



LEADING AND COLLABORATING FOR STUDENT SUCCESS TOOLKIT

Toolkit 9 of 10 in the Utah Teacher Toolkit Series

Prepared for Utah Leading through Effective, Actionable, and Dynamic (ULEAD) Education

In this toolkit, Hanover Research and ULEAD explore strategies and resources that current and aspiring teachers can utilize to meet **Standard 9: Leadership and Collaboration** of the Utah Effective Teaching Standards and Indicators.

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INTRODUCTION

This toolkit provides guidance and resources to assist current and aspiring Utah teachers in developing their ability to support the growth and learning of all students via effective pedagogies and a broader commitment to students, families, schools, and the broader mission of education. In particular, **Utah teachers should constantly strive to align their daily work, skills development, and professional dispositions to the ten standards and related indicators of the Utah Effective Teaching Standards** (located [here](#)). Commitment to achieving these standards will allow teachers to support the mission of public education to “ensur[e] literacy and numeracy for all Utah children, provid[e] high quality instruction for all Utah children, [establish] curriculum with high standards and relevance to all Utah children, and requir[e] effective assessment to inform high quality instruction and accountability.”¹ Specifically, this toolkit provides teachers with tips, strategies, and resources to support their professional learning around **Standard 9: Leadership and Collaboration**.

Utah Effective Teaching Standard 9: Leadership and Collaboration

 The Learner and Learning	Standard 1: Learner Development
	Standard 2: Learning Differences
	Standard 3: Learning Environments
 Instructional Practice	Standard 4: Content Knowledge
	Standard 5: Assessment
	Standard 6: Instructional Planning
	Standard 7: Instructional Strategies
 Professional Responsibility	Standard 8: Reflection and Continuous Growth
	Standard 9: Leadership and Collaboration
	Standard 10: Professional and Ethical Behavior

Professional Responsibility

Creating and supporting safe, productive learning environments that result in learners achieving at the highest levels is a teacher’s primary responsibility. To do this well, teachers must engage in meaningful, intensive professional learning by regularly examining practice through ongoing study, self-reflection, and collaboration. They must be aware of legal and ethical requirements and engage in the highest levels of professional and ethical conduct.

Standard 9: Leadership and Collaboration

The teacher is a leader who engages collaboratively with learners, families, colleagues, and community members to build a shared vision and supportive professional culture focused on student growth and success. The teacher:

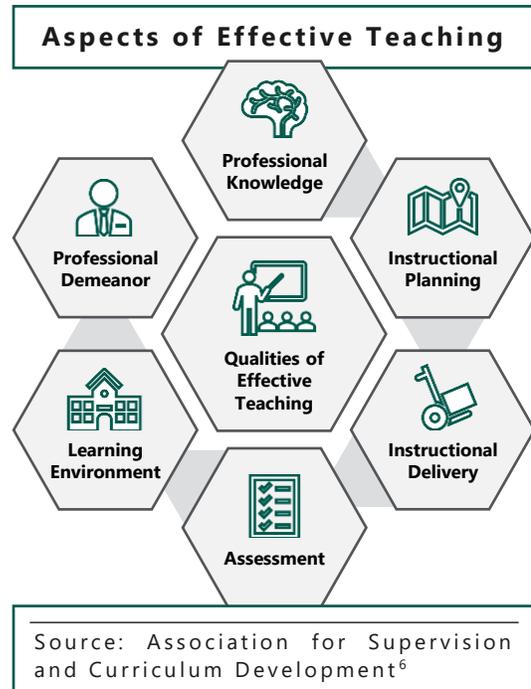
- Prepares for and participates actively as a team member in decision-making processes and builds a shared culture that affects the school and larger educational community;
- Participates actively as part of the learning community, sharing responsibility for decision-making and accountability for each student’s learning and giving and receiving feedback;
- Advocates for learners, the school, the community, and the profession;
- Works with other school professionals to plan and jointly facilitate learning to meet diverse needs of learners; and
- Engages in professional learning to enhance knowledge and skill, to contribute to the knowledge and skill of others, and to work collaboratively to advance professional practice.

Source: Utah State Board of Education²

LEADING AND COLLABORATING FOR STUDENT SUCCESS TOOLKIT: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Research shows that **teachers are the most influential and impactful element of the formal school system in promoting student achievement.** In fact, research estimates that teachers “have two to three times the effect of any other school factor, including services, facilities, and even leadership.”³ As the immediate organizers and supervisors of students’ educational experiences, teachers exert tremendous influence on student outcomes across multiple areas.⁴ These effects extend across dynamics such as academic achievement, attendance, social-emotional learning, behavior, future earnings, and college attendance.⁵

Consequently, **teachers should strive to maximize their effectiveness in all facets of their daily work,** from planning and delivering instruction to establishing a safe and secure learning environment to acting like a consummate professional.⁷ This requires an awareness of learners’ needs, of systemic expectations, and of one’s own strengths and weaknesses as they relate to professional practices and pedagogies.⁸ It also requires teachers taking concerted action to expand their content knowledge, strengthen their instructional skills, and maintain a professional and positive mindset with students, families, and colleagues.⁹



This **Leading and Collaborating for Student Success Toolkit** and the nine accompanying toolkits in the *Utah Teacher Toolkit Series* support Utah's current and aspiring teachers in meeting the demands of the Utah Effective Teaching Standards. In particular, this toolkit will help users progress toward those indicators marking high-effectiveness for Standard 9: Leadership and Collaboration.

Indicators of High-Effectiveness for Standard 9: Leadership and Collaboration

The highly effective teacher:

- Takes initiative to participate in developing and implementing policies and practices that improve instruction;
- Collaborates with colleagues on school improvement issues;
- Assumes a leadership role within their area of assignment that includes a shared responsibility for student work, examinations of problems of practice, and the identification of improvement strategies;
- Actively communicates the vision of college and career readiness to students;
- Actively participates, promotes, and provides support for initiatives in the school and community to have an impact on student success;
- Implements, reflects on, and improves joint plans to re-teach, enrich and reinforce learning; and
- Participates in professional dialogue, peer observation and feedback, peer coaching, and other collegial learning activities.

Source: Utah State Board of Education¹⁰

LEADING AND COLLABORATING FOR STUDENT SUCCESS TOOLKIT: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

OVERVIEW

This toolkit:

- ✓ Describes action steps individual teachers can complete to [prepare to learn from, support, and work with their peers](#) for the purposes of improving teaching and learning and expanding their individual and the larger school community's professional knowledge;
- ✓ Reviews methods and metrics by which teachers can [establish and sustain shared accountability for student outcomes](#); and
- ✓ Introduces procedures to [form and sustain collaborative partnerships between teachers, students, and their families](#).

AUDIENCE

This toolkit is designed to support current and aspiring K-12 teachers in the state of Utah in meeting the indicators and expectations outlined in the Utah Effective Teaching Standards, particularly Standard 9: Leadership and Collaboration.

PREPARE FOR COLLABORATION

Before teachers can successfully collaborate, **they must recognize that doing so requires hard work and sustained effort.**¹¹ Teachers need to establish goals and shared accountability for collaboration. They should also commit to parity in decision-making with collaborating colleagues, and to a mission of mutual professional advancement for students' benefit.¹²

At the same time, **teachers need to understand how to operate within existing mechanisms established by their school and district for formal collaboration.**¹⁶ This means knowing precisely how much formal

collaboration time a school has scheduled and what specific teaming structures exist.¹⁷ For example, teachers should determine if common planning time is embedded into their daily or weekly schedules or if they need to schedule team planning time outside of school hours.¹⁸ Likewise, teachers should identify if they are expected to work as part of one or more teams—such as grade-level teams or discipline-specific professional learning communities—and should clearly understand the expected outcomes of collaboration (e.g., improved student outcomes).¹⁹

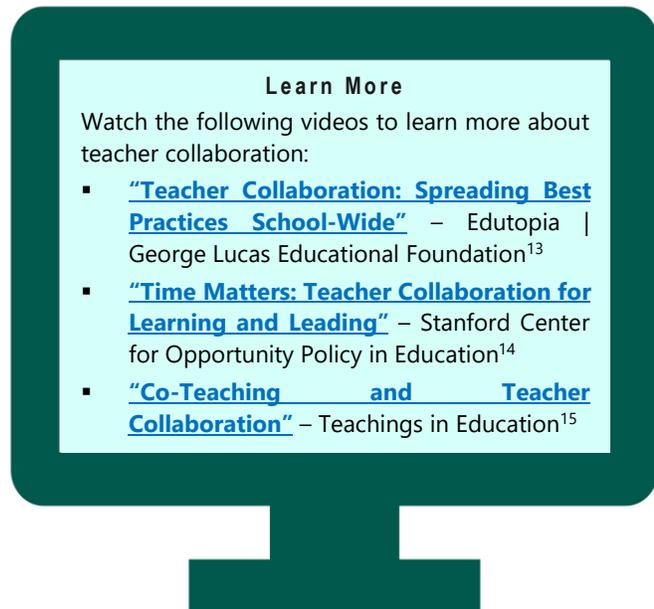
The [Reflection Questions to Promote Collaborative Work and Learning](#) on the following page provide a framework by which teachers can examine existing procedures and formats for collaboration. The questions will help teachers evaluate their own and other teachers' capacity to collaborate effectively with one another.

Understanding the Value of Teacher Collaboration

Seldom have teachers, students, and administrators been given such opportunities to work together. The only question is if we are all up for the challenge of these new opportunities for growth. Relationships between teachers and students and between teachers and school administrators have changed. The one-way transmission approach to teaching must give way to a more interactive approach. The security of set subject matter culled from dog-eared textbooks is no longer enough. Teachers must redefine themselves and their students as explorers—partners in a journey of discovery.

It is said that it “takes a whole village to raise a child.” Similarly, it could be said that it takes a number of teachers working communally and in a variety of roles, yet sharing a unified purpose, to truly educate a child. Collaboration allows teachers to teach one another and form committees and teams in which to formulate, disseminate, and test ideas. Every faculty member possesses sufficient talent and skill to produce an extraordinary program, and in most schools that assumption can be proved correct.

Source: K-12 Blueprint²⁰





Reflection Questions to Promote Collaborative Work and Learning

Description: Teachers can use these questions to evaluate the current state of collaboration and shared professional learning at their school. The questions support identification of existing processes that promote collaborative work and learning and of current challenges that will need to be navigated to improve the quality of teacher collaboration.

- ❓ How often does *vertical* planning occur between teachers at different grade levels or teaching sequential subject area courses? Is it sufficient?
- ❓ How often does *horizontal* planning occur between teachers teaching in the same grade level or teaching the same course? Is it sufficient?
- ❓ Do teachers have an opportunity to collaborate with other teachers who share the same students?
- ❓ Is time embedded in the school day or week for teachers to collaborate? How much time is allotted? Is enough time allotted?
- ❓ How clear are the expectations for how teachers use scheduled collaboration time? Who establishes the expectations and monitors their execution?
- ❓ To what extent does collaboration time focus on student learning and teacher reflection on instructional practice?
- ❓ To what extent does collaboration time focus on other aspects of students' educational experience (e.g., behavior, attendance)?
- ❓ How is teachers' collaborative work grounded in student, school, and district data or student work samples?
- ❓ How often do teachers observe other teachers' instruction? How do mutual teacher observations drive improvements in teachers' professional practice?
- ❓ Do teachers collaborate with one another and administrators on how and what to bring to the staff for professional development?
- ❓ To what extent are professional learning experiences and teacher collaboration connected to the school's mission and yearlong goals?
- ❓ How are collaboration and professional learning opportunities structured to foster teacher engagement and buy-in?
- ❓ Are teachers in your school open to sharing with each other and learning from each other's successes and failures?
- ❓ How is a safe culture for educator risk-taking and transparency fostered by your school and district?
- ❓ How is a culture of self-reflection fostered among teachers? To what extent is that culture modeled by school leaders?

Source: Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education²¹

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Key Factors to Team Success



Source: Human Resources, Massachusetts Institute of Technology²⁶

group decision-making.²⁴ Thus, teachers should examine ways in which they can adapt their own abilities and personalities to contribute positively to the larger group.²⁵

Importantly, **teachers should carefully wield their receptive and expressive communication skills to support collaboration.**²⁷ The ability to listen to, acknowledge, and interpret the written and spoken words of others and to successfully translate one's own opinions and knowledge into writing and speech is vital to effective teamwork.²⁸ Essentially, clear communication allows collaborating teachers to understand the merits of their team members' perspectives and to focus on those elements that are most complex or those questions which are most immediately pressing (rather than clarifying a wider array of misunderstood team exchanges).²⁹ Strong communication skills foster teachers' cooperation around their shared mission of supporting students.³⁰

Navigating different personalities, priorities, and experiences is an inherent element of successful collaboration.²² Teachers may not immediately (or ever fully) meld with their collaborators, necessitating hard work and determination to navigate conflicts and achieve consensus, understanding and action for the greater good of the students.²³ True collaboration will allow teachers to explore new techniques with the support of peers, but it also requires teachers to be accepting of feedback on their own work and willing to provide input on others' performance. In addition, they must be comfortable with active participation in

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Seven Norms of Collaborative Work and Communication

NORM	DESCRIPTION
 Pausing	Pausing slows down the discussion and provides precious "wait time." Pausing and acceptance of silence create a relaxed and purposeful atmosphere. Silence, though initially uncomfortable, can be an excellent indicator of productive collaboration. Pausing signals to others that their ideas and comments are worth thinking about. It dignifies their contribution and encourages future participation. Pausing enhances discussion and greatly increases the quality of decisions.
 Paraphrasing	Listeners summarize or provide an example of what has just been said. Paraphrasing maintains a speaker's intention and the accurate meaning of what has been said using different words and phrases. Paraphrasing helps a team hear and understand each other as they evaluate data and make decisions. Paraphrasing is also extremely effective for reducing group tension and individual anger.
 Probing	Probing seeks to clarify something which is not yet fully understood. More information may be required, or a term may need to be more fully defined. Clarifying questions can be specific or open-ended, depending upon the circumstances. Gentle probes increase the clarity and precision of a group's thinking and contribute to trust building. They communicate to group members that their ideas are worthy of exploration and consideration.
 Proposing	It takes a degree of self-confidence and courage to put forward ideas. Ideas are the heart of a meaningful discussion, and groups must be comfortable to process information by analyzing, comparing, predicting, applying, or drawing causal relationships.
 Paying Attention	Collaborative work is facilitated when each team member is conscious of self and others. They are aware of what is said, how it is said, and how others respond. Understanding how they create different perceptions allows teachers to accept others' points of view as different and not necessarily wrong. They understand that they should be curious about others' perspectives and not judgmental.
 Presuming the Positive	This is the assumption that other team members act from positive and constructive intentions, even if one disagrees with their ideas. Presuming positive presuppositions is not a passive state but needs to become a regular manifestation of one's verbal responses. The assumption of positive intentions permits the creation of such sophisticated concepts as a "loyal opposition" and it allows one member of a group to play "the devil's advocate." It builds trust, promotes healthy cognitive disagreement, and reduces the likelihood of misunderstanding and conflict.
 Pursuing Balance	Both inquiry and advocacy are necessary components of collaborative work. Highly effective teams are aware of this and self-consciously attempt to balance them. Inquiry provides for greater understanding. Advocacy leads to decision-making. One of the common mistakes that collaborative teams may make is to bring premature closure to problem identification and rush into problem resolution. Maintaining a balance between advocating for a position and inquiring about the positions held by others further inculcates the ethos of a genuine learning community.

Source: U.S. Department of State³¹

Relatedly, teamwork and knowledge and experience with team processes (e.g., goal setting, delegation of responsibilities) are also highly important items to consider.³² By successfully managing the time they devote to collaboration and communicating efficiently during that time, teachers will be able to focus more directly on those challenges they face on a daily basis and the goals they have for their own and students' performance.³³ Therefore, teachers should focus on developing and deploying team and task process skills to prepare to work alongside, teach, and learn from their peers.³⁴ This means learning how to support and coach one another in times of success and challenge and acting with synergy when there is unanimous consensus around a given course of action and when a decision may not reflect one's first instinct.³⁵

PROMOTE SHARED ACCOUNTABILITY

As an innate part of collaboration, **teachers share responsibility for their professional development and that of others.** By extension, they exert influence on students beyond those assigned to their class rosters.³⁶ Through their work with co-teachers and in grade-level, discipline-specific, schoolwide, or other teams, teachers can strengthen their professional knowledge and skills while supporting colleagues in doing the same. Improved knowledge should then translate into better outcomes for students, families, and the larger school community.³⁷

Teacher Accountability

We look to teachers to help every student learn, not just those who are self-motivated learners. We look to teachers to model that love of learning, learn new ways to engage students, master their subject matter, seek advice and accept critical feedback, and get better at their craft every year.

Source: Education Post³⁸

To this end, teachers working in professional learning communities, grade-level teams, co-teaching partnerships, and other collaborative arrangements should operate under the following foundational assumptions:³⁹

- Effective teacher teams focus on learning for both their members and students;
- For all students to learn, teachers must also learn together during their workday;
- Team members are intentional about setting their own learning goals based on what they need to know and do to ensure that students meet their goals;
- Collaborating teachers work interdependently to improve their practices and realize student, team, and school learning goals;
- Collaborating teachers collect and analyze data, study, apply, observe, measure, reflect, and adjust their practices in continuous cycles of improvement; and
- Collaborating teachers focus on measurable outcomes.

The Five C's for Building Team and Collaborative Accountability

NORM	DESCRIPTION
 Common Purpose	Teachers must explore and formally define objectives and intended outcomes for their collaborative work. Without common purpose, teacher partnerships—and the time and effort spent collaborating—will be directionless, ineffective, and wasteful.
 Clear Expectations	Clear expectations move beyond common purpose and describe the projects, activities, and conversations collaborators will engage in. Teachers need to work with their collaborators to delegate responsibilities to ensure that no items are inadvertently neglected.
 Communication	Teachers must keep one another informed about the progress of their individual work to ensure that the larger team's work remains in alignment. This means creating schedules for progress monitoring and establishing a cadence for meetings and communications.
 Coaching	Collaborating teachers should establish procedures to share ideas, provide and receive feedback, and engage in collaborative learning opportunities to improve their individual work and the work of the larger team and school community.
 Consequences	Teachers (and administrators) should define rewards for meeting expectations and corrective actions when expectations are unmet. Consequences should not be solely punitive. They should promote desired behavior and correct and discourage undesired behavior.

Note: The above items are based on a framework specifically targeting teamwork at non-educational organizations. However, the recorded principles and their base content have relevant applications in the K-12 sphere.

Source: Rhythm Systems⁴⁰

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A clear focus around which to orient collaboration is vital to direct teachers' thoughts, actions, and purposes to those outcomes and strategic goals that are most pertinent.⁴¹ At the same time, teachers operating in teams need to explicitly communicate and catalog the roles they and their peers will be directly and indirectly responsible for executing and outcomes they will be accountable for achieving.⁴² Goal-setting will be especially important to create performance thresholds upon which teachers can evaluate and track progress.⁴³ Teachers should determine "how their abilities, actions, and attitudes directly or indirectly affect student [and team] success."⁴⁴ They should also know how to track progress and performance using available data and other artifacts.⁴⁵

Shared Accountability Questions for Collaborating Teachers

- What do we care about in our team? What are we passionate about?
- What do available qualitative and quantitative data tell us?
- What bothers us — or gives us pain — about students' learning?
- What do we need to learn? How can we learn it?
- What actions can we take based on our learning to address our concerns?
- How will we know our actions have enhanced student learning?
- How can we continue to learn and work to increase student learning by being accountable ourselves?

Source: Phi Delta Kappan⁴⁶

Thus, **teachers should carefully compose and negotiate team norms, expectations, and goals to ensure that they and their collaborators "work productively, [maintain] open communication channels, and keep [themselves] accountable."**⁴⁷ In particular, teachers should work together—and with administrators—to determine what cooperative learning and planning activities will be most fruitful:⁴⁸

- Studying standards, reviewing concepts and skills necessary to master the standards, and determining how the standards are assessed;
- Selecting research-based instructional strategies and assessment techniques;
- Planning lessons and agreeing on evidence of student learning that they will share;
- Implementing lessons, noting successes and challenges, and collecting evidence of learning;
- Analyzing student work by revisiting the standards being addressed and identifying student strengths and areas of need; and
- Adjusting instruction after reflecting on disparate teaching experiences, selecting alternative strategies, and determining how future challenges will be addressed.

Importantly, the success of teacher collaboration must be judged in terms of results (e.g., student outcomes, new professional learning).⁴⁹ Teachers should also catalog how they use their collaboration time for activities that are most conducive to their individual and team's professional development and their students' academic, behavioral, and general success.⁵⁰ Furthermore, **teachers should determine how their teams can achieve desired results and engage in beneficial activities as part of the larger collaborative school and district community.**⁵¹

LEADING AND COLLABORATING FOR STUDENT SUCCESS TOOLKIT: PROMOTE SHARED ACCOUNTABILITY

Key Elements of Collaborative School Communities

DEVELOPING COMMUNITIES	IMPLEMENTING COMMUNITIES	SUSTAINING COMMUNITIES
Characteristics		
<i>Members of the school community...</i>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ ...work to develop collaboration norms and goals for improvement. ▪ ...are reluctant to address differences of opinion about effective teaching. ▪ ...see participation as individual and disconnected from their practice. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ ...have established common goals and a shared language around reform. ▪ ...demonstrate communal responsibility for student learning. ▪ ...use collaborative dialogue closely linked to practice. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ ...allow teachers to primarily drive collaboration. ▪ ...use data to drive continuous improvement. ▪ ...move beyond short-term gains to address underlying obstacles to student achievement.
TEACHER BEHAVIORS		
<i>Teachers in the community...</i>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ ...create data teams, oriented explicitly towards evaluating test-based outcomes. ▪ ...monitor student growth by developing a system with school leaders based on multiple measures of performance and linked directly to a shared vision. ▪ ...generate and use a list of obstacles to student learning to guide collaborative discussion. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ ...develop standards and protocols for managing conflict that are linked to shared goals. ▪ ...encourage peers to make innovative changes to practice and engage in reflection about challenges and breakthroughs. ▪ ...work with school leaders to shape professional development. ▪ ...seek opportunities for co-teaching or peer observation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ ...work with peers who have similar learning goals, using formal structures to collaboratively plan and analyze data. ▪ ...create opportunities for informal interaction with peers. ▪ ...seek opportunities for continual improvement by accessing additional expertise (e.g., in the form of external service providers).
LEADER BEHAVIORS		
<i>School leaders in the community...</i>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ ...develop common standards and protocols for meeting participation. ▪ ...model normative practices and protocols for collaboration. ▪ ...facilitate collaboration in a way that makes opposing views “visible” and subject to supportive discussion. ▪ ...establish a coherent school-wide reform message. ▪ ...restructure school time to allow for daily opportunities for teachers to meet in teams. ▪ ...restructure school time to allow for one period of collaborative planning each week. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ ...create a data and accountability system for monitoring school improvement, including information about teachers’ and students’ school experiences. ▪ ...create a team of teachers and leaders exclusively focused on instructional supports that align to teacher-identified challenges. ▪ ...increase teacher interaction time with teachers during meetings. ▪ ...address predictable sources of conflict or risk. ▪ ...resist the temptation to solve problems unilaterally and work with teachers to respond to conflict. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ ...work with teachers to develop a plan that aligns teacher professional development with learning goals. ▪ ...create a model in which mentor teachers serve as coaches to beginner teachers to improve instruction. ▪ ...encourage team teaching and integrated lesson design. ▪ ...provide resources to support teacher-directed collaboration but resist the temptation to offer direct guidance.

Source: Rennie Center for Education Research and Policy and EdVestors⁵²

The [Shared Accountability Worksheet](#) on p. 14 provides a template by which teachers can explore the concept of shared accountability as a practical matter. In particular, the worksheet asks teachers to determine specific stakeholder groups to which they are accountable and how they are accountable to these groups. It also provides space for teachers to record methods and metrics by which they will track and communicate progress and success in the specified areas of accountability.

LEADING AND COLLABORATING FOR STUDENT SUCCESS TOOLKIT: PROMOTE SHARED ACCOUNTABILITY

Additional Guidance on Promoting Shared Accountability

The following items represent a sample of publicly available information and tools that teachers (and other school staff) can utilize to improve the quality of their collaboration and promote shared accountability. Teachers may reference these documents to obtain a deeper understanding of collaboration beyond the information contained within this toolkit.

The PLC Guidebook: Leading Your Collaborative Team to Success⁵³



Teacher Collaboration in Perspective: A Discussion Guide for Teachers and Principals⁵⁴



The ACER Professional Learning Community Framework⁵⁵



Source: Multiple

PARTNER WITH FAMILIES AND STUDENTS

Teachers should prioritize family engagement as an integral part of their professional responsibilities rather than operating as if collaboration with students' parents and guardians is a secondary element of their daily work.⁵⁷ Recognizing the valuable knowledge, experience, and influence that families possess and the aspirations and hopes they have for their children will help teachers better adapt to meet the needs of all students.⁵⁸ Moreover, because teachers and families want the best for students, they already have a strong foundation from which to build a mutually beneficial and fruitful partnership.⁵⁹

Effective two-way communication is vital to establish enduring partnerships between teachers and families.⁶⁰ Indeed, establishing strong communication channels with families allows teachers to acknowledge the expertise parents and guardians have about their children and encourage familial participation in school activities.⁶¹ Relatedly, teachers can use family communication to recommend specific areas in which families can support students and teachers (e.g., guest presentations, volunteering, at-home learning support).⁶²

Key Ingredients of Home-School Communications



CHILD-CENTEREDNESS

Teachers should make communications specific to the individual student. This type of communication is most likely to engage families, due to its personalized nature and individual relevance.



CONSTRUCTIVENESS

Teachers should ensure all communications contain information that is meaningful, useful, and provides families with practical suggestions.



CLARITY AND CONCRETENESS

Teachers should highlight those guidelines and strategies which are most beneficial to families in supporting children's actual learning.



CONTINUITY

Teachers should keep families informed about and in sync with classroom practices and policies and students' performance and skill development.

Source: Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning⁶³

The potential strategies and tools that teachers can use to engage families are diverse, and **teachers should ensure that any campaign they undertake to strengthen relationships with families is tailored to the specific family audiences they want to reach.**⁶⁴ This encompasses problem-solving around the specific barriers and obstacles inhibiting families' ability to collaborate with teachers and assume a more prominent role in students' education.⁶⁵ Teachers also need to evaluate their perceptions of family collaboration, which can be supported by the [Family Collaboration Diagnostic](#) on p. 18.⁶⁶

LEADING AND COLLABORATING FOR STUDENT SUCCESS TOOLKIT: PARTNER WITH STUDENTS AND FAMILIES

Strategies for Teachers to Encourage Family Collaboration

- Involve families in setting goals for their child's learning program
- Value parents' and guardians' opinions, concerns, ideas, and visions
- Recognize that families care very much about their children
- View families as key contributors to their child's school experiences.
- Consider families' resources and talents when planning day-to-day activities for students
- Find ways to collect information from parents and guardians that can be used for developing the child's learning program (e.g., home visits, interviews)
- Share information with families about how children learn and develop
- Actively involve families in preparing for and completing parent-teacher conferences
- Talk regularly with students and encourage them to share information with their families
- Communicate regularly with families through students and through print materials, phone calls, home visits, informal gatherings, and workshops
- Use problem-solving strategies with families
- Appreciate and respect family values which may be different from one's own
- Refrain from criticism and judgment of families, both publicly and privately
- Maintain a warm, friendly, open, and responsive classroom climate
- Advocate for and promote opportunities for families to interact with one another and school personnel

Source: Nebraska Department of Education⁶⁷

Relatedly, **teachers should recognize the value of soliciting and considering student input as "a way[...]to deepen their practice, recharge themselves, and negotiate the complexity of teaching and learning."**⁶⁸ Students can provide teachers with insight into how they learn best, which instructional activities and methods are most effective and engaging, and whether they have achieved proficiency of individual content items.⁶⁹ Teachers who provide students with a voice in learning will be more likely to engage and motivate them.⁷⁰

Teachers should seek to "normaliz[e] student voice and leadership as a consistent component of classroom practice rather than a one-off approach."⁷¹ They can leverage a variety of methods, both formal and informal, to promote collaboration with students around instruction and gather feedback from students on past, present, and future activities. At the most collaborative levels, teachers may ask students to co-plan instruction, though requesting feedback and suggestions from students also serves as a form of collaboration.⁷²

Insights on Collaboration with Students

The February 2020 issue of *The Learning Professional*—published by Learning Forward—explores different ways in which teachers can respond to student perspectives and voice to improve instruction and guide their professional learning. It is available in HTML and as a PDF file using the hyperlinked icon below.



Source: *The Learning Professional*⁷⁷

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Specifically, collaboration can be promoted by:⁷³

- **Regularly Soliciting Student Feedback:** Teachers can use surveys and other research methods to routinely gather data or ask students how they feel about content and instruction and for suggestions on school policies, culture, and climate.
- **Engaging Students in Studying and Assessing Their School:** Beyond asking for feedback on questions created by adults, teachers and schools can train students in collecting and analyzing data. Students can then create their own research questions and use observations and feedback from peers to draw conclusions about what is working well, what could be improved, and how to help.
- **Advocating for Authentic Student Representation on Leadership Teams:** Teachers should lobby school and district leaders to leave space for students to join school leadership teams, improvement teams, or equity and diversity teams.
- **Inviting Students to Any Discussion Related to Their Own Learning:** Teachers should include students in parent-teacher conferences, IEP meetings, student support meetings, discipline hearings, and any discussion in which they are the main topic.
- **Acknowledging Students as Stakeholders:** When teachers set goals or make instructional decisions, they should expect students to contribute. At the same time, teachers should be willing to help students as they shape and achieve their own aspirations for their learning.

On p. 19, the [Teacher Report Card](#) offers a simple tool that teachers can deploy to begin building a collaborative relationship with students. Specifically, the form asks students to provide commentary on a teacher's strengths and areas of development.

LEADING AND COLLABORATING FOR STUDENT SUCCESS TOOLKIT: PARTNER WITH STUDENTS AND FAMILIES



Family Collaboration Diagnostic

Description: Teachers can fill out the following checklist to help determine their personal readiness to collaborate more closely with students' families. Listed items ask teachers to evaluate their personal mindsets as well as existing conditions at their school that will either promote or inhibit collaboration.

DIAGNOSTIC ITEM	STRONGLY DISAGREE	DISAGREE	NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE	AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE
All families have the capacity to support their students in learning.					
Leveraging family knowledge and skills is key to supporting student achievement.					
Families should be involved in making decisions regarding learning and instruction at school.					
Teachers are responsible for empowering families to know that their expertise is valuable to school performance.					
I value building trusting relationships with families.					
Students will achieve more if I work closely with families and communities.					
Families should have access to student and school performance results.					
My school has clear processes and platforms for families to voice concerns.					
My school has a space for families to work and come together.					
Families have the ability to set goals, create plans, and initiate change at my school.					
My school offers opportunities for families to develop their knowledge and skills based on their needs.					
I can find solutions to barriers to family engagement in schools.					
Families know and understand their potential as part of the leadership of my school.					

Source: Boston Public Schools (MA)⁷⁵



Teacher Report Card

Description: Teachers can use the following document to solicit feedback from their students about various aspects of their professional performance and the quality of instruction, curricula, and the learning environment. The form should be distributed to all students in a class to ensure all student voices are heard.

Report Card for: _____
(teacher name)

1. What do you like most about being in this teacher's class? What do you like least?

2. What does this teacher do during class that is most helpful to you? What do they do that is least helpful?

3. What can this teacher do differently to improve your experience in their class? How will this improve your experience?

Source: Education World⁷⁶

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