

March 2020

ONcall

ready-to-use NEWS

Collaboration works

The pandemic has created overwhelming challenges for schools — how to safely return to in-person learning, how to protect students and staff from COVID-19 and how to effectively meet the needs of all students. Schools and school boards can more effectively handle these challenges if they create a collaborative communication culture. Research shows that collaboration between district leaders, unions, associations and school boards results in “gains in student achievement, improved school climate, increases in teacher retention, and both principals and association representatives being seen as stronger resources by educators in their school.” www.nea.org/advocating-for-change/new-from-nea/case-collaboration-clear

What does collaboration look like in practice?

Some schools have excellent collaborative systems within a culture of collaboration. For schools that need to improve their collaboration efforts, or even build a collaborative system from scratch, there are many resources and models that can help.

Many school districts have found success using a policy governance approach. Policy governance is an idea developed in the 1970s by John Carver (www.carvergovernance.com/model.htm). The approach defines roles for leadership and encourages boards to look at the big picture. “The board sets the ‘ends,’ or outcomes it expects, while the superintendent and central office manage the daily operations needed to get there. Board meetings are focused on progress toward those ends; board members are there to quiz the superintendent about what needs to happen if metrics are moving in the wrong direction.” www.edweek.org/leadership/building-better-school-boards-3-strategies-for-district-leaders/2020/11

Creating clear roles creates an ideal atmosphere for trust and collaboration. Collaboration is even more important during a crisis when the community is looking for district staff, school boards and school leadership to be united in their mission to advocate for students. The National Education Association (NEA) developed a resource guide (www.nea.org/advocating-for-change/covid) with concrete action items to help schools and school boards collaborate effectively during a crisis.

The following steps can help districts and schools start or improve collaborative efforts:

Listen. How is the pandemic impacting staff members, leaders and stakeholders? What challenges are they facing?

Form teams. Form teams with diverse, ready-to-collaborate stakeholders and identify shared areas of focus. What are the common priorities? Is everyone sharing solutions?

Create shared goals. Define and document shared goals and objectives. What do you have in common? A shared goal puts a team in the right frame of mind to work together.

(Over)

For subscription information, contact WSSDA at (800) 562-8927 or (360) 493-9231.

For content questions, contact: Marcia Latta Communications Consultant (503) 580-2612.

Reproduction rights for materials distributed as part of *On Call* are granted only to subscribing districts and are restricted to distribution as part of their local public relations programs.



Communicate. It's important to keep your stakeholders informed. Determine how and when you will communicate about initiatives or projects. Being transparent and open builds trust with the community. Use various channels (social media, email, video, website updates, etc.) to broaden your reach.

For more information, download the NEA's 10-Step Quick-Start Guide to Collaborating Effectively in a Crisis: <https://bit.ly/3arB1A5>

How can a team work collaboratively while complying with social distancing guidelines?

The challenges schools and school boards face implementing ever-changing COVID-19 health and safety protocols, complying with state and federal guidelines and planning for the full return to in-person instruction is more difficult without face-to-face meetings. Conflicts due to miscommunications are more likely to occur using asynchronous communication like email. Not having face-to-face meetings makes collaboration more difficult, but it is possible with these tips:

- Over-communicate
- Give permission to be human
- Hold regular check-ins
- Be open and direct
- Make meetings matter

See the full list here: <https://builtin.com/remote-work/remote-collaboration-tips>

Use technology tools

The following tools can make remote work easier:

Use video chat. Regular communication is more important when teams are working remotely. Connect with members at regular intervals to keep the lines of communication open. Email is fine for discussing topics that don't need discussion. Video chat should be encouraged for most conversations. Video is more engaging than email or an audio call, and non-verbal cues and expressions reduce miscommunications that can happen in an email. Screensharing is also helpful when you want to share your work. Use the chat functions or the survey tools to further engage participants and foster open discussion.

Use collaborative tools. Google Drive or Microsoft One Drive are useful platforms for working on shared documents. Working on a goal-setting document together allows for greater input from team members. Editing a document in real time also mimics the nature of a normal workplace team meeting. You can even chat in real time without leaving the document. Learn how to use google chat here: www.lifewire.com/chat-in-google-docs-4844376

More resources

"4 Guiding Questions for Effective Remote Collaboration"
www.edutopia.org/article/4-guiding-questions-effective-remote-collaboration

"Best online collaboration software of 2021"
www.techradar.com/best/best-online-collaboration-tools