



# The Skyrocket Education School Culture Manual

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VERSION 2

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with Dr. Tiffany Holmes and Michael Sonbert



Thank you for downloading the Skyrocket Culture Manual. This manual was created to pair with the Skyrocket School Culture Framework. Over the years, we've received a lot of feedback from school leaders about how helpful the Skyrocket Teacher Coaching Framework and Manual and Skyrocket Leader Coaching Framework and Manual are, but...but where are the culture framework and manual? School culture tends to be one of those ineffable things that are talked about in nebulous and vague terms, accompanied by phrases like, "I know it when I see it," or "You can just feel it." Sometimes, leaders find pinpointing what makes an effective culture challenging and they find it easier to identify when that culture is missing or negative. The aim of this manual and the framework is to flip that narrative on its head and provide school leaders with tangible steps to creating the school culture they know is best for students, staff, and stakeholders.

As you dive in, please use this manual and the corresponding Skyrocket School Culture Framework to create the foundational systems, data-driven approaches, and pushes towards equity that will make your school culture come to life and thrive.

Thank you to all the school leaders who have pushed us to create this manual and the accompanying framework, they wouldn't exist without you. We hope what you find inside to be as useful, meaningful, and practical as our other frameworks and manuals.

Before you dive in, I'd like to give some more rationale for why I wanted to create both the framework and this manual as well as explain what, exactly, you'll find inside. Also, it can be easy reading through manuals like these and cherry-picking the action items that feel like they'll scratch your culture itch. We cannot emphasize enough that school culture is only as strong as the clarity of its vision and fidelity of that vision's implementation.

## THE WHY?

Similar to the Skyrocket Leader Coaching Framework and Manual, in my observations at schools around the country, three trends emerged.

Trend number one is that schools don't have a clear, articulated vision for culture, and whatever vision of culture exists is left solely in the hands of deans or culture staff. The implications of trend number one are huge. Administrators, teachers, culture staff, and students tend to be divided and operate independently, and often in direct conflict with each other. Because the vision is not solidified, expectations for upholding the culture system are inconsistent at best and inequitable at worst. An example of this are hallways that are inconsistently staffed by adults and students meander well after the bell. When I ask leaders about who should be present in the hallways, they say either "everyone" or "We don't have a policy." When I ask culture staff about how they are supposed to monitor and consistently uphold school expectations, they respond that they are always putting out fires and they're constantly being pulled for one thing or another. When I ask teachers about how they're supposed to attend to behavioral issues, some say they call the deans, others say they deal with it in class, and others shrug their shoulders. When I ask students about what the consequences are for being late to class (or something similar), they say it varies by teacher, if there are consequences at all.

The second trend is that data and goals or school culture are retrospective, incongruent with action plans, and isolated to culture staff. This happens frequently with goals and data for attendance. School leaders will look at their attendance data from the previous year and set a goal of increasing attendance by x percent (i.e. 87% to 93%). When pushed to identify how those goals will be achieved, leaders struggle to name tangible actions or they'll say they've hired an attendance coordinator. How will the attendance coordinator impact student attendance for the better? They're not sure. The data and goals for school culture deserve the same time, energy, explicitness, and tangibility as the goals for academics. And while there are school-wide goals and focus areas, there are also the individual, student-centric goals that need just as much attention. The trend here is that the goals and data are not communicated, shared, and owned by various members of staff. The dean owns discipline, the social worker owns peer support groups, and the teacher relies on both independent of each other. With trend number two, some pieces are in place. But they occur in silos and communication across teams rarely happens.

Trend number three is that the staff receive most of their training in upholding culture through a system of consequences. What's missing here are the systems for positive reinforcement, DEI trainings with practical application, and opportunities for students to showcase their talents and interests in a variety of ways. SEL programs and PBIS systems exist in name, not in practice. I've seen schools spend thousands of dollars on SEL curricula and when I've walked the building with school leaders, teachers either aren't using the curriculum at all or are using it improperly because they haven't had much coaching after the initial PD. Either way, the results are the same—students are not supported in the most effective practices. So often, the joy that we want for all our students and children in schools is absent, and it's because leaders have not strategically and purposefully set about creating the systems through which joy can operate.

## WHAT'S INSIDE?

Similar to the Skyrocket Leader Coaching Framework, what we've created here is a step-by-step guide to executing leadership actions using The Skyrocket School Culture Framework. Each leader action inside includes a real-world rationale for why it matters, and a section on what it looks like when the leader has the system in place or performs it with fidelity. We have intentionally built most of our practices to include both a design and execution component. That means that some of the practices will take longer, especially if there is a system or process that is missing. Some will take multiple meetings or even weeks to complete. That is exactly what should happen and is to be expected.

Since this manual and framework exist to foster culture development and it's possible that some of these systems, actions, documents or templates are absent entirely from your school, you may wonder, where is the model for x? Again, we considered including some, but to do so would make this manual unwieldy (imagine a 40 page student handbook within the manual), so we are leaving those templates and documents out.

As always, I hope you find this to be a useful tool. If you need anything or have any feedback for us, please reach out. We'd love to hear from you.

- Michael Sonbert



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# Table of Contents

<b>Strand 1: Foundational Systems</b>	<b>6</b>
Nickname - Vision	7
Nickname - Universal Accountability	8
Nickname - Welcoming Community	9
Nickname - Fun Calendar	10
Nickname - Culture Agendas	11
Nickname - Culture Team Organization	12
Nickname - Ladder of Rewards and Consequences	13
Nickname - Schoolwide Expectations	14
Nickname - Present and Visible	15
Nickname - School Handbook	16
Nickname - Culture Notification (Closing the Loop)	17
Nickname - Culture Communication	18
<b>Strand 2: Data Driven Leadership</b>	<b>19</b>
Nickname - Culture Goals	20
Nickname - Data Collection	21
Nickname - Action Planning	22
Nickname - Data-Driven Tiered Supports	23
Nickname - Triangulated Support	24
<b>Strand 3: Joy in Equity</b>	<b>25</b>
Nickname - DEI	26
Nickname - Culture Team and Academic Team Partnership	27
Nickname - School Rituals	28
Nickname - Social Emotional Learning	29
Nickname - Student Leadership	30
Nickname - Positive Behavior Management	31
Nickname - Staff Celebration and Recognition	32
Nickname - Family and Community Engagement	33
Nickname - Community Partnerships	34

## STRAND 1: FOUNDATIONAL SYSTEMS

### CULTURE OUTCOME GOAL:

Families, students, and staff members surveyed know the vision for the school, can articulate rewards and consequences, and report that they receive frequent and timely communication from culture team members.



## STRAND 1

**Leader Action 1 - Leaders have clearly defined, articulated, modeled, and habituated their vision for culture in their schools.**

### Nickname – Vision

**Rationale** – One of my favorite movies of all time is *The Shawshank Redemption*. For those of you who haven't seen it, it's about a man who is wrongly convicted of a crime and his quest to escape prison. The main character's name is Andy, and once he's imprisoned, his entire focus throughout the movie is escape: he acquires tools, works in the dark, deceives the warden, etc. He has a clear vision, and everything he does is aligned to making that vision a reality, and while he doesn't communicate his plans (since that would likely get him caught), you must be like him—have a crystal clear vision for how to operate that is applicable to all staff and students. Everyone needs to be on the same page regarding what culture means at your school. Do you stand for restorative justice? No excuses? A combination of the two? Intrinsic or extrinsic rewards? When? How? These have to be expertly defined so that there are no surprises, so that all stakeholders can say they've been treated fairly according to the vision of culture at your school.

**What it looks like** – A vision statement describes the school's purpose, what it is striving for, and what it wants to achieve. It gives the chance to articulate the characteristics that influence the strategy and approach to culture. You can't see a vision statement but you can see its values and manifestations in classrooms, hallways, and interactions between staff and students. Everyone understands the approach to discipline. Teachers, culture team members, parents, students, and administrators all expect similar responses to discipline. Also, all stakeholders know how rewards are earned for students. Teachers are all invested in using the schoolwide system. Students can explain how they earn rewards and what the rewards are. Whether it's a token economy to purchase trips, events and/or prizes, students are invested in the system. The vision statement should:

1. Inform the community of the school's core beliefs on how students should experience school within your building.
2. Drive the staff toward a common goal.
3. Set forth the expectations of the teachers, students, and administrators.
4. Establish the methods and the approaches to student and staff support.
5. Influence consequences and rewards.
6. Inform decisions, especially in situations when it is difficult to reach a consensus — the choice can be made with what aligns best with the school's goals.

### Practice

1. Provide a model of a vision statement that clearly defines what culture looks like. Explain how this vision statement meets the above criteria and how you would expect this vision statement to manifest itself with a few stakeholders (teachers, students, parents, deans, support staff, etc.) in a variety of situations. Provide some scenarios for the leader to practice as well.
2. Have the leader provide their vision statement (if they don't have one, have them write it in the moment). Provide feedback on the clarity of the vision statement against the criteria and your model. Have the leader revise the vision statement as needed.
3. Using the leader's vision statement, provide some scenarios that would test its fidelity, applicability, and practicality. Model analyzing one scenario and explain your thought process. Have the leader analyze another scenario and provide feedback on whether the vision statement holds up. Revise the vision statement as needed.

## STRAND 1

### Leader Action 2 - Leader actions display universal accountability of all parts of their school and school community.

## Nickname – Universal Accountability

**Rationale** – A long time ago, I worked for an insurance company. Four of us were eating lunch, and one of my colleagues called another coworker a term which I can't repeat here, but which meant, "an indescribable idiot." A few others chimed in and gave examples, though none used quite as offensive language. I was incredibly uncomfortable in the situation because I didn't know what to do. Do I stand up and tell my colleagues to talk to the person they're bad-mouthing? Do I tell my colleague what was said about them? Do I bring it up to my manager? Do I say something negative as well, just to fit in? You know what I did? Nothing. I thought, "It's not my place to say anything." My inaction says a lot about me at that moment. It also says a lot about the culture of the company. Some people took lunches that lasted over an hour. Some people showed up to work late. Lots of people spoke negatively about coworkers behind their back. You know where my manager was most of the day? In their office. If they were aware of what was going on, they didn't address it. If they weren't aware, it's because they shielded themselves with a closed door. In either case, the culture of the office meant that there were a lot of flies in the ointment, none of which were removed.

The highest-performing teams don't only rely on a leader to hold team members accountable, but rather, they create a culture in which peers respectfully confront issues head-on. In a setting where employees feel comfortable addressing problems, such as tardiness, inappropriate behavior, or low expectations of students, it creates greater trust among staff and results in leaders spending less time untangling conflicts.

**What it looks like** – The leader enforces and upholds all aspects of the culture policies with consistency by modeling previously agreed upon behaviors. The leader set the tone to establish a culture of universal accountability. They never let issues go unaddressed. They will always discuss issues promptly and directly with the appropriate party and create solutions that address the problem. The leader is present in hallways during transitions and does building walkthroughs throughout the day. The leader addresses adults and students when they are not meeting the bar. The leader's actions empower and compel staff to uphold school expectations, holding each other mutually accountable for the execution of them.

### Practice

1. Provide steps/criteria for success for how a leader can uphold universal accountability in the moment. Share a scenario which would necessitate upholding universal accountability and model how you would address the situation. Have the leader take notes and share what they noticed and compare with your criteria for success.
2. Role-play a variety of scenarios (3+) which would require the leader to have a critical conversation. For the first, have the leader to script out how they should respond and provide feedback prior to the role-play. For the second, have the leader script out how they would respond and don't provide feedback prior to the role-play. For the third, have the leader respond without scripting. Provide feedback after each scenario.
3. Conduct a joint walkthrough and observe the leader demonstrating universal accountability. If the leader does not address a particular situation (because they don't see it or avoid it), push them to do so. If their staff doesn't practice universal accountability, push them to address the staff member. Take notes on the effectiveness of the interaction and give feedback in a follow-up meeting or in the moment, depending on suitability/timing etc.



## STRAND 1

**Leader Action 3 - A welcoming community is cultivated for all students. Hallways and classrooms are adorned with relevant and culturally responsive positive messaging, student celebration, student work, school-wide data, and initiatives that promote school pride.**

### Nickname – Welcoming Community

**Rationale –** I was at my doctor's office not too long ago. The receptionist called me up to verify my information, provide my insurance card, pay my copay, etc. The woman who took all my details had her cubby/cubicle decorated with pictures of her family and a certificate commemorating her winning Office Assistant of the Month. She greeted me with a smile, made me feel welcome, and then directed me to the waiting room. On the waiting room walls hung articles about the research some of the doctors in the practice were doing, awards and national ratings, and magazines related to medicine were scattered on little tables between the chairs. Perhaps your experience is the same. You walk in, and it feels like a doctor's office. Everything is designed to make you feel at ease/comfortable. Your school needs to be decorated in the same way. Your students and staff see it every day and its appearance plays a tangible role in how your community feels about coming to the building.

**What it looks like –** Bulletin boards, walls, hallways are a reflection of the student population it serves. Decorations and celebrations include and spotlight students, their cultures, their achievements, their growth, and their effort. Students feel loved and supported by staff members. Micro-interactions are positive, support the community, and refrain from passive aggressive behavior and sarcasm.

#### Practice

1. Share some example clear expectations for displays in hallways, bulletin boards, etc. that cultivate a welcoming community. Have the leader create and/or identify their school's expectations for displays. Provide feedback on where displays are inclusive and positive and what's missing.
2. Do a joint walkthrough with the leader. Take notes on where bulletin boards, walls, hallways, interactions, etc. exemplify a welcoming community and where they do not. Share your notes with the leader and align on what areas need to be addressed.
3. If a joint walkthrough is not possible, do a walkthrough on your own. Take pictures of various areas of the school and take notes where pictures aren't feasible. Share your notes/pictures with the leader. Have them analyze your notes/pictures and then compare your analyses, norming on how to address misses in the welcoming community.

## STRAND 1

**Leader Action 4 - Leaders, with teacher and student input, have designed and communicated a year-long school culture calendar that outlines planned major events, trips, and positive incentives (end of report period celebrations, student achievement recognition, etc.).**

### Nickname – Fun Calendar

**Rationale –** Every year growing up, my family would spend a week down the shore (shout out to Ocean City, NJ). It always happened in August, and we would always rent the same house. I could count on the fun events like clockwork: walk the dog in the morning, eat lunch at the house, get to the beach by about 1:00pm, and stay there until about 5:00. Most nights my parents would cook, but one night we'd get pizza on the boardwalk, another night we'd go to our friend's house, and if we were lucky, we'd go to a restaurant a town over. Strangely, one of the biggest treats was getting to watch cable TV, since my parents didn't have it when I was a kid. The last day of the trip we'd spend at the waterpark on the boardwalk, and we'd finish the vacation with water ice before getting in the car to go home. This was our fun calendar, and we looked forward to it every year. It's just as important that your school schedules fun for students. If we aren't proactive, thoughtful, and planned, we can create an environment which takes all the joy out of school, and that's not good for anyone.

**What it looks like –** a year long calendar that includes trips, showcases, and incentive celebrations. By report period, calendar all important dates: holidays, parent/teacher conferences, concerts, etc... plan incremental celebrations that are earned by students and add any relevant school trips. The fun calendar is promoted and advertised in several ways: bulletin boards, announcements, and family communication are a few. The fun calendar provides a wide variety of activities that ensure that students can participate in multiple activities and in multiple ways throughout the school year. If/when an activity is earned, all stakeholders are aware and normed on the criteria for earning the activity. An example of this might be students must earn 75 merits to attend a Friday movie night at school. Another example of this might be everyone is allowed entrance to the Friday movie night. Merits are used to buy popcorn, snacks, and other fun add-ons at movie night.

#### Practice

1. Share a model calendar that has all the fun activities listed out in advance. Explain the purpose behind a certain event, the rationale behind its timing, staff required with their roles and responsibilities, resources needed, and the stakeholders involved. Have the leader perform the same analysis for their calendar (you should have done this as well) and identify which fun activities are present and missing. For a missing activity, have the leader create a plan for how it will be included and executed based on your model. Provide feedback on how well the leader's plan will drive the event's success.
2. Using your example calendar, model how to create the criteria for rewards or how you would communicate/promote the activity/event. Have the leader identify a specific activity or event on their calendar and create the rewards and/or the communication and promotional strategies for it. Provide feedback on the nature of the incentives and the efficacy of their communication strategies. Repeat for more events/activities.
3. Either jointly or on your own, interview a range of teachers and students. Ask them what fun school activities are coming up/have just passed and what they're looking forward to. Use their quotes to identify glows and grows. Have the leader determine next steps based on the quotes. Provide feedback on the leader's analysis.

## STRAND 1

**Leader Action 5 - The culture team functions as a cohesive unit. The team reflects on, modifies, and reviews the execution of culture systems, stamping this in ongoing daily and weekly agendas.**

### Nickname – Culture Agendas

**Rationale –** My wife has a mug that has a picture of a witch thinking: “Me after a 2 hour meeting.” The witch’s face is wide-eyed and aghast. On the other side of the mug is a fire-breathing dragon thinking: “This meeting could have been an email.” She routinely tells me about meetings in which people talk for ages, with no real purpose or filter for time, and often just to show off how smart they are. These meetings disengage my wife from future meetings, make her resentful, and perhaps most importantly, waste her time. How do such meetings come to exist? The lack of organization, prioritization, and an agenda. Every meeting your team has must include a targeted, time sensitive agenda that uses data to drive at goals the culture team is striving to achieve.

**What it looks like –** The culture team meets regularly to understand the needs of the building. The team communicates and enforces policies and procedures that have been agreed upon and communicated in a normed way. Culture agendas are used to discuss classrooms and/or cohorts who need more attention, teachers who are absent, student issues that one may be privy to when the rest of the team is not aware. The team does walkthroughs and building sweeps together and at scheduled times. The team meets with a normed culture agenda to reflect on systems/policies that are working and those that need adjustments. The agenda should include the following: student attendance (if applicable), celebrations, infractions, suspensions, hot spots, current issues being addressed, special events coming up and what roles each person will fill.

#### Practice

1. Share a model agenda and template with the leader. Explain the key components, why they’re included, how much time is allocated for each piece, who owns which data, and how each topic should be facilitated. Have the leader adopt this model, modify it to suit their needs, or create a new one.
2. Have the leader create an agenda for an upcoming meeting using an agreed upon template. Provide feedback on the clarity of the information, the focus and alignment of the content, the timing, etc. Have the leader share upcoming agendas with you for feedback before they are shared with the team.
3. Model how you would execute the meeting using the above agenda. Have the leader role-play being on the culture team and steering the conversation off course. Model how to redirect the meeting to stay on topic. Switch roles and play the role of the culture team member and attempt to derail the conversation. Provide feedback on the leader’s ability to address and course correct.

## STRAND 1

**Leader Action 6 - School culture members utilize, maintain, and share updated individual calendars for organizing individual responsibilities, events, meetings, and tasks.**

### Nickname – Culture Team Organization

**Rationale –** I was recently working with a manager of an organization and we were talking about how they keep track of what has to be done and been done, and more specifically, how do members on the team know what other team members are doing. She said, “They look at my calendar.” She showed me her calendar, and I was delighted to see that all of her daily and weekly obligations/tasks were there for all to see. I then asked her to pull up one of her colleague’s calendars. The difference between the two could not have been starker: her colleague’s calendar had events and meetings that were out of date, were missing a lot of the daily events he was responsible for, and was generally useless for knowing what he was doing at any given time. I asked the manager about the consistency of calendar use across the team. She said, “We’re not consistent or aligned.” My follow-up question, “Do all tasks and initiatives get done with fidelity?” Her answer, “No.” By building robust calendars that accurately reflect the day-to-day and week-to-week operations of the culture team, you ensure that not only does everyone on the team know what’s happening, but that everyone on the team can be held accountable for its completion and success.

**What it looks like –** Culture team members (and all leaders) have access to one another’s calendars. Parent meetings, duties, events, and time for culture dashboard/database updates are all calendared to ensure enough coverage throughout the day. Calendars are updated by the beginning of the week and modified throughout to account for absences, coverages, and major changes. Communication around shifts in the calendar is timely and clear.

#### Practice

1. Bring a model calendar and your analysis of what makes it a model, including how time is spent, responsibilities/duties delegated, and major obligations prioritized. Share that analysis with the school leader.
2. Be prepared with your analysis of the leader’s calendar and have the leader analyze their own calendar compared to the model. Compare your notes and align on what has not been calendared, what should be calendared, and who owns it. Then make the changes. Similarly, make changes where duties are duplicated or inefficient.
3. Have the leader list all of the tasks for the upcoming week and create a schedule for the team (if possible, use the roles and responsibilities document that’s been created). Provide feedback on the clarity, efficiency, and usefulness of the schedule.

## STRAND 1

**Leader Action 7 - Leaders ensure that a scaffolded ladder of rewards, consequences, and redirections exist and are used consistently by all staff members.**

### Nickname – Ladder of Rewards and Consequences

**Rationale** – A friend of mine is a project manager for a construction company and last year, he got a raise. A big one (like 30%). His job title didn't change. His responsibilities didn't change. I asked him what he did to get such a raise. He said he didn't know ("I guess my boss likes me," was his actual response). He didn't do anything out of the ordinary other than doing his job well. While I'm very happy for my friend, and he's extremely deserving of the raise he received, the process through which his pay increased is problematic. A running list of questions spooled through my mind: was his team compensated in the same manner? Do managers use metrics to determine pay? If so, what are they? Is there a process for evaluation and raises at all? My guess: no, to all of the above. The implications of the absence of a clear system of rewards and consequences, whether at a school or any other organization are massive. People will be treated differently, and because the rationale for their different treatment will not have been clearly defined, resentment, confusion, and frustration will run rampant.

**What it looks like** – Students are operating with full and complete knowledge of what behaviors earn rewards and what actions warrant consequences and there is school-wide language around those rewards/consequences. Students are also aware of the severity of the consequence in relation to the action. Additionally, students are aware of basic expectations and know what above and beyond actions earn rewards. Furthermore, all staff implement the ladder with consistency and fidelity so that a behavior in Ms. Smith's class that warrants a reward is treated the same way in Mr. Williams' class. Culture leaders train staff at the beginning of the school year on these systems. Culture team members consistently visit all classrooms and are present in hallways to take data-based and anecdotal notes, and share these notes and observations into a tracking system so that follow-up around the ladder's implementation can occur. If staff are inconsistently using the system, culture leaders create further trainings or small-group professional development to ensure everybody is on the same page.

**Rewards:** praise, merit/ticket, positive message home, Class/school reward, food parties

**Redirections/consequences:** non-verbal warning, verbal warning, teacher intervention (seat change/timeout), teacher consequence (detention w/ teacher or phone call home), behavior referral, in school suspension, etc.

#### Practice

1. Share a potential model of a ladder of rewards and consequences. Explain the rationale behind each and how they would be executed. Have the leader create their own ladder of rewards and consequences. Analyze it and share feedback on its logic, practicality, and consistency.
2. Provide a sample slide deck/training for how a ladder of rewards and consequences could be introduced to staff. Model its introduction and include its rationale and practice scenario for its execution. Have the school leader adopt, modify, or create their own presentation for introducing the ladder to staff. Have the leader practice delivering the presentation and provide feedback on the clarity of their rationale and the alignment of the practice scenarios.
3. Model how to build a tracking system (walkthrough form, spreadsheet, etc.) for culture team walkthroughs and how the data culled from this system could/should be used to follow-up. Have the leader create their own tracking system and provide feedback on the usefulness, efficiency, and timeliness of it.
4. Do a joint walkthrough with the school leader during a range of situations (lunch, transitions, classes, etc.) and take notes using the tracking system on the implementation on the ladder of rewards and consequences. Pay particular attention to the consistency of its application. Find a time to interview students to get their perspective. Share your notes and analysis with the leader, and what changes you recommend.
5. Have the school leader analyze their current system for inconsistencies in logic, applicability, and implementation. Support the leader in making shifts, designing professional development, and norming across the school.

## STRAND 1

**Leader Action 8 - School wide expectations are transparent, communicated, and monitored. All staff are trained, provided feedback, and coached to meet systems' expectations with fidelity (transitions, arrival, dismissal, hallway posts, etc.).**

### Nickname – Schoolwide Expectations

**Rationale** – Back when I worked for that insurance company, there were distinctly two groups during lunch. One group, comprised of veteran employees, would go out to lunch and routinely take an hour or more, saunter in, and then spend another five to ten minutes chatting in the breakroom. The other group was everyone else. Most of us ate lunch in the office, though occasionally we would eat out as well. Being late is a stressor for me, so I would never even encroach on an hour, let alone be late back to the office. The thing is, no one during my onboarding or training ever said anything about lunch expectations. How long did we have? I couldn't actually say. What I do know is that two groups of people working for the same organization behaved in dramatically different manners when given the same opportunity and situation. What this did, at least for me, was create resentment. I resented the other group for taking, what I perceived to be, advantage of unclear expectations and no follow-up from management to address the situation (maybe this happened privately, but their behavior didn't change so I'm skeptical that it did). In schools, there can be no question as to the expectations. When expectations aren't clear, it invites different behaviors, inconsistent treatment of students and staff, and ultimately, inequity. You've likely experienced this as a student or teacher yourself: one teacher enforces a school rule one way, and another teacher enforces the same rule completely differently, or perhaps not at all.

**What it looks like** – All staff have been made aware of expectations, systems, and routines, as all three are necessary for clarity. Parents are informed via letter, email blast, and/or open house. Students are informed during orientation and staff are informed during summer trainings. When everyone is on their posts and following the expectations, school systems run smoothly. When there is a hiccup or adjustment, everyone is informed of the adjustment and the rationale. When someone is not following/ meeting the expectations they are quickly reminded of the expectation.

**Example:** Dismissal expectations are as follows: Early dismissal ends 20 minutes before the end of the day. Parents who pick students up are expected to stay in their cars and join the carpool line. Teachers are to walk their students to the rear yard and line up on their classroom spot. All classes are expected to be outside no later than 3 minutes after dismissal and no more than 5 minutes before. Carpool students are sent to their assigned exit at 3pm. K-2 students are picked up and escorted by a staff member. Every classroom has a specific hallway and exit that they are assigned. Any staff member that does not have a homeroom is expected to get to their dismissal posts by 3:00pm. Dismissal posts included: hallways, stairwells, school perimeter, and carpool. When all goes well, everyone involved in dismissal, including parents and students, see and experience that this procedure maximizes efficiency and safety. However, if parents don't know what's expected of them, cars will be parked everywhere causing traffic jams, increasing parent and staff frustration. When teachers don't show up to their dismissal posts on time, students may get lost and/or it increases the opportunity for unsafe behaviors. When parents aren't allowed to pick up their students as dismissal is happening, it increases parents' frustration. If the child is pulled off the line while transitioning out, the teacher may not know and may panic. When students don't know where to go, they may miss their rides.

It takes patience and a "we are all in this together" mindset to get through dismissal. Leaders will optimize this by ensuring that all parties know exactly the role they play, how they play it and that they will be addressed when they are not doing their part.

#### Practice

1. Model how you would introduce a system roll out of expectations to stakeholders (staff, parents, and students). Identify the method of communication (letter, email blast, assembly, presentation, etc.), the rationale behind it, how staff would be trained, and how it would be monitored. Have the leader identify their own system and script out how they would roll it out to stakeholders. Provide feedback on the clarity of the system, efficiency of the communication method, precision around the training of staff, the feasibility of monitoring it.
2. Provide a list of expectations which you have observed as being unclear, inconsistent, or absent completely. Model the process for refining it to make it clear, executable, and monitorable. Ask the leader to perform the same process for another expectation on your list. Where there is incongruity, support the leader/team in revising, norming, or crafting the expectations.
3. Share a walkthrough tool/rubric/template to monitor school-wide expectations and have the leader adopt, modify, or create one that is tailored to their school. Use the template and perform a walkthrough together. Debrief on where school-wide expectations are being upheld and where they are falling short. Support the leader in identifying next steps.

## STRAND 1

**Leader Action 9 - School culture team members are present and visible during predictable high traffic parts of the day and in areas in and around the school grounds that are least monitored (transitions, near bathrooms, outside during arrival, etc.).**

### Nickname – Present and Visible

**Rationale** – A few years ago, I saw a show on Broadway. As I entered the theater, there were multiple lines and staff checking tickets. Once inside, ushers directed us to the concession stands, the bathrooms, and our seats. There were ushers at the doors to the general area in the theater, and then more ushers in the aisles helping us get to our individual seats, saying welcoming things like, “Enjoy the show.” Once the lights dimmed and the play began, the ushers disappeared from view and my consciousness. At intermission and at the end of the play, the ushers once again resumed their spots (you can be sure each usher had a designated spot they were responsible for). The entire process operated like clockwork.

The culture team at your school needs to be present, just like the ushers and ticket-takers. By being present throughout the building at the highest trafficked areas throughout the day, they’ll not only help your students and staff feel supported, but they will also have their fingers on the pulse of the school, and they’ll be able to respond proactively to any situations that may arise.

**What it looks like** – Culture team members are present, visible, and active during transitions, near bathrooms, and outside during all high traffic times of the day. All culture team members conduct regularly scheduled walks of the buildings, bathrooms, and stairwells to ensure students are clear and safe. Culture team members know which classrooms are the least settled and which ones have substitute teachers. Culture team members frequently pop into those classrooms to ensure safety. Arrival, lunches, and dismissal have the most hands on deck. Dean/culture team members use anecdotal data from observations to make decisions that positively impact the school community.

Deans have assigned posts and arrive there early. They monitor their spaces to ensure that students are where they need to be and they positively interact with students and redirect them appropriately in these spaces. Culture team presence is designed to be proactive and supportive rather than reactive.

### Practice

1. Model how culture team members should be active and present during a high-trafficked event/location. Identify where they should stand, language they should use, and actions they should take. Have the school leader identify a different event/location and create the expectations for a culture team member’s active presence. Provide feedback on how well the active presence would uphold the school’s culture vision. Repeat for other high-trafficked events/locations.
2. Share a communication plan for how culture team members should be active and present, including designated/assigned posts and rationale (slides, practice/professional development sessions, etc.). Model delivering this message. Have the leader script out their message and provide feedback on the clarity, equity of responsibilities, and aligned practice.
3. Come prepared with a list of a few high needs areas/times of the school where culture team members have been missing. Explain why their presence would be helpful. Have the leader identify other areas/times that would benefit from culture team presence. Support the leader in creating a schedule, identifying the appropriate person for each area/time, and sharing this message with the team.
4. Do a joint walkthrough with the school leader during a time of particular need. Note where culture team members are present/absent and the corresponding student behaviors. Debrief after to make recommendations based on the data.

## STRAND 1

**Leader Action 10 - A family and community handbook is updated regularly and shared with all stakeholders. It reflects realistic and enforceable expectations for students and families.**

### Nickname – School Handbook

**Rationale** – When I was a freshman in high school, we received a student handbook around the first day of school. It was about fifty pages, and honestly, I remember next to none of it. What I do remember is the section on the dress code. My school didn't have a uniform policy per se, except to state that students should be dressed "appropriately" and violators of the uniform policy could be sent home from school. Whether your school has a uniform or a dress code, or whether you believe that it should or shouldn't is not the point. The point is that "appropriate" means a thousand things to a thousand people, and cannot be upheld in a meaningful, consistent, and legitimate manner. How did my fellow classmates and I respond to this language in the handbook? By wearing whatever we wanted. Flip flops, jeans cinched low, skirts pulled high, t-shirts rife with innuendo, anything and everything you can think of. No one was ever sent home (at least not to my knowledge). In my recent work, I've encountered handbooks that have obsolete web addresses, defunct policies, and incorrect contact information. Whatever content is in your school handbook, it has to be useful, up to date, and impeccable clear.

**What it looks like** – The handbook is aligned with practices within the school. Staff are easily and readily able to celebrate and uphold what's communicated in the handbook. Any changes or addendums to the handbook that have been made due to the pandemic have been reviewed. Any outdated or inequitable policies about attendance, dress code, and behavior have been removed and updated.

**Example:** Students must wear laced or velcro sneakers that are appropriate and safe for exercising in gym class (Crocs, sandals, flip flops, sliders, boots, high heels, slippers, etc. are not permitted).

**Non-Example:** The dress code policy states that ladies are not allowed to have earrings bigger than a quarter and are allowed one bracelet per wrist.

During winter as students enter the school, no one can see the number of bracelets on each wrist under the coat nor can anyone eyeball the size of the earrings accurately. Therefore these policies become inconsistently enforced causing frustration and annoyance by staff, students, and families.

### Practice

1. For a school where none exists, identify the sections that should be present in a school handbook (vision and values, dress code, grading policy, report cards, attendance, behavioral expectations, parent communication, extra curricular activities, graduation requirements, student/bell schedules, non-discrimination policies, school calendar, administration and staff contact information, etc.) and provide a template for filling in the content. Have the school leader identify the sections that they need for their school.
2. Model a section of a school handbook and explain why it's a model (i.e. grading policy). If the handbook exists, have the school leader analyze the section in their handbook and compare it to the model, and if it doesn't exist, have the leader draft that section. Delve into changes that should be made to add clarity, consistency, appropriateness, applicability, stakeholder involvement required, and enforceability.
3. Have the leader perform a similar analysis/creation for another, predetermined section of their handbook compared with a model. Provide feedback on the leader's analysis and support them in crafting any revisions. Continue for each section as needed.

**Note: crafting or revising sections of a handbook may take a significant amount of time and will not be completed in one meeting.**



## STRAND 1

**Leader Action 11 - Families, teachers, and students are notified of outcomes by close of business the day culture incidents take place. These conversations are informative, non-judgmental, and solutions-oriented.**

### Nickname – Culture Notification (Closing the Loop)

**Rationale** – A friend of mine recently got divorced. The events leading up to the divorce were sad, frustrating, and anxiety-ridden. The process itself, from the beginning of my friend getting separated to the divorce being finalized, lasted nearly two years. Except it shouldn't have taken that long. The now ex-couple had completed their settlement negotiations with paperwork signed by both parties within six months. But the courts didn't process their case for something along the lines of fifteen months. While the two were separated and divorced in terms of their living arrangements, the fact that they weren't legally divorced until much later had some very significant consequences for both parties. Time is especially sensitive when it comes to culture incidents within a school. When we aren't prompt in communicating with all parties involved, we increase the likelihood of stories shifting, details being forgotten, and feelings getting hurt. Being a day late and a dollar short in communicating outcomes for any culture incident ensures that negative feelings will linger in your school longer than you wish, and will erode at the fabric that binds the community together.

**What it looks like** – When a student goes to an administrator or culture team member due to an infraction that requires intervention, the student outcome should be communicated to students, teacher(s), and parents. If a student has earned a detention, for instance, the parents receive some combination of a call, text, email, or written notice that day, and will then expect their child to return home from school an hour late. The teacher is aware of the consequences and next steps. Students are aware of consequences and next steps.

**Example:** Two students get into a verbal altercation in class. The students stand up from their chairs and start towards one another. The teacher quickly intervenes and sends each student to opposite sides of the room and calls for an administrator to remove the students from class. The students are picked up by the assistant principal (AP), who reminds the teacher to document the incident and offers support while the incident is documented. The AP escorts the students to the office and talks to them for 30 minutes to unpack the disagreement, insists they apologize and delivers two consequences: 1) they complete community service during recess by helping the administrative assistant put together a mass mailing, and 2) serve two days of after school detention. The AP calls each parent, describes the incident and the consequences for each student, gives each a detention notice to take home and have signed, and sends them back to class with a pass. The AP then sends an email to the teacher(s) and lets the administrative assistant know that the students will be helping out on Thursday and Friday during their lunch period. The AP creates a calendar invite for the administrative assistant and copies the leadership team, adds the students' names to the school wide detention list, and closes out the incident in the school's tracking system.

**Non example:** Two students get into a verbal altercation in class. The students stand up from their chairs and start towards one another. The teacher quickly intervenes and sends each student to opposite sides of the room and calls for an administrator to remove them from class. The students are picked up by the Assistant Principal (AP), who drops them off in the main office to tend to something else. Upon return, the AP talks to the students for 30 minutes to unpack the disagreement, insists the students apologize, and delivers two consequences: 1) they do community service on their recess by helping the administrative assistant put together a mass mailing and 2) they serve two days of after school detention. The AP sends home a detention notice and then realizes that the incident was not created by the teacher in the school's tracking system. The AP makes a mental note to follow up with the teacher, adds the students to the school wide detention list, and then sends each back to class.

### Practice

1. Share a model communication system around closing the loop and identify how it is to be applied and upheld, including timing, when/where stakeholder involvement is necessary, documentation requirements, and methods of communication, etc. Have the leader adopt, modify, or design their own system/expectations and provide feedback on the ease of use, efficiency, and effectiveness.
2. Model effective culture communication for a specific scenario that requires parent contact (i.e. student skipping the same class three times in a week), and have the leader take notes on your language, solutions, next steps, and stakeholder input. Have the leader practice how they would close the loop for a variety of scenarios that require parent contact and provide feedback.
3. Share a model presentation/slides to train/retrain staff on closing the loop and how you would present it, including rationale and practice scenarios. Have the leader create their own slides and provide feedback on their clarity, alignment with the school's values, and feasibility of monitoring the system. Have the leader practice delivering their content and provide feedback on their tone, clarity, succinctness, and rationale.
4. Have the leader film their presentation to staff on closing the loop. Watch and analyze it together noting where the leader was clear, where the message was muddled, and precision of the steps for implementation.

## STRAND 1

**Leader Action 12 - The culture team communicates with staff, students, and families in multiple ways and through multiple mediums throughout the week (daily culture blast, student information boards, family newsletters, school website, etc.).**

### Nickname – Culture Communication

**Rationale** – My family has a group text chain through which we communicate updates, tell funny stories, share pictures, etc. Perhaps you do the same with your family or friend group. In mine, my dad almost never responds, and if he does, it's a word or two adding on or chiming in. He doesn't initiate any of the content. He's not a texter. On the other hand, if there's a family email thread, he's all over it, and often, he starts them. He'll send email upon email, with links (often to news and scientific articles) and random thoughts - sometimes paragraphs worth. I also know that if I call him, I'm signing up for, at minimum, a fifteen-minute conversation. Emails and phone calls are how my dad prefers to communicate. While your school is not your family, it is important that each member has access to school communication. Maybe some read email religiously, others you know open and skim but don't retain the content. Some can't wait to see the blurbs in the family newsletter. No one way of communication works for everyone, so we must vary not only how we communicate but the content as well.

**What it looks like** – The culture team regularly communicates with all stakeholders through a variety of mediums. The culture team sends out a daily blast to staff that indicates important information that may include the day's attendance, the number of merits distributed, the number of infractions reported, the number of suspensions, the names of students serving after school detention, etc. The blast will include reminders about rewards and upcoming events. The culture (Principal/AP) team sends out a monthly newsletter/blast that highlights upcoming events, reminders about attendance, dress code trends, reminders about upcoming early dismissal days, and teacher in-service days. Information boards should be strategically located throughout the building so that students know what events are approaching (club auditions, testing schedules, etc.), the criteria for earning prizes, goals and actuals for attendance, and any other culture related items, etc.

#### Practice

1. Provide a list of potential communication methods and model how one should be implemented (i.e. family newsletter). Have the leader draft their own version of the communication method and provide feedback on relevancy, timeliness, and applicability of the information therein. Repeat as needed for other communication methods.
2. Model setting a communication strategy and routine for recurring updates and events for specific times of the year. Have the leader draft their communication plan around those events and provide feedback on its efficiency, timeliness, mode of communication, and effectiveness at delivering the message.
3. Share how you would communicate a particular piece of information to families. Explain why you chose the specific communication method(s), the timing of the communication, and the language used. Identify another key piece of information that needs to be communicated with families and have the leader identify which communication methods they would use and have them craft the actual message. Provide feedback on how likely that information is to get to the desired audience in a timely manner, as well as the clarity of the message itself. Repeat with other items that require communication, varying the target audience.
4. With the leader, walk the building and/or peruse the website and note where displays are not up-to-date or have not been maintained. Support the leader in creating a plan to address them.

## STRAND 2: DATA DRIVEN LEADERSHIP

### CULTURE OUTCOME GOAL:

End of year culture goals are achieved and remain within 5% of those targets throughout the year.



## STRAND 2

**Leader Action 1 - Year-long goals for culture are created and tracked on a shared spreadsheet throughout the school year. Students and staff are aware of the goals, which are referenced regularly. Staff uses historical data to proactively plan for goal achievement.**

### Nickname – Culture goals

**Rationale –** Over the past four or five years, my favorite basketball team was an above average three-point shooting team, at least in terms of percentages. The problem was the team didn't attempt enough three-pointers each game, and this was especially true and glaring when they lost. In fact, they were near the bottom of the league in terms of three-point attempts per game, and this issue was causing them to lose more than they should. In response, the coach set a goal of shooting more three-pointers. But it wasn't a vague goal. He gave specific players goals for how many three-pointers they should shoot each game. Even the players got in on the goal-setting. One player told his teammate, "You should be taking 10 three-pointers each game." This type of team buy-in and public goal-setting meant that everyone owned a piece of the team's success. There were no secrets. If you watched a game, you would see players getting on each other when they didn't shoot when they had the opportunity at an open three-pointer. Just like my basketball team, your culture team needs goals that are achievable and tracked publicly for all to see. Everyone, from the principal to the teachers to the students, needs to be bought-in and committed to these goals. Without them, defining success, let alone achieving it, will be near impossible.

**What it looks like –** Prior to the start of the school year, culture team members review previous culture data metrics (attendance, retention, graduation, behavior infractions, rewards, etc.) and set attainable goals for the upcoming school year for each metric. These goals are published, tracked, and shared with all staff and students. Routinely throughout the year, the data is updated and shared, so that all stakeholders know how the school is performing. The culture leader sends weekly emails to the staff with major data updates, or shares this data with the principal to include in staff-wide emails.

#### Practice

1. Using sample or school data, share a hypothetical or authentic deep dive into a specific school culture trend. Model a summary statement of that trend, along with a long-term goal and the shorter-term weekly and monthly goals. Provide a data tracking mechanism that can be used to simply, efficiently, and transparently share progress towards the goal.
2. Ask the leader to come to a meeting with current data for culture metrics (if no metrics exist, create a 4-6 week window to have baseline data collected). Have the leader take stock of the data and identify 1-2 statements that summarize the most urgent gaps. Probe their thinking - 'if this gap was closed, would our school definitively move closer toward our values or yearly intended outcomes?' Then, have the leader set an end-of-quarter goal metric. Working backwards from that goal, have the leader identify monthly and weekly thresholds that must be met to make adequate progress toward the final goal metric. Identify the key actions each culture team member will take to support this goal.

## STRAND 2

**Leader Action 2 - Culture team members use walkthroughs and observations to gather data about the execution of systems and processes (classrooms, arrival, dismissal, transitions, lunch, recess, etc.). This data is used to monitor goals, prioritize tasks, and create proactive action plans.**

### Nickname – Data collection

**Rationale** – When my partner and I got engaged, I was ecstatic. The wedding planning was a whirlwind, and soon, we were four months out from the big day. I looked at myself in the mirror and I was not happy with how I looked. I had gained twenty-five pounds. So I set a goal of losing those pounds by our wedding day. Twenty-five pounds in four months seemed like a monumental task. With my soon-to-be partner's help, we broke down how I would get there. I began tracking my food intake. I'm a notorious snacker, if there is junk food about, I'll find it, eat it, and forget that I did so immediately when it comes to meal time. This, of course, is precisely how I gained that weight in the first place. I also began tracking my exercise. So I had a task: every time I ate something, I had to write it down. Every time I exercised, I wrote it down. I also had to weigh myself every day to see if the food and exercise decisions I was making were having an impact on my weight. While this tracking of my food intake and exercise was tedious, the results were clear and obvious--I was losing weight. I became even more motivated to hit my goals. And I did. In fact, I lost more weight than my initial goal...thirty-five pounds in all by my wedding day. The only way your culture team is going to hit their goals is by tracking the markers each day. With data in hand, your team can problem-solve effectively, proactively make adjustments, and celebrate when goals are hit.

**What it looks like** – All culture team members are assigned posts and daily duties during which they gather data around the execution of schoolwide systems and processes (the team can use a premade tracker or members can take notes, as long as all team members are aligned on how and what data is tracked). At the end of each day/week, each team member inputs their data into a larger tracker through which the culture team leader can analyze, gather trends, and action plan. Action plans focus on the most important trends, and have clearly identifiable next steps for all team members.

### Practice

1. Provide the leader with sample data collection templates/rubrics for culture and have them adopt, modify, or create their own. The rubric focus areas should directly align to schoolwide systems documentation and current weekly/monthly/quarterly schoolwide goals. Using sample data, model identifying a glow, grow, and theoretical action step.
2. Conduct a walkthrough together, pushing the leader to intentionally observe for the metrics of focus. Post walkthrough, have the leader identify trending wins and gaps. Have the leader synthesize the gaps and develop an action plan to address and follow up.

## STRAND 2

**Leader Action 3 - Student, staff, and school needs are supported through laser-focused action planning. Action plans exist that reflect data trends and aim toward improving the school (referrals, attendance, incidents and dean calls, etc.).**

### Nickname – Action Planning

**Rationale** – I have recently started playing video games again, and one game I am currently obsessed with is Madden. When I played this game as a kid, I used to just play the game. I'd take control of the players on offense and defense, call and execute the plays, and try to win. One of the newer ways you can play the game is by taking control of the entire franchise and overseeing every element that goes in the creation of a successful team: practicing, scouting college players, negotiating contracts, drafting players, hiring and firing coaches, signing free agents, etc. My current team has players on defense who are not only old, but their contracts are up soon. So what do I do? I assign scouts to different areas of the country to find their potential replacements. I prioritize hiring coaches who have backgrounds in developing players at those positions. I look for potential free agents on other teams who I could sign to a contract. I have an action plan to address a trend on my team: improving my defense through the replacement of older, expensive, players who are likely to or are already declining in performance.

**What it looks like** – Collecting data through walkthroughs and observations is the first step (S2.LA2). Step two is the analysis of the data. At recurring and routine intervals (weekly, bi-weekly, etc.), the culture team members meet to action plan around school trends. For example, the transitions to and from lunch are taking longer than they should, have increased incidences of student conflict, and have created issues with trash. Based on the data analysis, the culture team repositions team members during the transitions to address time and conflict, creates a competition to see which period can leave the cafeteria the cleanest, and appoints student leaders within each lunch.

#### Practice

1. Using walkthrough data (gathered using a rubric from S2.LA2), identify a specific trend in school culture. Provide a model PD/slide deck that addresses the trend, and share this with the leader. Model the talking points of the PD, including how you'd share/frame the data, the rationale, and the practice/next steps/follow-up.
2. Ask the leader to identify another highest-leverage culture trend and define the 'problem statement'; then work together to design a training agenda with sound rationale, a data presentation, a tight model/stamped action step, and clear follow-up metrics.
3. Have the leader film the delivery of the training session, watch it together, and then have them conduct a self-evaluation: was the data presented clearly? Did the leader model success effectively? Were the next steps clear and measurable? Did the communication align to the culture vision and goals? Ask the leader to identify a specific shift to make in either scripting or delivery. Then, have the leader script the shift into the next meeting plan.

## STRAND 2

**Leader Action 4 - Tiered and proactive supports are grounded in data to ensure student success (student breaks, 1-1 supports, reflection spaces, etc.).**

### Nickname – Data-Driven Tiered Supports

**Rationale** – About ten years ago, my favorite football team hired a new coach. One of the trends he noticed was that too many players were getting injured. It was much more than average compared to the rest of the league. He decided that each player was going to have an individualized health plan: their meals tailored to their specific needs, their hydration and sleep tracked, and their activity, heartrate, and oxygen levels monitored during practices to see when they were performing below their peak, which would be the time they would most likely get injured. Each player even had an individualized smoothie made for them daily by the team's nutritionist. Because the coach, nutritionist, and medical team were proactively using the player's individualized health data, they could make adjustments as needed. As a result, the team was one of the healthiest in the league. Your culture team needs to create individual plans based on data for the students in your school: some will need breaks, others will need reflection spaces, and others will need peer support groups, etc.

**What it looks like** – Through pinpoint data collection and analysis, IEPs, 504s, and behavioral support plans, the culture team has identified what students need to be successful. The plans for student support are communicated with all staff involved (culture team, 1-1s, teachers, students, families, etc.). For any new initiatives/supports, the culture team plans and delivers training for staff, including metrics, goals, and accountability measures. Follow-up happens at regularly scheduled intervals, which are tracked and shared with all stakeholders involved.

#### Practice

1. Model the creation and implementation of systematized tiered supports: who is involved, how is data collected, when do the various stakeholders meet, how are action steps decided upon, and how is the process monitored? Support the leader in adopting, modifying, or creating the system that they will use in their school. Provide feedback on stakeholder involvement, feasibility of the system, and efficiency in supporting student outcomes.
2. Create imaginary student data, complete with an applicable IEP, 504, or behavioral support plan. Using a model rubric/template, share a culture team support plan and explain your thinking for who, how, and when the team would address the student's needs. Be prepared to discuss the logistics and feasibility of the plan, including check-ins with the team, monitoring of its implementation, and follow-up with the student.
3. Using an imaginary student, have the leader write a support plan with the rubric/template. Provide feedback on the plan: is it efficient and practical? Does it maximize staff skill? Does it set up all involved for success? What type of pushback could they anticipate?

## STRAND 2

**Leader Action 5 - Triangulated support is evident amongst the staff. Critical staff members (social workers, special education staff, culture team members, etc.) meet regularly to discuss students and to plan for their support.**

### Nickname – Triangulated Support

**Rationale –** My friend was recently in a car accident. He suffered injuries to his neck, back, jaw, arm, and hand. For each of these injuries, he's had medical treatment from different specialist doctors, chiropractors, dentists, etc. The road to recovery has been long and arduous, and thankfully, none of his injuries were life-threatening. He is in the process of suing the driver at fault, and in order to make sure all of his injuries and losses are documented, his lawyer has had to coordinate depositions, take testimony and question the other driver, arrange for specialists and experts to document how the injuries have impacted his ability to work and his quality of life, and steer my friend through this very difficult time. If my friend's lawyer did not have all the evidence from all the doctors, specialists, experts, and witnesses, the case, which is proceeding to court soon, would be weak, uncoordinated, and likely unsuccessful. Just like my friend's lawyer needs all the information from all parties involved in order to present the strongest case possible, students need teachers, culture team members, social workers, special education staff, etc., to be in communication with each other so that everyone is on the same page. If one critical staff member is unaware of how another is interacting with and caring for a student, the odds increase that services are duplicated, but the more likely and far worse outcome is that services are contradictory, ineffective, or absent altogether.

**What it looks like –** Culture team members, social workers, and special education staff have recurring meetings on their calendars to discuss and plan for student support. Culture team members, social workers, and special education staff create agendas based on culling data from the culture system database to identify and target students who need additional supports (i.e. students who have been removed from class, gotten into fights, skipped school, are chronically tardy, etc.). The agendas are data-driven and created and shared 24 hours in advance. All staff have input into the agendas, which have a stated outcome of creating next steps and supports for the identified students, including each team member's role in executing those supports. Plans currently in place for students are discussed, modified, or scrapped altogether based on their effectiveness.

### Practice

1. Provide a sample system for how triangulation of support looks when implemented with fidelity. Model how communication involves and includes all parties, urgent issues are addressed, each party owns a portion of the system/plan/data, and routine maintenance of support plans are attended to. Support the leader in crafting their triangulation of support plan and provide feedback on equity of voice, timeliness of the interactions and communication, and ownership of the content.
2. Share a model agenda for how critical staff members should interact and plan for student support. Detail how each staff member owns a portion of the agenda, it is complete 24 hours in advance of the meeting, supported with data, and that the action steps are collaboratively decided upon. Have the leader modify the example or create their own to meet their needs.
3. Provide a scenario with a sample student and explain how you'd complete your portion of the agenda, the data you'd prioritize, and the next steps you'd hope to align on. With other sample data, have the leader complete their portion of the decided upon agenda template. Push the leader to defend the data they chose and whether the next steps would be likely to be agreed to by the other members of the critical care team.



## STRAND 3: JOY IN EQUITY

### CULTURE OUTCOME GOAL:

Staff, students, and families surveyed agree that the school community is joyful, equitable, and inclusive of all students.



### STRAND 3

**Leader Action 1 - Diversity, equity, and inclusion are prioritized. Staff members value the diverse nature of students and reinforce this through their daily language and actions. Staff members are engaged in ongoing training and professional development that enhances their ability to lead without bias (book studies, PLCs, expert-led PD, etc.).**

## Nickname – DEI

**Rationale** – Thanksgiving is my absolute favorite holiday, and every year, for as long as I can remember, it has unfolded in a similar way: my mom cooks turkey, stuffing, sweet potato pie, and a vegetable of some description, and all of our friends and family bring a dish or two, along with the beverage of their choosing. Guests arrive at my parents' house around four p.m. to snack, drink, and watch football. All of Thanksgiving, the food, the family, the football, it all brings me so much joy. All except one component. At my parents' house, there were always two tables: the adult table and the kids' table. When I was a kid, I naturally was seated at the kids' table with my friend Danny, my brother, and my brother's friend Garrett. The purpose of the kids' table made sense to me, but at the same time, when I was sitting there, I always felt left out. Who cares who sits where? It's not like the tables were in separate rooms and the adults had conversations not privy to our younger ears. The tables were next to each other and the conversations loud and public, though the kids rarely contributed to these adult dialogues. Even amongst family and friends, my feelings of otherness persisted. In our schools, we must be careful, purposeful, and diligent to ensure that not only does everyone have a seat at the table, but that their voices are heard, recognized, and valued.

**What it looks like** – Classroom and hallway displays represent the diverse nature of the student and staff populations. The student handbook is updated regularly to make sure its language is appropriate and welcoming. Staff interactions in classrooms and hallways are warm, positive, and inclusive. The school hires experts to train all staff in on-going professional development in best practices to leading and teaching in inclusive ways. PLCs or book studies occur regularly and at routine intervals, driving best practices and furthering inclusivity experienced by all stakeholders.

### Practice

1. Share a model presentation series, book study, or PLC scope & sequence that addresses a gap in DEI metrics, being certain to model how the presentations, study, or scope and sequence would address the need. Have the leader examine their school's DEI metrics to identify a gap. Support the leader in creating the scope and sequence for their training series, book study, or PLC (if no DEI metrics exist, support the leader in creating a survey/data collection tool to gather DEI metrics and disaggregate data).
2. Model the framing conversation the leader will need to have with staff to implement the training series, book study, or PLC. Be sure to address the rationale with data, norms for staff behavior that promote equity, and resources that will buttress the work. Have the leader script their own framing conversation and provide feedback on how the message will be received based on the above criteria.
3. Provide a scenario that would show a lack of inclusivity or cultural awareness. Model how you'd address it with the individuals involved, including the rationale for the conversation, its impact on the school and community, and next steps. Provide another scenario, have the leader script out their response, and then role-play that scenario.

### STRAND 3

**Leader Action 2 - The connection between the school culture team and the academic team is evident and used to boost achievement. The teams engage in joint walkthroughs, dual support of teaching and learning, and action planning to drive teacher and student outcomes.**

## Nickname – Culture Team and Academic Team Partnership

**Rationale –** When I was in high school, I got good grades, stayed out of trouble, and did what my parents asked. In my junior year, I started staying out late with friends on weeknights, and my grades began to suffer. My parents noticed immediately and I was grounded for a month. But I wasn't just grounded. They identified in which classes my grades were dropping and made me show them that I had completed my homework for those classes every night (and also all my classes, because my parents didn't mess around). They knew when my next report card was coming out and looked it over with me that same afternoon. My parents knew that my behavior was linked to my performance academically, so they made sure they were in lockstep in addressing both. The culture and academic team at your school need to be partnered in the same way my parents were, with each team supporting the other. Otherwise, you'll create an environment that breeds conflict and resentment, where the adults operate discordantly, and the result will be that your students suffer in the long run.

**What it looks like –** Routine and recurring joint walkthroughs/observations are scheduled between the academic and culture team. Before each walkthrough/observation, the team meets to norm on key look-fors, indicators, and focus areas based on previous school trainings (these can be grade, teacher, time of day, or initiative driven, etc.). After the walkthrough/observation, the culture and academic teams meet to debrief, analyze data from the walkthrough or culled from the culture system database/dashboard, and identify next steps for both the culture and academic teams. At ensuing meetings, previous next steps are at the top of the agenda.

### Practice

1. Using your model calendar (S1.LA6), identify times/places where the academic and culture team can systematize collaboration and what that collaboration entails (i.e. culture team leader attends an academic team meeting once a week, and the academic team leader attends a behavior intervention plan meeting once a week as well). Have the leader pull up their calendar and identify when and where interaction and collaboration will occur, including how each team member will participate. Push the leader to explain their rationale for this collaboration and how it will benefit both groups as well as students.
2. Provide a model walkthrough rubric/data collection template that merges academics and culture. Using sample data, model how you would analyze it, create goals to address any gaps or misalignments, and identify next steps. Have the leader analyze another sample data set. Push the leader's thinking: how are teachers using the culture of the classroom to promote academic success? Where is that link undermined? Why? How are teachers using academics to boost the culture of the classroom? What is causing that falter?
3. Role-play a conversation between the culture and academic team leader. In the first scenario, the culture and academic team leader agree and can pinpoint next steps that align with both team's visions, goals, and priorities. In ensuing role-plays, give increasingly more pushback as the academic team leader. Support the leader in crafting language to navigate the disagreement(s) to land on next steps that benefit both teams.
4. Have the culture leader and an academic team leader modify the rubric to meet the school's needs, or create their own. Do a joint walkthrough with the culture and academic team using their rubric/data collection template and observe the meeting afterward. Take notes and provide feedback on how well the culture leader is able to navigate towards culture/academic team alignment and concrete next steps and goals.

### STRAND 3

#### Leader Action 3 - School rituals are student-centric, well planned, communicated, and meaningful.

## Nickname – School Rituals

**Rationale** – Friends of ours recently had a birthday party for their one year-old. We milled about in their backyard, caught up, drank beer and wine, snacked on appetizers (mini eggrolls and pigs in a blanket? yum!), and had a great time. When it came time for the cake, we all gathered round and sang happy birthday. Then the parents opened the presents (their son sat in a high chair, pointing, smiling, and garbling bits of words). Everyone paid their respects to the child of the hour, who did make a show of crawling about, pulling himself up, and taking a few jumbly steps, but make no mistake, this was a party for adults. In your school, rituals from back to school night, report card conferences, extracurricular activities, field trips, and assemblies cannot be a one-year old's birthday party. Students must be the driving force around which all such rituals are planned, coordinated, and executed. The communication around these rituals must be precise and shared well in advance of the actual event. Yes, there are times for events that are teacher and adult-centric, but the vast majority of your school rituals should highlight all the great things your students are doing.

**What it looks like** – Before the school year begins, all leadership team members meet to discuss, plan, and calendar the major and recurring school rituals that contribute to the fabric of the school and identity of the school community. School rituals are backwards-planned to account for desired outcomes for students, and team members consider how students will experience the rituals/events in their planning. At the beginning of the year, the calendar is shared with students, families, and staff, and each month the calendar is updated and reshared (email, newsletters, phone blasts, etc.). Staff attendance and responsibilities are communicated weeks in advance and through routine email blasts.

### Practice

1. Share a model school calendar that has allocated time for major student rituals (assemblies, community meetings, concerts, sporting events, field trips, etc.). Have the leader revise their calendar to include any missing rituals for the rest of the year.
2. Pick one ritual and detail the thought process behind where it lands on the calendar, the ideal student experience, the steps necessary to create that experience, and the communication required for all stakeholders involved. Have the leader repeat this process for another student ritual. Ask them probing questions: why this day? How will you ensure the ritual is safe, welcoming, and student friendly? What stakeholder involvement is needed? What training (if any) do the stakeholders require? What are some potential disruptions to the ritual and how will you handle them?
3. Using that same school ritual, model the thought process and planning behind delegating roles and responsibilities. Who is responsible for what by when? Why? What does execution look like? How will those responsibilities be monitored? What kind of support do staff need to execute their responsibilities? Have the leader choose one of their school rituals and backwards plan in the same way. Provide feedback on the alignment and clarity of responsibilities to the desired student experience. Repeat for other school rituals.
4. Have the leader film a student ritual and then watch it together. Analyze it from a leader and student's perspective. What went well? Where were there misses? What actions led to successes? What actions contributed to the misses? Have the leader identify a specific change to make and then script or plan that change.

### STRAND 3

**Leader Action 4 - The social-emotional needs of students are prioritized. Staff members are well trained in executing a diverse range of supports for a diverse student body (restorative conversations, calm down corners, SEL lessons, etc.).**

## Nickname – Social Emotional Learning

**Rationale –** One of reasons why I love my wife so much is how she responds to me when I’m stressed. Sometimes, she takes me out for a meal, sometimes she gives me a hug, or she might encourage me to hang out with friends, walk the dog, or play golf. Sometimes, it’s as simple as saying, “Let’s watch something together, whatever you want,” which usurps our ethos of compromise around TV watching. After being together so long, my wife has myriad tools and strategies to support me in these times. In your school, your staff need to be trained to handle a variety of situations in order to prioritize and support the social-emotional needs of your students. One size doesn’t fit all, and we must be prepared to find the shoe that fits, so to speak.

**What it looks like –** Culture team members train teachers and staff to execute SEL programming and curricula that center student belonging and restoration in the classroom and school community (circles, community meetings, mindfulness, calm down corners, restorative practices, responsive classrooms, etc.). These programs are executed with consistency and fidelity, and each team member has a variety of best practices to draw from when handling an issue. Teachers and staff are normed on how to respond to student needs and take ownership of addressing those needs within the classroom. Escalated incidents follow school protocol and are handled with dexterity from all parties.

### Practice

1. Using imagined school metrics, provide a scenario which highlights a gap in SEL at a school. Explain how you would select a specific SEL activity, curriculum, or practice. Detail the steps you would take to train staff, the scope and sequence to its implementation, and the goals you would set based on the scenario. Have the leader examine their school’s SEL metrics to identify a gap (you may need to help the leader in creating a survey or assessment tool to measure this). Support the leader in picking the appropriate SEL approach, including the creation and calendaring of the SEL scope and sequence.
2. Provide a slide deck/presentation series that addresses the SEL need. Model the talking points of the PD, including how you’d share/frame the need, the rationale, and the practice/next steps/follow-up. Have the leader modify the deck to fit their SEL program, the agenda for the first training, and then script out their framing conversation. Provide feedback on their rationale, the clarity of their practice, and actionable next steps.
3. Have the leader film the delivery of the training session, watch it together, and then have them conduct a self-evaluation: was the program and scope & sequence presented clearly? Did the leader model the skill/approach effectively? Were the next steps clear and measurable? Ask the leader to identify a specific shift to make in either scripting or delivery. Then, have the leader script the shift into the next meeting plan.
4. If there is an SEL curriculum or defined time and implementation of SEL programming, do a walkthrough with the leader during this time. Note trends: is the program being executed with fidelity? Are student voices and needs being addressed? Debrief with the leader, land on potential action steps, and script out those steps as needed.

### STRAND 3

**Leader Action 5 - Leaders provide multiple opportunities and pathways for students to demonstrate their leadership, interests, and exceptionalities (student council, principal advisory groups, student-led clubs, extracurricular activities, etc.).**

## Nickname – Student Leadership

**Rationale –** I love a good buffet. A buffet is the ultimate experience in choice. Do I feel like mozzarella sticks, salad, calamari, or soup to start? Would I prefer chicken parmigiana, popcorn shrimp, or prime rib for my main? I can try any and all of it. The other great thing about the buffet is I can try something mostly risk-free. If I don't like the pasta primavera, I'm not stuck with it. Your school needs to be the buffet of student leadership opportunities. Some students prefer the stage, others the computer, and yet others the newspaper room. Often, these preferences change over time. The only way students find out what they like and where they excel is by trying as many different options as possible.

**What it looks like –** At the beginning of the school year, students are informed of the many varieties and opportunities they may take to explore their interests (extracurriculars fair, announcements, flyers, teacher recommendations, etc.). Staff provide sign-up sheets, paperwork necessary for participation, descriptions of each of the activities, etc. Throughout the school year, leaders observe each of the activities to show support for both students and staff. Students are surveyed at the end of the school year regarding what other clubs, activities, extracurricular opportunities they are interested in.

### Practice

1. Model the thought process behind creation and design of one student leadership opportunity that recognizes and supports interests of all kinds (sports, electronics, arts, writing, music, government, academics etc.). Explain how you calendar, identify potential leaders, create the space, purchase resources, identify and promote student interest, ensure its quality, monitor the program, etc. Have the leader analyze their school's student leadership and identify one missing opportunity and plan in the same way. Provide feedback on the plan's cohesiveness and likelihood of success. Push the leader: what does it look like when it's facilitated well? How does it progress over the course of the year? What types of resources will be needed? How much time each week/month should students expect to commit? Who will oversee it? Where will students have ownership? Repeat for other student leadership opportunities.
2. Share an extracurricular activity proposal form and model its completion (target audience, frequency and timing of activity, max capacity of attendees, resources/space needed, desired outcomes, health/safety concerns, etc.). Have the leader adopt, modify or create their own form and share with staff and/or students.
3. Provide a template/model for an extracurriculars fair. Explain how it would be run: stands/booths/tables, signage, participants, timing, location(s), promotion of the event, etc. Have the leader design and calendar their own extracurriculars fair and provide feedback on stakeholder involvement and actionability of the plan.
4. Share a potential walkthrough tool/rubric for monitoring any extracurricular activity. With the leader, attend an extracurricular event and take notes together and debrief: was the activity facilitated effectively and with fidelity to its proposal? How was attendance? Were students afforded leadership opportunities?

### STRAND 3

**Leader Action 6 - Restorative practices, a Positive Behavior Incentive System (PBIS), and social-emotional learning programming are used in balance with a progressive and logical system of consequences to reinforce positive school culture and joy.**

## Nickname – Positive Behavior Management

**Rationale** – To this point, all of the previous rationales given have been related to something outside of school, a real-world, universal, or personal experience. I'm going to change tact here. I worked with a school that struggled with culture. Name a problem, and it existed there: attendance was spotty, students dropped out or changed schools, fights broke out routinely, students wandered the halls, and sometimes they walked into other classrooms simply because they felt like it. There were a lot of factors that contributed to this environment, but the thing that really stuck out to me was the lack of positive behavior management. There was no way for students to earn anything, restorative practices lived and died in the social worker's office, and social-emotional programming was administered with mostly lip-service. You know what the school did have? Consequences, lunch detention, after school detention, in-school suspension, after school suspension, reinstatement meetings, and expulsion hearings. As far as I could tell, the discipline system existed purely as a deterrent. There was no incentive for positive behavior (other than not getting in trouble), and the systems for addressing misbehavior were punitive in nature. As a result, joy was generally absent, teachers fought to control students, and students wriggled under the thumb of an atmosphere rife with oppression.

**What it looks like** – Staff utilize the PBIS, SEL, and restorative practices with the same fidelity and consistency as the system of consequences. These practices create the space for student identity, voice, a supportive environment, situational appropriateness, and data for equity. Data tracking for PBIS, SEL, and restorative practices are collected and shared in the same manner as other metrics (walk-throughs/ observations, surveys, staff and student interviews, etc.). Rewards and consequences are consistent, clearly communicated across the school (teachers and students know), and get similar attention, time, and support as the consequence system.

### Practice

1. Share a model of how a combination of PBIS, SEL, and restorative practices could be instituted at the school. Detail the leading indicators of their effectiveness, metrics to set goals, training necessary for staff, model tracking systems, and the calendaring of routine check points. Have the leader create a plan for instituting PBIS, SEL, or restorative practices and provide feedback. Push the leader's thinking: is this what students and staff need? How will the plan positively impact school culture? Who will be trained and how?
2. Have the leader examine the school's metrics for the system of logical consequences and set comparable goals and metrics for their PBIS, SEL and/or restorative practices. Support the leader in using/modifying the model tracking system and then calendaring the routine check points.
3. Provide a slide deck that rolls out the introduction of the PBIS, SEL, and restorative practices initiative, complete with rationale, steps for implementation, practice activities, goals, and next steps. Have the leader script out their framing conversation and provide feedback on their language, rationale, and clarity.
4. Have the leader film the PD and watch the video together. Analyze it for the effectiveness of the practice activity and alignment of the next steps. Identify an action to address any misses and have the leader script it for the next planning meeting.

### STRAND 3

**Leader Action 7 - All staff members are purposefully celebrated and recognized regularly for growth, leadership, and success. Staff is regularly brought together to build camaraderie and community outside of the school (staff joy committee, birthday celebrations, staff awards, etc.).**

## Nickname – Staff Celebration and Recognition

**Rationale –** The statistics about employee celebration and recognition are staggering. Here are a few: 78% of US workers say that being appreciated motivates them at their job; 69% of employees would work harder if they felt their efforts were better appreciated; 88% of employees that receive strong performance recognition are proactively innovating; nearly 65% of employees want more feedback than they're currently getting; and disengaged employees cost their companies over \$500 billion annually. Add it all up: employees want to be recognized, work harder and better when they are, and when they don't get enough of it, they actively cost their companies money. For schools, the consequences for unmotivated, underperforming, disengaged employees are two-fold: 1) the measurable cost in time and money of training and/or replacing that staff member, and 2) the immeasurable cost to the students' education.

**What it looks like -** Leaders positively recognize staff in email shoutouts every week with data and anecdotes collected through walkthroughs and observations. In meetings, staff are highlighted and celebrated for their efforts, growth, success, and dedication to school initiatives, focus areas, and/or goals. Staff birthdays are celebrated (perhaps with cake or cupcakes to recognize all those birthdays in a given month, or depending on the size of the staff, individually). After school happy hours, clubs, and events are promoted (i.e. tickets to a local sporting event, staff performances at poetry readings, etc.).

### Practice

1. Provide an email template for publicly recognizing staff, along with a model that includes data, quotes, anecdotes, and/or pictures. Have the leader examine staff metrics for the system of logical consequences, PBIS, SEL, and restorative conversations, identify a few staff members to publicly recognize, and script the language they'll use in the email. Provide feedback on conciseness and alignment of the metrics to culture goals/ priorities.
2. Do a joint walkthrough with the culture leader and collect evidence (anecdotes, quotes, pictures) to be included in the next email. Support and provide feedback to the leader as they script the email.
3. Provide a list of camaraderie building activities (book club, happy hour, birthday celebrations, etc.) and model how you would implement them. For teacher driven activities such as book clubs or happy hours, support the leader in identifying potential teacher leaders who might initiate such events. Model the conversation you would have approaching these teachers: touching on the opportunities, importance of camaraderie, that teacher's skills, and perhaps some initial perk for getting the activities started. Have the leader script out an initial conversation and provide feedback on how well the language would make the teacher feel valued.



### STRAND 3

**Leader Action 8 - Leaders actively engage families/communities through regular proactive outreach by creating opportunities and avenues for feedback and dialogue (home visits, open houses, school tours, family nights, workshops, family advisory committee, etc.).**

## Nickname – Family and Community Engagement

**Rationale –** We hired a wedding planner named Lisa before our wedding. She was amazing. She came to our apartment to get to know us, arranged for us to visit the venue, the caterers, the florist, helped us select the color theme and decorations, accompanied us to the stationary store to feel the paper of the invitations, and did all of this while being flexible to our schedule and time constraints. Throughout the whole process leading up to the wedding, Lisa helped us know exactly where we stood, what needed to be done, what needed to change, and generally helped us stay sane. She was a phone, text, or email away, and most of the time, she initiated the conversation. We felt supported and safe. We felt confident that the big day would go off without a hitch (it did). You are the wedding planner for each student's education. It is your responsibility to make sure families feel supported and confident that their child is in good hands. You have to communicate with them in a variety of ways, be flexible to their schedules, and earn their trust each step of the way. Treat each school year like it's the runway to move up day or graduation (wedding day), and support all families in making sure their child gets there as smoothly as possible.

**What it looks like –** All types of family and community engagement are outlined and calendared before the year begins, and those events are routine and recurring as needed (best practice: families/communities have at least one touchpoint with school leaders every month). The leader connects with families at the beginning of every school year to replace outgoing members of the PTA or family action committees. Family and community engagement activities vary in time, location, method of communication, and frequency.

### Practice

1. Share a model calendar detailing all the ways in which families/communities can engage. Outline how one event will be communicated, the staff required, their responsibilities and any training they may need, as well as leadership opportunities for families/community members. Have the leader calendar and plan one specific family outreach activities and provide feedback on its timing, feasibility, training required, and communication needed. Repeat for additional family outreach activities.
2. Model a sample communication to families, such as a letter inviting them to a workshop. Highlight the greetings, clarity of the language (perhaps the letter is in multiple languages depending on the student population), format, etc. Have the leader write their own letter and provide feedback on its succinctness, conciseness, and clarity.

### STRAND 3

**Leader Action 9 - Relational pathways are created through building community partnerships with local businesses and neighborhood stakeholders (PAL/community center, local universities/ colleges, local police district, local businesses, etc.).**

## Nickname – Community Partnerships

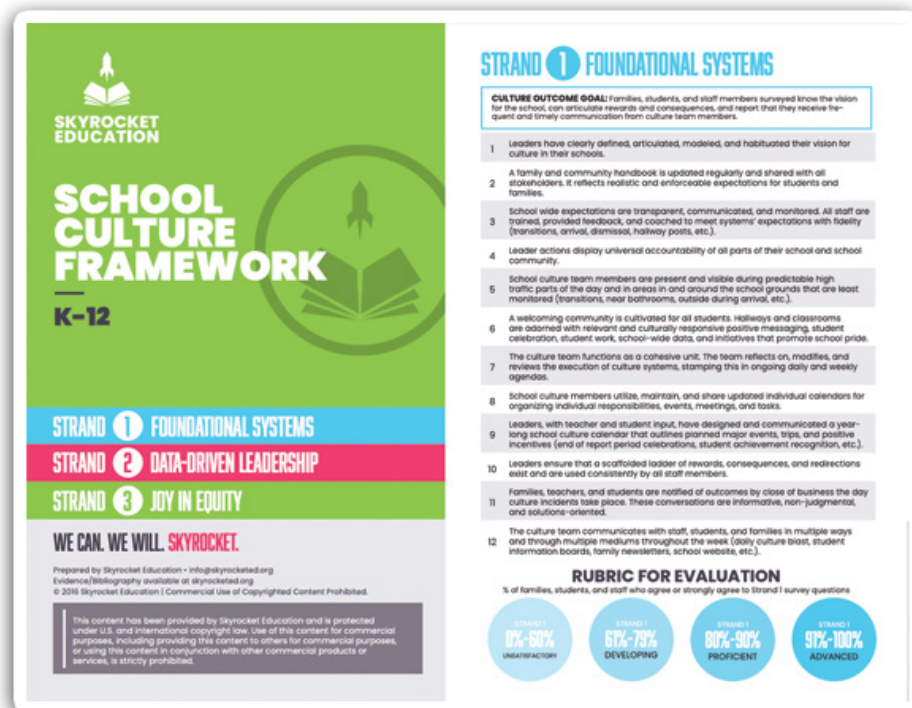
**Rationale –** Think of a concierge at a hotel. Guests arrive in a new city, tired from travel, unsure of where everything is. The concierge hands them a pamphlet that has a map (with the hotel clearly marked), lists of restaurants, things to do, tourist destinations/attractions, and even hands them a few vouchers or coupons should they visit any of the places the hotel recommends. The businesses in the city have a relationship with the hotel, and have in fact given the hotel the coupons in exchange for their recommendation. It's a symbiotic relationship designed to ensure tourists enjoy their experience so much that they come back and recommend it to their friends. As the school leader, you must establish relationships with local businesses and stakeholders so that your students have the opportunity to interact and have positive experiences with them.

**What it looks like –** Before each school year, leaders reach out to local stakeholders and community organizations to foster positive relationships and build connections. The leader explains the school's vision and goals, where the school currently stands, and how the local stakeholders and the school can support each other. Once established, community outreach is fostered through events throughout the year, including speaking engagements, internships, and site visits, and after school programming.

### Practice

1. Provide a sample action plan for creating and maintaining community partnerships. Explain the timing, steps, stakeholder involvement, outcome goals, and frequency of touchpoints. Have the leader adopt, modify, or create their own action plan and provide feedback on its alignment with vision and values, reciprocity between internal and external stakeholders, and practicality of the plan.
2. Share a model conversation/pitch to a potential community partner. Name the talking points that must be hit: the school's goals and how the potential community partner and the school can support each other, and the vision for how the community partner can interact with the school/students, and next steps for securing the partnership. Have the leader script how they would approach a hypothetical partner and role-play. Provide feedback on the clarity of the message, co-dependent nature of the relationship, and actionable next steps.
3. Provide a sample plan for engagement from a community partner. Detail the timing of the events, how the students will interact with the partner and how the partner will interact with the students, the proposed goals for the partnership, as well as check-points throughout the year to document progress. Have the leader map out as much of this plan as possible, since this will require the input of the external stakeholders. Provide feedback on the practicality of the plan, whether the touchpoints will elicit the desired goals, and the balancing of responsibilities.

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