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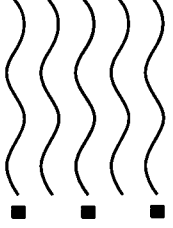
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ABSTRACT

Working with schools and communities across the United States, the Education Commission of the States has learned that people want to express their opinions about schools in their communities. This guide was designed to help engage all sectors of the community in conversations about education. It is suggested that holding a series of meetings about school improvement throughout the year may work best for building community partnerships in which people feel welcome in the decision-making process. The guide uses the example of New American Schools, a nationwide initiative made up of seven school reform networks or "designs." Tools and strategies for planning and hosting meetings, setting agendas, and facilitating discussions are presented. Appendices contain an outline of a discussion about local school improvement efforts. The discussion text incorporates a New American Schools "preview" video that may be ordered separately; samples of meeting agendas, ground rules, and a news release; and a list of resources and contacts. (LMI)

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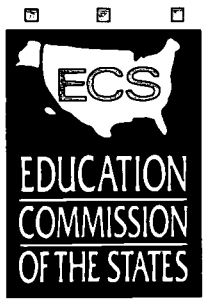
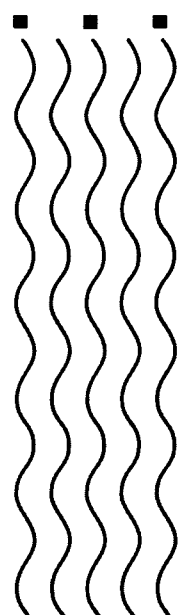
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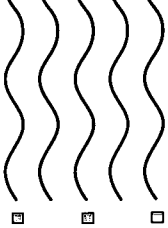
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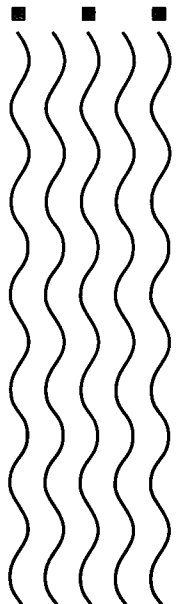
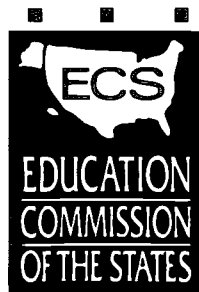


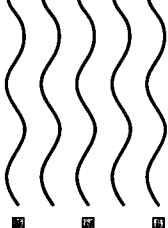


LET'S TALK ABOUT EDUCATION IMPROVEMENT

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Education Commission of the States
707 17th Street, Suite 2700
Denver, Colorado 80202-3427
303-299-3600
FAX: 303-296-8332
e-mail: ecs@ecs.org
<http://www.ecs.org>





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Writers: Elizabeth Holman and Amy DePaul. Editor: Sherry Freeland Walker. Production: Anna West. Proofreader: Josie Canales. Design: Debra Komodore.

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The New American Schools Development Corporation, established July 8, 1991, is a bipartisan, nonprofit, 501(c)(3) organization formed by American corporate and foundation leaders. Its mission is to help communities throughout the United States improve their public schools by implementing school improvement designs that the New American Schools' design teams have developed.

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INTRODUCTION

This guide is intended to help you as an educator, policymaker or community member engage all sectors of your community in conversations about how your public schools can do a better job of educating students. It also can help you introduce school improvement efforts and explore how the changes can help meet your community's goals. This guide uses the example of New American Schools (a national initiative made up of seven school reform networks or "designs"); it also can be used to foster discussion on a wide range of education improvement efforts.

Through the Education Commission of the States' work with schools and communities across the country, we have learned that people want to express their points of view in a lively and thought-provoking dialogue. This guide is meant to foster such a dialogue. We envision leaders using this guide in different locations with small or large groups, including parents, businesspeople, educators and members of civic and religious organizations. The guide offers a number of tools that you can mix and match, according to what works best for you and the groups with which you work.

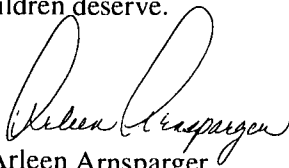
These tools include checklists for planning and holding a meeting, discussion activities, ideas for overheads, follow-up and take-home materials, and lists of additional resources. Appendix A gives a sample text you may use to lead a conversation about your local school improvement efforts. The text incorporates a New American Schools "preview" video (please see ordering information in the Resources section).

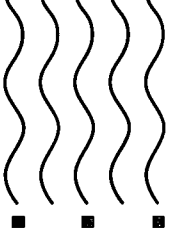
We hope these tools and strategies save you time in preparing for discussions and help you communicate more effectively. Please remember these are *your* tools and *your* strategies. You should adapt what this guide provides to fit your needs. You are the authority on your community's concerns and your school; you are one of the school improvement leaders in your community.

This publication is designed to be a conversation guide, not a "speaker's kit." We believe community members must work together to improve their schools — sharing ideas and concerns and making decisions jointly. Therefore, this guide is intended to help you have an honest and open discussion with people, rather than "talk at them." We hope it will help you listen to people, talk with them and build on those things you agree about and have in common. The cornerstone of these conversations is, of course, a desire to make education the best it can possibly be for your community's students. This conversation guide is meant to help you in that process.

Please use the feedback form at the end of this notebook to give us any comments you have about this guide. Did the discussion activities work well? Did people find the video useful? Which suggestions worked best, and which did not? What other ways can we help you involve your community in school improvement efforts?

We thank you in advance for your valuable feedback and for your continuing commitment to improve education for all your community's young people. When schools and communities work in partnership with each other, they can provide the quality education our children deserve.


Arleen Arnsperger
Director of Communications
Education Commission of the States



TOOLS AND STRATEGIES

Planning Meetings and Setting Agendas

Why should communities have public conversations about school improvement efforts? You may be the principal in a school that is considering a partnership with one of the New American Schools designs or another school improvement network. If so, you will want to find out what the teachers, parents and other community members desire in their schools and how the school improvement model can help. Or maybe you're a businessperson whose involvement in the local schools has led you to seek new ways to improve education for all your community's students.

No matter why you are interested in having these conversations, you can use this guide to help plan and support them. We strongly urge you to think beyond the traditional "one-shot" approach, where one person or a small group calls a meeting, makes a presentation and then has a few moments of public comment.

There is ample evidence that the one-shot approach does not lead to people's sustained commitment to work together to improve schools. To the contrary, it often leads to resentment and concern about issues and questions that remain unanswered.

A series of meetings about school improvement throughout the year, giving people varied opportunities to come together and raise issues, may work best for you and your community. In other cases, several informal gatherings will meet your needs. You also may be invited to speak to various groups about school improvement issues. And don't forget the power of one-on-one conversations! The goal is to build community partnerships in which people feel welcome in the decisionmaking process and confident that their points of view are respected. People will not make a commitment for change until they have a relationship with the school and the people who work there.

Should you decide to hold a series of meetings as part of your broader communications effort, start by putting together a planning team to decide on what will best achieve your purpose. A planning team offers people ways to stay involved in school improvement efforts

and participate in decisionmaking. It should include teachers, parents, administrators, students and any other school or community leaders. It should not, however, be comprised only of people who share the same point of view about school improvement. Rather, the team should represent diverse viewpoints.

This team will need to define the purpose of the meeting(s), describe what people coming to the meeting will be asked to do and what they will gain from participating, set an agenda and designate contact people so that community members know whom to reach if they have questions or comments about your school improvement effort.

THE GOAL IS TO BUILD COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS IN WHICH PEOPLE FEEL WELCOME IN THE DECISIONMAKING PROCESS AND CONFIDENT THAT THEIR POINTS OF VIEW ARE RESPECTED.

The planning team also will need to think seriously about the participants before any meeting, asking questions such as: Who is likely to participate in this discussion? What experiences does he or she bring to the discussion? Are participants skeptical or enthusiastic about different approaches to improving education? What would I want to know if I were in their shoes? Of course, these questions should be asked directly at the meeting! But anticipating people's needs will help you plan some ways to meet them.

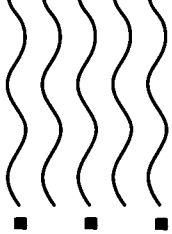
Organizing and Hosting Meetings

Members of the planning team should contribute what they have learned in other settings to help make preparing for and holding a meeting as smooth and efficient as possible.

Before the meeting:

- Consider inviting a person from outside the school system to be the discussion leader/facilitator. Sometimes school district personnel are seen as trying to "sell" a particular agenda. Someone from a civic association, such as the League of Women Voters, or a parent who has good facilitation skills might be a good choice to begin the conversation.
- Start with the basics — choose a date or dates that work for as many people as possible, and steer clear of dates that conflict with holidays or school activities, such as plays and sports events. Remember that evenings tend to be better for working parents, although midweek brown-bag lunch sessions are an option, particularly if a local business will host them.
- Choose a convenient, familiar location. Some people are uncomfortable coming to the school but will gather in a community center or similar facility. Make sure the location:
 - Easily accommodates the number of people in your group without being overly large. People need to be able to move around, but not be too spread out as often happens, for example, in a hotel ballroom.
 - Is a place where people will feel comfortable and relaxed.
 - Is conveniently located and accessible by public transportation.
 - Has enough parking.
 - Has movable furniture so that you can set the room up to accommodate both large discussions and small "break-out" groups.
 - Has outlets for electronic equipment such as VCRs and laptop computers.
 - Has handicapped-accessible parking and facilities.
 - Has a way to regulate temperature so people will not be distracted by being too hot or cold.





- Let participants know about the meeting well in advance and provide them with information on how they will participate in the meeting and what they will get out of it. Sending out personal invitations adds a nice touch. *did.*
- Publicize the meeting and work to ensure a full turn-out. Some suggestions include:
 - Ask community groups to send information to their members.
 - Put a meeting notice in the local paper or ask your local radio station to make a public service announcement (see the sample news release in Appendix B).
 - Post notices on bulletin boards in nearby libraries, churches, grocery stores and other public locations.
 - Ask school leaders to distribute a flyer to students, parents and teachers.
 - Call key people to remind them to come.
- Prepare materials to distribute to participants, ahead of the meeting, if possible. These materials could include but are not limited to:
 - Statistics about your school or district, including demographic information, test scores, dropout rates, teacher turnover rates, any recent awards or special programs. This school or district “snapshot” tells people where the school is now so they have a basis to discuss what needs to improve.
 - “Answers to Commonly Asked Questions About New American Schools” (see Appendix B), or a similar Q&A about other school improvement efforts under way.
 - Names and titles of the planning team members, including contact information.
 - Directions to the meeting.
 - Meeting agenda (see Appendix B for a sample).
- Secure the equipment and supplies you will need. These may include:
 - VCR/Monitor/TV set
 - Overhead projector and screen
 - Easel and large pads of chart paper
 - Markers
 - Tape or push pins if you want to put lists and papers on the walls as your discussion unfolds
 - Paper and pencils so participants can take notes
 - Dessert or a snack, depending on the time of day
 - Coffee, tea and drinking water.
- Be aware of your community’s language needs. If it would be helpful, use bilingual discussion leaders or hold some meetings for individuals and community groups in their own language. Participants also might benefit from a sign-language interpreter.
- Provide child care if possible and let people know it will be available.

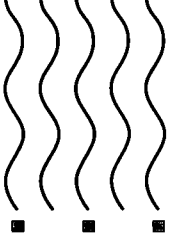
At the meeting:

- Provide a sign-up sheet, asking for phone numbers and addresses so you can call to follow up with meeting participants.
- Keep the meeting focused and on schedule. Because many people may have hired babysitters, be particularly sensitive about time on school nights.
- Have plenty of take-home materials available and be sure they are readily accessible.

Enhancing Meetings

We encourage you and your planning team to use your knowledge and imagination to make meetings as welcoming, exciting and productive as possible. Some suggestions include:

- Hold a meeting in an unusual but significant place. One possible site is a business operated by students — one community held a meeting in a student-run bike shop, for example. This situation allows participants to see firsthand the benefits of new ways of teaching and learning. Students can give tours of the site and display their accomplishments, and show how the work gives them an opportunity to apply their academic learning — in subjects such as math, English or science — with technology and other skills in “real-world” situations.
- Decorate the walls and/or tables in the room with student art work and exemplary projects that students in your school have completed — for example, portfolios of student work, a business plan for a student-run business, a book children have written and illustrated, photos of student learning activities, a physical object or blueprint designed in a class or a science display. Students generally enjoy highlighting their work, and this gives parents and other community members an important opportunity to see what young people are producing.
- Invite students in a school using New American Schools or other reform network designs to speak with participants and answer questions about their school experiences. They could perhaps give a walk-through “tour” of their portfolio in small groups or as part of a larger discussion.
- Depending on their ages, student volunteers can help seat people and show them around. Consider asking them to watch younger children during the meeting. One way to help older students entertain young children is to set up a reading circle or area for drawing if the room is large enough.
- Lure people. A school in a disadvantaged neighborhood got parents to attend meetings by sponsoring a student talent show after the meeting concluded.



Activities

Here are several activities that can help community members think about schooling and how to improve education. In addition to the instructions here, please turn to the “Outline of a Conversation about Your Community and New American Schools” (page 11) to see how some of these activities might unfold in a group discussion.

Best and Worst

Purpose: This is a good activity to begin almost any discussion about education. It helps establish rapport among participants, roots discussion in personal experience, enables participants to identify the types of experiences that foster and hinder learning, and gets them thinking about why change is necessary.

Materials: Easel, large notepad, tape, markers

Activity: Ask participants to spend a few minutes reflecting on their *best* and *worst* school experiences. People may make notes if they wish. Ask participants to share these with the group. Write their answers on sheets of notepaper and stick them to the walls around the room. You are likely to find that people are quite enthusiastic about sharing their experiences once they get started!

Reflection: When participants’ answers are recorded, ask the group:

- What, if anything, do the best and worst experiences that people shared have in common?
- What do these memories suggest about the influence of particular experiences on people’s perceptions of school and on themselves as learners?
- What does this activity suggest about the way or ways school should be organized to maximize learning for all students?

Knife, Fork, Spoon

Purpose: This activity is an excellent, quick way for participants to get some experience with “hands-on learning.” It demonstrates how different people learn in the course of solving problems and thinking and talking about what they did.

Materials: Metal or plastic knives, forks and spoons or any three objects of similar size that can be stacked upon one another (sheets of paper in three different colors also would work, for example).

Activity: Participants work in pairs or groups of three. Each group receives a set of three stackable objects, such as a knife, fork and spoon. The group’s task is to figure out how many different ways all three objects can be ordered. (The orientation of the objects doesn’t matter, just the order.) If participants resolve this problem quickly, ask them to speculate about how many different ways *four* objects could be ordered.

Reflection: When all the groups are done, ask:

- ☑ How did your group go about solving this problem?
- ☑ Describe the thought process that led to your answer.
- ☑ Was one problem-solving approach more effective than another?

If you were to express your resolution as an equation, what would it be? (Answer: the objects can be ordered six different ways. You may want to put the equation $N = 3+2+1$ on the board or overhead.)

How does this approach to understanding the concept of “variables” compare to other approaches, such as memorizing and applying a formula?

Skills, Knowledge, Attitudes and Behaviors

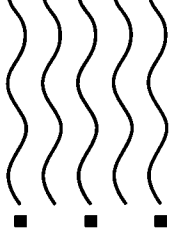
Purpose: This activity is designed to help people think about what it is that helps them succeed in their personal and professional lives, and how much of that comes from what they learned in school. The idea is to show that a solid base of knowledge is critical, but it must be paired with skills, attitudes and behaviors to lead to personal success.

Activity: Put four headings on a sheet of easel paper: Skills, Knowledge, Attitudes and Behaviors. Ask for volunteers to say what they do for a living and what skills, knowledge, attitudes and behaviors they use on the job and in their daily life. Write these on the easel paper. Also ask where they learned these — at school? At home? On the job? Note that on the easel paper as well.

Reflection: Ask the group to discuss:

- ☑ What do you think of the variety of places where participants learned what they needed to know to succeed?
- ☑ How often is “school” on this list? Would it be different for your children? Should it be?
- ☑ What things are appropriate and/or possible to learn at school? Are some things best learned elsewhere? Where?





What Every 10th Grader Should Know

Purpose: This activity illustrates the limitations of curriculum as a set of facts and formulas that constitute a particular subject, particularly when it comes to determining *which* facts among an ever-increasing body of information “well-educated” students should know. The activity underscores the need for education that emphasizes the understanding and application of concepts and the development of essential skills.

Activity: Divide the large group into groups of three or four. Tell each small group they are in charge of determining the list of the *10 most important facts every 10th-grade student should know when she or he completes biology* (this can be modified by grade and/or subject area to better fit participants’ needs). Groups may organize or rank these facts in any manner they choose. They have a maximum of 10 minutes to complete the task.

Reflection: When the groups are done, ask:

- How did your group go about generating its list?
- What, if any, problems did the assignment present?
- How did you deal with these difficulties?

Would you have been able to complete this task to your satisfaction had you been given more time? Why or why not?

If your group had a hard time compiling a list of “facts” for a given curriculum, what does this activity illustrate about the shortcomings of a curriculum based on facts versus one that focuses on essential ideas, skills and the ability to gather and use information?

Why Change?

Purpose: This activity is designed to help participants think about and articulate the ways the world has changed and why schools need to change as well. Discussions about education improvement generally are based on the assumption that change is desirable and necessary. A discussion facilitator should never assume that all participants share the same understanding of what it means to be educated for the 21st century.

Activity: Begin by asking people how specific areas of their lives (such as the workplace, kitchen, leisure time, etc.) are different today than they were 10, 20 or 30 years ago. Write their responses on easel paper (you may want to put the responses in columns headed “work,” “kitchen,” etc.) and post the sheets where everyone can see them. Then put up the “Why Change?” overhead (the sheet follows these instructions — it can be made into an overhead by photocopying it onto a transparency).

Reflection: Ask the group to discuss:

- What do the changes in our own lives tell us about the need for changes in schools?
- What do you think of the items on the “Why Change?” overhead? Are there items you would add, change or delete? (Use page 23 to make an overhead.)
- How should schools change in response to our current situations? To changes in the future?

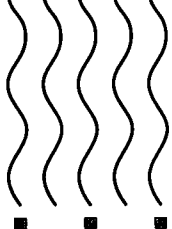
WHY CHANGE?

- Knowledge in areas such as mathematics, science and technology is expanding rapidly.
- Dramatic changes in technology, communication, economics and family, and social structures have had a powerful impact on teachers and students.
- Getting and keeping good jobs requires a broad range of complex skills.
- Full participation in democracy increasingly requires citizens to make informed decisions about complex issues.
- Educators and the public are beginning to change their definition of student success and how to measure it.
- Minority and female students continue to lag behind in standardized test scores and in numbers pursuing higher education, particularly in mathematics and science.
- Recent research into human development, artificial intelligence and the biology of the brain has yielded vast amounts of new information about how people learn.
- Educators are redesigning class schedules and school structures to more closely reflect the way people learn and use information.

Materials for Participants

In addition to the materials distributed before the meeting (see suggestions under “Organizing and Hosting Meetings”), there are other materials that may be helpful to have on hand for people to review. Make these available for people who want to check them out for a period of time, perhaps through your local library system. Please see the “Resources” section for ordering information if you need copies of resource materials. You also could provide:

- Print materials about your school’s improvement efforts (such as *A Guide to New American Schools* or literature distributed by any reform networks you are working with).



- Videos about your school, the changes it is making or specific reform networks you are working with (i.e., the New American Schools “preview” video or videos on each of the New American Schools designs).

We also recommend a “public engagement kit” of materials for participants to take home. The kit could be composed of:

- Publications describing the need to improve education. These could be pieces you already have or some of the free or low-cost flyers and brochures listed in the “Resources” section.
- A fact sheet or “school snapshot” that details demographic information, graduation rates, test scores, discipline information, dropout rates, teacher turnover rates, any awards in recent years, special programs, etc.
- A list of the typical entry-level jobs available in the local community, detailing the skills they require and the salaries they pay. (For example, a person working in a fast-food restaurant might use relatively few skills and receive low hourly pay, while an air-conditioning technician or computer programmer might be expected to have advanced occupational training and would receive a much better salary.) The local chamber of commerce or business roundtable may be able to supply this information. You may also want to reach out to your local newspapers and ask them to publish this type of information.
- A schedule of school board meetings and information on where and when to watch the meetings on local cable television.
- Names and numbers of key school and district staff people, committees and elected officials.
- Names and numbers of teachers, principals, parents and community members available to talk about school improvement efforts at churches, synagogues, Rotary and Kiwanis Clubs and other forums.
- Local newspaper clippings relevant to your school improvement efforts.
- A parent-friendly brochure or flyer that gives tips on how to get the most out of a parent-teacher conference and other ways to work with their child’s school.
- A bookmark, poster or sticker made from local children’s art work and embodying your school’s goals.

These pieces can be mixed and matched according to your needs. If you like, you can package them in a folder or bag which is pre-printed with your school district’s name and motto on it.

APPENDIX A: Outline of a Conversation about Your Community and New American Schools

A note to discussion leaders: This outline is built around three discussion activities leading into overheads and a video. It assumes a situation in which leaders of a school considering a New American Schools design want to broach the idea to community members and get their feedback. However, this outline can be adapted for a wide range of school improvement efforts. We provide this “script” simply to give you an idea of how such a conversation might unfold. We encourage you to use the ideas represented here in ways that fit your style and your community.

Introductions and Setting the Stage

Welcome! Thank you for your interest in improving education for our students. I am _____, a teacher/parent/principal. I am also a 10-year employee of this school district. My children attend public schools in this community.

[Describe your own connection to the schools.]

I’m part of a team of people working to foster discussions in our community about education *[introduce planning team members]*. Tonight we’ve invited you here to think and talk about the ways we can help our children learn and accomplish a lot more in school than they ever have before.

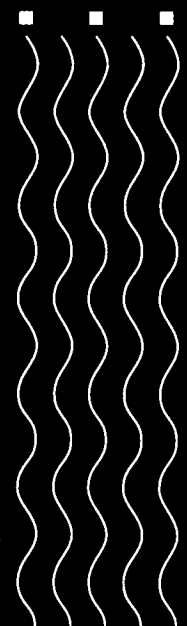
Before we get started, let’s go around the room and briefly introduce ourselves and describe our connection to the schools.

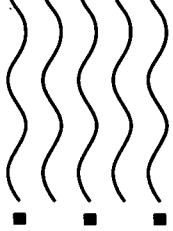
[Depending on the size of the group, spend five minutes or so on introductions.]

We’ve found that a set of agreed-upon “ground rules” can help make a discussion go more smoothly. Is everyone comfortable with the ones we’ve posted on the wall?

[Read ground rules and get group assent. If participants are uncomfortable with this, feel free to modify them.]

- Be respectful of others and their ideas.
- Adhere to time limits.
- Raise questions and make suggestions to help clarify ideas.
- Speak one at a time.
- Listen to understand, not to rebut.
- Note all points of view.





As we begin, I'd like to tell you what to expect from this meeting. First, we will talk about what we want for kids in our schools and whether our schools are providing that now. Second, we will look at what New American Schools is and what it offers for schools, parents and students.

Best and Worst

[Bring out easel with a large notepad. Draw two categories: Best and Worst.]

To get started, let's think about our own education experiences. Who was your favorite teacher and why? Your answer will say a lot about education at its best. I'll start us off by saying that my best teacher was Ms. Thurgood, and I remember her because she truly loved her students and she was so enthusiastic about books. She used to read *Charlotte's Web* aloud, and I can still remember the part where.... *[Give your own personal example]*. Take a few minutes to think about your experiences. Then I'll ask you to share your thoughts.

[Call on people to talk about their best or favorite teachers and why. In the "Best" column, list names of teachers and one word that sums up what made them great. Beyond loosening up the group, the point of the exercise is to show a few things: that students remember teachers who cared about students, believed in them and demanded a lot from them. You can lead the discussion to draw out these points.]

Okay, another question: What was your worst school experience? Besides not getting picked for the kickball team, of course.... My worst academic class was ancient history in 9th grade. I thought studying the Fertile Crescent was boring, and I didn't see the value of it. *[Again, give your own personal example.]*

[Call on people to detail their worst classes/academic experiences and encourage them to analyze why. List answers in the "Worst" column. The purpose of this is to help people identify through their own experience what factors contribute to making school a negative experience for some students, and lead to ideas about how to make school better.]

What I see in common in the answers to the first question are a few things: kids love teachers who care about them and who hold them to high standards. And what I'm hearing from you on the second question is that kids hate classes where they have to study information that seems abstract, pointless or confusing to them....

[Draw attention to whatever themes emerge from these lists, with particular attention to the importance of teachers who care about and believe in students, the detrimental effect of having learning disconnected from real life and the value of having high standards set and achieved.]

[Note: If the group is larger than 20 people, you may want to do this exercise in smaller groups or with partners, and have a large-group "reporting session" at the end. You can tear off the sheets of paper and put them up on the walls to remind people of this activity.]

Skills, Knowledge, Attitudes and Behaviors

[Turn to a new sheet of easel paper. Put up four headings: Skills, Knowledge, Attitudes and Behaviors.]

Now let's talk about which parts of your education were most useful to you. I'd like to ask a few of you what you do for a living and what skills, knowledge, attitudes and behaviors you use on the job and in your daily life, such as technical knowledge, specialized skills, working well with colleagues, openness to different ideas, imagination, reliability or honesty. Where did you learn these? In school? In a religious setting? At home? On the job?

[Call on people and ask what they do for a living and what helps make them successful on the job and in their lives. The idea here is to show that it is critical to have a solid base of knowledge — but that it has to be married to skills in order to lead to professional and personal success.]

Thank you for your input on these questions. What I'm hearing is that success requires skills such as analyzing, communicating, managing, exercising good judgment and problem solving. It also seems clear that many people did not learn or practice these skills in school. That may be because schools as we have known them emphasize knowledge that comes from books only, or knowledge that is abstract and removed from everyday challenges and doesn't emphasize how to apply what we learn. Does that seem like an accurate reflection of what you said?

[Draw out the common themes from people's answers, asking for confirmation from the group.]

[Tear off the sheets with the lists and tape them up on the walls.]

Synthesizing People's Concerns, Interests and Desires for Education

[Starting on a clean piece of easel paper, write a heading that says "Schools in our community should..."]

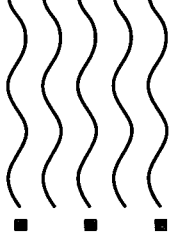
So we've got a pretty good picture now of what worked and didn't work for most of you in education, and where and how you learned what you needed to know. Let's take a few moments to translate these ideas into some statements about what you think education should be like and what schools should be doing now.

[Write people's statements on as many pieces of paper as you need. As you go, tear off the sheets and tape them to walls where everyone can easily see them.]

For reference, here are a few statistics on where our schools are right now.

[Pass around statistics sheet that has basic information on current school performance and vision].





Introduction to New American Schools

[Introduce the New American Schools effort and explain its role in your community.]

Thank you for your participation in these activities. Now that we have a clearer idea what people want for education and our children in this community, let's take a few moments to examine whether New American Schools can help us meet some of our community's needs.

[Take a few moments to let people read "Answers to Commonly Asked Questions About New American Schools," if they have not already done so.]

A common belief in many New American Schools is that children will learn more and be much more successful in school and beyond school if their learning is interesting, challenging and related to their lives, and if they are offered a number of different ways to learn. For example, instead of just memorizing the chemical abbreviations in the periodic table, students might use chemistry to investigate the quality of their local water supply. Or, instead of just reading the dry details of how a bill in the statehouse is passed, students might hold a day-long legislative session that requires them to research, write and argue for their proposals.

In short, the philosophy of New American Schools is that learning should be linked to all kinds of skills needed for work and citizenship in the 21st century — everything from reasoning and communicating to using complex math skills and computer systems. This tallies with what we just heard in our discussion about the good and bad of schooling and what learning you use throughout your life.

New American Schools is a coalition created by the nation's leading educators and businesspeople, committed to improving achievement for all students by dramatically changing America's classrooms, schools and school systems. New American Schools provides comprehensive designs, or blueprints, for school improvement and ongoing assistance for school staffs to help *all* students reach higher standards.

THE PHILOSOPHY OF NEW AMERICAN SCHOOLS IS THAT LEARNING SHOULD BE LINKED TO ALL KINDS OF SKILLS NEEDED FOR WORK AND CITIZENSHIP IN THE 21ST CENTURY.

New American Schools designs have been tested in hundreds of schools across the country. New American Schools approached these communities, including ours, because we all have significant school improvement efforts under way. If they are interested, school communities invite New American Schools to help them improve education. New American Schools provides a series of school blueprints or "designs" that may be a good solution. This school district has chosen to be a partner in the New American Schools effort, as part of our ongoing effort to improve education for all our students.

Here's what the New American Schools design team offers: Access to teams of education leaders, researchers and teachers who have developed promising approaches to creating high-quality, high-performance schools. The school designs are diverse, but share three goals: to help all kids reach high standards, to keep high-performance schools operating at costs comparable to today's and to better prepare kids for productive employment and citizenship.

Video About New American Schools

Here is some more information about New American Schools. *[Dim the lights.]*

This short video gives an overview of the New American Schools effort and a little of the “flavor” of some of the different school improvement designs and the communities where they’re working. *[Roll video.]*

[After the video, bring the lights up and return to the front of the room.]

As I said, this video just gives the flavor of this effort. For more specific information on any of the designs, please see the brochures about the individual design teams or the workbook, *A Guide to New American Schools*, which we have copies of here tonight. Overall, the New American Schools design teams offer our schools and our community strategies for improving the entire school, rather than a piecemeal program.

New American Schools can help our community make sure all kids graduate from high school with strong skills that will give them options — to attend college, to train for high-wage occupations or to go directly into a good job with a future. And it’s about more than just work. The skills we want our students to gain in school will give them the ability to apply what they learn to their everyday lives — to serve with distinction on a jury, vote intelligently and thoughtfully, and not only respond to, but play an important part in, an ever-changing world.

Discussion About New American Schools and Whether It Meets the Community’s Needs

Does anyone have any questions about the New American Schools effort and what it might mean for our community? *[Spend as long as you need answering questions from participants.]*

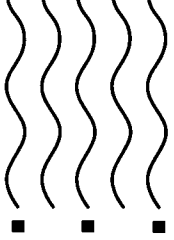
Thanks and Closing

Before you leave, please take a brochure that summarizes each New American School design. We also have a lot of other helpful materials for you: *[List materials and make sure people know where to get them.]*

Our children can benefit greatly from the opportunities New American Schools offer us. I invite you to work closely with teachers, other parents and other supporters of education so we can select a strategy to improve our school(s) that best fits what our kids and community need. The next time you hear from New American Schools will be

[Describe the next step — school communities will begin meeting to talk about New American Schools designs, for example.]

Thank you very much for your participation. Thanks also to *[thank the planning committee and any student speakers or helpers who participated in the meeting.]* We’re looking forward to hearing more from you. If you have any questions, please contact *[list contact names]*.



APPENDIX B: SAMPLES AND RESOURCES

Sample Meeting Agenda and Ground Rules

This agenda is for participants, to be enclosed with the invitation and/or placed on chairs as participants arrive.

SCHOOL MEETING AGENDA

School Improvement Efforts at Swanson Elementary School

DATE: November 11, 1996

TIME: 7:30 p.m.- 9 p.m.

Purpose: To discuss school improvement efforts with parents and the community at large and how New American Schools can benefit our students, teachers, parents and community.

- A. Welcome and introduction — June Newcombe, Swanson Elementary School principal
- B. Discussion of community's needs and goals for Swanson Elementary
- C. Introduction and discussion about New American Schools
- D. Follow-up discussion

SAMPLE MEETING GROUND RULES

The following is based on a set of ground rules or "working agreements" that a Colorado community used in a discussion on academic standards. Feel free to use or adapt the concept if you feel that your meeting is likely to lead to contentious debate. It is sometimes helpful to post the ground rules on the walls and also include them in the introduction.

1. Be respectful of others and their ideas.
2. Adhere to time limits.
3. Raise questions and make suggestions to help clarify ideas.
4. Listen to understand, not to rebut.
5. Speak one at a time.
6. Note all points of view.

SAMPLE NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
November 8, 1996

Contact: Chandra Jones
Phone: 303-555-1234

SWANSON ELEMENTARY SHOWCASES ITS DESIGN FOR SCHOOL EXCELLENCE

Greenville — This Wednesday, Swanson Elementary will host a community discussion about its schoolwide effort to improve student achievement. Swanson Elementary Principal June Newcombe and Greenville Hardware Vice President Hector Martinez will welcome Greenville community members and lead a discussion about the community's hopes and goals for our schools.

Newcombe and Martinez also will introduce Swanson Elementary's work with New American Schools, a national organization with which Swanson is partnering to boost student achievement. Participants will discuss what changes are taking place at the school, what they will look like for students and parents, and how the change will lead to greater achievement for all Swanson students. Information on New American Schools and other efforts under way at Swanson will be available to meeting participants.

WHO: June Newcombe, principal of Swanson Elementary School; Hector Martinez, president of Greenville Hardware; Swanson Elementary students and parents; other interested community members.

WHAT: Newcombe and Martinez will lead a roundtable discussion about what Greenville citizens want for their schools and how Swanson Elementary can help students achieve those goals.

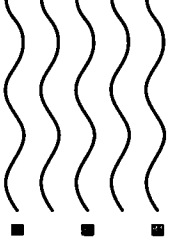
WHERE: Swanson Elementary School, 289 Linden Road; 303-555-2762

WHEN: Monday, November 11, 1996, 7:30 - 9:00 p.m.

Reporters with cameras are welcome to arrive early to set up.

###

[Print on your school letterhead.]



Resources

The following are materials available for your use in conducting a community meeting. Contact the appropriate organization for copies.

ECS resources can be ordered from the ECS Distribution Center, 707 17th Street, Suite 2700, Denver, CO 80202-3427. 303-299-3692 (phone); 303-296-8332 (fax). All orders must be prepaid and include postage and handling (please see back of title page for more information).

Communicating About Education Improvement: Engaging Your Community

- ***Listen, Discuss and Act: Parents' and Teachers' Views on Education Reform.*** Reports on a parent survey and parent and teacher focus groups in eight states. Examines people's beliefs about education reform in general and about specific elements of reform. Closes with recommendations for building public and political support for education improvement. ECS. (1996; \$10.00; publication no. AN-96-2).
- ***What Communities Should Know and Be Able to Do About Education.*** Designed to help individuals or groups interested in improving math and science education build a sense of community to bring about fundamental change in the classroom and in the education system. Also looks at what a variety of communities learned from their efforts at building community support for education reform, and includes worksheets to help get started. ECS. (1993; \$8.50; publication no. SM-93-1).
- ***Communicating About Restructuring.*** Helps people build support for education improvement efforts in their school and community, describe their restructuring efforts, work with the media and anticipate and respond to criticism. ECS. (1993; \$20.00; publication no. SI-91-6).
- ***How to Deal with Community Criticism of School Change.*** Provides guidelines to help educators talk plainly about school restructuring, respond to community concerns, disseminate information and understand how critics of education reform interpret education terms. ECS and the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. ECS. (1993; \$6.95; publication no. SI-93-2).

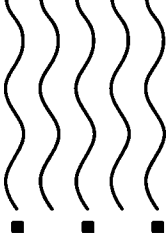
Changing School Districts

- ***Bending Without Breaking.*** Discusses ways in which policymakers have attempted to give schools greater flexibility and relief from rules and regulations; suggests new roles for schools, districts and states, and ways for schools to operate differently and use resources more efficiently. ECS. (1996; \$12.50; publication no. SI-96-4).
- ***The New American Urban School District.*** Seven contributing authors, including Chester Finn and Paul Hill, describe new solutions for school districts. (1995; \$10.00; publication no. UE-95-2).

- **Education Week articles.** Articles from *Education Week*'s "Scaling Up" series, which ran from November 1994 to June 1995. Examines reform networks, the business community, the foundation world and other groups that are grappling with making quality schools a reality for more than just a few model schools. Articles and charts are available on disk for \$6 from *Education Week*, Special Reports and Series on Disk, 4301 Connecticut Ave. NW, Suite 250, Washington, DC.
- **Reinventing Central Office: A Primer for Successful Schools.** Describes how urban districts might better organize themselves to support schools and improve education. 1995. \$6.00 from Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform, 407 S. Dearborn Street, Suite 1725, Chicago, IL 60605. 312-322-4770; (phone); 312-322-4885 (fax).
- **Restructuring for Results: High Performance Management in the Edmonton Public Schools.** David D. Marsh; National Center on Education and the Economy. Call 716-546-7620 for information.

New American Schools Effort

- **Answers to Commonly-Asked Questions About New American Schools.** Two-pages. Basic introduction to the New American Schools effort. Available free from ECS.
- **A Guide to New American Schools.** Provides an overview of the New American Schools effort and introduces the seven New American Schools designs. ECS. (1996; \$10.00; publication no. AN-96-1).
- **New American Schools: A Preview.** Eight-minute video introduction to the New American Schools effort. ECS. (1996. \$8.00; publication no. AN-96-1V).
- **Getting Stronger and Stronger: New American Schools 1995-96 Annual Report.** Available free from New American Schools, 1000 Wilson Blvd., Suite 2710, Arlington, VA 22209; 703-908-9500.
- **Working Towards Excellence: Early Indicators from Schools Implementing New American Schools Designs.** Available free from New American Schools, 1000 Wilson Blvd., Suite 2710, Arlington, VA 22209; 703-908-9500.
- **Bringing Success to Scale: New American Schools.** Available free from New American Schools, 1000 Wilson Blvd., Suite 2710, Arlington, VA 22209; 703-908-9500.



Contacts

Partner Organizations in the
New American Schools Effort
Education Commission of the States
707 17th Street, Suite 2700
Denver, CO 80202-3427
303-299-3600
e-mail: eholman@ecs.org

New American Schools
1000 Wilson Boulevard, Suite 2710
Arlington, VA 22209
703-908-9500
e-mail: info@hq.nasdc.org

RAND Corporation
1333 H Street, NW, Suite 800
Washington, DC 20005-4792
202-296-5000

New American Schools Design Teams
ATLAS Communities
Education Development Center
55 Chapel Street
Newton, MA 02158-1060
617-969-7100
e-mail: Linda_Gerstle@bbs.edc.org

Audrey Cohen College
75 Varick Street
New York, NY 10004
212-343-1234 extension 3400
e-mail: JanithJ@aol.com

Co-NECT
BBN School Restructuring Services
70 Fawcett Street
Cambridge, MA 02138
617-873-3069
e-mail: info@co-nect.bbn.com

Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound
122 Mount Auburn Street
Cambridge, MA 02138
617-576-1260 extension 16
e-mail: info@elob.ci.net

Modern Red Schoolhouse
Hudson Institute
5395 Emerson Way
Indianapolis, IN 46226
317-549-4168
e-mail: skilgore@ideanet.doe.state.in.us

National Alliance for Restructuring
Education
700 Eleventh Street NW, Suite 750
Washington, DC 20001
202-783-3668
e-mail: nareinfo@ncee.org

Roots and Wings
Johns Hopkins University Center for Social
Organization of Schools
3505 North Charles Street
Baltimore, MD 21218
410-516-8806
e-mail: rslavin@inet.ed.gov

EVALUATION

Let's Talk About Education Improvement

Date _____ Position/Title _____

1. How would you rate this document overall? (1 = not helpful in my work, 10 = very helpful)

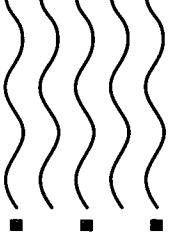
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

2. What did you like best about *Let's Talk*?

3. What did you like least or find unhelpful?

4. What would make this publication more useful for you?





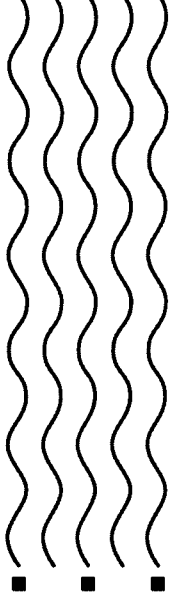
5. How will it help you in your work?

6. Additional comments:

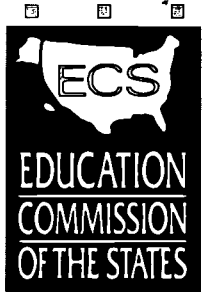
Please mail your response to Cathy Ziemba at the Education Commission of the States, 707 17th Street, Suite 2700, Denver, CO 80202-3427. Or you can fax your response to Cathy's attention; 303-296-8332. You can also respond via e-mail; cziemba@ecs.org.

WHY CHANGE?

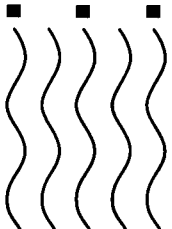
- Knowledge in areas such as mathematics, science and technology is expanding rapidly.
- Dramatic changes in technology, communication, economics and family, and social structures have had a powerful impact on teachers and students.
- Getting and keeping good jobs requires a broad range of complex skills.
- Full participation in democracy increasingly requires citizens to make informed decisions about complex issues.
- Educators and the public are beginning to change their definition of student success and how to measure it.
- Minority and female students continue to lag behind in standardized test scores and in numbers pursuing higher education, particularly in mathematics and science.
- Recent research into human development, artificial intelligence and the biology of the brain has yielded vast amounts of new information about how people learn.
- Educators are redesigning class schedules and school structures to more closely reflect the way people learn and use information.



0 3 6



Education Commission of the States
707 17th Street, Suite 2700
Denver, Colorado 80202-3427
303-299-3600
FAX: 303-296-8332
e-mail: ecs@ecs.org
<http://www.ecs.org>





U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)



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