

Superintendent Listening Tour Checklist

How to collect feedback and demonstrate your commitment to transparency to drive district success

Today's superintendents are faced with many challenges due to the fast-evolving education environment and pandemic — from intense scrutiny over every health and safety decision to volatile school board meetings.

Highly successful superintendents — even in the midst of challenging times — have one trait in common: their willingness to listen.

Listening to your school communities is not a passive or one-time exercise, and it requires you to be proactive. Whether you're a new superintendent or you've been with your district for a decade, a listening tour is a great way to intentionally meet with key stakeholders to ask questions, listen to concerns, identify issues, and strengthen trust.

This listening tour checklist will help give your community an opportunity to share feedback and inform school improvement efforts while demonstrating your commitment to transparency — leading to better experiences and engagement across your district.



Before your listening tour

Before launching a districtwide listening tour, spend some time conducting research, reflecting on where your district is today, and outlining a solid plan to ensure you achieve your goals.

Review existing data and reflect on your assumptions.

Analyze your district's achievement, budget, and enrollment data, as well as the resources, perceptions, and community relationships that impact your district's success. Outline your assumptions about schools, staff and student needs, and issues faced by the district to help inform the direction of your listening tour.

Outline your goals and create an active agenda.

Setting clear goals from the start will help ensure your listening tour is a success. Consider what you want to understand, clarify, and discover during your listening tour. Using your goals, reflections, and research, develop a list of action items and meaningful questions you know need to be addressed.

Plan your tour.

Make a list of the groups, people, and organizations within your district you need to engage. You'll want to offer specific sessions for stakeholder groups — such as teachers and families — and provide town hall-style sessions for community members to share their input.

Announce your listening tour.

Tell key stakeholders — from board members to staff to parents — about your plans to conduct a listening tour. Define your goals, explain the parameters, and give examples of specific times stakeholders will be able to communicate with you. If there is a specific reason *why* you're beginning this listening tour, make sure to publicly acknowledge it.

Promote your listening tour.

Stakeholders have varying communications preferences, so it's important to promote your listening tour in a variety of ways. Use email, flyers, handout cards, your website, monthly newsletters, social media, and other channels available to help stakeholders know when and how they can share feedback.



“Serving as superintendent is as much about partnerships and relationships as it is leadership. We are constantly doing everything we can to connect with our families and the community, and most importantly, our internal staff. Those connections will assist you in making tough decisions. Your stakeholders can be your most powerful cheerleaders and district advocates. When they have a strong relationship with you and your administration, they feel connected to the process, and they understand the why behind key decisions.”



Dr. Ehren Jarrett, Superintendent



During your listening tour

Staying organized, diligent, and aware is important during your listening tour. Throughout your tour, collect insights and data to report to your community. These insights will be critical to helping you develop a roadmap for districtwide improvements.

Create and share a calendar.

In addition to scheduling time to meet with stakeholder groups, publicly communicate your timeline for communicating periodic updates, results, and action plans for improvement to your district community.

Set agendas to guide your conversations.

Prepare an agenda with goals and a list of customized questions for each stakeholder group. Questions can be focused on challenges they're facing, resource needs, perceptions, opinions, and ideas for improvement.

Provide a variety of ways for stakeholders to communicate with you.

Some stakeholders will prefer to share their feedback in person, while others may prefer an anonymous digital option. In addition to closed meetings with teachers and open town halls for community members, provide options for people to submit feedback on their own time from a digital device. Use a platform like Let's Talk! to streamline communications within a unified inbox and collect data that can help you identify trends.



After your listening tour

The most important part of your listening tour will come after you've collected a trove of information, data, public opinions, and ideas. Use this knowledge to guide the development of your action plans and communicate next steps to your community.

Evaluate the data and trends.

Communication and transparency are key as you wrap up your listening tour. Did the listening tour bring to light a previously unknown issue? Do you need to collect more information about any issues brought to light? How can you take action to resolve conflicts you uncovered throughout the tour? Spend time evaluating the data and trends to help drive the development of a clear action plan.

Update your district's strategic plan.

Revise your district's strategic plan to reflect needs, aspirations, goals, and values identified by your stakeholder groups.

Assess your district's communications and community engagement.

Listening tours often help identify gaps in communications or understanding within school communities. After listening to the needs and concerns of your district, develop ways to provide better experiences and engagement — which will help you build trust and develop a culture of transparency that will serve you throughout your term.

Create a roadmap for the future.

Using the data and insights collected during your listening tour, create a clear roadmap that addresses academic and organizational goals to ensure your district best meets the needs of all stakeholders.

Report back.

People become easily frustrated when they feel their feedback wasn't seriously considered when big decisions are made. In the months following your listening tour, communicate clearly and frequently to help stakeholders know exactly how their input is shaping decisions.



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- Improve productivity and morale
- Reduce staff and student churn
- Provide equitable communications access
- Build community trust and support

[Request a consultation](#)

Strengthen staff, family, and community connections


Listening tours are a great way to improve trust and transparency within your district. It's important to keep two-way communications open throughout the year — even long after your listening tour is complete.

Continue to find ways to engage and empower your stakeholders to provide feedback that improves how your district approaches the experiences of students, families, teachers, staff, and the greater community. Leaving the door open for frequent feedback will help you anticipate potential issues and make proactive decisions to prevent future problems. If you're not sure where to start, [K12 *Insight* can help](#).

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