

Central School District

Equitable Community Engagement for Student Success

The Board and district are committed to a shared vision of equitable community engagement as an ongoing and intentional process of building trusting relationships, sharing power/shared decision-making, and working collaboratively with all stakeholders toward educational equity. The Board believes that community engagement is critical to achieving equitable outcomes, lasting impact, innovative solutions, and community support. As civic institutions, schools work best when they have the support of their communities, when they model democratic practices, and when they give community members opportunities to be heard and involved. Schools that equitably engage with their communities also safeguard important work during staff turnover and district leadership changes, more creatively address challenges, and develop shared trust and commitment with community partners.

The Board is committed to building and sustaining equitable community engagement practices throughout the Central School District.

NOTE: It is important for school board members to review this policy on an annual basis. This policy is purposefully aspirational and outlines actions and behaviors for school board members both collectively and individually. A transition in membership of the Board might also create a good opportunity to develop or adopt an equitable community engagement policy if one is not already part of your policy manual. This policy provides a blueprint for both formal and informal relationship-building and engagement. Its success depends on deep and meaningful relationships, and nothing in this policy serves as a substitute for relationship-building. Building equitable and mutual relationships is the foundation of any and all community engagement efforts or work.

The Board recognizes that a school community consists of individuals both within the schools themselves and beyond, and thus uses the language of “community members” to include that broad membership: students, teachers, school staff, parents, caregivers, families, residents, and taxpayers of the district. In particular, the Board understands that community members include individuals and groups who, whether as students or as adults, may have been historically kept from fully participating in schools and other civic institutions due to their race, ethnicity, age, gender, sexual orientation, income level, religion, language, disability, or other facets of their identity. With that in mind, the Board is committed to ensuring equitable processes and pathways for engagement, as well as equitable outcomes for students and families.

To that end, the Board recognizes that for engagement to be both effective and equitable, an array of strategies is required; strategies may include providing information in a timely and accessible way, soliciting feedback and ideas on school programs and operations, and providing opportunities for community members to serve in leadership roles and make decisions. The



Board affirms that no matter the activity, it is critical to identify and shape engagement opportunities so that strategies build upon each other to result in sharing power/shared decision-making.

NOTE: The practices and principles below are examples of best practices in equitable community engagement. When selecting the practices and principles that are appropriate for your specific context, communities will need to weigh the financial implications, the opportunity to phase in and work toward full implementation, and the needs and desires of your community. This policy could be adopted wholesale, if it is right for your context. It could also be adapted in any number of ways; what honors and protects the work in one community may be inappropriate in another. What matters is that this policy codifies a commitment to concrete practices aligned to the principles of equitable community engagement in your local community, not that each engagement activity necessarily aligns discreetly with one category or another.

A. Providing Information

Information includes but is not limited to academic progress reports, details about school and district activities, and information relating to school and district governance. The following are practices and principles of information-sharing that the district and each school will adhere to in all communications:

1. **Translation and Interpretation:** The district and each school will provide translation and interpretation services as necessary.
2. **District and School Communications:** District and school communications will be designed to be accessible to all community members, regardless of their formal education level. District and school communications will avoid technical jargon, acronyms, and other types of language that exclude those who are not professional educators.
 - a. Communications will be provided using a variety of formats and platforms, including social media.
 - b. The district and each school will regularly review and refine its communications practices by seeking and integrating feedback from community members about both the content of its communications and its communications processes.
3. **Data:** The district commits to regularly sharing transparent and disaggregated data about student performance, student experience, and strategic plan priorities. When sharing data, the district will present the data by school (as appropriate) as well by race, ethnicity, language, gender, disability status, and economic disadvantage. When publicly reporting disaggregated data, the district will adhere to best practices around protecting student privacy, particularly when reporting the performance of disaggregated groups with small population sizes. The district will also provide explanatory information so that the public is able to interpret, understand, and make meaning of the data presented. Strategies for data-sharing might include annual district- and school-level report cards, a yearly state-of-the-district address, or a standing data dashboard that displays real-time data.

B. Encouraging Involvement

The following are practices and principles the district will adhere to in all its efforts to encourage

family and community involvement in all aspects of school and district work:

1. **Family and Caregiver Engagement:** The Board recognizes and embraces the diverse ways that families can be involved in their children’s education, including communicating high expectations, monitoring their children’s performance, guiding their children’s education, supporting learning at home, and advocating for their children.¹ The Board is committed to nurturing these roles by providing resources and capacity-building for families and caregivers—as appropriate, in partnership with community organizations (e.g., adult literacy and continuing education, regular academic data-sharing, home visits, ongoing positive communication, modeling of learning support strategies, goal-setting strategies, etc.).
2. **Relationship-Building:** In their professional capacity, district leaders and staff are strongly encouraged to build relationships, mutual understanding, and trust with community members, particularly with those who have historically been marginalized. The Board recognizes that while other investments are also essential to sustain and propel involvement, relationships among educators, students, families, and community members remain the primary driver of equitable engagement.
3. **Removing Barriers:** The Board is committed to doing everything within its power to remove barriers to engagement for community members. The district will partner with community-based organizations and community members to implement strategies and best practices such as providing food, on-site childcare, transportation, and interpretation and translation services as necessary and applicable. District leaders will work with community members to proactively identify potential barriers to their involvement and will mitigate them in a timely manner.
4. **Professional Development:** The Board is committed to providing all staff, educators, and district leaders with the professional tools required to promote and enable equitable community engagement and relationship-building (e.g., training and resources related to family engagement, student voice, educational equity, understanding bias, meeting facilitation for diverse groups, etc.).
5. **Soliciting Feedback:** District leaders and staff are encouraged to actively seek out feedback and input from students, families, and other community members. Feedback may be solicited via surveys, focus groups, and/or community conversations.

C. Sharing Power/Shared Decision-Making

NOTE: “Sharing power” or “shared power” might not be the right language to use in every district or community. Think about the appropriate naming and structures for codifying greater and more diversified opportunities for decision-making in your district and how to frame those conversations with local community members, leaders, and policymakers. Some alternate framing or language might include “shared decision-making” or “shared and transparent decision-making.”

¹ Flamboyan Foundation. *Five Roles Families Play to Accelerate Student Learning*. www.flamboyanfoundation.org

Sharing power/shared decision-making means intentionally using resources to engage equitably with all members of the district community when making decisions that affect the community. The following are practices and principles that the district will adhere to in all its efforts around sharing power/shared decision-making:

1. **Hiring and Recruitment:** The Superintendent will establish a process for community (students, teachers, school staff, parents, caregivers, families, residents, and taxpayers of the district) involvement in hiring and recruitment processes in the district and in each of our schools.
2. **Leadership Structures:** The district is committed to creating or modifying structures and processes that move beyond simply increasing participation toward truly shared decision-making with a particular emphasis on removing barriers for historically marginalized groups in our community. To that end, the Superintendent will work with building and district leadership to diversify membership on the formal leadership structures of the district and schools to include students, families, and community members.
 - a. The Superintendent will include community members, students, and families in determining how community and student leaders are selected.
 - b. The goal of this process will be to establish student membership on both building and district leadership teams as well as family and student leadership structures with authentic decision-making authority on topics that are central to the functioning of our district and schools.
 - c. In the development and implementation of any district processes, the Superintendent will prioritize responsiveness to staff, student, and community input and feedback as well as clear and timely communication about the process and its outcomes.
3. **Foundational Documents and District Vision:** District and school leaders will partner with the community to regularly revisit and revise the district mission and core beliefs as necessary to reflect community priorities. When the district does its strategic planning, it will attend to equity and engagement as priorities in both the process of developing the plan and the goals and commitments of the plan itself. As discussed elsewhere, the district will regularly and systematically involve community members in the review of progress toward the goals of the plan.
4. **Partnerships:** The district will develop formal and informal partnerships with community-based organizations, families, and individual community members premised on reciprocity, transparency, and the belief that community members and the assets they bring must be integrally involved in ensuring all students are successful in our schools. The Board celebrates the unique contributions that local organizations and individuals make in providing opportunities to our students and families for learning and growth and seeks to engage them in identifying priorities, taking collaborative action, responding to challenges, and leveraging opportunities.

NOTE: Like all practices codified in this policy, the success of these structures is dependent on deep and intentional relationship-building, an examination of individual bias, and an equity lens. These are skills that can be cultivated but not meaningfully established through policy. Think about the accompanying practices that need to be created or cultivated in your community and how (and when) a thoughtful policy could influence their development and longevity.

The district recognizes that the success of our students is a shared responsibility and necessitates a deep commitment to collaboration. As the Board works to implement the practices and principles of this section, it will include the beliefs captured here in all seminal district documents, including the strategic plan and the mission, vision, and core beliefs of the Central School District.

Cross Reference

AD: Educational Philosophy

AF: Comprehensive Plan

GCFB: Recruiting and Hiring of Administrative Staff

IHBEC: Interpreter and Translation Services for Speakers of Languages Other Than English

IKCA: Reports to Parents/Guardians

JFB: Student Involvement in Decision Making

KA: Goals for School-Community-Parent Relations

KB: School and Family Partnership

KGB: Community Involvement in Decision Making

KM: Relations with Community Organizations

Approved: 00/00/0000

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