WHOLE SCHOOLING

Education for a Democratic Society

Towards A Guide for Action Planning

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October 19, 2000

1. EMPOWER CITIZENS IN A DEMOCRACY: Educators work to build a culture of democracy in the school among staff, in classrooms and the school community with students, parents, and community members.

We would *expect* to see. . .	We would hope *not* to see . . .
• Principal providing leadership and vision while engaging staff, parents, and students in dialogue about important decisions. • Principal facilitates discussion and dialogue among staff, providing support when staff have difficulties. • Informal and formal collaboration among teachers, sharing of ideas, knowledge of each other's practice, discussion at the end of the day. • Staff attend to relationship building and people reframing and summarizing what they hear when people talk. • Staff disagree but also show respect and a willingness to work towards consensus. • Many choices for children – helping to make decisions about the school, daily choices in the classroom – activities on which to work, books to read, the making of rules by students. • Students study controversial social and political issues, take action to make an impact, seek to promote social justice – all as an integral part of the learning process. • Staff work with students and parents to engage in political action to promote positive policies in education and push back against damaging policies. • The school involves parents, university educators, and others in its dynamics of growth and change.	• Principal making major decisions and imposing these on staff with no real dialogue or involvement. • Efforts at change are made by autocratic decree. Principal often seems stressed or angry. • Children with no or few choices, teacher direction, no opportunity to make decisions or have input into class activities. • School and class rules are lists of what not to do which children had no part of making. • Much tension exists among staff, little dialogue. • Principal either resists innovation by teachers or seeks to control such efforts. • Principal takes personnel action against a teacher who participated in a rally against standardized testing. • Staff are told they cannot communicate with parents about their rights regarding inclusive education or issues regarding standardized tests. • Outside involvement is resisted and limited. The school puts forth an image that it is perfect. • Parents must make an appointment a week in advance to visit their child's classroom.

Action Steps
1. Develop a working group to look at how the school functions as a democracy, its use of power, its dynamics for group, how democracy is supported in the classroom.
2. Investigate the culture of the school. Do a "Democracy Audit" based on observations, interviews, and other data.
3. Involve staff, parents, and children in forums to discuss the idea of democracy and develop an action plan for strengthening democracy in all aspects of the life of the school.
4. Start with 1-3 small projects as 'action learning experiments' – eg. Create ways that children can influence the curriculum of study; create forums for staff decision-making about policies.

2. INCLUDE ALL. All children learn together across culture, ethnicity, language, ability, gender & age.

We would *expect* to see. . .	We would hope *not* to see . . .
• A range of children – gifted, second language learners, mild to severely disabled – in classes learning together. • Multi-age learning is used frequently – multi-age classes, linking of classes of older and younger students in learning projects, involvement of older people in the community. • Teachers and support staff work to teach so that all children are challenged at their own level of ability, that students with different first language are given support in dual language learning. • School staff is composed of people of different ethnic groups, socio-economic status, and disability. • The school reaches out to insure that all students in its catchment area are welcomed into the school. • The principal and teachers talking about the value of all sorts of diversity and their philosophy of inclusive schooling. • Students in the school talk about what they are learning from having kids with substantial differences in their classes. • Children develop friendships and relationships across their differences.	• Separate classes for special education, gifted, bilingual, at risk. • Clustering of students by category across classes. • Ability grouping in classes. • Special education, gifted, or bilingual separate classes in the school. • 12 year old students with mental retardation 'included' in a 2nd grade class due to their presumed mental abilities. • Students with moderate to severe disabilities at a segregated special education school. • Teachers complaining about kids with special needs in their classes, stating they should go to separate classes. • Kids taunt, call kids with special needs 'dummy' or 'retarded'. • Students from different ethnic groups cluster together; kids with disabilities are pushed away by other students.

Action Steps

1. Develop a working group to move towards inclusive schooling practices.
2. Conduct an "Inclusion Audit". Determine how children are distributed in the building – special classes, ability grouping in classes, etc. Identify children who are sent to special programs before they get an opportunity to come to the school.
3. Dialogue with staff, parents, and children about segregated versus inclusive education. Develop a commitment to become an inclusive school.
4. Engage in learning about inclusive schooling and teaching through conferences, visits to other schools.
5. Develop an action plan. Start small. Strategies may include (depending upon the situation of the school).
   • Place children in classes heterogeneously intentionally, seeking to balance different characteristics of children.
   • Move children out of separate classes into general education classes. Re-design the roles of special teachers to support staff *or* add classes and reduce the overall class size.
   • Seek out parents of children who have been sent to segregated, special schools and invite them to consider enrolling their children in the school.
   • Teachers obtain training, as needed, and develop strategies to teach authentically at multiple levels of ability.

3. MULTI-LEVEL, AUTHENTIC INSTRUCTION FOR LEARNERS OF DIVERSE ABILITIES.

Teachers design instruction for diverse learners at multiple levels, challenge each child at his or her own level, provide scaffolds and supports and engage them in active learning in meaningful, real-world activities. Teachers develop accommodations and adaptations for learners as these are needed.

We would *expect* to see. . .	We would hope *not* to see . . .
• The experiences and interests of children are used to direct and expand learning activities. The state curriculum and standardized tests are considered on source of focus for learning goals and activities. • Students involved in projects, collaborative learning activities. • Evidence of multiple modalities – words, art, music. • Children are involved in real, meaningful work – writing letters to real people, stories of their experiences, reflections on a book they have read, studying social problems in the community. • Learning activities allow a place for children to be challenged at multiple levels while they work together. • Teams of teachers work together across disciplines – literacy, science, social studies, art – to link learning around key themes. • Student produced work is everywhere – on the walls, strung from the ceiling, in the hall. Few commercial materials are evident. • A quiet hum with periodic rush of excitement pervades the classroom. Kids move around as they need and may be working on tables, under desks, on the floor, in the hall. • Visitors are expected and welcome. Students easily talk with visitors explaining what they are doing. • Student sit at tables with small groups or desks are clustered together with students facing one another. • Students may be working on different projects or activities simultaneously. • Teacher walks all over the room helping students, may be hard to find when you come in the room.	• Much pressure and emphasis on standardized tests. It becomes the thrust of the curriculum with little to no room for individual student interests. • Teachers instructing mostly through lecture, textbook or basal, and audio-visuals. • Student desks in rows facing forward. They are expected to stay seated and must ask permission to stand or move around. • Student work that mostly involves completing worksheets of isolated skills and facts. • Walls rather bare except for rules and teacher or commercially made materials. • Children's work displayed is all the same – multiple drawings of a tree and a house, worksheets, etc. • Each subject is rigidly separated and there is little connection between subjects. • Most talk involves teacher to student and student to teacher interactions. Little student to student talk is allowed. • Learning activities are targeted at one level. Children who do not fit are excluded, bored, or cannot keep up. • All students must work on the same activity at the same time. • The teacher is at the front of the class, spends a lot of time keeping kids in their seats and asking them to be quiet and work.

Action Steps
1. A working group or groups is convened to look at curriculum and instruction in the school.
2. The group conducts a Teaching Audit regarding how instruction occurs across the building.
3. The working group identifies areas of need and improvement and these are used to develop specific action steps. These might include:
   - Identification of innovations to create within the school – eg. Multi-age classes, reading and writing workshop, interdisciplinary teaching, strategies for multi-level teaching.
   - Identifying teachers interested in different innovations to work together as a 'Learning Innovation Team' (LIT). Teachers work in collaborative implementation and study groups.

4. BUILD COMMUNITY & SUPPORT LEARNING. All work together to build community and mutual support within the classroom and school. The school uses specialized school and community resources (special education, title I, gifted education) to support learning and heterogeneous grouping of students. Teachers and staff work proactively to understand, support, and meet the needs of students with behavioral challenges.

We would *expect* to see. . .	We would hope *not* to see . . .
• A philosophy of building community in the school and classrooms that pervades the building. • Welcoming, inviting atmosphere – bright posters, art and writing work of students in the halls, pleasant interactions among staff. • School staff work to build a caring community with each other. They work together in study groups, flexible teaming arrangements. Staff enjoy being with one another. • Kids interacting with one another constantly in helping ways – reading as partners, hugging or talking if a child is emotionally upset. • A teacher and support staff facilitating a circle of friends for a child with many needs and challenges. 2/3 of the class volunteer to help the student when invited. • Teachers intentionally work in their classrooms to promote community, talk with children about this, build structures to support this – peer partners, cooperative learning, class meetings, circles of support. • Support staff – special education, at risk, bilingual, gifted, speech therapy, social work – are available to work with teachers *in the class* to provide assistance in designing instruction for children with diverse abilities and needs. • Support staff function as a flexible, collegial team to provide in-class help to teachers – team support for instruction, aiding in facilitating students circles of support, etc. • A building team is available to confer with teachers about students having difficulties and to support both teacher and student. • When children have behavioral or emotional problems, teachers and other school staff struggle to understand what need the child has that is not being met and to help the child have more positive alternatives for meeting that need. • Conflict resolution programs help students learn how to solve difficulties that occur. This occurs throughout the school involving teachers in supporting students. • A student support team works proactively with the student and provides support to the teacher. • Teachers and the school resists and works against the administration of Ritalin and other medications to children. • Staff look at children's strengths and resist use of psychiatric labels, rather looking at the needs of the child, his / her school and home environment, and ways to build on strengths and meet needs.	• Major emphasis placed on following the 'rules' for staff, students, parents. • An adversarial relationship exists between staff and administration; cliques among staff abound. • School support staff pull children out of class to get help. They work in parallel with little communication. • Students are sent to special classes – special education, biligual, gifted – for special help pulling them out of the classroom community. • Aides for students with special needs sit with them in the back of the room and work on a parallel curriculum. • The school and teachers used elaborate systems of rewards and punishments – stickers, gold stars, demerits. • Many students in the school identified with behavioral problems being sent to the office, not allowed to go on recess or lunch break. • School uses a 'zero tolerance' policy and frequently suspends children for minor infractions. • Staff are angry and afraid of students. The principal and teachers are heard frequently yelling at students. • Either the school has no support for teachers in dealing with students having behavioral problems or specialists see their role primarily as referring a child to a separate program for emotional disturbance. • When children have problems they are quickly labeled as ADD, Oppositional Defiant Disorder, or some other psychiatric label that identifies the problem as one within the child and reduces efforts to help a child have needs met. • 10% of more children in the school take Ritalin or some similar drug. Parents are pressured to put their children on such medications.

Action Steps
1. Develop a Working Group to look at issues of community, behavioral and emotional needs, and support.
2. Conduct a Community and Emotional Needs Audit. Observe, interview, focus groups, statistics on detentions, suspensions, etc.

3. Develop a plan for trying innovations to build community and strengthen proactive ways to respond to the emotional and behavioral needs of children and provide strengthened support for teachers. Depending upon specific needs of the school, these might include:
   - Develop a plan to increase support for teachers and build a sense of community among staff – reading together about community, looking at support and collaboration mechanisms – team teaching.
   - Develop strategies to strengthen team work of support staff as a coordinated, flexible team with one another and with general education teachers. For example, identify thematic unit teacher might want to do and engage a few teachers and support staff team members in planning this collaboratively.
   - Identify small ways to strengthen a sense of community and welcome in the building – greetings to children as they come in the door, greetings to visitors, children's work displayed throughout the building.
   - Develop circles of support for children with high needs based on their interest. Involve teachers and support staff in assisting children learn how to help and function as a circle of support.
   - Obtain training and develop new skills in looking at the behavioral challenges of children – see these as needs, do functional assessments, have options available for meeting needs.
   - Engage a local physician who is concerned about the over-medication of children as a consultation to work with staff and parents in finding alternatives to use of drugs to control behaviors.

5. PARTNER WITH FAMILIES AND THE COMMUNITY. Educators build genuine collaboration for learning with families, community members, and resource organizations. They seek to engage the school and students in strengthening and improving the community.

We would *expect* to see. . .	We would hope *not* to see . . .
- Parents and community members in the school and classrooms frequently, working in classrooms in meaningful teaching activities. - Teachers have close relationships with many parents. - Parents and community members are part of the school improvement team and other working groups and are involved in making major decisions regarding governance of the school. - School staff reach out and connect to community resources. They know people in the community. - Much student learning goes on in projects in the local neighborhood and community. This goes far beyond the traditional field trip where students are engaged in real activities as a centerpiece of their learning. Students study local social issues and develop strategies for their solution. - The school involves children and staff, as part of their learning, in contributing to efforts to strengthen the community. - Many community individuals and organizations are involved in instructional and after school programs in the school – artists, musicians, violence prevention, mental health, Big Brothers – Big Sisters. - The school acts as a community center, is open most evenings filled with activities for children and parents. - The school partners with other schools and external partners to learn and grow and support the learning of others. - The school collaborates with other agencies to provide a full range of services, including wrap-around services for families with great challenges.	- Parents and community members feel unwelcome in the school. - The school is usually locked and closes it's doors at 4:00 PM on most days. - Parents must fight to have their students with special needs considered for general education classes. - School staff have an us / them attitude about parents and the community. - Few school staff know the community at all – they live elsewhere and drive in and out daily. - Efforts to reach out to parents are due mostly to pressures from the bureaucracy and involve trying to give parents 'rewards' for coming to a meeting. - Parents receive much negative feedback from the school about their children. The teachers don't seem to care. - Few outside organizations are involved in the school. Those that are come in for one day, short term 'events' that impact on the ongoing life of the school in limited ways. - Students do not learn in the community. Many school rules actually prevent teachers from taking children into the neighborhood for learning. - The school attempts to get resources from community agencies but does not engage in any real partnerships so as to protect its 'turf'.

Action Steps

1. Develop a working group to strengthen parents and community partnerships.
2. Conduct a Parent and Community Partnership Audit. Find out how parents and community members are interacting in classes. Conduct interviews and focus groups to get perceptions of the school and teachers by parents. Use Epstein's framework in this process.
3. Conduct a Neighborhood and Community Map. Identify resources in the area based on John Mcknight's community mapping process. Involve the students in this as part of their learning activities.
4. Develop a plan for strengthening parent and community partnerships. These may vary depending upon the situation of the school.