fundamental value.

Have a record keeper make a record of the values not well exhibited, along with indication of consensus and disagreement, 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: 10 minutes)

2.7 Participants discuss stakeholder values in small groups.

First, each participant should read through the sample values and take some time to write down the values they would like to see the Decatur schools live up to for each box on the Work Sheet.

Second, starting with the first box, participants should take turns describing to the group the most important (remaining) value on his or her list, finding out if the others agree or disagree with it, and (only if there is disagreement) each participant describing why s/he believes what s/he does, and seeing if they can come to consensus. Consensus is not necessary. The reporter should write down all values with which at least two people agree. When disagreement remains, the differing viewpoints (values) should both be included, as long as two or more people hold each. Then proceed to the next box, and so on until all the boxes are done.

Finally, for each box the reporter should flag all values on which there is consensus.

The site coordinator 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 reporter and referee are both doing their jobs well.
2.8 Small groups report on their discussions.

Starting with the first box, have each group report a value on which consensus was reached (that hasn’t been mentioned yet). If any values are in conflict with any other values reported, encourage the reporters to explain their thinking, so that everyone can understand why others value what they do. Repeat this process for each box.

Have a record keeper make a record of the values reported, along with indication of consensus and disagreement, 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 minutes)

2.9 Participants discuss the fourth question in small groups.

Each group should discuss the extent to which the stakeholder values identified within each box are currently exhibited in the Decatur schools, using a grading scale of A, B, C, and F.

The site coordinator 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 reporter and facilitator are both doing their jobs well.

(Time: 7 minutes)

2.10 Small groups report on their discussions.

Starting with the first box, have each group report a value that is not well exhibited in Decatur. If there is disagreement, ask the reporter to explain their thinking, so that everyone can understand why they think that value is not well exhibited in Decatur schools. Repeat this process for each box.

Have a record keeper make a record of the values not well exhibited, along with indication of consensus and disagreement, 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: 15 minutes)

2.11 Evaluate the activity.

Ask each small group how to improve this activity, what made it useful, what they learned, and what could make it a more powerful experience. Have their reporter take notes and give them to you, along with all other notes. Share the results with all other site coordinators and the Core Team.

(Time: 5 minutes)
2.12 Wrap-up.

Closing comments and thanks. Provide free copies of short readings that may reinforce or elaborate on what was discussed. Schedule some kind of interim event they can attend soon. Membership card.

(Time: 2 minutes)

(Time: 2 hours and 27 minutes)
(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)