A PEATC

Do You Know….

Fact Sheet for Virginia's Professionals Working with Families
Community Engagement and Schools

What is Community and How Does it Affect Schools?

"**Community**" is both a feeling and a set of relationships between people. People create and help communities to meet needs [and experience]. Members of a community have a feeling of trust, belonging, safety, and caring for each other. They have an individual and shared feeling that they can, as part of the community, impact their surroundings and each other. *(Chavis and Lee 2015).*

Each community has a unique set of systems, cultures, and resources. **Developing important and lasting systems for safe and supportive school environments requires communities, and the people within them, to be front and center**. Addressing hard problems requires change within and across communities and local systems and among the people working and living within them. **It is also important to remember that people are part of more than one community.** They may be part of school, work, faith, ethnic, sexual orientation, gender, disability or even a social media community. Different communities provide different levels of relationship and support.

Schools are part of the community. The community can support the school and the school can support the community. **When a community supports student success, the entire school has increased access to community resources**. The community also has an opportunity to broaden its investment in positive youth and family outcomes.

What about Families of Students with Disabilities?

Students with disabilities and their families are part of the school and broader community. However, they often face increased stress and demands. **Some students are educated in separate classrooms or schools which can lead to families and students feeling disassociated from the larger school community**.

Schools and communities need to create a welcoming and inclusive environment for students with disabilities and their families. Broader community engagement can also contribute to student success by providing equal opportunities for socialization, recreation, worship, internships, employment opportunities, etc. Creating positive relationships and sustaining them, will require work and commitment by the school and its partners.

Community Engagement

"**Community engagement is a two-way street where the school, families, and the community actively work together**, creating networks of shared responsibility for student success. It is a tool that promotes civic well-being and that strengthens the capacity of schools, families, and communities to support young peoples' full development."
Coalition for Community Schools

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Six Keys to Community Engagement

When engaging diverse communities – school leaders must first consider their own readiness to engage. The *Coalition for Community Schools* put forth six keys to community engagement that help create optimal learning conditions for students:

1. **Know Where You are Going**—Start by creating a vision of what the school can look like and how to get there. **Ensure diverse viewpoints**.

2. **Share Leadership**-Actively involve parents, staff and community partners.

3. **Reach Out**. Be proactive in learning about the community around the school. Identify community resources that could help the school and school resources that can help the community.

4. **Don't Ignore the Elephant in the Room**. Recognize and embrace diversity within the school and broader community. **Promote open and honest discussion.**

5. **Tell Your School's Story**. Use stories, facts and figures to inspire people to get involved.

6. **Stay on Course**. Ensure the vision and plan stay at the heart of partnership and community engagement initiatives and think about long tern sustainability.

Creating Safe and Supportive School Environments

Using the **Six Keys**, including **implementing shared leadership** with families and community leaders, gives everyone a stake in the outcome and improves sustainability over time. **There will be barriers that have to be overcome**. To break through barriers and facilitate success, it is important to remember that communities are complex and diverse and that:

✓ All perspectives matter.

✓ Assumptions and values should be explicit.

✓ Inclusion is complex and not always easy to implement.

✓ Broadened definitions of knowledge and data may be necessary.

Without a sense of caring, there can be no sense of community.

Anthony J. D'Angelo

Resources:

What Is Community Anyway? , *Stanford Social Innovation Review, Chavis, D. and Lee,* K https://ssir.org/articles/entry/what_is_community_anyway

Sustaining Community: Families, Communities, the Environment https://sustainingcommunity.wordpress.com/2014/05/13/6-kyes/

Community & Family Engagement, *Coalition for Community Schools,* http://www.communityschools.org/assets/1/AssetManager/CommunityAndFamilyEngagement.pdf

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