**8 Community Connections**

**8:1. With whom in the community should the board connect?**

Community members are both the district’s “owners” and its clients. They pay for the district’s products and services and incorporate its graduates. Keep in mind that people support what they help create. If the district’s stakeholders don’t help to create the district’s vision, goals, standards, plans, budgets, etc., they may feel no ownership of them.

Although your board may not be able to engage every single group and community member, you should identify and engage key internal and external stakeholders. These individuals and groups can help or hinder the district in achieving its vision and goals. Key internal stakeholders may include students, faculty, staff, administrators, volunteers, PTO, unions etc. Key external stakeholders include parents, NYS police, 5-volunteer fire departments, taxpayers, public officials, business/civic/social/religious leaders, and representatives of higher education, health, social, and youth service organizations.

**8:2. How should the board engage the community?**

Engage key stakeholders by inviting ~~and appointing~~ them to attend and possibly participate in school events and activities such as: school musicals, arts festival, school field trips, field days, all night grad party, parent teacher conferences, grade level orientations,athletic, articistic and academic events. ~~standing and ad hoc committees, advisory panels, focus groups, forums, and surveys to describe a vision for the district, set its goals, plan strategically, align resources with goals, and other actions offering them an opportunity to learn about public education and to influence governance decisions.~~

You can also engage community members by using a variety of means to inform them about the district, and to learn their interests, priorities, and concerns. Print and electronic media, social media such as Facebook and Twitter, and face-to-face conversations all play important roles in this year-round district campaign to inform and to be informed. While accentuating the positive – student successes and district progress – don’t neglect the negative. Be the first to let your community know about clouds looming on the horizon, and what you’re doing to dispel them. Board members and the superintendent can be effective ambassadors for the district, especially by scheduling dialogues with a cross-section of your community.

Part of your community engagement strategy should also encourage all members of the community to visit their schools. Invite them to shadow day across grades 5-8, extracurricular activities, ~~schedule grandparents’ day,~~ offer tours and briefings. In public education, familiarity often breeds support.

All these actions and more should be in your district’s public engagement policy.

**8:3. How do you bridge a gap between community and board?**

Most gaps result from poor communication. Remember that communication is a team sport: both parties must have the opportunity to speak; both must actively listen. You should review your school board policy on community engagement. If none exists, develop one.

~~Check whether your policy provides a variety of methods for informing the community about the district. Does it~~ Our board policy uses varied means of communication – print media (such as newsletters and board member or superintendent articles in local newspapers), electronic media (perhaps the district website), social media (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube) and oral delivery (such as board or superintendent talks with community organizations such as the volunteer fire departments)? ~~Does it provide various means for the public to inform the board and administration about its interests, priorities, and concerns?~~ ~~Such means include opportunities for participation in district committees and advisory panels, focus groups, polling and social media.~~