

Facilitator Notes on Cluster Meeting about Listening to Families

Although this session also includes time to reflect on family engagement activities and share ideas as school teams plan for the future, it begins with an important topic that school leaders often don't spend enough time thinking about: what they learn by listening to families.

One goal of this session is to help school leaders/teams reflect on what they learn when they listen to families. This may be a new idea to many participants. School leaders often think of communication as sharing information with families and tend to forget about the importance of what they learn by listening to families.

In a 90 minute session, one can devote the first 10-15 minutes to welcome and introductions, and then the next 30 minutes to a discussion about learning from families. The other segments of the session (sharing what they are learning through reflection and their planning for the rest of the year) can be divided to fill the other 45 minutes of the meeting.

Learning from Families

Grouping participants at tables of 4-5 with markers, post-its, and other paper for notes works well for this session component. Large poster sheets can be placed on the walls in advance for participants to place their post-its (which represent the "survey data" from the group about their experiences) as the session proceeds.

A brief introduction about the importance of two-way communication and learning from families is useful (Slide 5).

Slides 6-8 guide participants through the data collection process as they think about their interactions with families recently.

Slide 9 – As the group considers the multiple examples of topics of conversation with families, encourage them to find overarching themes (some potential themes summarized on Slide 10).

Slide 11 – The group may have difficulty summarizing LEARNING from these interactions. The goal is to help them think more deeply about what the

interactions have meant, and to go beyond surface topics to deeper understanding of family situations, what they need to understand from families to be able to help students flourish and succeed academically.

For example, school leaders/teams may need a deeper understanding of students' cultures (e.g., the importance of Ramadan and the associated prayers and fasting practices) to understand students' needs during a particular time of the school year. There may be issues of safety in getting the school that need to be understood by school personnel. Perhaps LGBTQ families have particular issues that need to be understood by school personnel. And so on...

Sharing Reflections on Recent Family Engagement Activity

During this segment, participants are encouraged to use the Plan-Do-Study-Act framework to share about a recent family engagement activity or strategy: what they planned, what they observed, what they learned, and how this has affected their future planning. It would be good to pair representatives from 2-3 schools at each table for this sharing time. If time permits, some share-outs to the large group could be useful to close this component.

Sharing Future Plans

The previous component can potentially move seamlessly into a sharing a future plans. It would be good for these to be shared with the full group if possible, time permitting, as the cross-pollination of family engagement ideas is often deeply valued by participants.