Guide to a Student-Family-School-Community Partnership

WestEd

USING A STUDENT & DATA DRIVEN PROCESS TO IMPROVE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENTS & PROMOTE STUDENT SUCCESS

Created by
Bonnie Benard, MSW
Carol Burgoa

Guide to a Student-Family-School-Community Partnership

Using A Student & Data Driven Process to Improve School Environments & Promote Student Success

created by
Bonnie Bernard, MSW and Carol Burgoa

written by
Carol Burgoa and Jo Ann Izu, PhD
with Jamie Hillenberg

November 2010

WestEd

Lucile Packard
FOUNDATION for Children's Health

CONTENTS

WestEd and the Lucile Packard Foundation for Children's Health have partnered together to create this guide. It presents a data–driven, research–based process—referred to as the *school–community forum process*—for increasing youth voice, promoting resilience, strengthening adult–youth connections, and ultimately, for improving schools. It uses a *student listening circle*—a special type of focus group involving eight to ten student participants who respond to five or six questions determined from data on resilience and non–academic barriers to learning. A separate listening circle is conducted with each of the primary stakeholder groups in the school–community (family, school staff, and community members). This forum process helps these groups hear and better meet the needs of students to promote the healthy development of youth, and their success in school and life. It is also a powerful process for actually demonstrating a resilience practice that brings forth the wisdom of youth, and the support of adults in improving school environments and student success.

The guide is meant to help adults who work with youth in school– and community–based organizations, and is based on lessons learned in the Student–Family–School–Community Partnership Project carried out at a San Francisco Bay Area middle school. It is our hope that this guide will help parents, educators, and community members better understand the critical role of resilience in improving student success and school climate, and will show them one way to capture and use the power of student voice and community involvement in improving schools and fostering youth resilience.

Funding for the project and the development of this guide was provided by the Lucile Packard Foundation for Children's Health.

UNDERLYING PRINCIPLES

Adolescence is a time when young people face many developmental tasks that are critical to their healthy development and success in school and life (Carnegie Corporation, 1989, 1992, 1995; Dryfoos, 1998). Research on resilience—the positive capacity for people to bounce back from trauma, adversity, and everyday stress—documents the power of family, school, and community systems to provide the developmental supports and opportunities that enable young people's positive growth and success. Resilience theory suggests that environments rich in three types of developmental supports and opportunities—caring relationships, high expectation messages, and opportunities for meaningful participation and contributions—(also known as protective factors) foster resilience. These three protective factors provide the fertile soil youth need to develop skills and strengths such as social competence, the ability to problem–solve, and a sense of purpose and future (Benard, 1991, 2004). Longitudinal developmental studies show how young people in environments rich in these protective factors are able to overcome challenges to their development such as poverty, racism, trauma, and abuse, and become competent, confident, and caring adults.

While each of these systems—family, school, and community—working in isolation can meet many of the developmental needs of adolescents, research has found that the outcomes, both developmental and academic, are far better for youth when these systems work together with shared values and expectations for young people (Coleman & Hoffer, 1987; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Putnam, 2000). When these settings work together as partners in the lives of children, they are essentially weaving a resilience safety net, creating a community rich in social capital so that all young people can succeed in school and life.

By working together to enhance and sustain these critical developmental supports and opportunities for youth, the connections between youth and adults, and student connections to school are also strengthened. Student engagement and connectedness to school is one outcome of school environments rich in developmental supports (Hanson, et al., 2007) that is associated with improved health, school attendance and academic performance.

THE PARTNERSHIP PROJECT

The Student–Family–School–Community Partnership Project, also referred to as the Partnership Project, was designed to demonstrate the effectiveness of a multi–group partnership focused on promoting resilience and school connectedness among students. At its core is the school–community forum process—an opportunity for families, school staff, and community members to hear what young people need from them in order to be healthy and successful in school. Using data on student behaviors and school climate to drive the questions, the forum process relies on a special type of focus group that we refer to as a *student listening circle*.

A student listening circle is a structured focus group process where, initially, only students speak (and adults listen). This provides students the opportunity to voice and generate *their* ideas and identify ways each system—family, school, and community—can support them and help improve their school environment. This youth voice component is followed by dialogue between youth and adults to generate recommendations and possible action steps.

To build environments rich in social capital, the process followed in the forum event is used as a catalyst for on–going collaborative action focused on youth voice. The initial forum event serves as the impetus for developing an action plan to strengthen the connections students feel toward their school and to improve school environments. Forum participants work together to identify activities or processes—including additional listening circles—to refine and follow up on forum recommendations. In this way, the broader school community continues to move forward and support healthy development and opportunities for youth to build resilience competencies and strengths.

LISTENING TO STUDENTS

For over a decade, WestEd has worked with hundreds of schools and districts to create school–based listening circles with students of all ages. Originally created as part of a workshop to support schools in using data from the Resilience and Youth Development Module (RYDM) of the California

Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS), we found the student listening circle to be a powerful process for changing adult beliefs about young people, and for actually demonstrating a resilience practice that brings forth the wisdom of youth and the support of adults. Some of the benefits of listening circles include (Izu, 2005, 2008):

» Not only do students experience a process that embodies the three major protective factors (caring relationships, high expectations and meaningful participation), they also contribute to identifying and making school program and policy changes based on their needs, experiences, and interests. They learn that young people from different backgrounds have very similar perspectives on important questions, and they develop a greater respect for similarities and differences across different groups, cliques, and even gangs.

» Adults discover that young people value adults who genuinely want to help them. They learn that students appreciate knowing the "little things" that are within their power to do in order to make a difference in the lives of youth. And they realize that young people know a great deal about how their schools and communities operate.

» In turn, the school community benefits from a strengthening of adult–student/youth relationships, improvements in school climate, and action plans and activities that youth feel make a difference and to which they feel ownership.

When listening circles have been conducted as research tools to shed light on CHKS/RYDM findings, workshop evaluations consistently revealed that most participants were committed to using the process in their own schools and districts, and to take responsibility for follow–up on recommendations generated by students (Benard and Slade, 2009).

COLLABORATIVE DIALOGUE AND ACTION

The Student–Family–School–Community Partnership Project expanded on existing research practices that supported student voice in schools by including all members of the broader school community in dialogue and action. The project proposed that the school–community forum is a highly effective means for establishing an ongoing, collaborative, action–oriented, cross–organizational partnership to support and sustain the critical developmental supports and opportunities youth (and research) say they need to succeed and thrive in school. During the 2009–10 school year, with funding from the Lucile Packard Foundation for Children's Health, WestEd worked to implement this process with an urban middle school that serves a diverse, multi–ethnic population in the San Francisco Bay Area. A school–community forum was held in November 2009, and follow–up activities and an action plan were developed during the remainder of the school year. The experiences and lessons learned from this Partnership Project are the basis for this guide.

This guide is designed to help those who work with young people (e.g. schools or community–based organizations) implement and sustain the school–community forum process. It is organized into four sections:

» *Section I: Planning the Forum* describes the process of preparing for the initial forum event (an event which consists of a student listening circle for members of each system—family, school, and community), including selecting a resilience support coordinator, identifying discussion topics, and recruiting participants.

» *Section II: Conducting the Forum* describes the procedures for conducting a school–community forum, reporting back, and facilitating dialogue to generate recommendations and action steps.

» *Section III: Maintaining the Collaboration* describes the processes and procedures for follow–up action planning and implementing forum–generated ideas and recommendations, and for ultimately building stronger relationships and improving school environments and school connectedness.

» *Section IV: Resilience & Youth Development Resources* provides an introduction to, and some grounding in, resilience research and practices that are needed by those facilitating listening circles or coordinating a forum process.

The school–community forum can be conducted without the structured follow–up described in Section III. However, we believe a forum process that includes all the recommended components (including the follow–up) is critical to ensuring that a strong partnership focused on youth is sustained, and that school environments continue to improve. Students are almost always very enthusiastic about forming partnerships with adults, but they are less likely to continue those partnerships unless they see solid evidence that their contributions are taken seriously. For this reason, we strongly urge all who begin the process of soliciting the opinions of students to consider that the follow–up steps are as essential as the initial listening efforts, and to plan your work with this longer–term goal in mind.

ABOUT THE FORUM

The school–community forum as an event brings families, school staff, and community members together to hear directly from students what they need from each of these groups in order to be healthy and successful in school and life. This event also fosters the development of partnerships between educational, family, and community systems. It is the first step in a collaborative process to increase opportunities for youth to be heard and sends an official message to students that adults value their opinions. As a resilience practice, the following three components are critical to the forum process and the student listening circles that are part of it:

» *Data–driven.* The forum process and project grew out of hundreds of trainings and work-shops throughout California that were designed to help schools use data from the Resilience and Youth Development Module (RYDM) of the California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS). Whether it uses data from the RYDM, CHKS, or another school climate survey, the forum process is above all, data–driven. Data on student behavior and school environment help identify issues and concerns, and drive the development of the questions used in the student listening circle.

» *Focus on youth voice.* Student voice is key to the forum process. Greater youth voice and participation are essential if schooling is to be meaningful and effective for students. Attentive listening and youth voice go hand–in–hand. Resilience research has established that listening is a simple, but powerful "turnaround" practice that adults can use in families, schools, programs, and communities in order to support and empower young people. Both attentive listening and youth voice are central to the student listening circle and inform how the circle is structured.

» *Collaborative & action–oriented.* The forum event is often the start of a partnership between schools, parents, and communities, and is intended to be a catalyst for action. By involving several systems, instead of just students and school staff to work together to refine and implement recommendations, the hope is that stronger and better sustained solutions and actions are created. Forum participants who volunteer to move the work forward (also called the core action group) continue their efforts for the remainder of the school year, so that the forum signals the beginning of a long–term process where stronger partnerships, improved school climate, and increased school connectedness result from the continual revision of action plans.

With this background information in mind, what follows is a guide for conducting a school–community forum process. While organizing an event where students speak and adults listen may seem simple, it actually requires analysis, intensive promotion, recruitment, coaching, and detailed logistical arrangements—all happening long before youth and adults participate in the actual listen-

ing circle. Multiple listening circles that operate simultaneously add to the complexity of conducting the forum.

To simplify the process, activities related to the forum are divided into three parts: 1) preparing for the forum event, 2) actually conducting it, and 3) information on maintaining the process.

Preparing for the Forum

There are six steps involved in preparing for the forum:

1. Identify a resilience support coordinator
2. Gather and examine data
3. Reach out to key players and recruit participants
4. Obtain parental permission
5. Select listening circle facilitators
6. Arrange and manage the details

STEP 1: IDENTIFYING A RESILIENCE SUPPORT COORDINATOR

Any event, be it a science fair or a community meeting, requires coordination. And the forum is no different. But the main difference is that a resilience support coordinator must believe student voice and input are absolutely crucial components of all school improvement efforts. Too often student contributions and insights on how schools might be improved to meet their needs are ignored. Promoting resilience and youth voice, and building relationships between youth and adults, and school and family/community are the distinctive aspects of this role. Ideally, the resilience coordinator is someone who is already part of the school, but does not have full–time teaching responsibilities, and/or with experience addressing the health and nonacademic barriers to learning that students may face (see Key to Success on How to Identify an Effective Resilience Support Coordinator below).

Although in theory, a committee could do the groundwork leading up to the forum event as well as the action planning that follows, we have found the process still requires strong commitment from one person to manage and coordinate the roles and responsibilities of the committee members. And as an ongoing process, we found the resilience support coordinator to be crucial to the success of the forum process, particularly when it comes to establishing and maintaining relationships in the school community.

What are the Requirements for a Resilience Support Coordinator?

At a minimum, the coordinator should have:

» An understanding of, and a strong belief in the principles of resilience and youth development

» Group facilitation experience

» Familiarity with available school data

» Time and schedule flexibility

» Established positive relationships with at least some students, teachers, and the principal

» Connections to members from all systems (e.g. parents, community members)

» Excellent communication, social, planning, and organizational skills

While some of the job requirements and skills are common to any coordinator (e.g., communication and organizational skills), several of those listed above are specific to the forum process, or take on special meaning within this context. As noted previously, the resilience support coordinator must believe student voice and input are absolutely crucial components of all school improvement efforts in order to "sell" the concept of adults seriously listening to, and making use of, the ideas and experiences of students. Reading the materials suggested in this guide, or other training or grounding in resilience and youth development research and principles are key to implementing this process well. (Resources in Section III are a good start.) Because of the student listening circles

KEYS TO SUCCESS

How to Identify an Effective Resilience Support Coordinator

The resilience support coordinator role requires someone familiar with the school community, and who, ideally, has established positive relationships with some teachers. While new staff often volunteer or are assigned to coordinate new events, a person new to the school and its community won't be able to rely on existing relationships to support the level of collaboration that is necessary for the success of this highly participatory process. In many schools, the way in which teachers and staff are approached, and the nature of their relationship with the person approaching them are what determine the extent of their support and participation. In the Partnership Project, we found that one in five teachers participated in the forum event because a colleague they knew well had encouraged them to do so.

In turn, we found teacher support is critical to the participation of students in the forum process since students may need to be pulled out of class periodically or class time may be needed to promote the event, or participate in follow–up activities. Teachers were also an excellent resource for identifying and contacting parents.

In short, finding a person with prior connections to teachers and the school who also has the time to take on the responsibilities of the resilience support coordinator is a challenge, but it is key to a successful forum process.

and the many follow–up, action planning meetings, group facilitation experience is also required. Because the forum is a process that is grounded in data–driven decision–making, the resilience support coordinator should also be familiar with the kinds of data that are available on school climate, student behaviors, and attitudes.

A flexible schedule is another key element of the resilience support coordinator role. As the role requires meeting with staff, students, and parents—many of whom are only available at lunch or before and after school—the coordinator must be able to attend meetings throughout the week and at a variety of times during the day. Someone on campus only one or two days a week, a full–time teacher, or a counselor may quickly become overloaded with the work that is required outside of school time to prepare for the forum.

How Much Time Does the Forum Process Require?

The time required varies according to the stage of the forum process and the extent of the resilience support coordinator's existing relationships. Initially, the promotion, participant recruitment, logistics, and site arrangements typically demand a fairly intense amount of time over a relatively short period. After the forum event, the follow–up is less intensive, but still requires regular time devoted to the effort.

In the Partnership Project, a part–time resilience support coordinator was employed who also worked at the school part–time. This gave her the schedule flexibility that the process demands. The coordinator needed about 16 hours per week—spread across the entire week—to plan and implement the initial forum event over a three–month period. After the initial forum event, about 8 hours a week was necessary to facilitate and guide student–led follow–up activities.

If a part–time resilience support coordinator is not feasible, at a minimum, we estimate a day a week of a volunteer's time is required coupled with a highly functioning committee to plan and conduct the initial forum event. A highly functioning committee process could be used with good results for the follow–up activities. The members themselves would have to be responsible for many specific tasks, setting and maintaining timelines, coordination, and following up on details.

As described earlier, the forum process is data driven. In the short term, determining the topics and questions for the listening circles is the primary purpose of data collection. The long–term goal is to learn whether different environments, especially schools, are doing all they can to promote positive development, well–being, and academic success among all youth.

The listening circle process began as part of training and workshops on how to use data from the Resilience and Youth Development Module (RYDM) of the California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS). In the Partnership Project and previous listening circles, CHKS data has been used.

Data from the CHKS and RYDM surveys are ideally suited for the forum process because the surveys measure developmental supports in the school, home, community and peer environments (e.g., caring relationships, positive and clear expectations, and opportunities for meaningful participation). Resilience–related competencies and skills such as communication and cooperation, goal orientation, problem–solving and self–efficacy, and self–awareness and empathy are also measured. It also provides data on fundamental non–academic barriers to learning such as substance use and violence that are helpful in identifying specific issues (e.g., bullying and harassment) that can also be addressed in the listening circle process.

The CHKS and RYDM surveys are excellent tools for providing data for the school–community forum process since they allow schools, especially California schools and districts, to look at trends in developmental supports and competencies, school climate and school connectedness. Moreover, data from these surveys are ideal because they provide a way for schools to compare themselves to other California districts, counties and the state as a whole.

But other school climate surveys that include questions on resilience and risk behaviors will also work. For example, several California districts have surveys of their own such as Oakland Unified School District's *Use Your Voice* survey, which includes resilience and other items from the CHKS. Many districts also implement surveys related to assets research. The key is to build on a survey your school already administers or create a

KEYS TO SUCCESS

How to Focus on Specific Issues of Interest: Balance Risk with Resilience

If questions about particular issues of interest are asked, we have found it critical to combine resilience–based questions with risk behavior questions. Focusing solely on risk makes it challenging to identify and work from the developmental supports found in a school, and can defeat the purpose of the listening circle. For this reason, whenever we include risk behavior or school climate questions (e.g. bullying, violence), we begin with one or two resilience–related questions. Questions can also be framed positively. For example, instead of asking students only about violence on their campus, asking them about what makes them feel safe at school is more likely to lead to comments that can be turned into actionable solutions.

survey your school is willing to administer at least twice (as a pre/post measure). And ideally, the survey is administered on an on–going basis throughout the life of the forum process.

The examples and questions shown in this section are based on the CHKS/RYDM because it has been designed specifically to look at the three developmental supports and opportunities, or protective factors that promote positive development and school success. (For more details and training opportunities regarding this survey and how to analyze data go to http://chks.wested.org/training_support.)

An example of a user–friendly CHKS data sheet is provided in Appendix A. The template for this data handout was developed by WestEd staff to simplify the school and district based data that are made available in the more technical reports received by schools. Efforts should be made to provide data that is useful and easy to understand. The forum event is not the place to explore school/district data in detail. Rather, it provides an opportunity to hear student perspectives on the resilience–related items from the RYDM, which are the basis of school and student well–being.

How are Listening Circle Questions Selected?

In the Partnership Project and previous listening circles, data on developmental supports, risk behaviors, and school climate are examined a couple of months prior to the forum event. Data on developmental supports are generally the core of the forum event. For this reason, listening circle questions focus on these developmental supports and typically include questions like:

1. How do you know when adults in your school care about you? What do they say and do?

2. How do you know when an adult believes in you? What do they say and do?

3. What would make school/learning more fun and interesting for you and your friends? What would you like to do?

4. What kinds of decisions have you made and would you like to make in your classrooms and about your school?

5. What kinds of things do you or could you do at school that would make a difference? That would help others? That would improve your school?

6. Is there anything else you need from the adults in your school to help you achieve your goals and dreams?

Issues or concerns specific to particular schools may also drive the questions students are asked. For example, in the Partnership Project, bullying and harassment were a concern, while in several others, high rates of binge–drinking and/or teenage deaths related to drinking were school issues. Examining risk behavior and school climate data is a good starting point for looking at whether, and for how long this has been an issue in your school community. For example, in a previous listening circle, students were asked why binge–drinking rates were high, and especially high for girls, in their school.

The purpose of using different methods for outreach—e.g., flyers, presentations, individual invitations, and contacts—and doing so repeatedly, is to create a buzz about the forum, and to get people excited about participating. Reaching out to key players in each system—students, school staff, families, and community members—requires individual contacts and networking, a good grasp of what's important to each group, and persistence—especially for the first event.

Eye–catching flyers about the event are a basic strategy for spreading the word and recruiting participants. Since the potential participants being approached may or may not have a good under-standing of resilience and youth development, and probably have not experienced a student listening circle, materials such as flyers need to succinctly communicate the purpose of the event with details about when and where the event will be held. Other opportunities to learn about the event or at least whom to contact should also be included. All flyers should be available in the students' home languages.

In addition to flyers, brief presentations are often an effective means to reach students, staff and parents. Five– to ten–minute presentations in classrooms, PTSA and other parent groups and school staff meetings allow for more detailed information about the event to be presented and for potential participants to ask questions. This is also a good way to gauge initial interest, so that additional strategies to encourage and recruit participants can be designed.

Finally, follow–up or contact with individuals who might be good candidates is another effective strategy. At presentations to staff or students, those who want more information or who may be interested in participating can complete the sign–up sheet. In the Partnership Project, individual follow–up with interested teachers proved to be one of the most successful strategies for securing staff participation. Some specific strategies used in the Partnership Project to recruit participants for each group are described in the follow-ing pages.

Effective Outreach Builds on Participant Reasons for Attending

We developed specific outreach strategies for recruiting participants based on adult and student evaluations of the Partnership Project's forum event and the reasons they gave for their participation.

Adult participants attended for two main reasons: 1) they wanted to support their child and/or the school, and espe-cially among teachers, 2) they felt it was important to hear student and/or other viewpoints.

Student participants attended for a broader range of reasons. Like adults, they wanted to improve their school and/or wanted their voice and opinions heard. But some students also participated because they wanted "to make a difference" or because their friends were participating.

Including these key ideas—e.g., supporting your child, improving the school, hearing/voicing opinions of students and/or friends, making a difference—in flyers, presenta-tions and other outreach materials will tap into potential participant motivations for attending the forum event.

Personal Contact and Relationships are Key to Participation

In the evaluation of the Partnership Project, both the resilience support coordinator's feedback and the survey results from the forum event indicated that personal contact and relationships were among the most effective tools for recruiting youth, and especially adult participants. While one in five adult participants reported that they had heard about the forum through multiple types of outreach (e.g., flyers, staff meetings, individual contact), about half of the adult participants pointed to contact with an individual—a colleague at school for staff, their child for parents, and discussions with the principal or coordinator for community members—as the way they had heard about the event.

These findings suggest that networking can also be used as an effective tool for reaching out to young people and adults. Asking each committed participant to invite at least one other adult or student is another highly–effective strategy to build interest and increase participation using relationships as the key.

Student Recruitment

Incentives play a pivotal role. Identifying and utilizing the types of student incentive systems that are already in place at the school is a very effective tool for promoting the forum event. For example, in the Partnership Project, school "spirit points"—participation points earned to gain admission to a celebration trip at the end of the school year—were offered to each participating student to give them the extra motivation to participate. Think creatively about incentives. In another project, to get seniors to participate in an assessment, rides on the lead float at homecoming were offered as incentives.

Use brief presentations to provide more detailed information. Short, five– to ten–minute classroom presentations are a good strategy for giving more detailed information about the event that a flyer cannot provide. In the Partnership Project for example, the brief presentations included the following talking points:

» *Detailed general information:* Many students in a school may know that a forum will be held, but few may understand exactly what that means to them or their school. This part of the presentation should explain a) the topic—school improvement and change; b) how special the opportunity is to speak out and have their voices heard; and c) what the listening circles look like (this helps to ease fears of speaking in public or in front of large groups of people).

» *Examples from other schools:* Provide tangible examples from other forums of changes and improvements that were inspired by their student circles. One such example is a school where students were able to work with teachers to create a testing schedule that eliminated the school's previous practice of having tests in

How Many Participants Do You Need to Recruit?

As a rule of thumb, each listening circle—family, school, community—needs eight to ten student participants, and a minimum of eight to ten adults. We encourage schools to recruit more adult than student participants, and ideally, the forum should include twice as many adult as student participants.

From previous listening circles, we have found that more than ten students is unwieldy and diminishes the quality of the student discussion. More than ten students in a listening circle can make it challenging to allow each student enough time to respond to each question.

multiple subjects all on the same day.

- » *Incentives:* Offer spirit points, talk about the importance of having an impact, provide food, or raffle off a prize to those who participate.

- » *Sign–up sheets to gauge interest and use for following up:* At the end of each presentation be sure to send around a sign–up sheet for all interested students. This was extremely helpful when following up with students.

How to Ensure that a Range of Student Voices are Heard

A range of student voices needs to be heard, especially the voices of students who tend not to participate in traditional school events. Because these voices are particularly important to the success of the forum event and process, in the Partnership Project, specific efforts were made to reach out to these students. In addition to classroom and student government presentations, the resilience support coordinator worked with the academic counselor to identify about 20 students the counselor felt would be good candidates. These included students whose viewpoints, backgrounds, and school experience provided a balance to those students who had already expressed interest. Both the coordinator and counselor followed up with these students individually to encourage them to participate.

Aim for a balanced mix of different types of students. The goal of the forum is to hear from all types of students. So be sure that participants are from different grades, gender, and ethnic groups.

Start recruiting as early as possible. In the Partnership Project, classroom presentations were made two weeks before the event. Although this was sufficient time to get students interested, we found that it actually was not enough time to properly follow up with interested individuals. Ideally, start the recruiting process four to six weeks in advance.

Follow up repeatedly! Students and their families need multiple reminders. Permission slips, phone calls, e–mails, and additional flyers are ways to ensure that those who sign up show up!

School Staff Recruitment

Use existing meetings and events to publicize the forum event. Staff meetings are useful mechanism for spreading the word quickly. Talk with the principal about how frequently staff meetings are held. Some schools have leadership teams comprised of key departmental heads. Enlisting their support is helpful, and making presentations to departments can reinforce the importance of the event. A brief presentation to these groups can be your opportunity to give event details, answer questions, and gauge interest.

Find time for follow–up, especially on an individual basis. In the Partnership Project, individual follow–up with interested teachers was the most successful way to secure staff for the event. Finding time to talk with teachers during their prep periods or lunch allowed for more meaningful conversations and encouraged staff to participate.

Utilize personal relationships. Using personal relationships you already have with various school staff is a great way to secure participants. Having informal conversations with these individuals can get them very excited about the event.

Remember teachers aren't the only staff members! The school has a wide variety of adults who help make it run smoothly. Counselors, campus supervisors, teacher aides, and office staff are all good people to include in the forum.

Incentives for adults are helpful, too. Like students, incentives for teachers are also helpful. In the Partnership Project, we provided a small stipend to teachers for his or her participation. While many schools may not be able to afford this luxury in the current fiscal climate, substitute release–time for participation during school hours can often be negotiated with the district. Similarly, gift cards for classroom supplies or books can be obtained as donations from local businesses.

Family Recruitment

Utilize other school events and organizations to promote the event. In the Partnership Project, one of the most effective methods for reaching out to families was advertising at school events. Back–to–School Night, Family Potluck, and PTSA meetings were all great opportunities to reach out to a range of families. Having a booth at functions, handing out flyers, and making brief presentations were all important steps.

Enlist the support of appropriate school administrator(s). In order to prepare properly, make sure to meet with the administrator responsible for student services and/or school events. Not only can he or she help you secure speaking time or a booth at various school events, but perhaps they can put in a good word on your behalf.

Make time for individual follow–up. In the Partnership Project, we found that personal follow–up made the difference. A personal phone call or e–mail can be the key to winning the participation of anyone who signed up or expressed interest. This is especially true for parents, and goes a long way toward getting them in the door.

Ask for help. Since it is important to include families who represent the entire school population, make sure to reach out to individuals in the school who work closely with a variety of families (e.g., counselors, PTSA members, EL teachers). In turn, asking the people they recruit to invite one or two other parents can quickly increase your numbers.

Translation is critical. Remember that not all families are English speaking. It is especially important to find and enlist the help of translators, early–on in the process in order to ensure that non–English speaking families attend the forum, and that their voices are heard. Flyers and announcements need to be available in the languages parents use, and it is critical to find out whether adults will need translators at the forum event itself.

Consider transportation and food issues. Find out if there is a need for transportation to and from the event and ask for a volunteer to coordinate rides for students and family members as needed. Similarly, while families can bring their children to the forum event, make sure to address

other family needs. For example, let parents know that healthy snacks are available for children and youth, and if the forum is held during a mealtime, that food is available.

Community Member Recruitment

Make a plan. Since school–community relationships are often left unexplored, this may be the most challenging aspect of recruitment. If this is the case at your school, make a plan, stay focused, and don't be afraid to ask for help, especially if you are new to the community. Here are some suggestions to help bring the community into your forum.

Start with existing school–community relationships. Building on any (even relatively weak) established relationships between community organizations and the school was the most effective method in the Partnership Project. While the resilience support coordinator may or may not have connections to community organizations, it is almost certain that the principal does. Coordination with the principal is essential in identifying an initial list of potential individuals and community organizations. In the Partnership Project, invitations and personal follow–up by both the principal and resilience support coordinator were helpful in securing community members for the event.

Ask young people. There are many organizations and agencies in a community that provide services to school–aged youth and their families. Ask a variety of students to identify places where they go in their out–of–school time. Find those agencies that serve the students in your school and invite them to participate in the forum process. Start with the after school program, the neighborhood branch of the public library, the Parks and Recreation department, the local YMCA/YWCA, Boys and Girls Club, faith–based organizations, and wherever students spend their out–of–school time. Many people working at these agencies share the same goals for local youth and are willing to participate in other ways to promote their well being and success.

Identify local businesses. Approaching businesses in the immediate school area directly—or organizing youth to do so—is another strategy for recruiting community participants. These may provide not only forum participants, but also, new contacts for donations of services or products for the event may be discovered in the process.

STEP 4: OBTAINING PARENTAL PERMISSION

In order to have a successful forum that complies with district and school policies, it is critical to find out whether parental permission is necessary, and, if so, how it should be obtained. Parent permission could be necessary for:

» Student participation in after school or weekend events

» Students to be photographed or video–taped

» Student ideas or comments to be used in any capacity

Since districts differ in their policies, the best way to ensure compliance with them is to talk to the school administration—*early*! This should be one of the first things discussed with school administration when preparing to hold a school–community forum. Getting or developing the appropriate permission forms takes time, and the task of administering and collecting them takes longer. Many schools send home packets at the beginning of the year that contain permission forms for parents to sign, so make sure to ask if your documents can be included or has already been covered with another form.

STEP 5: SELECTING LISTENING CIRCLE FACILITATORS

Since more than one listening circle is conducted during the forum, and the resilience support coordinator is responsible for the overall coordination of the event, identifying appropriate facilitators for each of the listening circles well in advance of the event is important. At least three facilitators will be needed, one each for the family, school, and community listening circles.

The facilitator is responsible for preparing students and adults for their roles, describing the purpose and format of the listening circle, and facilitating the dialogue. Listening circle facilitators do NOT need to have previous knowledge or experience with the specific students selected or the school. In fact, in previous circles we have frequently found that students are much more open to an "outsider" than an adult from their school.

KEYS TO SUCCESS

How to Coach Youth on Reframing

Reframing student responses and helping them understand how much more effective a positive example will be to finding solutions is the key to fruitful dialogue in the listening circle, and getting adults to really understand the needs of students. Students frequently want to complain about aspects of their school life—perhaps a teacher who yells or a vice principal that is unfair. Even though the question posed to them is "How do you know a teacher cares about you?," the response is often an expression of how they know when the teacher DOESN'T show caring.

Helping students reframe the negative comment about yelling into a positive suggestion can be done in several ways. Students can be reminded of how they feel when their behavior is criticized and how unlikely they will then be to change. Second, it often helps to get students to state what they might need, want, or like in place of the unwanted adult behavior. An example might be for students to state that they work better when spoken to in a quiet or normal voice. Or "I can improve if my teacher comes over to my desk, looks me in the eye and speaks directly to me." Many students have stated that they do much better in classes when the teacher acts in a respectful way by avoiding sarcasm, knowing students' names, smiling often, checking frequently for understanding, or walking around the room instead of sitting behind the desk most of the time. A good facilitator can guide students toward positive comments and away from negative ones.

Listening Circle facilitators need the following skills:

» *Excellent group facilitation skills, especially prior experience working with youth groups.* The facilitators must be able establish a positive relationship with students in a very short period of time. They need to be able to simply and clearly explain the purpose and format of the listening circle, and to make both students and adults feel confident and comfortable as quickly as possible.

» *Good time manager.* The facilitator must be able to keep the process going and make the best use of the time available. Once warmed up, it is often difficult for participants, especially students, to stop talking. The balance between being able to encourage participants to speak on the one hand, while keeping them focused and on–track on the other hand is a critical skill. In particular, students will tend to "shut down" if the facilitator gives them a mixed message —"Please tell me what you think, but don't take so long doing it." It is also important for the facilitator to manage adults to be listeners so that they don't dominate the dialogue in the follow–up discussions.

» *Ability to reframe experiences positively.* The opportunity to speak out and be listened to is often a new one for youth, especially middle school students. Being able to show students that how something is *said* can affect whether it is *heard*, is another crucial feature of circle facilitation. Students often need assistance in reframing their negative, and sometimes pain-ful, school experiences into positive suggestions. Helping students (and sometimes even adults), understand the ineffectiveness of judgmental negative criticism vs. the effectiveness of reframing positively is crucial if their responses are to be heard and acted upon.

» *Ability to probe and clarify student responses so they become actionable.* The facilitator must always be mindful of the goal to have students present their responses in such a way that will guide adults to finding solutions or taking action. For example, it is not clear how to take positive action on a student comment like, "I know adults care about me because they're nice." Helping the student reframe this comment as "I know adults care about me because they use my name when they talk to me and say hello when I come in the room" means that the adults can know exactly what to do to help the student feel cared for. This requires skillful use of question probes and clarification of student responses without making students feel they are giving a "wrong" answer.

STEP 6: FORUM LOGISTICS —ARRANGING AND MANAGING THE DETAILS

Since the forum is an event with at least three listening circles being conducted simultaneously, there are a number of tasks and arrangements that need to be prepared in advance. In addition to the resilience support coordinator, a forum committee and/or the assistance of others is very useful here. The basic time requirements, materials, and equipment necessary for the forum are listed in Table 1.

Table 1: Basic Requirements for the Forum Event

Agenda & Time	You will need a total of about 4–4.5 hours (depending upon whether you begin on time and participants are able to stay focused), divided as follows:
	» 20 minutes for introductions, review of agenda, etc. in large group
	» 60 minutes to prepare students and adults (separately) for the listening circle (includes a brief break as adult participants move from their prep spaces to the location of the listening circles)
	» 90 minutes to conduct simultaneous listening circles and summary discussions
	» (10 minute break)
	» 30 minutes for report–back
	» 60 minutes for dialogue, recommendations, and action steps
Space	☐ One large, multi–purpose room with space on walls to post chart paper
	☐ Three, small break–out rooms with chairs arranged in two concentric circles and chart paper on walls for summary notes
Participants	☐ Resilience support coordinator/school administrator to lead large group presentations and discussions
	☐ Two or three welcome/sign–in hosts
	☐ Several food servers/helpers
	☐ Note–taker and timekeeper for large group
	☐ One or two large group assistants to help post/move chart paper, distribute materials, etc.
	☐ Three listening circle facilitators
For each listening circle	☐ Eight–ten students for each listening circle
	☐ Minimum of eight–ten adults for each listening circle
	☐ One note–taker and one timekeeper for each listening circle
	☐ Two participants (one adult and one student) to chart a summary and report results to large group
Materials & Equipment **For the multi–purpose room**	☐ Microphone(s) for large group presentations and discussion
	☐ Welcome/sign–in table with sign–in sheets and name tags, pens, markers
	☐ Tables for food
	☐ Chart paper, markers and tape
	☐ Handouts—agenda, map, data handout, and evaluation survey/event feedback form
	☐ Food—snacks or larger meal (if needed)
	☐ Small tables for participants
	☐ Sign–up sheets for participating in forum follow–up efforts
For the small break–out rooms	☐ Chart paper, markers, and tape
	☐ Note paper, pens, pencils (for individual participant notes)
	☐ Student question cards and pens
	☐ Optional: Door prizes, recognition awards for participating students

In order to publicize the event and recruit participants, determining a place and time is one of the first decisions you'll need to make. As described in Table 1, about five hours is required for the forum event, and you will need to decide whether to hold it after school or on the weekend. In the Partnership Project, we decided to hold the forum on a Saturday morning so that more families and students could attend, and staff would be better able to focus on the activity.

Space

The introductory presentation, summary report–backs from each listening circle, and dialogue and next steps planning need to take place in a comfortable room that is large enough for all participants to be able to hear and be heard. The listening circles, conducted simultaneously in separate rooms, should be held in smaller, cozier spaces, if possible.

If the forum event is held at a school site, a large room like the school's multipurpose room is ideal for the whole group activities. Individual classrooms work well for the listening circles. If the event were held at a community site, separate breakout rooms for each of the listening circles would be ideal. While it is possible for the listening circles to be held simultaneously in the corners of a very large room, it is much harder to hear the students, and the role of the listener is much more difficult. This can seriously diminish the unique experience of students being formally and seriously listened to by adults.

While the large room can simply be arranged with speakers at the front and participants at tables and/or in chairs, the small break–out rooms for the listening circles need to have a specific physical arrangement. Chairs in these rooms need to be arranged in two concentric circles. The smaller, inner circle has enough chairs for each student and the facilitator, placed as close together as possible. Adult listener chairs are arranged so that they surround, and look toward, the inner circle.

Participants

In addition to the different types of students and adults needed as participants for the listening circles, a note–taker and a timekeeper are important to both the listening circles and large group discussion to ensure that these activities run smoothly and efficiently. An adult note–taker is critical to ensure that all student comments, ideas, and experiences are captured, as it is very difficult for the facilitator to keep track of all comments at the same time he or she is leading the group. A written record makes it easier to plan and prioritize follow–up actions later. Remember, NO

How to Facilitate Youth Voice & Collaboration: Physical Arrangements

While the concentric circle arrangement for the listening circle takes more space, we have found it is extremely helpful in focusing adult attention on students, and makes it easier for them to be active listeners. This "fishbowl" arrangement drives home the point to both students and adults that student voices are central in this process.

Once students have responded to all the questions, they move their chairs back so that one large circle is formed. Now everyone—both adults and youth—are part of the process and solutions.

How to Encourage Participants to Stay for the Entire Forum Event

While student incentives for participation have already been discussed, door prizes and raffle items on the day of the forum—along with lunch, of course—are good incentives for getting participants to stay for the entire day. In the Partnership Project, we found local businesses willing to donate food as well as items for a raffle. In many listening circles, a certificate recognizing each student's participation is presented at the end of the day to publicly show students how much their voice and participation are appreciated.

Making the forum a family event is also helpful. By allowing parents to bring other children to the event, it is easier for some parents to participate. Planning on something for young children to do during the hour of the actual listening circle—an arts and crafts table or video, for example—may also make it easier for both parents and students to participate.

names should be indicated so that people feel more comfortable expressing their ideas.

A timekeeper is essential, especially in the listening circles. The timekeeper will need to keep track of time, and signal the facilitator at regular intervals so that the facilitator is able to pace the questions and responses to ensure that all questions are asked and all students have a chance to respond. In the dialogue that follows, strict attention to time is also required. Since there are simultaneous listening circles occurring, it is essential that groups stick to the agreed upon forum schedule to avoid one or more groups having to wait for others to finish their discussion and move back to the large room.

Other roles—welcome hosts, food helpers, large group assistants—help ensure that the event runs smoothly and stays on schedule. These are great roles for students, especially those who are not participating in the listening circles. Welcome hosts stationed at a registration table near the entrance ensure that each participant is welcomed, signs in, and makes a nametag. By having each participant sign–in with name, phone number, e–mail address, and his or her role, a list of potential participants for future follow–up activities is quickly generated.

Materials and Equipment

For the large room, we have found it useful to have at least one or two microphones. Depending on the size of the room, the resilience support coordinator and/or person making presentations may need a stationary microphone, but a portable microphone is helpful so that the rest of the audience can hear all participant responses and questions.

Informational handouts should be kept to a minimum. However, an agenda with the schedule for the day, a map showing the location of break–out rooms, and an evaluation or event feedback form should be distributed at the registration table.

In our experience, food is a necessity, especially with students. It can be very simple and inexpensive. Providing food before and after the large group sessions can also help ensure that families stay for the full day. In the Partnership Project, we provided a continental breakfast (bagels, fruit, coffee, tea, and water) and a full lunch.

The Forum Event Consists of Five Key Components, with the Student Listening Circles at Its Heart:

1. Prepare participants for the day
2. Train youth to speak and adults to listen
3. Conduct listening circles
4. Report back
5. Facilitate dialogue and action steps

STEP 1: PREPARING PARTICIPANTS FOR THE DAY

Because the schedule of activities for the forum is quite tight, it is important to be clear about the agenda, expectations, and outcomes for the day, and to build the connections that will make committing to action steps easier. The key then, is to provide clear information about the day's activities and to make participants comfortable so they feel a part of the group. As participants, especially adults, arrive, the administrator, resilience support coordinator, and committee members should mingle to greet and introduce themselves. Making sure that all participants have name tags with their names and roles on it helps. Color coding or marking name tags so that participants know which listening circle they should attend is also helpful. (For example, the distinction between families and community members isn't always clear). *Note:* Students should check–in, help themselves to food, and then immediately proceed to their previously assigned break–out rooms to begin their listening circle preparation process. The students will not be in the large group room until the last report–back and dialogue/action step planning takes place.

STEP 2A: TRAINING ADULTS TO LISTEN

While preparing adults for their role in the listening circle is the primary goal, the adult training and preparation is also the main opportunity to review the key concepts that underlie the forum (e.g., resilience generally and youth voice, specifically), and to share the data that form the basis for listening circle questions. When adults understand these key concepts they are better able to listen to student responses and hear the relevant information that will help them with their action planning.

How to Achieve Long–term Success: Focus on Protective Factors

While it may be tempting to base the listening circle questions on more immediate concerns at the school (e.g., binge–drinking), research shows it is essential to address the protective factors in the school environment first and foremost. If students do not feel cared about, or adults in the school do not believe students can and will succeed, or if there are no or limited opportunities for meaningful student participation, the strategies or programs selected by adults to address those specific issues and challenges have little chance of succeeding. In other words, strengthening the protective factors is the foundation on which any specific program must be built.

During the first 10–20 minutes, the resilience support coordinator introduces her or himself and the other key players, including the timekeeper, so that the importance of staying on schedule is emphasized. If time allows, a fun ice–breaker activity is helpful. For example, a quick and easy ice–breaker is to ask everyone to find two people they don't know and in three minutes find something (or as many things) they all have in common (can't be the obvious like they all have a connection with the school). Ask for volunteers to share their commonalities. It is a fast and interesting way for people to begin talking to each other, and feel more comfortable together. A prize can be given to the trio that found the most things in common.

Resilience Overview

A brief, 5–10 minute overview of resilience should be presented to help adults understand why it is important for students to feel connected to their school.

For example, students can't feel connected to school if they have no opportunities to make decisions or make a difference, or if adults in their school don't seem to care or believe in them. The three basic resilience concepts (also called protective factors)—caring relationships, high expectations, and meaningful opportunities for participation and decision–making —should be discussed. At a minimum, adult participants need to know how these three protective factors shape the resilience questions that students are being asked, and why student responses are so important to any future action planning. Examples of handouts used to present these concepts are shown in Appendices B and C. Additional resources and training opportunities to understand these concepts are listed in the resource section at the end of this guide.

Data Overview

Some time should also be spent sharing available data about the school that was used as the basis for the listening circle questions. As described previously, the CHKS resilience data for the appropriate grade levels have been used in previous listening circles. Data (sometimes compared to the district and state aggregate data) are presented for school environments on caring relationships, high expectations, and opportunities for meaningful participation.

Where data are available, any issues regarding risk behaviors can also be shared. For instance, in a community where two teenagers died in a car accident due to drinking, data on alcohol use and attitudes toward alcohol were examined. In other communities, safety, gang concerns, or bully-

ing and harassment have been issues. One of the reasons the CHKS data and items are particularly useful is that they cover a broad range of topics similar to these.

In the remaining time, the resilience support coordinator or person(s) working with adults need to focus on the goals of the listening circle, the listening circle process, and the listening circle agreements.

The Listening Circle Process

The format and structure of the listening circle should be described. Remember to emphasize that the listening circle process itself is a structured illustration of the three protective factors—caring adults, high expectations for youth, and opportunities for meaningful participation. In short, it is a resilience practice in action.

Tell adults how the room and chairs will be arranged, and how the listening circle will be conducted. (For more details, refer to the next section on preparing students.)

The Agreements

In the Partnership Project and other listening circles, we have found certain agreements to be critical to a productive listening circle that stays within the time limits (see Appendix F). During their training and preparation session, the adults need to agree to conduct themselves according to the following agreements as they observe the student listening circle:

» Attend only one listening circle, i.e., no "room–hopping."

» Turn off cell phones and refrain from texting.

» Stay for the entire listening circle.

» Be silent during the student voice (response) portion, i.e. listen attentively.

» Commit to a plan of action that reflects the students' perspectives.

STEP 2B: TRAINING YOUTH TO SPEAK

Just as listening without speaking is a new role for many adults, speaking out is new to many students. Making students comfortable about sharing their ideas and opinions—through coaching and opportunities to practice—are the goals of this session.

Making Students Comfortable with the Process

Making students feel comfortable with speaking out is accomplished in several ways. Apart from introductions, a brief warm–up question (for example, why students volunteered to participate or what they hope to gain from the experience) is one strategy for making students feel comfortable with speaking out as well as with their peers.

Explaining the purpose of the listening circle is another strategy. Drive home the point that the listening circle is about giving students an opportunity to share experiences and ideas about what they need in order to be healthy and successful in school. Remind them that the adults have chosen to come and listen, and have agreed to use the students' comments to improve the school community. Briefly state that students who feel strongly connected to their school do better academically, emotionally, and socially. Schools that have caring adults; high, positive expectations for all students; and lots of opportunities for student participation and contribution are the schools that students feel most strongly connected to. Explain that the questions they will be asked in the listening circle are aimed at uncovering what adults can do to strengthen the connection students feel toward their school.

How–To Conduct a Successful Listening Circle

Reassure students that nervousness is natural. Reassure students that it is reasonable and natural to feel nervous. In previous listening circles, most students reported that, after the first or second question, their nervousness went away and they really just concentrated on what their peers were saying.

Encourage students to think of, and contribute lots of ideas. When students are writing out their responses to the questions, as well as during the actual listening circle, encourage them to contribute as many *specific* ideas and suggestions as possible. Point out that it's quite possible someone else may offer the same idea or suggestion they have before them, and that it's better to have lots of suggestions that people can think about acting on. The more ideas there are, the more opportunities for change there will be.

Review and practice reframing, i.e., making suggestions which adults can hear. When students are practicing their responses, an issue that frequently occurs and needs to be discussed is the impact of complaints, criticism, and negative comments versus the power of positive examples, ideas, and suggestions. Because adolescents in particular can relate to the consequences of criticism and feeling attacked, students can usually understand quite easily that adults who are feeling defensive because of the negative wording of a student comment will not be likely to support that student's suggestion. (See previous Key to Success on facilitator skills.)

Clearly describing the process so that students understand exactly what will occur also helps put students at ease. Let students know that:

» They will sit in a very tight circle, with chairs almost touching, and the adults will sit in a bigger circle surrounding them. Remind them that this means they will not be able to see the faces of all the adults and will have their backs towards some.

» The adults will be silent while students respond to all of the questions.

» Questions will be asked one at a time, and each student will have the opportunity to answer each question without interruption.

» Students will be asked questions clockwise or counterclockwise, in the order they are sitting, so they will always know when their turn to respond is coming up.

» After every student has answered a question, the facilitator will ask if anyone else has anything to add before going on to the next question. This will be the ONLY time students will be called on out of turn. Frequently, students will think of new ideas and suggestions after hearing their peers respond to a question. This is their opportunity to add those additional thoughts and comments.

» Students will be asked what it feels like to be listened to by adults, before adults are encouraged to give feedback and the general discussion begins.

» There will be an adult assigned to be the timekeeper and another adult who takes notes at the start of the session. Let students know that they may see the adults writing down things students say, and that this is a good sign—not something to be distracted by.

» Two people, one adult and one student, will be asked/volunteer to record a summary of the discussion on chart paper following each question, and to report back to the large group.

The Agreements

As with the adults, we have found that students also need to agree to certain rules in order to make the listening circle successful. During their training session, students need to agree to conduct themselves according to the following agreements while participating in the listening circle:

» Turn off cell phones and refrain from texting.

» Focus on what you do like, want, or need (not on what you don't).

» Only use people's names when making positive comments.

» Be respectful of each other.

» Pay attention to the timekeeper.

» Speak your truth!

The Heart of Training Students: Providing Opportunities to Practice

Apart from making students comfortable and knowledgeable about the circle process and reviewing the agreements, training and prepping students primarily consists of giving them opportunities to come up with specific ideas and positive suggestions, and to practice sharing them.

Materials:

- ❐ Copies of focus group questions on 5 X 7 note cards (ideally, a different color for each question, or color coded with dots).

- ❐ Pens or pencils

- ❐ A chart or poster of the Student Agreements

Directions:

1. Distribute the question cards and pens.

2. Explain that questions are color–coded so everyone will be able to keep track of the questions by looking at the color of the card the facilitator will hold up during the listening circle.

3. Remind them that no one else will ever see their written responses so they shouldn't be concerned with correct spelling and grammar. The cards help students to organize their thoughts, remember their answers, and keep track of which question is being asked. It also gives them something to do with their hands. Encourage them to write further ideas down once the circle process starts.

4. Ask the students to write down their responses for the first question and encourage them to have at least three answers for each question. This will help them avoid having nothing to say if another student "uses up" their answer before their turn comes around.

5. Allow each student to respond to the first question.

6. Gently demonstrate how to reword (reframe) students' responses by giving several examples of helpful, useful responses, and contrast those to one or two that aren't very useful. Ask the students to discuss the difference (see Key to Success on eliciting specific student suggestions.)

7. Move on to the second question and repeat the process.

8. In addition to giving students more opportunities to provide specific ideas and suggestions (illustrated with examples), show students how to reframe negative experiences into positive ones so that adults can better hear them. (See the Key to Success in the previous section on how to coach youth on reframing.) Repeat the process until all questions are completed, encouraging specific examples and illustrating how to positively reframe experiences and suggestions. If necessary, check for understanding using your own scenarios.

How to Elicit Specific, Useful Suggestions from Students

A "yes" or "no" student answer is not useful in that it doesn't provide any real ideas about what adults can do to address an issue. In as many ways as possible, give students examples of responses that provide specific information that adults can act upon. Also explain that the facilitator's job is to make sure that their responses are useful, and that if probing is needed it does not mean their answer is wrong or not good enough, only that there isn't enough specific detail to help adults make changes.

For example, if a response to the question, "How do you know if an adult cares about you" is, "She is nice to me," you should help students understand why more information is needed. Use probes such as "HOW is she nice to you?" or "What does she specifically say and do?' Help students understand how valuable specific suggestions and examples are to adults. If answers are too brief or too general they aren't helpful.

If students are having trouble coming up with specific examples about what they mean by general concepts like "she is fair," "he is good," "teachers are friendly," it may help to ask them what not being fair, good, or friendly looks like. It is sometimes easier for students to describe the opposite behavior first, and then arrive at what the positive behavior looks like in practice.

Similarly, when asked "How can school be made more fun and interesting," a common response is more games, field trips, activities, etc. Help students see that change is more likely to occur if specific ideas are provided; for example, the kinds of games or specific field trip destinations that would make school more fun and interesting.

Remind the students that there is less than an hour available for all of them to have a chance to give responses to each question, and that it will be important for them to be as brief as possible while still sharing their many good ideas and suggestions. Let them know that you may gently remind them of the time remaining at some point during the circle, so everyone will get their chance to speak out. Not an easy task! Help them to examine their responses to see if there is enough information for the adults to act on.

Materials

- ☐ Blank chart paper
- ☐ Adult and student agreements posted
- ☐ Timekeeper (start of session)
- ☐ Adult and student volunteer to chart ideas and report back (end of session)
- ☐ Completed student question cards (have students bring)

Directions

1. As the adults join the students in the break–out room, encourage them to take seats in the surrounding circle.

2. Make sure everyone—students and adults—has agreed to the agreements.

3. Introduce the timekeeper, stress the importance of staying on schedule, and briefly explain the process.

4. Facilitate the listening circle using the process described above.

5. When all the questions have been answered, thank the students for their courage and their excellent contributions, and thank the adults for their respectful participation as listeners.

6. Ask the students how they felt about their experience being listened to by adults.

7. Then ask the adults what it felt like to be listeners and not talkers.

8. For the discussion of student responses, have everyone move their chairs to form one large circle.

9. Select two volunteers (one adult and one student) to capture the main ideas on chart paper as the discussion progresses. This record will be used to report back to the larger group.

10. Ask the adults if they have any questions that might help clarify the student responses.

11. Then ask the whole group what were the main ideas expressed by students. Ask for suggestions about how to organize the main messages into major themes (if any).

12. Pay attention to the timekeeper and the time. When the time is nearly up, in addition to thanking everyone for their participation, briefly explain what will happen in the report–back and summary discussion.

Helpful Hints

» Before discussing specific comments made by students, the facilitator should initiate the discussion to focus on the listening circle process itself, rather than the content. Compliments to the students should be encouraged at this time. Usually adults will take this oppor-

tunity to validate the efforts of the students, praise the quality of their responses, and share how unusual the experience of having the time to really listen is.

» Encourage one adult and one student to volunteer as note–takers and reporters. Combining the two roles ensures that the volunteers pay attention and understand what they write down. It also sends a powerful message about the value of students and adults working together when the reporters are a student and adult team.

» Remind everyone that this initial debriefing process itself is not meant to solve any issues or challenges. Rather, the point of the process is to capture the main messages expressed during the day. Discourage attempts to focus on specific solutions at this time. Also remind participants that the "solution" discussion will begin during the next step, in the large group, and can continue throughout the school year. This is the time to encourage students and adults to participate in that process.

» Encourage everyone to stay until the end of the solution discussion.

Questions for Listening Circles

The major intent of the student questions is similar in all listening circles, whether the adult listeners are parents, school staff, or community members—to focus participants on the importance of resilience, as well as on local issues or concerns. Research has shown that children are more likely to be happy and successful when the adults in their families, communities, and schools are caring and supportive, convey high, positive expectations for their behavior and success, and provide many opportunities for meaningful participation and contribution.

The specific wording of resilience–related questions and a few of the questions themselves may differ, however, depending upon the adult group listening and local issues. What a parent, teacher, or community member may do to show their caring for a student can each look very different to the student. What students need from each group is very different as well.

The process of listening to students describe their needs and experiences is also more meaningful and powerful when the specific examples given are directly related to the adults' role. When students are asked to respond to the question, " How can the adults in your family help you succeed in school," the information gleaned from their responses is most useful and meaningful to family members. While the responses to "What kind of decisions have you made or would you like to make in your community," might be very interesting to all the adults, the information will be most relevant and useful to community representatives.

This is why the forum includes separate, distinct listening circles for each adult group. The nature of the students' needs, and the adults' contributions will vary depending on whether the adult group comprises parents, teachers and school staff, or community members. Holding separate circles for each adult group can help students express their needs as they relate specifically to that group.

Most adults in schools and families will state unequivocally that, of course, they care about and believe in their students, their sons, and their daughters. But sometimes youth, especially adolescents, interpret how the adults in their lives show and express their care as the exact opposite of what the adults intended. Hearing from students themselves is a valuable lesson that intention and results can often be at odds with each other. A somewhat surprising, but consistent message from the hundreds of students participating in listening circles across the state is that they know that "hard" and "demanding" teachers really believe that they can succeed. Students will often admit that they might complain that the teacher is too strict or too particular, but they know, "deep down," that those kinds of teachers believe they can do better and won't give up on them.

More specific questions can be asked in subsequent follow–up listening circles, focus groups, or at another forum event. This first effort must incorporate the environmental supports and opportunities identified in the research as necessary to meet the developmental needs of all youth—caring adults, high expectation beliefs and messages, and opportunities for participation, decision–making, and meaningful contribution. Without these fundamental factors, any efforts to deal with more specific issues and challenges will have little chance of succeeding.

Examples of questions for the separate listening circles are shown in Appendices G–I.

STEP 4: REPORTING BACK TO THE WHOLE GROUP

After a brief break, the entire group is given the opportunity to share the main ideas and messages from the school, family, and community listening circles by reconvening at a report–back session. This important session allows participants to examine common themes and ideas across the three groups—themes that will serve as the foundation for further dialogue about action steps.

Materials

- ☐ Chart paper with main ideas from each group posted
- ☐ Note–takers

Directions

1. Each student–adult report–back team takes no more than ten minutes to report back on the main ideas and themes from their listening circle and group discussion. Other members of that listening circle group have the opportunity to add to their report–back.

2. The facilitator then asks the group members if there are two or three main ideas that seem like reasonable starting places, keeping in mind "do–ability" and available time, resources, and people to help. These starting points can then be indicated on their posted chart.

3. The facilitator for the large group asks participants about any general, overlapping themes across the three listening circles. These themes can either be highlighted on the posted charts, or re–stated on a new chart.

The goal of this final step of the forum is to begin to build the connections between groups—school, family, and community—by focusing on ways in which each group can support improvements in the school environment and one another. How can families and community members better support the efforts of the school staff? How can school staff and community members better support families in their efforts to help their children be successful, etc.? The forum provides a very unique opportunity for these groups to collaborate in this way. Seldom are the very adults who can do the most to promote youth well–being and success brought together in this way, for this specific purpose. In turn, this sets the stage for continued action by identifying recommendations and people who are willing to continue that work.

Facilitating the Dialogue

The process goes as follows:

1. The facilitator asks participants for comments and ideas on how each of the groups can support the others, i.e. how can families help the school move forward on their ideas, how can school staff help families with their group's ideas etc. The focus here should be to have a motivating discussion responding to the question, "What can each of our groups do to build a strong school–community environment based on what we heard from our students today?" The ideas generated should be noted on new chart paper.

2. As part of this discussion or part of a closing activity, ask for volunteers to state one thing they will act upon as a result of their participation in the forum. (Be sure the note–taker documents these suggestions for the group and individuals.)

3. Facilitate the dialogue so that at least two or three actions for improvement are generated out of the day, along with a specific person who can follow up with each action or schedule an agreed–upon time to check in on each action (see below). Where possible, guide the discussion so that participants work together to act. These do not have to be actions that require lots of time or money; the goal is to jump–start the process of follow–up and action planning. It also sends a clear message to the students that their ideas CAN make a difference!

4. Close the session with an action–step calendaring, i.e., who will be responsible for checking in with individuals who have committed to actions today, and when will they do so? A sign–up sheet for participants to indicate their interest in being a part of the next–step planning and action process is key.

5. The resilience support coordinator should make sure that she/he obtains all the notes from the three listening circle note–takers, and all the charts used to reference in future planning meetings. A volunteer might be recruited to transcribe them all into a more easily read format that can be distributed to interested participants and at future planning meetings.

Facilitating Immediate Action Steps

Action steps that emerge from the forum may be individual or group–oriented. In the Partnership Project, for example, students had suggested that the restrooms needed improvement. At the forum, the principal agreed to meet with the custodial staff to help them address student concerns. By the end of the week, restrooms were well stocked with toilet paper, paper towels, and soap, and were noticeably cleaner. At the end of the year, students acknowledged that this was a consistent improvement.

It is important that someone commits to following up on the actions that require attention beyond the day of the forum. For example, in another school, students wanted healthier food options, including a means to warm up food from home. The superintendent indicated the district could buy a microwave oven for the students, but he needed their support to figure out a way to ensure that the microwave was maintained and used properly throughout the year. The facilitator asked the group for volunteers to work on this issue, and made sure that both an adult and students were part of the group. The facilitator also ensured that someone was assigned to follow up with the students and the superintendent before participants left the event. (In this process, the resilience support coordinator would take on this role.) The students got a microwave within a month, and used it responsibly throughout the year.

This example also illustrates how groups need to work together and support each other so that improvements happen and are sustained over the long–term. Without students taking responsibility for establishing a process and rules to maintain the microwave, or joint work with the resilience support coordinator and principal to set up consequences, sustaining this improvement would have been much more challenging.

Another example of immediate action at a different school took place when students expressed dismay at the litter and trash that made their school look dirty and depressing. They were also concerned about having to throw away recyclable items, especially in the lunchroom. The principal purchased large trash cans on his way home from the forum, and the next morning asked those students to label the cans and then put them in the lunch room and around the school where they thought they would be noticed and used. By lunchtime of that same day, the school had a new recycling program and a group of concerned and motivated students to run it! By the end of the year, they had raised several hundred dollars from their efforts and the school was noticeably cleaner.

STEP 6: EVALUATING YOUR WORK

Collecting participant feedback on the forum is not only useful for improving the process, but also for informing outreach strategies and broadening the pool of potential participants. The feedback form to collect this information can be quite simple and does not require a tremendous amount of time to develop or administer. For example, in the Partnership Project we used a brief,

one–page feedback form for youth and adults (see Appendices D and E). On the feedback form, in addition to demographic information questions and advice on ways in which the forum could be improved, we asked participants how they had heard about the forum and why they decided to participate.

By categorizing youth and adult responses and then looking for patterns, we learned that participants, especially adult participants, often heard and responded more to individuals (e.g., friends, children) than to formal announcements inviting their participation. Prior relationships, then, were shown to be an important outreach strategy, and the project planned to use an "invitation tree" where participants who were already committed to the forum personally invited at least one other person to the next forum. In turn, that person would invite at least one other person, and so on. Examining your data according to role group or ethnicity can help you see other patterns that may help you understand the best ways to reach out to other potential participants.

In fact, simply summarizing the demographic information will tell you who was reached successfully, and those you may have been less successful at reaching. For example, in the Partnership Project, Latino students comprised a larger percentage of the student population than was represented among adult participants at the forum. Finding other community–based organizations that serve Latino parents, and asking them to participate and assist in outreach was one way the project had planned to increase the potential pool of forum participants so that they were more representative of the student population.

The forum event provides the catalyst and initial ideas for action. If facilitated appropriately, a few key actions and individuals willing to work on them will be identified by the end of the forum event.

The follow–up action planning is the key to 1) achieving results and forging long–term relationships among groups, and 2) providing youth with sustained opportunities to speak out, be heard, and have meaningful roles in the decision–making process of their school. Following up on the actions identified during the forum can take different forms and require different levels of intensity, depending upon the resources devoted to your efforts. Without a resilience support coordinator, follow–up will be less structured and intense, and can easily fall to the wayside. Even if individuals agreed to commit to certain actions at the forum, mechanisms to monitor these agreements still need to be established. For example, a committee made up of a representative(s) from the PTSA, student council (or student government or leadership group), school staff, administration, and community members could be formed to track and guide the follow–up process.

Depending on what the actions involve, enlisting the help of just a few adults can bring major results. One example of a solution that was quickly and easily implemented came in response to some students' dilemma of having to study for all of their tests on the same night, usually Thursdays. A short agenda item at the next teachers' meeting to discuss which content area would take which day for testing—math tests on Tuesdays, science on Wednesdays, etc.—was all it took for an important change to take place that had an immediate impact on student success and their sense of belonging to, and being cared about at school.

At another school, the students wanted healthier food available at lunch. One administrator arranged for a meeting between students and district and school food service personnel. Soon afterwards, that school had a salad bar at lunch and an ongoing committee providing ideas on what healthy food could be served.

In short, depending on participants' ideas about what actions may be needed, it doesn't always take an official resilience support coordinator or a full–blown committee meeting over a long period of time to make important changes.

A structured approach also provides opportunities for on–going listening circles and a more consistent focus on school improvements incorporating student ideas.

Follow–up Action in First Year

In the structured option (recommended), where a part–time resilience support coordinator is available for about eight hours a week, we recommend the following:

1. Establish a core action team
2. Develop an action plan,
3. Conduct on–going listening circles

STEP 1: ESTABLISHING A CORE ACTION TEAM

The role of the core action team is to develop and implement an action plan based on what transpired at the forum event. Ideally, representatives from school staff, parents, a community member, and students comprise the team. People on the sign–up sheet or who had expressed interest in participating in follow–up activities at the end of the forum are likely candidates for core action team membership.

Recruiting the right groups for successful follow–up is an essential step in the forum process. In order to solidify the core action team formed during the Partnership Project, the following strategies were used:

Outreach and Publicity at the Forum Event

The day of the forum event is the best time to recruit members for the core action group. Participants will be excited and motivated by the day's activities, so use that momentum to your advantage. *Helpful Hint:* Written sign–up sheets are more reliable than verbal agreements, so make sure to have some kind of sign–up form that participants can return to you *that day*.

School Staff Recruitment

The best method for action group recruitment is to follow up individually with all staff participants. These personal "asks", coupled with a general reminder (e–mail or flyer) can help secure a number of participants for the group. *Helpful hint:* Not all staff members will have the time to participate in this group; it is better to secure one or two really committed teachers than to try to engage everyone.

Student Recruitment

For students, it is important to first reach out to all the students who participated, in order to allow each an equal opportunity to accept or decline. Sending out a flyer/sign–up sheet is a good place to start. Based on the response from these, it might also be necessary to follow up with students individually. Personally asking students who excelled during the forum is also a good way to fill any empty spots. Remember, you want students who are dedicated to the cause in order to

have a truly successful action group. *Helpful hint:* Scheduling conflicts or previous commitments (such as sports teams or clubs) could end up pulling some of your students from the group. If this turns out to be the case, consider using students from the other action groups to help recruit new members. *Helpful hint:* Treating the action committee as a special group or club is a great way to keep students excited and motivated about their participation. Coming up with a new name, assigning special roles and responsibilities, and bringing snacks are all great ways to do this!

Family Recruitment

In order to secure family participation, personal e–mails and phone calls are best. Begin with those who expressed interest, and eventually move on to all families from the forum. *Helpful Hint:* Parents tend to have busy schedules, and there will likely be a few interested individuals who cannot make the time commitment. Make sure that you don't forget about them! There is always room for extra help and support, so make sure to keep them in the loop and offer them opportunities to participate in less time–consuming ways—bringing food to events, passing out or printing up flyers, calling a limited number of other parents to recruit or give them information, etc.

Community Member Recruitment

Methods of individual outreach that are similar to those used with parents can be used for community members as well. *Helpful Hint:* As with parents, community members might have busy or inflexible schedules that make the time commitment difficult. If this is the case, offer them an opportunity to attend just one meeting, just to stay involved and informed.

The role of the core action team is to refine, prioritize, and implement actions that emerged from the forum event. In the Partnership Project, the team's first meeting focused on reviewing the take–away notes and report–back lists generated from each of the listening circles, and the general follow–up discussion. Team members then collaboratively selected their top eight priorities to focus on for the year, based on feasibility and likelihood for success, time and resources needed, and importance to school improvement efforts. Subsequent meetings focused on implementation. At every meeting of this core action team, students were the majority members and the driving force behind the success of the changes made.

In the Partnership Project, the core action group refined suggestions and ideas from the forum event. The resilience support coordinator then developed a timeline and schedule for these activities, which was referred to as their action plan to monitor the activities and keep people focused and on track. We encourage schools to write an action plan because the process of writing it increases commitment to follow through, and makes it easier to share these plans with others.

The following were central activities of their action plan:

» *Verbal encouragement presentation:* Students and adults agreed that, like the forum event participants, the entire faculty should hear about ways in which teachers could verbally support and encourage students in class and school. A small group of students presented their ideas at a staff meeting. Many students reported that they noticed a definite increase in the frequency of teachers' verbal encouragement of their peers.

» *School board presentation:* Students made a presentation to the school board on their experience participating in both the Forum and the Core Action Team. The presentation was an opportunity to showcase a "best practice" happening in the district, and demonstrated how students shared their feelings about the importance of speaking out, and of staying involved in school.

» *Suggestion box:* A suggestion box procedure was initiated in order to give the entire student body a chance to share their input. Administered once a month, on "suggestion day" in the lunchroom, students were encouraged to give feedback to teachers, student government, other staff, etc. The suggestions were then recorded and passed along to the appropriate individuals. As a direct result of the suggestion box procedure, a popular, elective "sports club" was brought back for the next school year, and one teacher added more projects to his class.

» *Lunchtime activities/clubs:* In response to a strong request from students during the forum, the core action team worked to increase lunchtime activities. They were successful in both getting more equipment for the schoolyard and in recruiting a handful of teachers to establish lunch clubs for the following school year. Both of these improvements were achieved through meetings with the principal and the staff leadership team.

Bottom line: the greater the number of people involved in planning and supporting the forum process generally (and an action plan specifically), the greater success you will have.

STEP 3: CONDUCTING ON–GOING LISTENING CIRCLES

On–going listening circles are important for a number of reasons. They provide students with opportunities to build confidence, public speaking, and leadership skills. The process itself builds stronger connections to school, and increases the capacity for improving the way students who haven't been connected in more traditional ways can become more involved. On–going listening circles also provide adults with reminders about how much students know and understand about schools. Finally, they increase the capacity—the social capital—of the school–community to work together toward improving school environments.

Following is a template for using ongoing listening circles during the school year. While listening circles will look slightly different at each site, following these basic guidelines can assure their success throughout the year

1. *Content Specific Follow–Up:* Every new school–community forum will bring with it a host of site–specific issues established by the participants. While the initial forum serves to uncover and highlight these issues, ongoing listening circles will serve as opportunities to go deeper and gain more insight from students. Participating schools should aim to have at least one of these listening circles during the year. Topics will vary and should be based on those identified as being most pertinent to the school and the students. For example, in the Partnership Project, bullying was identified as a topic of concern, and was elected to be the topic of a follow–up listening circle.

2. *Year's End Follow–Up:* The final format for the listening circle is an end of the year event. The goal of this listening circle should be to revisit the initial forum topics and determine what has or has not changed. This is a great opportunity to gauge success over the year and bring everyone back together to share ideas one final time before the school year ends. The core action group should play a central role in the planning of ongoing listening circles. Whether it's determining topics, writing questions, or recruiting participants, make sure to take advantage of the resources this group provides!

CONTINUED ACTION

It takes time to build the capacity of schools and communities to partner together in order to use student voice and a data–driven process to improve school climate. But the benefits of continually increasing opportunities for students to offer their ideas, using data to drive decision–making, and working collaboratively to meet students' needs are obvious and well–worth the effort; school climate and the system of support for youth achievement, success, and well–being are improved and strengthened. The more students and adults participate in this process, the more ownership and responsibility for school improvement they assume over time.

We recommend that a school–community forum be conducted annually at the beginning of the school year. After the initial year of the forum, schools should aim to keep the forum as an annual event. As new students, teachers, and families filter through the school, it is important to continu-

ally revisit this process and allow new voices to be heard. Establishing the school–community forum as an annual event will also make for a simpler planning process from year to year.

Once students start speaking up about what matters to them at school, it is not hard to find student volunteers to talk to groups of adults in the community. Most PTSAs have a student member, but increasing the student presence at meetings can help garner more adult support for the entire forum and forum follow–up process. In the Partnership Project, students were asked to address school staff at a scheduled staff meeting and the school board at the district school board meeting. Other community groups surely would have welcomed hearing from them, if the opportunity had been provided.

The structured follow–up process described in the previous section should ideally be followed each year that a school–community forum event is held.

We also recommend that schools hold at least one listening circle at the end of the year to examine progress and achievements. Additional, ongoing, content–specific listening circles would help ensure that the school and community continue to collaborate on solutions to issues that directly impact student and school well–being. Just as important, this ongoing work will also demonstrate the positive impacts of strengthening the three resilience protective factors necessary to support healthy youth development—caring relationships; positive, high expectation messages; and opportunities for meaningful participation and contributions.

Benard, B. (1991). *Fostering Resiliency in Kids: Protective Factors in Families, Schools, and Communities.* San Francisco: Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development.

Benard, B. (2004). *Resiliency: What We Have Learned.* San Francisco: WestEd.

Benard, B. & Slade S. (2009). "Listening to Students: Moving from Resilience Research to Youth Development Practice and School Connectedness". In M. Furlong, R. Gilman, & S. Huebner (Eds.), *The Handbook of Positive Psychology in Schools.* New York: Routledge.

Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development (1995). *Great Transitions: Preparing Adolescents for a New Century.* New York: Carnegie Corporation.

Carnegie Task Force on Education of Young Adolescents (1989). *Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century.* New York: Carnegie Corporation

Carnegie Task Force on Youth Development and Community Programs (1992). *A Matter of Time: Risk and Opportunity in the Nonschool Hours.* New York: Carnegie Corporation.

Coleman, J. & Hoffer, T. (1987). *Public and Private High Schools: The Impact of Communities.* New York: Basic Books.

Dryfoos, J. (1998). *Safe Passage: Making It Through Adolescence in a Risky Society.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Hanson, T., Bono, G., Zheng, C., and Austin, G. (2007). *Academic performance and school–related well–being in California schools.* San Francisco: WestEd/Regional Educational Laboratory–West.

Henderson, A. & Mapp, K. (2002). *A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family and Community Connections on Student Achievement.* Austin: National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools/SEDL.

Izu, J. (2005). "Fishbowl Lessons". Prepared for quarterly report of the San Mateo North County Youth Development Partnership Project.

Izu, J. (2008). "North County Youth Development Partnership Evaluation Report". Final report prepared for the San Mateo North County Youth Development Partnerhsip Project.

Putnam, R. (2000). *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community.* New York: Simon and Schuster.

ON RESILIENCE

Benard, Bonnie. *Resiliency: What We Have Learned.* San Francisco, CA: WestEd, 2004.

WestEd (n.d.) *Resilience and Youth Development.* Retrieved from http://chks.wested.org/using_results/resilience

ON YOUTH VOICE

Aust, Barb and Vine, Wendy. "The Power of Voice in Schools", *Classroom Leadership*, volume 7, number 2, October 2003.

Benard, Bonnie. "Turnaround Teachers and Schools", pg 115–137. In Williams, Belinda (Ed). *Closing the Achievement Gap: A Vision for Changing Beliefs and Practices, 2nd edition.* Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2003.

ON RESILIENCE, RISKS & ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

WestEd. *California Healthy Kids Survey Factsheet 1: Health Risks, Resilience and the Academic Performance Index* (p 4*).* Retrieved from http://chks.wested.org/resources/factsheet.pdf

WestEd. *California Healthy Kids Survey Factsheet 3: Are Student Health Risks and Low Resilience Assets an Impediment to the Academic Progress of Schools?* (p 4). Retrieved from http://chks.wested.org/resources/FACTSHEET–3.pdf

ON POSSIBLE SURVEYS

WestEd. *Guidebook to the Healthy Kids Survey, Part II: Survey Content–Core Module, 2010–2011 Edition (p 133).* Retrieved from http://chks.wested.org/resources/chks_guidebook_2_coremodules.pdf

WestEd. *Guidebook to the Healthy Kids Survey, Part II: Survey Content–Resilience and Youth Development Module, 2010–2011 Edition (p 14).* Retrieved from http://chks.wested.org/resources/chks_guidebook_2_rydm.pdf

ON DATA USE

WestEd. *Guidebook to the Healthy Kids Survey, Part III: Data Use and Dissemination (p 44).* Retrieved from http://chks.wested.org/resources/chks_guidebook_3_datause.pdf

Oakland Unified School District. *Use Your Voice Surveys: How to Read and Analyze the Survey Data (n.d.).* Retrieved from http://ousdstudents.org/Use_Your_Voice_Survey/index.html#How_to_Read_and_Anal

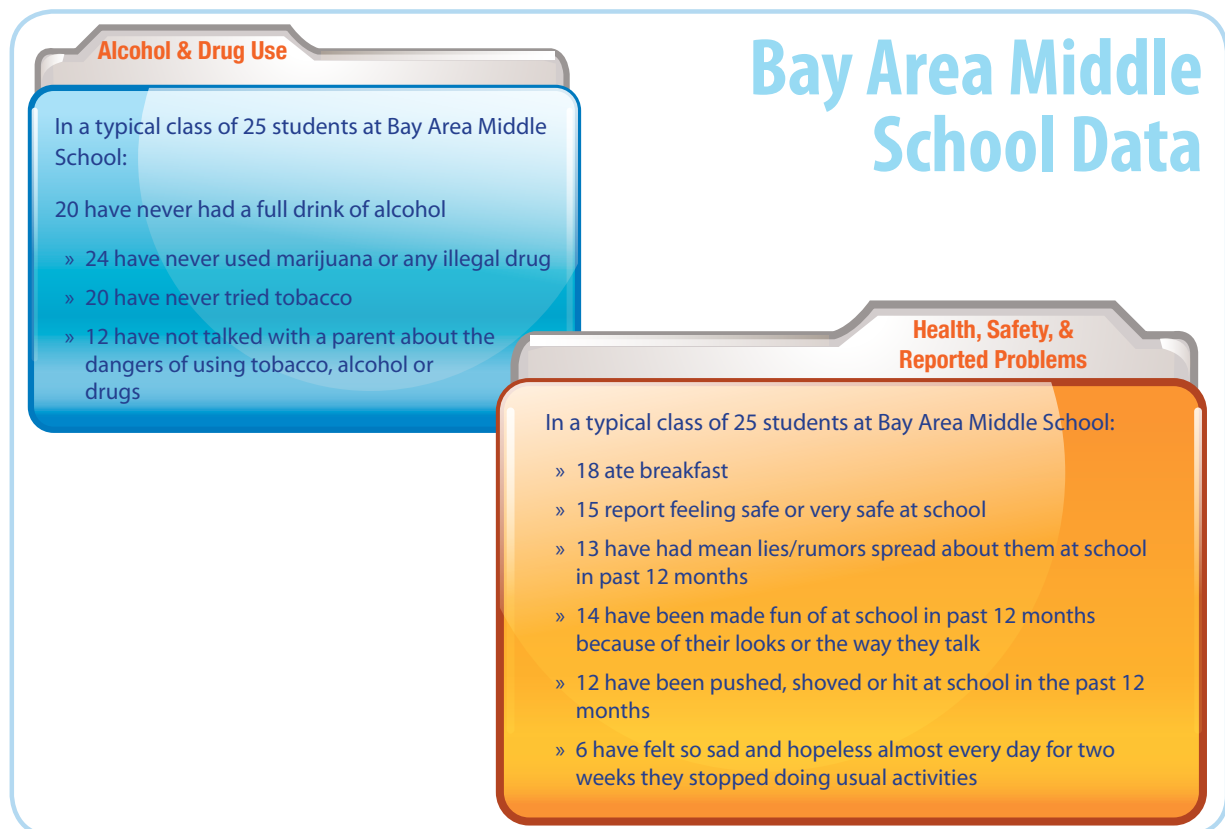**PROMOTING RESILIENCE & SCHOOL CONNECTEDNESS**

A Youth & Data Driven Student-Family-School-Community Partnership Demonstration Project

The middle school years are a time when young people face many developmental tasks that are critical to their healthy development and school and life success. Resilience and education research has found that both developmental and academic outcomes are far better for youth when families, schools, and communities work together with shared values and expectations. The Partnership Demonstration Project is an effort on the part of WestEd's Center for Resilience & Youth Development, funded by the Lucile Packard Foundation for Children's Health, to demonstrate the effectiveness of a data- and youth-driven student-family-school-community partnership process for promoting resilience and school connectedness in students.

The major element of the Partnership Demonstration Project is the Student-Family-School-Community Forum. The purpose of the Student-Family-School-Community Forum is to provide an opportunity for adults to hear what young people need from them to be healthy and successful and to develop a sense of partnership between these systems. Simultaneous Student Listening Circles will be held to hear what students need and appreciate from their families, peers, school staff and community members. A Core Action Planning Group will be formed to follow up on the ideas that emerge from today's Forum.

We welcome your participation and invite you to contact the Bay Area Middle School School Resilience Coordinator, Jane Miller, at 000-000-0000 or John Smith, Principal, at 000-000-0000.

Bay Area Middle School Data

Alcohol & Drug Use

In a typical class of 25 students at Bay Area Middle School:

20 have never had a full drink of alcohol

- » 24 have never used marijuana or any illegal drug
- » 20 have never tried tobacco
- » 12 have not talked with a parent about the dangers of using tobacco, alcohol or drugs

Health, Safety, & Reported Problems

In a typical class of 25 students at Bay Area Middle School:

- » 18 ate breakfast
- » 15 report feeling safe or very safe at school
- » 13 have had mean lies/rumors spread about them at school in past 12 months
- » 14 have been made fun of at school in past 12 months because of their looks or the way they talk
- » 12 have been pushed, shoved or hit at school in the past 12 months
- » 6 have felt so sad and hopeless almost every day for two weeks they stopped doing usual activities

Data drawn from the results of the 2008 Bay Area Middle School California Healthy Kids Survey.

School & Community Protective Factors in California, Bay Area County, & Bay Area Middle School*

% Reporting High Level of
Caring Relationships

	state		San Mateo Co		BF	
	33	61	40	66	37	62

Legend: community (orange), school (blue)
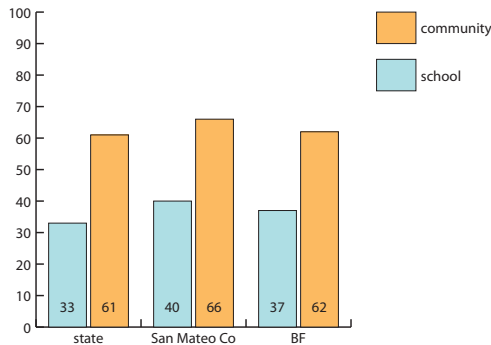
At my school, there is a teacher or some other adult...
- ...who really cares about me.
- ...who listens when I have something to say.
- ...who notices when I'm not there.

Outside of my home and school, there is an adult...
- ...who really cares about me.
- ...who notices when I am upset about something.
- ...I can trust.

% Reporting High Level of
Meaningful Participation

	state		San Mateo Co		BF	
	17	45	19	56	15	42

Legend: community (orange), school (blue)
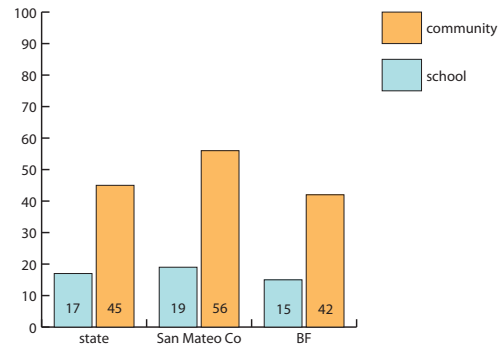
At school...
- ...I do interesting activities.
- ...I help decide things like class rules and activities.
- ...I do things that make a difference.

Outside my home and school...
- ...I am part of clubs, sports teams, church/temple, or other group activities.
- ...I am involved in music, art, literature, sports, or a hobby.
- ...I help other people.

% Reporting High Level of
High Expectations

	state		San Mateo Co		BF	
	48	62	59	68	62	64

Legend: community (orange), school (blue)
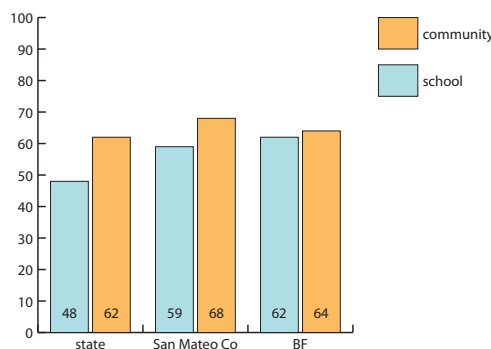
At my school, there is a teacher or some other adult...

Outside of my home and school, there is an adult...
- ...who always want me to do my best.
- ...who tells me when I do a good job.
- ...who believes that I will be a success.

% Reporting High Level of
School Connectedness

	state	San Mateo Co	BF
	41	54	53
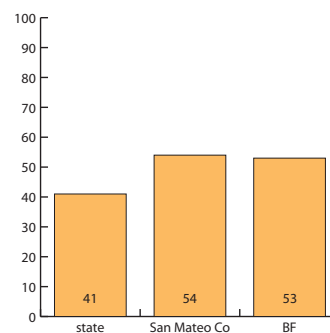
How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements about your school?
- I feel close to people at this school.
- I am happy to be at this school.
- I feel like I am part of this school.
- The teachers at this school treat students fairly.
- I feel safe in my school.

October 2003 | Volume **7** | Number **2**
Building Classroom Relationships

The Power of Voice in Schools

Bringing Democratic Ideals to Life

by Barb Aust and Wendy Vine

When adults in a school trust and value what students have to say, plenty is said. Students become willing to risk trying out new ideas and to share alternate points of view, and they revel in their individuality. Giving students voice means providing venues where students' opinions can actually have an impact on the school, making a real difference in how students grow and learn.

Schools that encourage students to help govern are democratic. Democracy is not only a topic that's covered in these schools—it's a way of life; students perform many of the roles they'll play as citizens in a democracy. In democratic schools, where shared power and shared decision making are the norm, you will find:

October 2003

- **Underpinnings of respect.** People learn respect by being treated with respect. When treated respectfully, learners remain open to learning and making mistakes. Where respect and challenge are coupled, people can be risk-takers and experiment with ideas and concepts, knowing that there is always another chance. This keeps the door open to life-long learning.

- **Opportunities for every voice to be heard.** When people trust and value what others have to say, when they themselves are provided with the opportunity to be heard and acknowledged, ownership is created.

- **Opportunities to share responsibility in appropriate areas.** At every turn, it is essential to find ways to share the responsibility—to build a community of learners in which each shares in the education of the other. When we share what we know and flatten the hierarchy so we are all learners and teachers, we provide fertile ground for people to share leadership roles in creative and innovative ways. Inviting everyone to the table increases ownership and investment.

- **Ample opportunity for choice.** Opportunities for choice increase the feeling of personal control and ownership. Choice provides an invitation to join—something much more palatable than a directive. Schools, of course, have to follow some timetable in order to be efficient; however, within the structure, a variety of opportunities can be provided for choice.

- **Opportunities for facilitation skills to be learned and practiced.** Although, as principals and teachers, we can't completely abdicate responsibility and authority,
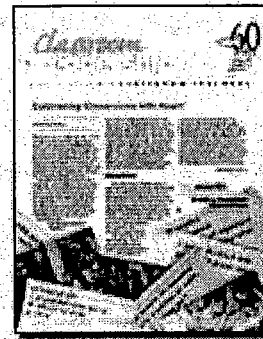
there are many ways in which we can share the power. Through facilitation and a flattened hierarchy, we ensure participation and share decision making. This can be learned and implemented at every level.

- **An atmosphere of non-judgment and neutrality.** It takes courage and skill to allow what may be contentious issues to be put on the table. Yet, with practice in mediation skills and a resolve to assume a neutral attitude, the emotion in some issues can be neutralized, and difficult situations can be resolved. A place of neutrality leads to win-win solutions.

In the print version of *Classroom Leadership* (Vol. 7, No. 2), we discussed ways teachers could create more democratic classrooms. In this article, we'll share some suggestions for creating school structures that support democratic education.

Meaningful Meetings

Family or multi-aged group meetings and whole school meetings are the essence of the democratic schools we've been involved with. Meetings are designed to provide opportunities for participatory decision-making. To create family or multi-aged groups, the entire school population is essentially divided into groups. Some schools ensure that actual family members are all in the same group. Others base their groups on different criteria. The idea is to end up with class-sized, multi-aged groups throughout the school. Each teacher and administrator takes on a group and facilitates a circle discussion, similar to a class meeting. At these group meetings, staff, students, and parents raise issues that require discussion. Each person has an opportunity for his voice to be heard. The issues and suggestions are noted and volunteers bring the group's suggestions to the next whole school meeting.

Once a week, the entire school meets together for a time of celebration and connecting. Birthdays are acknowledged, special events described, new students introduced, departing students cheered on their way, and class work celebrated. Multi-age group volunteers then share suggestions for resolving any issues at hand. If there seems to be a general consensus about the issue and suggestions, there are easy agreements. Sometimes, however, further discussion is necessary and those meeting times are organized. This may seem to be a time-consuming and cumbersome process, but the experience gained and the degree of ownership of decisions by the students, staff, and parents makes a remarkable difference in how a school functions.

The "circle" model is the most effective for these discussions. Once an idea is presented, the discussion goes around the circle and every person has a chance to give voice to the topic. A pass is acceptable, but discussion continues until there is some sort of agreement— even if it's to agree to disagree on the issue. Again, this may take more time than many wish to spend but, in the end, it builds great trust. When all stakeholders have a voice in how things go in a school, they feel ownership and commitment and are willing to go the extra mile.

Reaching Out to Parents

Parents and the community are key partners in democratic schools. And we can't stress enough the need to keep parents and community members well informed. Send home weekly newsletters, leave voice-mail messages, and provide current information on the school Web site.

To allow for input, establish groups such as Parents' Advisory Councils. Classroom and individual meetings are just as important. When it's understood that issues can be brought safely to the table and will be dealt with neutrally and non-judgmentally, parents are

comfortable being active members of their child's school.

Tapping Students' Leadership Skills

One of the best ways to share responsibility with students is to create a peer helper program, which can provide excellent opportunities for children to learn to listen to others, develop healthy relationships, invite others to participate in discussions, hone the ability to be flexible about their ideas and the ways things turn out, and take on voluntary responsibility for managing parts of their own school.

Peer helpers act as school leaders and take on tasks that support the entire school. Students involved in such a program have increased self-esteem and have a deeper personal commitment to their school.

A Culture of Dignity

If we believe that a key part of a school's mission is to teach children citizenship, we must give them opportunities to be active participants in a democracy. We must create schools in which shared power and shared decision making are the norm rather than the exception.

In such schools, there is a strong emphasis on building relationships. In these schools, educators believe it is their job to build healthy and supportive relationships, develop rapport, and engender respect and trust—in short, to create a culture of dignity. Dignity helps people find their voice and gives them the ownership and commitment needed for true democratic communities in our schools.

Read more in *Classroom Leadership*. Barb Aust and Wendy Vine share strategies for teachers to use in creating democratic classrooms.

Barb Aust (aust@saltspring.com), a former principal and teacher now working as a university instructor and consultant, and **Wendy Vine**, a teacher, have worked in schools operated by democratic ideals. Wendy and Barb were partner teachers for five years on Salt Spring Island, British Columbia, Canada.

Caregiver Beliefs

Environmental Inputs

developmental supports & opportunities

Protective Factors:

· Caring Relationships
· High Expectations
· Meaningful Participation

Personal Inputs

that meet developmental needs

· Safety
· Love & Belonging
· Respect
· Power
· Challenge
· Mastery
· Meaning

Personal Outputs

promoting developmental strengths & outcomes

Personal Resilience Strengths:

· Social
· Emotional
· Cognitive
· Moral-spiritual

Societal Impacts

thus producing

positive prevention, education, & successful life outcomes

PROMOTING
RESILIENCE
& SCHOOL
CONNECTEDNESS

A Youth & Data Driven Student-Family-School-Community Partnership Demonstration Project

1. What is your role?

Ⓐ   Student

Ⓑ   Parent/Guardian

Ⓒ   Other family member
       (eg. aunt, sister, cousin etc.)

Ⓓ   Community member

Ⓔ   School staff

2. What is your ethnic background? *(Mark all that apply)*

Ⓐ   African American or Black

Ⓑ   American Indian or Native American

Ⓒ   Asian or Asian American

Ⓓ   Filipino

Ⓔ   Hispanic or Latino

Ⓕ   Pacific Islander

Ⓖ   White

Ⓗ   Other

3. How did your hear about the school community forum? _____

4. Why did you decide to participate in this school community forum? _____
_____

5. What is the most important idea you will take away from this event? _____
_____

6. How valuable has this event been to you?

Very valuable	Valuable	Somewhat valuable	Not valuable
Ⓐ	Ⓑ	Ⓒ	Ⓓ

7. Please give an example that explains your rating. _____
_____

8. What is one thing you would have liked to see done differently? _____
_____

9. Do you have suggestions for future forums? _____
_____

	yes	no
10. Would you come to another forum?	Ⓨ	Ⓝ
11. Would you be willing to participate in follow-up activities?	Ⓨ	Ⓝ

PROMOTING
RESILIENCE
& SCHOOL
CONNECTEDNESS

A Youth & Data Driven Student-Family-School-Community Partnership Demonstration Project
PARTICIPANT SURVEY

1. What grade are you in?

   (7)   grade 7

   (8)   grade 8

2. What is your gender?

   (M)   male

   (F)   female

3. What is your ethnic background? *(Mark all that apply)*

   (A)   African American or Black   (E)   Hispanic or Latino

   (B)   American Indian or Native American   (F)   Pacific Islander

   (C)   Asian or Asian American   (G)   White

   (D)   Filipino   (H)   Other

4. How did your hear about the school community forum? _____

5. Why did you decide to participate in this school community forum? _____

   _____

6. How comfortable were you answering questions in the forum?

Very comfortable	Comfortable	Somewhat comfortable	Not at all comfortable
(A)	(B)	(C)	(D)

7. How could we have prepared you better to be more comfortable? (e.g. more materials, more information about how event is set up, more practice, etc.)

8. What is the most important idea you will take away from this event? _____

_____

9. How valuable has this event been to you?

Very valuable	Valuable	Somewhat valuable	Not valuable
Ⓐ	Ⓑ	Ⓒ	Ⓓ

10. Please give an example that explains your rating for question #9. _____

_____

11. What is one thing you would have liked to see done differently? _____

_____

12. Do you have suggestions for future forums? _____

_____

	yes	no
13. Would you come to another forum?	Ⓨ	Ⓝ
14. Would you be willing to participate in follow-up activities?	Ⓨ	Ⓝ

If you're willing to participate in another forum or follow-up activities, please let the coordinator know.

Thank you for your participation!

Listening Circle **Agreements**

Students agree to:

- Turn off cell phones and no texting
- Focus on what you do like/want/need
- Only use names for positive comments
- Be respectful of each other
- Remember time
- Speak your truth!

Adults agree to:

- Turn off cell phones and no texting!
- Stay for the entire listening circle
- Be silent during listening circle
- Commit to a plan of action that reflects the young people's perspectives

School Listening Circle Questions

PROMOTING RESILIENCE & SCHOOL CONNECTEDNESS:
A Youth & Data Driven Student-Family-School-Community Partnership Demonstration Project

1. How do you know when an adult in your school CARES about you? What do they say and do? Please give some specific examples and suggestions.

2. How do you know when an adult in your school BELIEVES in you? What do they say or do?

3. What would make school and learning more fun and interesting for you and your friends? What would you LIKE to do? Give us ideas for in class and outside of class time.

4. What kinds of decisions do you make or would you like to make in your classrooms and about your school?

5. What kinds of things could you do at your school that would make a difference? That would help others?

6. Please share your goals and dreams with us and tell us what else you need from the adults in your school to help you achieve your goals and dreams.

Bonnie Benard & Carol Burgoa   WestEd

Community Listening Circle Questions

PROMOTING RESILIENCE & SCHOOL CONNECTEDNESS:
A Youth & Data Driven Student-Family-School-Community Partnership Demonstration Project

1. How do you know when an adult in your community CARES about you? What do they say and do? Please give some specific examples and suggestions.

2. How do you know when an adult in your community BELIEVES in you? What do they say or do?

3. What kinds of fun and interesting activities do you do or would you like to do outside of home and school?

4. What kinds of things could you do or would you like to do in your community that would make a difference? That would help other people? That would improve your community?

5. How can the adults in your community help you succeed in school?

6. Please share your goals and dreams with us and tell us what else you need from the adults in your community to help you achieve your goals and dreams.

Bonnie Benard & Carol Burgoa   WestEd

Home Listening Circle Questions

PROMOTING RESILIENCE & SCHOOL CONNECTEDNESS:
A Youth & Data Driven Student-Family-School-Community Partnership Demonstration Project

1. How do you know when an adult in your home CARES about you? What do they say and do? Please give some specific examples and suggestions.

2. How do you know when an adult in your home BELIEVES in you? What do they say or do?

3. What kinds of responsibilities do you have at home and what do you do to help your family?

4. How can the adults in your home help you succeed in school?

5. Please share your goals and dreams with us and tell us what else you need from the adults in your home to help you achieve your goals and dreams.

Bonnie Benard & Carol Burgoa   WestEd