

**“It is time to face the truth of our situation—that we’re all in this together, that we all have a voice—and figure out how to mobilize the hearts and minds of everyone in our workplaces and communities.”**

**-Margaret Wheatley and Debbie Frieze**



# Exploring Community Engagement

August 24, 2021  
New Hampshire School Boards Association

David J. Ruff, executive director

# Outcomes

Learn about the benefits of community engagement to promote deeper student learning

Recognize barriers that impede deeper community engagement

Understand how effective community engagement operates along a continuum of strategies

# Agenda

Welcome + Overview

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What is Equitable Community Engagement?

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Why Community Engagement?

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A Community Engagement Continuum

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How to Create Community Engagement

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Closing



GREAT  
SCHOOLS  
PARTNERSHIP

is a nonprofit school-support organization  
working to redesign public education and  
**improve learning for all students.**

 [@GreatSchoolsP](https://twitter.com/GreatSchoolsP)

**We believe** in equitable, personalized, rigorous learning for all students leading to readiness for college, careers, and citizenship.



# **WELCOME**

**Please use the chat box  
to share your name and  
community**

# What is Your Experience with Community Engagement?

*Personal Reflection...*





How was your family  
connected or not connected  
to your school and  
educational experience?

How might these past experiences, positive or negative, shape your beliefs about community engagement—both in terms of value and process?

# What is 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

# CHAT BOX



How does your experience connect with GSP's definition of engagement?

Where is there dissonance and why?

Who in your  
community do you  
most need to  
engage?

# Recognized Tensions Faced by School Boards

State/Federal Requirements v Local Control

Individual Constituent Desires v General Good

Policy Implementation v Strategy Enactment

Full Board Authority v Individual Member Interests

Competing Interests v Limited Resources

# Why Community Engagement?

1. Equitable Outcomes
2. Lasting Impact
3. Innovative Solutions
4. Community Support



# Equitable Outcomes

Schools' instructional, budgetary, and policy priorities —and the actions and results that flow from them— **better reflect the needs and goals of everyone they serve.** This results in schools that are more responsive to all stakeholders' needs, regardless of their race, income level, dominant language, or other social markers.

# Lasting Impact

Quality programs are **more resilient in the face of inevitable changes and challenges**, whether prompted by state policy, the local economy, technological developments, global events, or a social or political crisis. In addition, school improvements are far more likely to persist beyond the tenure of a visionary superintendent, a dynamic parent leader, or a committed school board member.

# Innovative Solutions

Bringing a range of voices and experiences together broadens **leaders' perspectives and generates a wider array of ideas** to act on opportunities and challenges while being responsive to stakeholders' needs.

# Community Support

Intentional inclusivity **builds trust and provides leaders an opportunity to hear different perspectives and help find common ground.** People are more likely to remain involved in the next phases of the work and to stand with the school in the face of pushback or challenges when they have been part of setting the agenda and working together to achieve it.

# Common Barriers

# BARRIER 1

Failure to recognize unseen structural barriers for participation

# BARRIER 2

Traditional hierarchies of power and privilege in district systems reduce engagement and willingness to participate

# BARRIER 3

Changing the deeply entrenched patterns of perceptions across groups from different socioeconomic, cultural, racial, and ethnic backgrounds



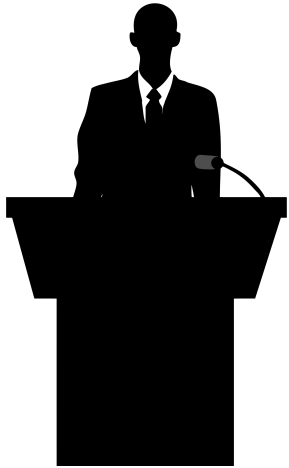
# CHAT BOX



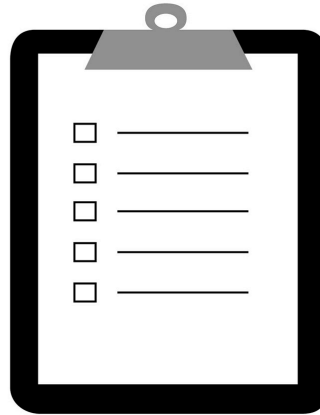
What barriers would you add to this list from your experiences?

Moving Toward  
Equitable  
Community  
Engagement

# Engagement Spectrum



Providing  
Information



Encouraging  
Involvement



Sharing  
Power



**More** school  
directed

**Less** community  
involvement

**Less** school  
directed

**More** community  
involvement

# Moving Toward Engagement



## Providing Information

Teachers and school administrators provide basic and expected information to students, families and other community members at regular intervals.

## Encouraging Involvement

In addition, educators actively seek feedback and input from students, families, and other community members.

## Sharing Power

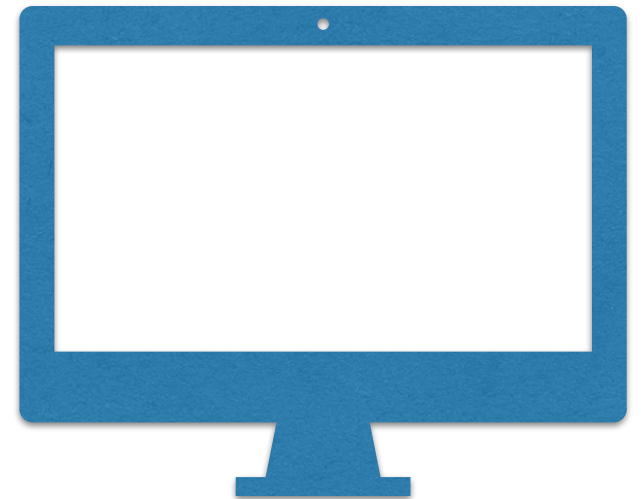
In addition, use resources to engage equitably with all members of the community when making decisions that affect the community.

Example:  
Competency-Based  
Learning

# Providing Information

## Participation is minimized and contained

- Learning standards are determined solely by school staff.
- The school posts the learning standards on its website.



# Encouraging Involvement

## Participation is supported within established channels

- Leadership at the school encourages parents and/or community members to attend a forum to give feedback on the proposed learning standards.
- Leadership takes a straw poll regarding support for the proposed learning standards.
- School leadership makes the final decision



# Sharing Power

**Resources are dedicated to maximize participation and share ownership**

- Parents, community members, school board members, teachers and students debate various learning standards. Participants are deliberately asked to weigh various standards based on their lived experiences.
- Once implemented, parents, community members, educators, and students engage in a data dialogue about how students are doing and why.





# Example: Mastery- Based Graduation Assessment

# Operating Progressions

| Providing Information   | Encouraging Involvement  | Sharing Power   |
|---|--|---|
| <p>CT Statute requires all students must demonstrate mastery for graduation through mastery-based graduation assessment</p> | <p>Our district is expanding to offer this in 4th, 8th, and 11th grades. Students will create a portfolio of their work that will demonstrate achievement of the characteristics from our Portrait of a Graduate</p> | <p>We believe this opens up more opportunities, but we are not sure what these are</p>  |
| <p>Is this state requirement clear?</p>   | <p>How does this sound?<br/>What suggestions would you make to this strategy?</p>  | <p>What else should be embedded in this work?<br/>How might we use our internship or early college programs?<br/>What community resources exist that could help us?</p> |

# CHAT BOX



What aspects of this continuum resonate or contradict with your thinking regarding community engagement?

# Key Findings from the Frameworks Institute

## **A Focus on Self Interest**

Since most people feel they do not have an agency, power, or authority when it comes to navigating the education system, they adopt a defensive posture that favors a consumerist “me and my kid” approach to education issues

# Key Findings from the Frameworks Institute

## **The Tangible Triad**

Unframed conversations about education and education reform tend to default to three highly visible actors who are judged as primarily responsible for education results: parents, teachers, and students

# Key Findings from the Frameworks Institute

## **Avoid the Crisis Frame**

Crisis thinking, while common in educational communications and campaigns, leads to caution and conservatism, not innovation

# Key Findings from the Frameworks Institute

## **Make It Understandable**

When people begin to understand the education system in concrete, familiar terms, and they recognize the need to coordinate its different parts for the good of the whole, they become more expansive in their thinking and commitment

# NESSC School Board Focus Groups

- 1) 21st century skills--like critical thinking, problem solving, teamwork, financial literacy, and technology--are essential for success in today's world
- 2) It's every high school's responsibility to teach students the skills they need to succeed in college, work, and citizenship
- 3) Every student should graduate from high school prepared for college



# NESSC School Board Focus Groups

- 1) 21st century skills--like critical thinking, problem solving, teamwork, financial literacy, and technology--are essential for success in today's world **4.91**
- 2) It's every high school's responsibility to teach students the skills they need to succeed in college, work, and citizenship **4.50**
- 3) Every student should graduate from high school prepared for college **3.20**

# Strategies for Community Engagement

| Do Less                                     | Do More  |
|---|--|
| Why don't they ever come to things?         | How can we involved 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                  |

# Strategies for Community Engagement

## Do Less

Making assumptions

Hosting events at the schools

Marketing & public relations

Waiting to share something until it's a finished product

Having all the answers

## Do More

Looking for your potential blind spots

Hosting events in the community

Inviting personal stories

Bringing others in to design, refine, and communicate about a work in progress

"I don't know" or "I'm still learning"

# Reflection and Commitment

Look back at your ‘personal experience with CE.’ What insights have you gained today regarding equitable community engagement?

What might you do differently, or more often when you return to your community?

# Resources



## Shifting Mindsets and Increasing Family Engagement

in New Bedford Public Schools



### The Foundations of Equitable Community Engagement

Equitable community engagement—an ongoing, two-way process of building relationships, working collaboratively to support all students, and sharing power—is an achievable goal for all school communities. Our Community Engagement Toolkit and resources can help make it happen.

To make use of our tools, it's helpful to be aware of the principles they are built upon:

1. Schools and other public institutions in the U.S. often perpetuate systemic racism and other forms of oppression.
2. Individuals, communities, and institutions are able to grow and change.
3. Community engagement can lead to transformative benefits for schools and communities.
4. Equitable community engagement requires that school leaders share power with students, families, community members, and school staff at all levels.
5. All members of a community have valuable insights, experiences, and ideas to contribute.
6. Relationship-building is a worthwhile investment that requires willingness to listen, reflect, and build empathy.
7. Discussing issues of race, power, and privilege is essential in order to dismantle inequitable systems and structures.
8. Those who have been historically marginalized must be intentionally provided opportunities to participate in and lead community engagement work.

**Research**


The Nellie Mae Education Foundation's literature review—*How Family, School, and Community Engagement Can Support Student Achievement and Influence School Reform*—provides a summary of studies that demonstrate a direct link between family or community partnership and improvements in student or school outcomes.

**Foundational Reading**


Equitable community engagement requires a comprehensive understanding of social, cultural, and economic barriers that marginalized communities face. It also requires those in power to examine the institutions and organizational structures that perpetuate inequity in and beyond our school systems. The reading below offers a place to start this journey of understanding and learning:

- *"White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack."* Peggy McIntosh, 1989.
- *"White Fragility and the Rules of Engagement."* Robin DiAngelo, 2015.
- *"Defining Racism: Can We Talk?"* Beverly Daniel Tatum, chapter from *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria: And Other Conversations About Race*, 2003.
- *"Race, Wealth, and Equality."* Thomas Shapiro and Melvin Oliver, chapter from *Black Wealth/White Wealth: Perspectives on Racial Inequality*, 1995.
- *"Equity Literacy for Educators: Definition and Abilities."* Paul Gorski, 2007.
- *"Changing the Discourse in Schools."* Eugene Eubanks, Ralph Parish, and Dianne Smith, chapter from *Race, Ethnicity, and Multiculturalism Policy and Practice*, 1997.
- *"Racism and inequality are products of design. They can be redesigned."* EquityXdesign, medium.com, 2018.
- *"Four Versions of Family-School Partnerships."* Anne Henderson, Karen Mapp, Vivian Johnson, and Don DePoy from *Beyond the Bake Sale: The Essential Guide to Family-School Partnerships*, 2007.
- *"The Groundwater Approach: Building a Practical Understanding of Structural Racism."* Bayar Love and Hayes-Greene, 2018.
- *"Five Stereotypes about Poor Families and Education."* Paul Gorski, excerpt from *Reaching and Teaching: Poverty: Strategies for Erasing the Opportunity Gap*, 2013.

Great Schools Partnership thanks Everyday Democracy for their collaboration in the fieldwork and shared learning that shaped many of these resources.



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### The Case For Community Engagement

*Research shows* that students learn better when their families and local community organizations are engaged in schools. Strong family engagement is linked to increased student achievement, reduced absenteeism, and higher graduation rates. In addition, community engagement can help ensure that students' social, emotional, and physical health needs are addressed, while also providing meaningful, real-world learning opportunities. Schools that engage with their communities are also better able to help students solve local problems, contribute to civic life, and respond to a changing economy.

Equitable community engagement—an ongoing, two-way process of building relationships, working collaboratively to support all students, and sharing power—can also result in transformative benefits for schools and school districts:

**Equitable Outcomes**

When school leaders hear from a broad range of voices, especially those who have been systematically marginalized, schools' instructional, budgetary, and policy priorities—and the actions and results that flow from them—better reflect the needs and goals of everyone they serve. This results in schools that are more responsive to all stakeholders' needs, regardless of their race, income level, dominant language, or other social markers.

**Lasting Impact**

Schools and districts that are informed and shaped by the needs and contributions of students, families, and community members are better positioned to work toward their goals. They are able to reflect, learn, and grow together. They are more resilient in the face of inevitable changes and challenges, whether prompted by state policy, the local economy, technological developments, global events, or a social or political crisis. In addition, school improvements that result from equitable community engagement are far more likely to persist beyond the tenure of a visionary superintendent, a dynamic parent leader, or a committed school board member.

**Innovative Solutions**

Bringing a range of voices and experiences together broadens school leaders' perspectives and generates a wider array of ideas to act on opportunities and challenges. Equitable engagement with students, families, and community members—especially those who have been historically disenfranchised—is a critical way for leaders to develop a multi-faceted, thorough understanding of educational issues and generate strategies that are responsive to stakeholders' needs. In fact, it can prepare a whole new set of people to help problem-solve and lead the school system and community through complex and/or unforeseen circumstances.

**Community Support**


When students, families, teachers, and other members of the school community collaborate with school leaders to develop goals, plans, and decisions, it builds mutual trust. Intentional inclusivity also provides school leaders an opportunity to hear different perspectives and help find common ground. People are more likely to remain involved in the next phases of the work and to stand with the school in the face of pushback or challenges when they have been part of setting the agenda and working together to achieve it.

**What Does It Mean to Share Power?**

Sharing power means intentionally using resources to engage equitably with all members of the school community when making decisions that affect the community. Sharing power requires that leaders learn what is preventing people's full participation, systematically remove those barriers, and create meaningful opportunities for all community members to have an impact. Whether in one-on-one conversations, in teams, or as an organization, sharing power can happen in formal and informal ways. At its core, it is about ensuring that those who are most affected by decisions, programs, and decisions are the ones shaping them—even if that means leaders must give up some control.



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### Community Engagement Moving Toward Equity

Equitable community engagement is equitable. To achieve equity, those in power, such as teachers or school administrators, must share power with all stakeholders in their school community. This tool is designed to help you identify and implement practices that enable more effective and equitable practices.

**Providing Information**


Teachers and school administrators provide information about the school to students, families, and community members at regular intervals.

**Encouraging Involvement**

In addition to providing information, teachers and school administrators actively seek out feedback and input from students, families, and other community members.

**Sharing Power**


In addition to providing information and encouraging involvement, teachers and school administrators also use resources to engage equitably with all members of the school community when making decisions that affect the community.



**Community Engagement in Action**

Equitable community engagement isn't just providing information, encouraging involvement, or sharing power; it requires all three. What that looks like in practice will depend on the school, community, venue, topic, and more.

|               | Providing Information   | Encouraging Involvement   | Sharing Power  |
|---------------|---|---|--|
| Examples      | Parents receive data and information about the academic progress of their children.                             | Teachers share their reflections on each student's progress, allowing for input, reflection, and goal-setting.  | Students lead conferences by sharing their work, reflecting on their progress, and setting goals. Families, teachers, and students function as a team.                 |
| Practices     | The school sends notices about events that families can attend, such as math nights, the school play, and more. | Families are invited to chaperone field trips, volunteer in classrooms, or co-plan activities, such as a back-to-school barbecue.                                 | Families design and implement activities of their own choosing, such as inviting school staff to neighborhood block parties or living room conversations.              |
| Structures    | Budget priorities are determined without input from the community and posted on the district website.           | The superintendent encourages community members to attend public school board meeting about the budget and/or to vote.  | The school board sets aside funds for participatory budgeting, a process in which community members decide how to spend part of a public budget.                       |
| Communication | The school sends newsletters, email updates, robo calls, memos, or other communications about policy changes.   | In a presentation, the school shares policy changes and invites feedback in the form of surveys, focus groups, suggestion boxes, or a question and answer period. | After the collection of data and the public exchange of ideas, decisions regarding a new school policy are made in an open forum with input from the school community. |



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# CHAT BOX QUESTIONS





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# THANK YOU

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