

Do Less, Do More: Strategies for Equitable Community Engagement

Equitable community engagement--an ongoing and intentional process of building trusting relationships, sharing power, and working collaboratively with all stakeholders toward educational equity--can seem overwhelming at first. Especially when it comes to rethinking a decades-old status quo, it's hard to know where to begin. Or maybe you've been working hard on engaging families, students, and staff and have been frustrated by the results.

The good news: school leaders can pave the way to systems change by considering their own leadership practices and habits.

The shifts below can help you model equitable community engagement, and this can set the stage for broader, systemic work in your schools and district. These low-cost, high-impact modifications are an invitation--not to put more on your plate, but rather to consider replacing "defaults" with more inclusive and reflective patterns and practices. Even if you select just one thing to focus on from the list below, you'll be on your way to developing a more equitable and engaging school community.

Do Less	Do More
"Why don't they ever come to things?"	"How can we involve them in developing activities?"
Emailing	Face-to-face conversations
Explaining why	Asking why
Relying on the same folks	Connecting with the outliers
Designing and facilitating all the meetings	Building others' capacity to lead
Making assumptions	Looking for your potential blind spots
Hosting events at school	Hosting events in the community
Marketing and public relations	Inviting personal stories
Looking for a quick fix or clear resolution	Sitting in the discomfort
Setting the agenda	Finding out what's important to others
Waiting to share something until it's a finished product	Bringing others in to design, refine, and communicate about a work-in-progress
Getting everyone "on board"	Embracing and exploring disagreement
Having all the answers	"I don't know" or "I'm still learning"
Collecting and analyzing survey data behind closed doors	Sharing and making meaning of data with the people surveyed