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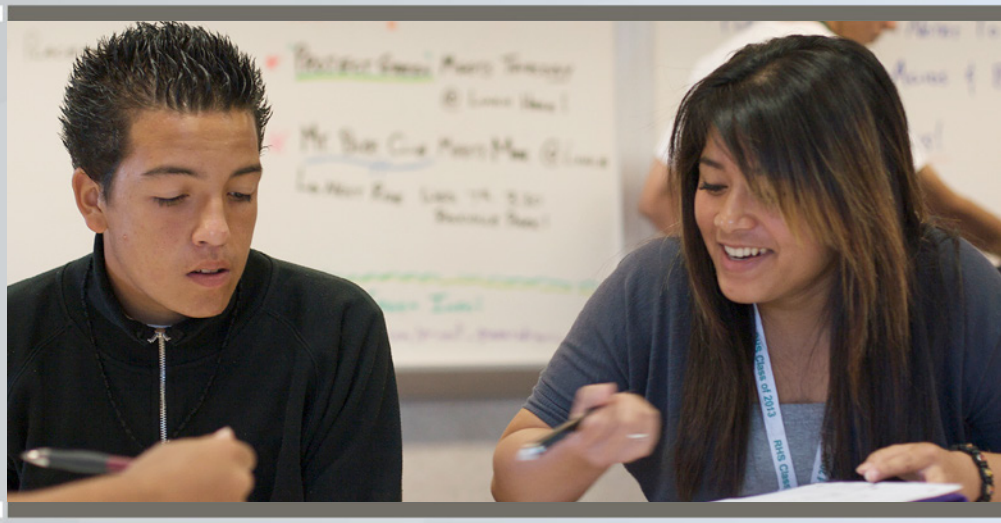

SHIFTING SCHOOL CULTURE TO SPARK RAPID IMPROVEMENT

A Quick Start Guide for Principals and Their Teams

Sam Redding and Julie Corbett

The Center on School Turnaround
FOUR DOMAINS *Series*

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Contents

Getting a Handle on Culture

The Center on School Turnaround (CST) has identified four levers, or domains, for dramatic change to rapidly improve schools: turnaround leadership; talent development; instructional transformation; and culture shift (CST, 2017). These levers are highly integrated — the only way for each to succeed is to ensure that all four are enacted and aligned. Yet each requires an understanding of the unique knowledge, skills, and tools required for its enactment. This paper focuses on Domain 4, culture shift — what it means, why it is essential for rapid improvement in a school, and — critically — how to move a school from a negative culture to a positive one that fosters student learning and success.

A school's culture is a powerful force that will work for or against improvement efforts. A school with persistent and chronic low achievement has, almost by definition, spiraled into a negative culture that contributes to and is worsened by its failures. Rapid improvement, then, requires culture shift, an enterprise that requires changes in mindsets, norms, and attitudes and is as difficult and uncertain as it is essential.

In this paper, we address the nature of that challenge. We define what we mean by school culture and differentiate between the school's culture and the variety of cultural influences students and teachers bring with them to the school. Throughout, we emphasize that the unrelenting focus of a successful school's culture is student instruction and learning. We address why, in particular, that means ensuring that everyday school and classroom practices substantively respond to, rather than ignore or simplistically acknowledge, students' home and family cultures. Finally, we offer steps schools can take to prepare for culture shift and a tool that can help launch and guide the change process.

What is school culture and why does it matter?

School culture is the "underground stream of values, beliefs, traditions, and rituals," built up over time, that influence daily behavior and actions of everyone at the school and set the context for student learning (Peterson & Deal, 1998). At any school, a positive environment of respect and trust is key to enabling the teamwork needed to solve problems and meet challenges. At a persistently low-achieving school, defeat and pessimism have likely become entrenched. Immediate concerted action to shift to a positive culture is crucial to fostering the community cohesion needed for student learning and academic improvement.

A negative culture "smothers" low achieving schools as an atmosphere of neglect, dysfunction, and disappointment takes the oxygen from efforts to improve (Peterson & Deal, 1998). The staff lacks a sense of community and common purpose. There is often a sense of "us versus them" and much blame shifting and finger pointing. Stakeholders don't feel listened to; responses to issues raised are slow and inconclusive. People assume a hidden agenda behind every decision. Fear of retribution for speaking up leads to self-protection rather than a focus on students. A compliance mindset robs staff of the ability to take ownership or responsibility for student learning or to hold each other accountable.

Culture shift requires changes in mindsets, norms, and attitudes and is as difficult and uncertain as it is essential.

By contrast, in a positive culture, trust, teamwork, and a common sense of mission, focused squarely on instruction and learning, prevail. A shared understanding of "how we do things around here" in the service of student success is matched by each individual's clarity about his or her role in achieving the mission. Core values driving actions and decisions are overt. Structures are in place to involve all stakeholders in decision making, and people feel safe to raise problems. Leaders openly and honestly admit mistakes, both to signal the "messiness" of change and to model the openness that builds trust and teamwork. High expectations are matched by support to achieve them. There is a sense of community where students are well known, feel safe, and can learn in a caring and supportive environment.

A turnaround culture has the additional dimension of urgency — of fusing strong community cohesion with an academic press. The task is to sustain an intensity that challenges and supports students to aim higher, work harder, and realize the satisfaction of accomplishment. Doing so requires that the school's community of people — staff and students and also the families of students — be engaged, collaboratively, in the turnaround work.

Multiple cultures affect us all

It's important that we recognize that within schools, a number of "cultures" come into play and have an impact on students. Beyond the school culture itself are the characteristics of the community the school is embedded in, the individual backgrounds of each student and teacher, the sensitivities of various constituencies, and the influence of mass culture in a world of mass media and the internet. Students and teachers live within these multiple and overlapping cultural spheres. Each culture exerts pressures, both positive and negative, on everyone within its field of influence.

No shift in school culture removes all the pressures from all the various cultures that affect any one child or teacher. But part of being educated is learning to filter the positives and negatives of our cultural influences rather than being imprisoned by them. We learn to make reasoned judgments about them and exert selectivity in how they influence us. How we understand that is, itself, culturally influenced.

To be clear, culture is not race, ethnicity, class, or socioeconomic status. It may run alongside these characteristics so closely that it seems their shadow at times, but it should not be conflated with them. Poverty, for example — endemic in many low-achieving schools — is a situation, not a culture. It's a situation shared by a multitude of groups of people from Appalachian whites to Somali immigrants, groups who likely don't share much in terms of values, dispositions, and behaviors that usually describe culture (Gorski, 2013). Yet too often, when teachers or other adults face a behavior such as apathy or aggression that they can't explain or identify with, "culture" becomes the catch-all culprit, "randomly and regularly used to explain everything" (Ladson-Billings, 2006).

Rather than using culture as a catch-all for blame, successful schools honor it and harness its power to reach and engage students.

Rather than using culture as a catch-all for blame, successful schools honor it and harness its power to reach and engage students. All school personnel receive training and support to understand their own and their students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Teachers, in particular, receive professional development and ongoing support to implement culturally responsive pedagogy, an instructional approach (discussed further, below) wherein teachers know their students well and integrate culturally relevant experiences and material into the classroom to help students make connections between ideas.

Shifting Culture: Three Key Practices

To move a school from a negative to a positive culture involves three key practices for rapid improvement: 1) build a strong community intensely focused on student learning; 2) solicit and act upon stakeholder input; and 3) engage students and families in pursuing education goals.

Build a strong community intensely focused on student learning

Building a positive culture starts at the top. The school's leaders, including those leading the culture shift, need to embody, model, and overtly talk about the values driving the enterprise (see "Name Your Values," below) and keep everyone focused on the pivotal urgency of improving student learning. They need to create structures, including multiple layers of teams, for exchange of information, common message building, and sharing of accomplishments and frustrations. Structures that foster open, transparent communication help strengthen relationships, infuse a sense that everyone is "in the loop," and allow all players a voice and sense of ownership of reforms. Above all, by explicitly signaling "we need your involvement, we need your support," they foster a sense of community, common purpose, and trust — the building blocks of culture shift.

> ***Members of the school community come together and ask, "How do I, whatever my role, help contribute to a culture where students work their hardest?"***

The point that bears repeating is this: the shift in the values and behaviors of the people attached to the school must be in the direction of greater intentionality about teaching and learning. In other words, for students, teachers, staff, and parents, the idea is not merely to shift to a more uplifting culture. It's to shift the culture in ways that matter to learning.

That means developing a vision for what an effective school culture looks like. Doing so means creating opportunities for members of the school community to come together to discuss, explore, and reflect on student learning. What will be different here when instruction is effective and students are highly engaged? Importantly, it means going beyond discussion to each person thinking about what he or she will *do* — in short, asking such questions as, "How do I, whatever my role, help contribute to a culture where students work their hardest?" Leaders compile and delineate the agreed upon roles, responsibilities, and expected behaviors of each person — whether administrator, teacher, parent, caretaker, volunteer, or student — regularly reiterating how each contributes to the turnaround process and student progress (CST, 2017).

Such specific defining of roles and expectations creates a sense of interdependency among members of the school community. People begin to trust each other, take responsibility for collective action, and become loyal to each other beyond immediate self-interest (Cobb,

1992). Over time, members of the group gain confidence that others in the group will fulfill the obligations of their spelled-out roles (Coleman, 1990).

Solicit and act upon stakeholder input

As the school community works to make a positive shift in school culture, it's important to collect data at regular intervals by way of stakeholder surveys, focus groups, and/or questionnaires. These data are important for helping focus and shape culture-change efforts and for gauging the effectiveness of those efforts. More than that, when schools collect input from stakeholders and then share findings as well as actions taken based on that input — a crucial feedback step — barriers of mistrust begin to break down and the us-versus-them mentality dissipates. When parents, for example, see that their opinions on such things as the school's schedule actually lead to schedule changes, they get a message of acceptance and empowerment. That builds trust and ownership.

Strictly speaking, surveys and focus groups are measuring school *climate* rather than culture, though these terms are often used interchangeably. As distinct from the more encompassing idea of culture, we define school climate as the perceptions of people in the school community about their school and each other. Climate, in short, mirrors culture. And we can much more readily assay people's perceptions — what students, parents, teachers, staff, and administrators think about the school, their role relative to the school, their satisfaction with their relationship with the school.

When schools collect input from stakeholders and then share findings as well as actions taken based on that input, barriers of mistrust begin to break down.

Climate indicators include such factors as a school's order, safety, and discipline; supports for teaching and learning; personal and social relationships; and school connectedness (Voight, Austin, & Hanson, 2013). Surveys and interviews can query people's thoughts about those factors. What they think at any point in time is important to know. Libraries of school climate items are readily available. Responses can be quantified, aggregated, disaggregated, indexed, and mapped over time to create a trend line.

It's Important to remember that defining and choosing indicators is dependent on articulating vision: How does the school describe the culture to which it aspires? When findings from climate research are shared with all stakeholders, that vision forms the basis for dialogue about the findings and provides direction for taking action. Teachers and administrators, for example, consider survey findings about classroom environments in light of their commonly understood vision of what effective classrooms look like. That allows them to collaboratively brainstorm actions that would change classroom practices and improve student learning.

Leaders can buoy these efforts by continually reminding everyone that school climate and culture are, indeed, malleable. Recent studies underscore that intentional interventions — for example, schoolwide adoption of a behavior management system; instructional approaches that teach students social skills that foster social and emotional learning; and classroom management approaches wherein students themselves establish rules and norms and, thus, are motivated to take responsibility — can create shifts toward rapid improvement in a school (Voight, Austin, & Hanson, 2013). Such interventions lead to improvements in student behavior and performance. In tandem, attitudes and perceptions about the school become more positive.

With all this in mind, our advice for gaining a data grip on culture is to: (1) adopt a climate survey that suits the context and aspirations of the school; (2) construct a list of descriptors for the desired, observable expressions of culture found in rituals, routines, customs, and attributes of the facility; and (3) use the indicators of practice (see the Quick-Start Culture Shift Tool, below) to calculate the degree of implementation at any point in time, basing this calculation on the percentage of indicators in effect. Out of this, a culture scale may be constructed that fits the school's vision and aspirations.

Engage students and families in pursuing education goals

Culture shift is as much about aspiration as custom and tradition. A successful school culture is clear about its north star, for the school and for each student and teacher in it. A cultural atmosphere of hope and high expectation encourages teachers, students, and families of students.

In an aspirational culture, teachers create classroom environments that emphasize learning goals and provide support. They help students build skills in setting learning goals, thus fostering intrinsic motivation and high-quality learning. Students who have opportunities to set goals, apply learning strategies, and track their own progress toward mastery become confident, independent learners. They develop aspirations, meaning that they are able to identify and select goals for the future, while being inspired in the present to work toward those goals (Quaglia & Cobb, 1996).

In an aspirational culture, students have opportunities to set goals, apply learning strategies, and track their own progress toward mastery. They become confident, independent learners.

Teachers help students explore possibilities, articulate their personal aspirations, and connect their learning to the pursuit of these aspirations. At the same time, the school helps students and their families formulate educational goals and understand and use a variety of data sources about student progress and interests. When parents guide their children to articulate aspirations and reinforce day-to-day behaviors in pursuit of those aspirations, student achievement improves (Jeynes, 2010; 2011).

In an aspirational culture, then, each student has access to personalized learning, supported by qualified, caring adults. Teachers purposefully form respectful, trusting relationships with students and parents. Teachers engage each student in identifying what will be learned and designing how it will be learned and intentionally building students' personal competencies that propel learning (Redding, 2016).

To help each student gain clarity over time about his or her interests and aims and the path toward personal life goals, a growing trend in schools is to have an individual plan of study for each student as part of a process to keep students on track throughout the grades. This process typically begins in middle school and carries through high school, prompting students to think about their college and career possibilities and align coursework and experiences accordingly. The process includes a learner profile; periodic meetings of the student with parents, teachers, and counselors; and the mapping of a learning pathway. On occasion, community members representing the student's interest areas are also brought into these meetings.

Responding to Students' Cultures

Effective educational environments and instructional practices go beyond *understanding* students' cultural contexts to embracing students' cultures and using their prior experiences, frames of reference, and cultural knowledge as resources for learning. At the heart of this approach is culturally responsive teaching, a pedagogy that recognizes the importance of including students' cultural references in all aspects of learning (Ladson-Billings, 2006, 2009).

Key steps schools and teachers can take to foster a culturally responsive teaching and learning environment include:

Prepare to teach with cultural responsiveness.

Effective instruction for any student requires that the teacher respects and leverages each student's cultural background, taking advantage of each culture's richness to help students make connections among ideas. This is a different instructional approach for many teachers, and making the shift is no small task. It requires that the school overall, as well as each teacher, undergo an intentional reorientation to the craft of teaching (Hammond, 2015).

Fostering and preparing for that reorientation calls for training and support to help all personnel understand their own and their students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds; to avoid stereotyping of students based on assumptions about their family and cultural backgrounds; to encourage a growth mindset that encourages academic growth and success for all students through effort, self-regulation, and persistence to mastery; and to help teachers integrate cultural and linguistic material into the curriculum.

Reconceptualize the teacher–student relationship.

Teachers need to have high expectations and be very demanding while also offering encouraging support, thus affirming their faith in students' ability to rise to the high standards. In a culturally responsive teacher-student relationship, the teacher's job is to "find a way to bring the student into the zone of proximal development while in a state of relaxed alertness so that he experiences the appropriate cognitive challenge" (Hammond, 2015). This requires what's been called "hard caring"(Antrop-Gonzalez & De Jesus, 2006) or being a "warm demander"(Kleinfeld, 1975). An important aspect of helping students do their best is for teachers to promote a growth mindset — an understanding that intelligence is not fixed; instead, effort will lead to increased competence. One way teachers promote a growth mindset is by insisting on, and rewarding, persistence to mastery for all students.

Bridge cultural referents

To impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes that empower students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically, culturally responsive teachers alter the cultural referents in the curriculum (Ladson-Billings, 2009). Appropriate cultural referents are a bridge to explain the dominant culture. They are also aspects of the curriculum that allow students to use their prior knowledge and experiences to make connections among ideas.

As an example of a culturally relevant style, Ladson-Billings (2009) notes that a fifth-grade teacher might begin a lesson on the U.S. Constitution by discussing bylaws and articles of incorporation used to organize a local church or African American civic association. "Thus the students learn the significance of such documents in forming institutions and shaping ideals while they also learn that their own people are institution-builders. This kind of moving between the two cultures lays the foundation for a skill that the students need in order to reach academic and cultural success" (Ladson-Billings, 2009).

Exalt a community of learners

Teachers must intentionally foster a sense of community among students in the classroom and with their families. Ladson-Billings (2009) describes traditional classrooms that tend to rely primarily on interactions between the teacher and each student. Such classrooms are often colored by the student's academic performance and behavior, she notes, and miss opportunities to take advantage of the diversity of student backgrounds and cultural crosscurrents to help students connect with and understand new ideas. By contrast, the culturally responsive teacher structures the classroom to develop a "community of learners" that provides students from varied backgrounds with a strong sense that each is seen, matters, and belongs.

The culturally responsive teacher develops a "community of learners" that provides students from varied backgrounds with a strong sense that each is seen, matters, and belongs.

The teacher not only works deeply to understand each student and personally connect with each but also establishes classroom structures and routines that allow students to get to know each other and that encourage collaborative learning. The teacher also explicitly teaches social-emotional skills such as self-regulation, communication, and cooperation as a foundation for academic learning. Using strategies such as cooperative learning groups, the teacher supports students in teaching each other, learning from each other, and assuming responsibility for each other's learning. In addition, the teacher forms connections with students and their families beyond the classroom and school. This community of learners incorporates "value, beliefs, traditions, and rituals" that constitute a culture — one that transcends the cultures the students bring to the classroom.

Use story

Culturally responsive teachers use specific instructional strategies that teach the commonalities and meritorious distinctions of different groups of people as well as the human qualities and experiences that are universal. Gay (2010) makes the case for one such method: the use of story. Stories, writes Gay, "are a powerful means for people to establish bridges across

other factors that separate them (such as race, culture, gender, and social class), penetrate barriers to understanding, and create feelings of kindredness" (Gay, 2010).

Stories can create links between home, family, and school and can be used to give deep meaning to many different kinds of lessons. They can be based on student interviews with family members. They can bring parents into the classroom to tell their family stories.

Gay notes that story-making — the art of creating and telling stories — is itself an important learning task, serving alongside story-listening, interpretation, and sharing. Students learn that stories convey intentionality; they help connect the causes behind the outcomes we see. Stories express values, beliefs, desires, and theories, communicate emotions, and describe the motivations of their characters. For all these reasons, stories shared and held in common among classmates contribute to their sense of community and attachment to the classroom and school.

Shifting to the School Culture We Want

Toeing up to the starting line for rapid school improvement and turnaround, the reform team must consider the school that is as well as the school desired. From the outset, it's critical to bear in mind that the fundamental reason for the culture shift is to significantly improve student learning. Decisions about courses of action must be guided by determination of each action's potential impact on learning, not just by the good that may be achieved in terms of warm feelings among members of the school community. The school environment must be a place that supports and encourages learning. It must be a safe space that allows children to grow.

Like any attempt to change people's behavior, shifting culture requires an understanding of what motivates behavior and what facilitates change. Telling people that everything they've been doing is wrong and has to change is unlikely to motivate cooperation. People require a rational explanation to help create a bridge from where they are to where they're expected to go. Teachers, parents, and administrators all deserve support and understanding, even as the best interests of students impels urgency to rapidly improve.

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Below, we offer four ways to prepare for the culture shift followed by a tool to help engage the three key practices in shifting a school culture toward one more conducive to learning.

Prepare for the shift

Four sets of actions can help culture shift leaders prepare a school community for the shift: (1) Name your values, (2) Look around you, (3) Count your customs, and (4) Pluck up your courage.

Name your values

Culture reflects values, and shifting a culture begins with boldly stating the values the new culture is to reflect. Engaging a representative group of school community members in a process to arrive at consensus about a short list of value statements is a good starting place. The people who are already there have a wealth of knowledge, and engaging them honors that knowledge and helps to build ownership of the change process.

Early in the process of rapid improvement, facilitate sessions with this group to discuss what's going well versus what needs improvement and to brainstorm a set of values to guide that improvement. This begins to lay the groundwork for building a necessary environment of candor, which is likely in short supply in a school in need of significant improvement. An

honest assessment of current reality can help lead to a shared vision and to action steps to attain that vision (White, 2013).

Since the potential list of values is endless, and focus is important for results, it's important to whittle down the list to a manageable few core values. Focusing on just a few key values facilitates intentionally applying those few to behavior — of students, staff, and even parents, as models and guides for their children. Seeing values materialize in behavior is the ultimate goal, and articulating core values is the first step.

Stating values is, of course, a common practice in schools. A list of values is often posted alongside the school's mission statement in the main hallway, and value statements may be referenced in student handbooks, rules, and regulations. But explicitly using the value statements as concrete guideposts to steer all policies and practices — including, for example, hiring, promoting, and retention decisions — is less common.

To guide the work of articulating values, models can be brought into play. For example, the Circle of Courage model, based on Native American traditions and culture, focuses on four core values: belonging, mastery, independence, and generosity (Reclaiming Youth International, n.d.; Brendtro, Brokenleg, & Van Bockern, 2002). The model's central theme is that a set of shared values must exist in any community to create an environment that contributes to resiliency.

An honest assessment of current reality can help lead to a shared vision and to action steps to attain that vision.

At the CST we cite three interrelated values that we believe are inherent to a strong school culture: trust, respect, and high expectations. Trust and respect form the relational foundation for a community. Trust is a contributing variable to school performance and student learning, one that builds from social relationships in and around the school (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). Trust and respect grow from experiences involving cooperation and solidarity, experiences that encompass a sense of service and lending a helping hand so that others may achieve. As members of the group demand sacrifice from one another, powerful social bonds form (Douglas, 1986). These bonds help reinforce high expectations for self and others, as people embrace the idea that actual accomplishment matters here.

Look around you

To get a read on the school as it now exists, look for cues around the school. What do you notice? Three things tend to form our first impressions: the cleanliness and polish of the facility; the wall displays and signage in the hallways; and the interactions among students, teachers, administrators, support staff, and visitors. These are outward indicators of prevailing values; they represent the school's culture. Large art murals that feature the students, for example, spread messages of aspiration and high expectations. Appearances, in other words, matter. The cleanliness and functionality of bathrooms, the condition of water fountains and lockers offer vivid expressions of how students are valued. Such indicators can be noted, described, and discussed by the teams enacting the shift.

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As we spend more time in the school, we discover more cultural cues. We notice people's dress. We see waves of behavioral change when bells ring. We walk by classrooms and notice the deportment of students and the energy of teachers. We listen to conversations and detect the nature of the interactions, how teachers talk about students and students' families, how students talk about each other, how visitors are greeted and treated by office staff. Of course, there are great variations among the many different people, but patterns emerge — a group's value-laden, normative patterns of social behavior.

A staff developer writing about change in schools relays a telling professional development scenario. "The session is held in the auditorium, which has far more seats than there are faculty. As the teachers come in, many go straight to the back. The superintendent asks people to move to the front, but there is always a group, mostly male high school teachers, who stay back there. Before I've even been introduced or had a chance to bore them, some of them have their newspapers out, some are correcting papers, some are dozing" (Evans, 1996).

This scene says volumes about the school's professional relationships, the status of communication, and how people perceive and treat each other. It exemplifies value-laden social behaviors that we would want to shift away from in a rapidly improving school. Identifying and reversing behavioral patterns that reflect negative or counterproductive values is one part of the shift. The other part is everyone knowing and embracing what the school wants to shift toward.

Count your customs

Customs are predictable routines associated with events, and every enactment of a custom is an opportunity to amplify a value. Customs are typically rituals, traditions, or ceremonies associated with beginnings and endings — for example, the first day of school, last day of school; how students are greeted when they enter the building; the opening of school each morning and the end of each school day; graduations. Customary behaviors also mark many other events — such as the school team's introduction at a ballgame or the curtain call after a play — and situations, such as when a new teacher joins the staff. To greet the new teacher, maybe the principal emails an announcement, holds a special introduction in the gym, or presents the teacher with a sweatshirt emblazoned with the school mascot.

In preparing for cultural change, it can help to create a list of situations that call for customary behavior, then describe existing customs related to each situation. For example, "Each day the principal does morning announcements that emphasize the four P's: be prompt, be prepared, be professional, be productive." What values are evinced by this behavior?

Culture shift leaders can analyze the list with the aspirational values of the new culture in mind. Do the customs express and magnify the stated values? This exercise can help determine which customs deserve to be either extinguished or amplified.

Pluck up your courage

The decision to shift culture occurs at a point in time and is spearheaded by one person or a small core group of visionaries. It takes courage to be in the vanguard of change, since efforts will, without doubt, face resistance in some quarters. There will be community members who don't believe real change will happen because they are inured to thinking that people won't change their behavior, beliefs, or mindsets. At the same time, however, culture change leaders will attract an enthusiastic cohort of the like-minded, and over time those numbers will grow.

Culture change leaders can take several actions to bolster their chances of success. Importantly, they need to recognize that rapid improvement is best achieved not by lone stalwarts but through a coordinated, systemic course of action designed to have true collective impact (CST, 2017). That kind of action requires enlisting the support and involvement of school, district, and even state-level personnel. Additionally, given the challenges of the work, the partners leading it need to bolster each other as well as hold each other's feet to the fire. Said one veteran of a turnaround culture effort, "We are with each other so much, we share our lives with each other. We have to be able to say difficult things to each other. We talk, we meet, we work, we develop and implement action items."

Once a win occurs, "publicize the hell out it," said one reformer. "Once we could demonstrate some success, everyone wanted to be part of that winning team."

Finally, the partners need to deliberately and strategically use such tools as surveys and focus groups to identify and go after low-hanging fruit — areas where early wins are most likely. Once a win occurs, they should "publicize the hell out it," said one reformer. "Once we could demonstrate some success, everyone wanted to be part of that winning team."

The Quick-Start Culture Shift Tool

The Quick-Start Culture Shift Tool that follows provides guidance for a Culture Shift Team, most likely a principal with district support and a core group of teachers and parents. Designed to aid in planning and executing a culture shift, this tool is built from three sources:

- the four ways to prepare for the culture shift (Name Your Values, Look Around You, Count Your Customs, and Pluck Up Your Courage),
- the indicators of effective practice (CST, 2018), and
- a set of indicators for cultural responsiveness.

For a quick start for a culture shift, this tool will help a school's Culture Shift Team enact a quick start by getting a handle on both the current school culture and the culture they aspire to. For more complete guidance on incorporating indicators into a turnaround or improvement cycle, see *Four Domains for Rapid School Improvement: Indicators of Effective Practice* (CST, 2018) and *Utilizing Integrated Resources to Implement the School and District Improvement Cycle and Supports* (Layland & Corbett, 2017).

A. Prepare for culture shift

To complete the following tables on preparing for the culture shift, follow the prompts and fill in each respective column by:

- Summarizing your observations about the existing culture.
- Describing the culture you want.
- Describing how the shift will be executed; what are your levers for change?

1. Name three to five prevailing values of the school

Values	Existing culture	The culture you want	Shift levers
Name three to five prevailing values of the school			

2. Look around you

What to describe	Existing culture	The culture you want	Shift levers
Outside, classrooms, hallways, bathrooms, etc. *(brief description)*			
Describe the wall or door displays *(three words to describe)*			
Teacher attire *(three words to describe)*			
Student attire *(three words to describe)*			
Interactions between student and student *(three words to describe)*			
Interactions between teacher and student *(three words to describe)*			
Interactions between teacher and teacher *(three words to describe)*			
Interactions between staff and parent/family *(three words to describe)*			
Interactions between office staff and visitors *(three words to describe)*			

3. Count your customs

Routine	Existing culture *(if applicable)*	The culture you want	Shift levers
Morning routine *(three words to describe each)*			
End of day routine *(three words to describe each)*			
Meetings routine *(three words to describe each)*			
Rituals and ceremonies *(list)*			
Traditions *(list)*			

4. Pluck up your courage

Question to ask	Your Answers
Who leads the culture shift?	
Who are members of the culture shift team?	
Who are your allies within central office at the district?	
Who are your allies in the community?	

To conduct a quick assessment of the current status of indicators of effective practice in a culture shift:

- Meet with the Culture Shift Team to discuss each of the following indicators.
- By consensus, identify the level of implementation of each indicator.

  F = fully implemented; **L** = limited implementation; **N** = no implementation at all

B. Build a strong community intensely focused on student learning (Community)

1. All school personnel are organized into teams with clearly defined purposes (related to improving practice to enhance student learning), regular meeting times, and work products.
2. A team including teacher and parent representatives oversees school–home relationships that enhance student learning and operates with clearly defined purposes (related to improving practice to enhance student learning), regular meeting times, and work products.
3. The Leadership Team clearly defines, documents, and annually reviews roles, responsibilities, and expectations relative to students' learning for administrators, teachers, parents/caretakers, staff, volunteers, and students.
4. The school promotes, recognizes, and celebrates academic achievement in school rituals and routines, such as morning announcements, awards assemblies, hallway and classroom wall displays, and student competitions.
5. The school facilitates two-way communication and face-to-face association among school personnel, students, and families of students to work together to advance student learning.

C. Solicit and act upon stakeholder input (Climate)

6. The Leadership Team annually conducts a survey of school personnel, families, and students to gauge perceptions about the school, its effectiveness, and their place in it.
7. The Leadership Team annually releases to the school community a report of its analysis of the climate survey including concrete actions it plans in response to the analysis.
8. The Leadership Team annually convenes meetings of school personnel and families to discuss the results of the annual climate survey.

D. Engage students and families in pursuing education goals (Aspiration)

9. All teachers build students' skills in setting learning goals, applying learning strategies, and tracking their mastery.
10. All teachers help students explore possibilities, articulate their personal aspirations, and connect their learning to the pursuit of these aspirations.
11. The school helps students and their families formulate educational goals and understand and use a variety of data sources about student progress and interests.

If the Culture Shift Team determines to include cultural responsiveness as a pillar in its culture shift efforts, the following indicators will provide guidance.

E. Build from the strengths of diverse cultures and individual students' potential (Responsiveness)

12. The school provides all school personnel with training and support to understand their own and their students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds.
13. The school provides all school personnel with training and support to avoid stereotyping of students based on assumptions about their family and cultural backgrounds.
14. The school provides all school personnel with training and support on a growth mindset that encourages academic growth and success for all students through effort, self-regulation, and persistence to mastery.
15. The school provides professional development for teachers on how to integrate cultural and linguistic material into the curriculum.
16. The school promotes an understanding of the history and values of various cultures in school rituals and routines, such as morning announcements, awards assemblies, hallway and classroom wall displays, and student competitions.
17. The school includes community representatives from different cultural backgrounds in planning and providing school events that feature culture, customs, and values.
18. The school ensures that the promotion of the history, culture, customs, and values of culturally distinct groups is done in a way that engenders respect for the history, culture, customs, and values of other groups.

19. All teachers promote a growth mindset by attributing learning success to effort and self-regulation and insist upon (and reward) persistence to mastery for all students.
20. All teachers seek an understanding of each student's personal "story" and that of his or her family to appropriately engage the student and family and teach the student.
21. All teachers demonstrate in their lesson plans and materials that they have integrated cultural material into the taught curriculum.
22. All teachers promote an understanding and value for various cultures in their classroom displays, including cultures represented by students in the school and classroom.
23. All teachers employ classroom management and instructional methods that facilitate cooperative learning and mutual respect.

Summary for action planning

Reviewing the results of the Quick-Start Culture Shift Tool, have the Culture Shift Team list 10 priority actions that will initiate a dramatic and palpable shift in culture over the next three months. Identify:

Priority actions	Person responsible	Resources needed

Glossary

Culture — A group's value-laden, normative patterns of social behavior.

Custom — Situational (connected to time and place) behavior identified with a culture, such as rituals, traditions, and ceremonies.

> **Traditions** are customs that stand the test of time, being transmitted from one group in a culture to a group that arrives later to the culture.
>
> A **ceremony** is a customary way of celebrating or commemorating an event or accomplishment, and a **ritual** (often taking on religious coloring) is a precise, procedural activity that is typically part of a ceremony.
>
> **Customs as part of culture:** "Culture is the underground stream of norms, values, beliefs, traditions, and rituals that has built up over time as people work together, solve problems, and confront challenges" (Peterson & Deal, 1998).
>
> **Artifacts** are made objects with cultural significance.

Community — A group of people with common interests and shared values whose relationships with one another are based on communication and association.

Climate — The collective perceptions and attitudes of members of a group about the group, its aims, its effectiveness, and especially the relationships among its members.

Cultural competence — Skill in teaching in a multicultural or cross-cultural situation (teacher and students of different backgrounds).

School culture — The values, patterns of behavior, and customs that prevail among the community of the school — its students, teachers, staff, families of students, volunteers, and any others with an intimate association with the school.

Cultural responsiveness (or cultural relevance) — Culturally responsive teaching is a pedagogy that recognizes the importance of including students' cultural references in all aspects of learning (Ladson-Billings, 2009).

Teaching culturally — Adopting the teaching, childrearing, socialization, and acculturation practices of the students' cultures in teaching them.

Cross-cultural situation — One in which, for example, the teacher is of a distinctly different cultural background than the students.

Multicultural situation — One in which a variety of cultural backgrounds are represented, for example, among the students in a classroom or school.

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