

Community Engagement Guide



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WHY

As you begin a new initiative or initiate your strategic planning process it is essential to engage your community intentionally to glean their priorities, pain points and questions. A deep understanding of your community will ensure the following outcomes:

- Authentic representation of multiple viewpoints across your schools, offices and community
- Inputs that prioritize diversity of thought and perspective
- Community investment in the upcoming process or initiative

First encounters with your community are critical as they set the precedent of how you will engage them throughout. Engaging your community early is key to ensuring their voice throughout the plan.

PURPOSE

This document is meant to guide community engagement for district-wide initiatives. Below you will find the important information needed for community engagement in addition to potential structures aimed at gathering certain evidence.

Why a Guide for Community Engagement








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Navigating this Document

STEP 1: ARTICULATE YOUR WHY

1. What information do I need from the community? We have developed categories of information that are important for district-wide initiatives which we articulate in the domains.
2. What will result from this information? You might need feedback, buy-in or sourcing ideas. Clarity on which will help you best select your resource.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT DOMAINS

DOMAIN	INFORMATION WE WOULD LIKE TO GLEAN:
 PRACTICES/ SUPPORT	<hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• At the district/school/classroom level, what is the participant's perception of current practices/supports?• What are growth areas/bright spots in current practices/supports? <hr/>
 STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT	<hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• How are the interactions with different parties within your community? <hr/>
 QUALITY OF INTERACTION/ COMMUNICATION	<hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• How do community feel about the quality of academic achievement, and social-emotional growth? <hr/>
 CURRICULAR RESOURCES	<hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Do students and teachers have the resources needed to achieve at high levels? <hr/>
 ACCESS AND DIFFERENTIATION	<hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Does your district provide fair access to programs, extracurriculars, and higher-level courses for all?• Does your district provide spaces for its students, staff, and families to feel seen, heard, and valued? <hr/>
 COMMUNITY OUTREACH	<hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• How does your district work with the community to address issues that affect the well-being of all community members? <hr/>
 OTHER	<hr/> <p>Potential topics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Collaborating with other districts, networks or national organizations• Prevailing district mindsets• Free response portion to add any other ideas <hr/>

STEP 2: IDENTIFY YOUR community

A community is a person with an interest or concern in your work. Included are the community groups identified for outreach.



STUDENTS

Students enrolled in any grade K-12. When reaching out to students we must ensure that all programs, grade-levels and ages are represented.



FAMILIES

Parent or legal guardian of children enrolled in your school district.



DISTRICT & SCHOOL-BASED STAFF

All school-based staff should be included and represented, which includes but is not limited to: administrators, maintenance staff, office staff, teachers' assistants and teachers.



COMMUNITY MEMBERS

Any community member living within the school district who does not have a child currently attending school there.

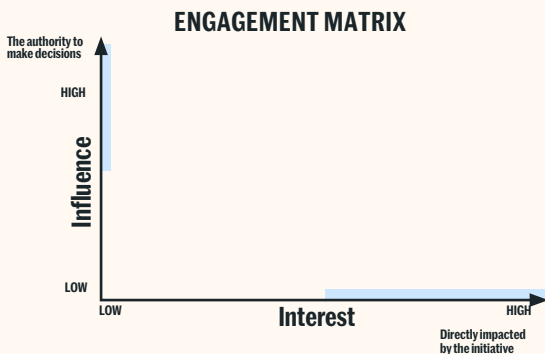
A note on taking a stance for differentiation:

We believe that the first step to building a plan that uplifts all students is to understand that at their cores, most systems have been designed to uplift some; not all. Our school districts are not an exception to this truth and it is incumbent upon those who work our districts to change this reality. Grounding ourselves in this understanding allows us to build plans that dismantle long-standing beliefs about what some can achieve versus others, and prevent more students growing up in schools that uphold unfair practices.

In identifying your community we strongly encourage including individuals that reflect various lived experiences in the district. Outside of these teams, we recommend leaders actively, consistently, and meaningfully incorporate underrepresented voices throughout the strategic planning process (not just during early community engagement activities). Such efforts will ideally provide such voices with clearer feedback-giving and decision-making opportunities and will avoid a single individual speaking on behalf of an entire community group. As a result, you might identify other community groups whom you want to engage.

STEP 3: PLOT YOUR community ON AN ENGAGEMENT MATRIX

To help prioritize and determine the most appropriate approach for engaging with community, try using an engagement matrix. On the x-axis is INTEREST, which is defined by the level of engagement required by the community and on the y-axis is INFLUENCE, which is the level of influence that the community has. On the matrix, plot the community groups to help you determine the communication and supports each of them will need.



Find out more about your community through empathy building activities to better inform and/or validate your matrix.

STEP 4: EXPLORE TACTICS ALIGNED WITH YOUR NEEDS

Utilize the following empathy building activities to begin engaging your community.

- [Empathy Building Shadowing](#)
- [Survey](#)
- [Forums](#)
- [Empathy Interviews](#)
- [Other Structures/Evidence](#)

Empathy Building Shadowing

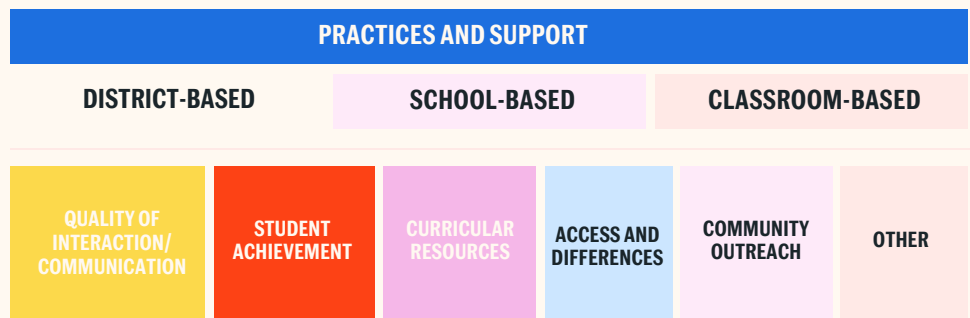
BEST FOR



STUDENTS



STAFF



Empathy Building Shadowing works best, when...

participants identify clear learning goals for the exercise, and work to assess only their own experiences as a student that day; not to evaluate teachers' or students' actions.

What is Shadow a Student?

The Shadow a Student exercise is an opportunity for educators to come together to gain more empathy with their students in the hopes of using the experience as a way to help design instructional models and experiences for students in their community. Consider shadowing other community such as teachers or principals depending on where you want to glean insights.

Why? We have found that shadowing can lead to powerful observations and insights to drive change. View: PBS: What one assistant principal learned from shadowing a student for a day.

Who? Teachers and Administrators

Prepare for the Day:

Resource: Shadow a Student Challenge (d. [School](#))

1. Team members need to identify at least 1-2 educators to participate.
2. Principal/AP feel free to modify this [email template to share with staff, students, and parents](#).
3. The educators who will be participating in the day need to print out the workbook. They will be responsible for sharing this experience with the Core Team. [Print workbook](#)

Email Template:

Dear _____,

During the week of {DATES}, {INSERT TEACHER NAMES} will be participating in the Shadow a Student Challenge. They will be part of a national community of school leaders clearing our calendars, silencing our walkie-talkies, throwing on sneakers, and immersing ourselves in student life for a day. Their goal is to improve the student experience at our school by better understanding the students' perspective. On _____ [the date you've committed to], do not treat them as your _____ [their titles]. Instead, they will be a student for the day from the first to the last bell.

- Teachers: They will not be evaluating you on your teaching methods. Treat them as you would one of your students, including giving them that pop quiz.
- Students: They will not be there to watch your behavior. They will be sitting at a desk next to you, as one of your peers.
- Parents: They are doing this because of their commitment to improving the student experience at our school.

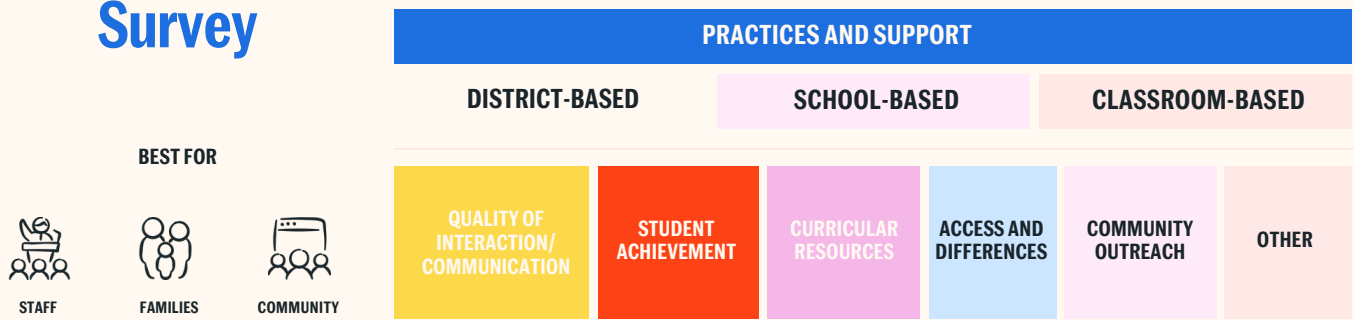
Learn more about the Shadow a Student Challenge at shadowastudent.org.

I look forward to joining this community of educators committed to rethinking the student experience – starting by walking in the shoes of a student. Thanks for your support. See you at the bus stop.

Sincerely,

_____ [Your Name]

Survey



Surveys work best, when...

- they involve community members who may otherwise not have a chance to share their voice. • the district needs to collect information from a wide range of individuals in a low-effort setting, and/or gather continuous feedback throughout the process. A high response rate will more closely reflect the community's perspective.
- the district needs to take a first step in understanding the community's perspective. They can be used to inform the direction future forums or interviews take.

Guidance

- Provide a clear purpose, topic, and central message for your survey
- Share ways in which principals and other community leaders can distribute the survey. Consider:
 - Will translation be provided?
 - Will distribution differ for students, families, and community members?
 - What kind of distribution link (open or individual invitation)?
 - Can distribution be paired with another community event (i.e. PTA meeting or parent forum)?
 - Will there be a way for ELL, SPED, and other student populations to engage with this activity?— What other barriers to involvement may exist?
 - What is the survey window? Will it be distributed in one or multiple waves?
- Share how survey results will be utilized to inform the strategic planning process.
- Provide a summary of findings after the survey + follow up with how results have informed the strategic plan.

Examples

Family and Community Engagement
[Survey Guide for Facilitators](#)

Great for: examples of how to deliver a survey to small groups of diverse demographics

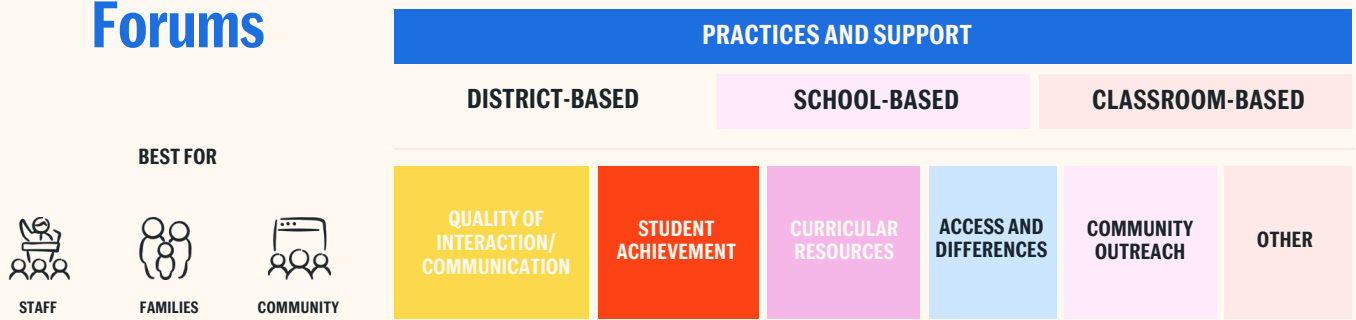
Lower Marion Community Survey

Great for: examples of simple formatting and messaging through SurveyMonkey

Panorama Surveys

Great for: showing alignment between strategic planning goals/priorities and outreach strategy

Forums



Forums work best, when...

they involve groups who are traditionally excluded from decision-making processes, for example: young people and marginalized populations. Those who are already active in the community are likely to readily engage in these spaces - while their voices are valuable, they must not be the only participants.

Guidance

- Provide a clear purpose and topic for your forum.
- Share ways in which parents can engage with the forum.
Consider:
 - Will translation be provided?
 - Will there be a way to engage virtually?
 - Will there be multiple dates and times that accommodate working parents/guardians and/or childcare?
- Develop a clear agenda and preview prior to the forum.
Consider:
 - How will you honor the mood of the room?
 - How will you structure your forum to ensure all voices are represented?
- Share how discussions will be utilized to inform the strategic planning process.
- Provide a summary or minutes after forum/forum series + follow up with how discussions have informed the strategic plan.

Examples

How to Organize an Issue Forum

Great for: a breakdown of best practices for planning forums, town halls, etc.

Arlington, MA Public Schools

Great for: examples of clear messaging and formatting on a variety of topics

Parent Council Resource

Great for: a comprehensive step-by-step guide for engaging parents through multiple strategies

Focus Group Guide [Charlotte-Mecklenburg]

Empathy Interviews

BEST FOR



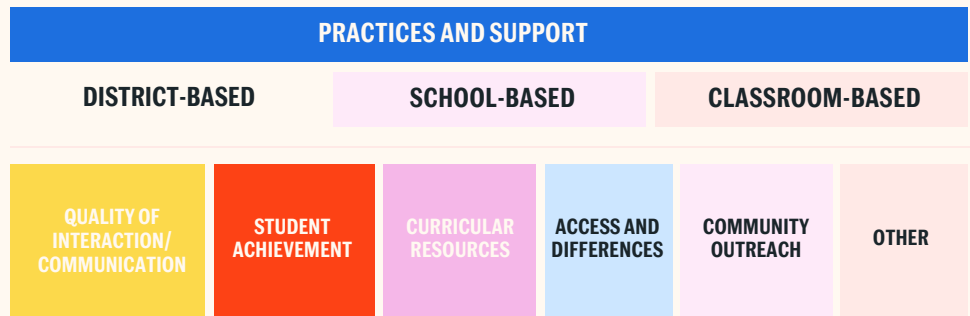
STUDENTS



STAFF



FAMILIES



Empathy Interview works best when...

they are designed with the people's needs first and work to center the voices of individuals traditionally excluded from strategic planning conversations (i.e. behaviorally challenging students, first-year teachers, etc.)

Guidance

Why? We believe that the best designs come out of deep empathy. This means starting with people, first. As we start intentionally responding to your community needs while strategic planning, we recommend spending time learning from students, families, educators and building leaders who can lend insight into how we all can better support student learning.

Interview Tips

Don't suggest answers to your questions:

Even if they pause before answering, don't help them by suggesting an answer. This can unintentionally get people to say things that agree with your expectations. Ask questions naturally.

Don't be afraid of silence: Often if you allow there to be silence, a person will reflect on what they've just said and say something deeper.

Look for inconsistencies: Sometimes what people say and what they do (or say later) are different. Gracefully probe these contradictions.

Be aware of non-verbal cues: Consider body language and emotions.

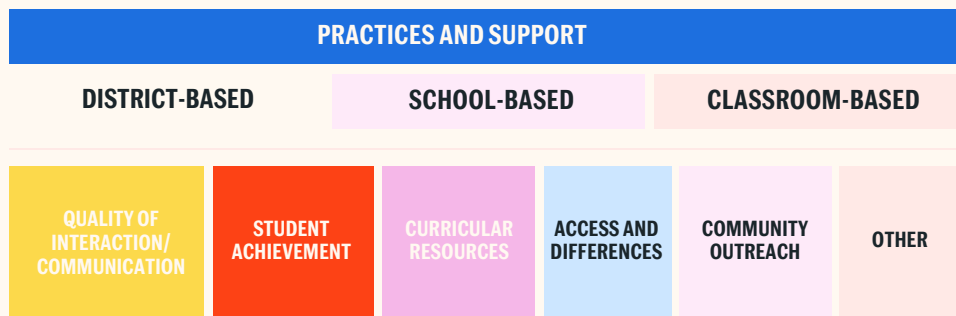
Stay on the same path of a question: Respond to what your interviewee offers and follow-up to go deeper. Use simple queries to get them to say more:







- "Oh, why do you say that?"
- "What were you feeling at that point?"
- "ASK "WHY" "What is the reason for that?"

Examples

- EE Empathy Interview Questions
- EE Student Empathy Interviews [Template]
- [Institute of Design @ Stanford] Empathy Field Guide and [Quick Reference](#)
- [Design Thinking: Getting Started with Empathy](#)

Other Structures/ Evidence



BEST FOR	STRUCTURE	DESCRIPTION	RESOURCES
	Academic Achievement Data	Gather all data related to national, state and benchmark assessment information. Consider using the following protocol: Predict, Observe, _____ Infer.	
	Attendance Rates	Gather rate of absences, tardies and other relevant information related to student attendance/participation in school.	District Provides
	Behavioral/Conduct Information	Gather rate of referrals based on age, race, special education classification, school, etc.	
	Value Proposition Canvas + Iceberg Canvas	The Iceberg Canvas is a conscious design framework for re-evaluating new initiatives. It departs from standard applications of design thinking in that it takes into consideration 'below the iceberg' ramifications, such as the forces at play (i.e. the forces at play below the polished surface of the services we offer and initiatives we create). These include invisible or unseen factors and unintended consequences.	Iceberg Canvas
	Online Forums	Create an open online forum where parents can engage with school district representatives to ask questions and provide feedback.	School District "Ask Me Anythings" (Reddit Elementary School Principal "AMA")
	Social Media Engagement Data	Capture posts on Twitter, Facebook or other social media outlets to determine feedback, questions or priorities of the greater community group.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Buffer • [Hootsuite] A Step-by-Step Guide to Hosting a Successful Twitter Chat



About the Authors

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Andrea Goetchius is an Associate Partner at Education Elements working with schools and districts to best meet the needs of all learners. Andrea specializes in projects that bring initiatives to scale across districts, regional organizations and state entities through the lens of strong innovative leadership. Additionally, Andrea has led districts through a strategic initiative planning to identify long term priorities, goals, and processes that respond to the changing needs of an organization.

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Natalie Hall is a Design Principal on the Design and Implementation Team. Natalie comes to Education Elements with experience as a middle school reading and ELA teacher, and as a consultant in the private sector. Natalie has led districts through engagement focused on personalized learning implementation, peer observation system development, strategic planning, and innovative change management.

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