



CONNECTION TIPS

Supporting Staff and Celebrating Their Re-entry

What's Going On?

Staff are likely to feel hesitant and overwhelmed about returning school to school due to: fears about contracting coronavirus and/or transmitting the virus to high-risk people in their personal circles; adjusting to ever-changing new safety and teaching protocols; and uncertainty about what to expect from students who have experienced a wide range of things during this time of social distancing. Acknowledging these feelings and celebrating the presence of staff in concrete ways is an important step in demonstrating staff appreciation and building cohesion among teams.

For a Positive Outcome

- Increasing staff confidence, morale, and attendance with the explicit, shared understanding that success for the coming year will be an on-going endeavor. Whenever possible, communicate and model that human needs and safety will be prioritized at every junction.
- Carefully consider your written communications with all staff prior to re-entering. How can you acknowledge or offer supports regarding: the unfamiliar task of teaching students remotely; concerns about safety or student learning loss; and strengthening the racial equity lens in the school-wide culture and in classroom instruction? Using your personal, genuine communication style and language, how can you demonstrate alignment with staff? What frequent words of support, or encouragement can you offer?
- Ask yourself, "What concerns do I have regarding my teaching approaches/strategies for students as they re-enter school?" You may have quite a few! Now it's time to examine your teaching strengths! Write them down and refer to them often, acknowledging your abilities.
- Re-institute and/or "advertise" your new open door policy for staff. When someone comes to talk, try to switch gears and use your listening skills. You do not have to fix every concern or be the best problem-solver of all time—presence and empathy are top strategies of leaders during uncertain times.
- Acknowledge that Zoom fatigue is real and people miss in-person human contact.
- Keep in mind that individuals' experiences during the time out of the building were unique, as will be the re-entry process. Some people have experienced more obstacles or trauma, or will struggle more. Assure all staff that the "plan" for re-entry to school will proceed "one step at a time" and with care for individuals' physical and mental health.
- Be visible. Check-in with staff in their spaces. "How are you doing?" can go a long way to support staff after a critical incident. Notice the efforts that individuals are making and name those: e.g. "I noticed that each day you take time to greet children individually and ask them about their morning. That really sends the message that you care about them and that they are safe."

- Plan now for extra acts of kindness upon re-entry. Consider your school culture, the current level of staff cohesion and your own leadership style. What types of concrete support can you provide? Some ideas are listed below:
 - Surprise(s) by the classroom door/office space: what meaningful little something would your staff like?
 - Outdoor tailgate staff workday breakfast
 - Raffle for coveted, close to the building parking space each month
 - Staff wellness activities during lunch break for upcoming Superintendent's Day
 - Create a staff "shout outs" process. Make sure that all staff are recognized in some way by you, or by a peer.
 - Send individual emails or personal letters to staff thanking them or indicating a particular strength
- Incorporate celebrations into your regular staff meetings. Staff can nominate peers for outstanding teaching strategies. Administrators should always have at least two acknowledgements to make, both to encourage other acknowledgements and let staff know they are seen. Honor and encourage teaching ingenuity through highlighting creative and successful instructional efforts.
- Provide opportunities for staff to vent. At times, use concerns as problem solving opportunities for teams to discuss solutions. Let staff know that you struggle at times too. The "new normal" is not normal, but strengthening the team/ school community is a substantial protective factor going forward.