

# How to achieve higher levels of trust, buy-in, and engagement in your school district

5 strategies for strengthening  
relationships with your  
school community



# Introduction

Trust is the foundation of a thriving school district and effective two-way communications, and it begins with relationships.

Every interaction with your school district is an opportunity to build and strengthen trust, as well as to ensure your district delivers an exceptional school experience for all students and families.

From conversations with school staff to questions addressed at school board meetings, the quality of each of these engagements build the foundation of your district's reputation.

Wherever you are in the trust-building journey at your district, we've created a guide with actionable steps to help you strengthen relationships with your school community.

**“Without trust, we don’t truly collaborate; we coordinate or, at best, cooperate. It is trust that transforms a group of people into a team.”**

**— Stephen Covey**

# 5 strategies for strengthening relationships with your school community

School leaders know it takes time to build trust and, in turn, maintain a strong reputation. But in today's environment, many don't have enough time or resources. However, there is a repeatable and effective process to build and strengthen trust.

Read on for five key steps to building a culture of trust in your schools.



## #1 Measure community confidence

Every stakeholder brings unique experiences to your district. Having a clear understanding of community perspectives is a critical first step to building trust.

Thoughtful, research-backed surveys are an excellent way to establish a baseline understanding of stakeholder perceptions around a given topic — such as school climate and quality, employee engagement, or equity.

You can also effectively measure community confidence by routinely seeking community feedback at dedicated touch points throughout the year. Technology — including Let's Talk — makes it possible to collect and analyze feedback from students, parents, staff, and others on critical topics — such as safety reporting, bond and levy campaigns, school boundary issues, transportation questions, and more.

## #2 Identify opportunities for strengthening trust

In today's media environment and 24/7 news cycle, families and community members are always plugged in and seeking information. Through proactive listening, districts can get ahead of conversations or issues before they become crises.

Consider offering a central location — such as a Let's Talk landing page — for families and others to provide their feedback and pose relevant questions to their school or the district. As you receive responses, flag trending topics and recurring themes to understand what your community cares about. Use this information to identify potential risks and areas of mistrust, so you know where to focus improvements.



## #3 Develop an action plan

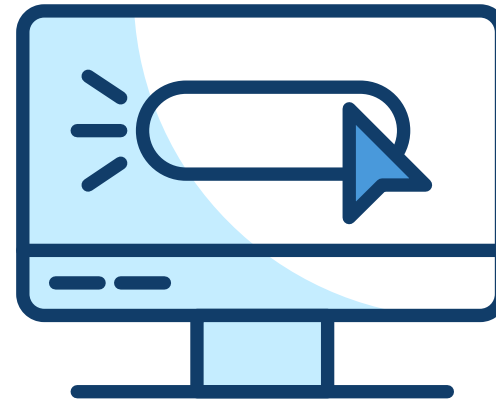
Once you understand community perceptions, build a plan that addresses their wants and needs. Outline the outcomes and define measurable steps to help track your progress toward goals and easily identify areas for growth and improvement.

## #4 Create a positive brand story

Your school district's brand and reputation is important. How families, students, and others perceive your school district goes a long way toward your ability to build trust with your community.

Marketing is critical for school district success in today's environment. Traditional channels — such as advertising and social media — are a great way to get the message out, especially if you're losing students.

Of course, your school district's brand is more than tweets and billboards, or words on a website. It's the promise you make to your community and — more importantly — whether the actions (and the actions of everyone in your school district) align with that promise.



**“Each encounter between a school employee and its customers can make a lasting impression. Your employees are either building or breaking your brand promise every time they encounter a customer.”**

**— Julie Thannum, former president of the National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA)**



“Parents want to get involved while knowing information and participating in their children’s education. Now more than ever, we need to listen.”

Tara Helkowski  
Public Information Officer  
Fauquier County Public Schools (Virginia)

## #5 Reinforce your story with exceptional customer experiences

A bad experience will almost always put your school or district in a negative light. People are also more likely to talk about bad experiences, which means news of those experiences often spreads fast — sometimes too fast.

Parents have many choices today for where to enroll their children, and customer experience is a critical way to keep them engaged and satisfied.

To help, more school districts are investing in professional development to ensure staff have the resources and skills to provide exceptional service.

To help define exemplary customer service in your district, start with the following questions:

**#1 What is your mission?**

**#2 What is your brand promise?**

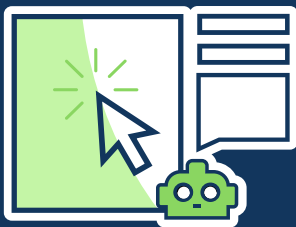
**#3 What do you offer at your school district that is unique and memorable?**

After receiving a response from a school or district, families and others should have an opportunity to rate the service — whether through a feedback form, survey, or informal questionnaire. That feedback can be used to identify where your district or school is already providing great service and where it can continue to improve — turning every interaction into a learning opportunity.

# Ready to strengthen **trust** and **confidence** in your schools?

K12 Insight delivers the only customer experience and intelligence platform purpose-built for education. We help district leaders strengthen trust and deliver superior customer experiences by:

- Supporting districtwide goals for better communication, collaboration, transparency, equity, and engagement
- Streamlining all inbound communications in one, districtwide unified inbox
- Revealing needs and trends in real time so you can make proactive decisions for your departments and district



**Request a consultation** to learn how we can help your district deliver better experiences and engagement.