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Module Eight: Strong Districts and Their Leadership Characteristic *Productive Working Relationships With Staff and Stakeholders*

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Productive Working Relationships With Staff and Stakeholders

Agenda

1. Objective

As a result of participating in this module, district leaders will become more sensitive to the importance of productive working relationships and better able to further the development of such relationships in their own districts.

2. Overview of relevant research:

Part 1 Internal District Relationships ([PowerPoint presentation](#))

3. Case Study: Waterloo Region District School Board

What can be learned from this case study about how to develop productive working relationship among staff?

- Overview of case study by senior leaders
- Discussion of written case study
- Debriefing of what was learned from the case study

4. Case Study: Superior Greenstone District School Board Parent Engagement Project

What can be learned from this case study about how to create productive working relationships between schools and parents/guardians?

- Overview of case study by senior leaders
- Discussion of written case study
- Debriefing of what was learned from the case study

5. Work Relationships Assessment Form

6. Full group discussion

- Participants identify other promising approaches to building productive internal district relationships used in their districts (similarities and differences with Waterloo Region District School Board and Superior Greenstone District School Board approaches).

Self-assessment

In order to assist you with your learning, use a rating scale in response to the following: (1 = not at all, 2 = a modest amount, 3 = significantly, 4 = a great deal)

Please indicate the extent to which you feel that participation in this module has extended your ability, or increased your awareness of the need, to address the following challenges associated with the creation of productive working relationships with staff and stakeholders in your school district.

Internal District Relationships

To what extent has participation in this module:

1. Helped you appreciate the importance of developing interconnected central office roles and fostering collaboration in the service of a widely shared set of district purposes?
2. Provided useful insights into the importance of frequent and cordial communication among staff?
3. Increased your awareness of the need to provide opportunities for school staffs to participate in system decisions and to have frequent contact with central office staff for support and assistance?
4. Encouraged you to have central office staff in schools frequently and to know most school staff members by name?

Relationships with Parents

To what extent has your participation in this module encouraged you to:

1. Provide school staffs with helpful opportunities to acquire the capacities needed to productively engage parents in schools?
2. Provide school staffs with helpful opportunities to acquire the capacities they need to assist parents in creating conditions in the home which support the success of their children at school?
3. Have a formal policy on parent engagement and conduct periodic audits across schools about the extent to which that policy is being implemented. School staffs and parents are asked for evidence as part of these audits?

Samples of Relevant Research

Internal District Relationships

- Argyris, C. (1976). Theories of action that inhibit individual learning. *American Psychologist*, 31(9), 638–654. doi:10.1037/0003-066X.31.9.638
- Argyris, C. (1982). Reasoning, learning and action: Individual and organizational. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Kafetsios, K., Athanasiadou, M., Dimou, N. (2014). Leaders' and subordinates' attachment orientations, emotion regulation capabilities and affect at work: A multilevel analysis, *The Leadership Quarterly*, 25, 512-527.
- Leithwood, K., Patten, S., Jantzi, D. (2010). Testing a conception of how school leadership influences student learning, *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 46 (5) 671 -706
- Tallia, A., Lanham, H., McDaniel, R., Crabtree, B. (2006). Seven characteristics of successful working relationships, Downloaded from the Family Practice Management web site at WWW.aafp.org/fpm.

Relationships with Parents

- Fan, X., & Chen, M. (2001). Parent involvement and students' academic achievement: a meta-analysis, *Educational Psychology Review*, 13, 1-22.
- Hill, N., & Tyson, D. (2009). Parental involvement in middle school: a meta-analytic assessment of the strategies that promise achievement, *Developmental Psychology*, 45, 740-763
- Jeynes, W. (2005). A meta-analysis of the relation of parent involvement to urban elementary school student academic achievement, *Urban Education*, 40, 3, 237-269.
- Lee, J., & Bowen, N. (2006). Parent involvement, cultural capital and the achievement gap among elementary school children, *American Educational Research Journal*, 43, 2, 193-218.
- Leithwood, K. (2015). *Ontario parent engagement project*. Toronto: Final report of research to the Ontario Ministry of Education.

Appendix A: Waterloo Region District School Board

Guiding Questions

During the 2013/2014 school year the newly appointed director of education identified the need to gain feedback from the system about its strengths and weaknesses. Initial feedback indicated that leadership was felt to be hierarchical, decisions were top down and that it took a great deal of time for a decision to be made.

As a result of this feedback, over 60 focus groups were conducted to seek additional feedback and insights. For the 2014/2015 school year the Director made the Strong Districts and Their Leadership research the foundation of their work and made engagement (developing strong working relationships) a priority.

- 1. What can be learned from the Waterloo Region District School Board process?*
- 2. What processes and strategies do you use in your system to ensure that relationships are positive and on track?*

Waterloo Region District School Board learned from its consultations that there was a low trust culture.

- 3. What is your view of Waterloo Region District School Board's decision to focus on internal stakeholders as a first step in improving relationships within the district?*

The district also changed the manner in which system leader meetings were organized and conducted by forming a Leadership Development Steering committee inclusive of managers and central staff.

- 4. What process does your district use to ensure that system leaders meetings are meeting the needs of your school leaders and are aligned with your system goals?*

CASE STUDY

Appendix B: Superior Greenstone District School Board¹

Guiding Questions

This case study illustrates the challenges associated with developing productive relationships with parents, many of them living in difficult economic and physical circumstances. The school featured in this case served a largely Aboriginal population of students and, at the outset, included a teaching staff not especially sensitive to their students' circumstances. Over the course of a single year, however, the school's efforts to build productive relationships with parents changed teachers' understandings of their students and significantly increased the social capital of parents related to the schooling of their children.

As you read this case study, questions that will help guide what you learn from it include:

- 1. To what extent does this school have teachers and serve families similar to the teachers and families in some of your schools?*
- 2. What is currently being done in that school that is similar to what was done in the case study school?*
- 3. Are there interventions used in the case study school that would be promising to introduce in your schools?*

CASE STUDY

¹ The original report for this district included a series of appendices which provide much more information about both the methods used in the project as well as its results, especially results provided through parent interviews. Those interested in this information should contact the authors.

Appendix C: Work Relationship Assessment Form

Plot your practice's performance in these six critical areas on the continuum below. You may want your colleagues and staff to assess your practice as well, then compare and discuss your ratings.

Characteristic	What does it look like?	Where is your practice on this continuum?
Trust	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Seeking input from others.• Allowing others to complete their work without unnecessary oversight.• Feeling comfortable discussing successes and failures.	Always Sometimes Never
Diversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Including people who have different backgrounds or perspectives.• Encouraging those who think differently about important issues to share their opinions.	Always Sometimes Never
Mindfulness	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Being open to new ideas.• Talking freely about what is and isn't working in the practice.• Adjusting routines in response to current situations; not running on autopilot.	Always Sometimes Never

Interrelatedness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being attentive to current tasks as well as larger goals. • Being aware of individual roles and how they affect other functions and people in the practice. 	Always Sometimes Never
Respect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being considerate, honest and tactful. • Valuing others' opinions. 	Always Sometimes Never
Varied interaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding the importance of both social and task-related relationships. • Encouraging people to pursue activities outside of work. 	Always Sometimes Never
Effective communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding when certain methods of communication are more appropriate and timely than others. • Using “rich communication” (e.g., face-to-face meetings) for more sensitive matters. • Using “lean communication” (e.g., memos) for routine matters. 	Always Sometimes Never

Developed by Alfred F. Tallia, MD, MPH, Holly J. Lanham, MBA, Reuben R. McDaniel, Jr., EdD, and Benjamin F. Crabtree, PhD. Copyright © 2006 American Academy of Family Physicians. Physicians may photocopy or adapt for use in their own practices; all other rights reserved. “Seven Characteristics of Successful Work Relationships.” Tallia AF, Lanham HJ, McDaniel RR Jr., Crabtree BF. *Family Practice Management*. January 2006;47-50; <http://www.aafp.org/fpm/20060100/47seve.html>.

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1. If your participation in this module has caused you to consider doing something different in your own system, please describe what that is.
 2. Please identify any changes or refinements that could be made to this module that would improve participants' learning.
 3. How can this work best be used with others in the future?

The Institute for Education Leadership (IEL) invites you to share your responses to the above questions with the coordinator of the IEL at communication@education-leadership-ontario.ca.