

Are you having trouble determining where your school is situated with respect to the Guideposts? Or, are you trying to improve your school's social and character education program in light of a particular Guidepost? These questions are intended to direct your team's thinking and alert you to integral ingredients to successful programs as your journey proceeds.

Guidepost #1 – Feeling Motivated and Getting Ready

Creating the conditions for positive changes in school systems among staff and community stakeholders is a critical step in making a good start to build an effective program. Identifying formal and informal leaders who will commit to working on and supporting changes and adaptations over an extended period of time because they believe in the purpose and goals of social and character education is crucial to the sustained effort that is necessary for long-term success.

Checklist



- ✓ Is this a new project, program or initiative, or is it an expansion of an existing effort?
- ✓ What is the recent history of this kind of program in your school/district?
- ✓ Are conditions ripe for positive change?
- ✓ Are those feelings shared among staff?
- ✓ Are those feeling shared among administration?
- ✓ Are those feelings shared among students?
- ✓ Are those feelings shared among community stakeholders?
- ✓ Have you identified formal leaders committed to working on and supporting changes over an extended period of time? (teachers, administrators)
- ✓ Have you identified informal leaders committed to working on and supporting changes over an extended period of time? (parents, community members, liasons)
- ✓ Is your school looking for a quick fix or sustained changes in school culture? If the answer is the latter, you must be committed to the process because it takes time!

Guidepost #2 – Reaching Out for Information, Knowledge and Resources

There is no way to know what the best options are for making changes without seeking multiple sources of formal and informal information. The most meaningful sources of information may be close at hand – school staff, students and parents – and should include best practices and effectiveness research from a variety of sources.

Checklist

- ✓ Have we conducted a school climate inventory or other formal and informal means of collecting information pertaining to our school's needs?
- ✓ Have we included students among the various sources from whom valuable information about school's needs should come?
- ✓ Have we included the school staff among the various sources from whom valuable information about school's needs should come?
- ✓ Have we included community stakeholders (including parents) among the various sources from whom valuable information about school's needs should come?
- ✓ Have we carefully studied best practices and effectiveness research from a variety of sources as a means of collecting information? Have we identified the credibility of other sources of information used as ideas or to structure the project?
- ✓ Have we talked to professionals from other schools or institutions who may have experience or wisdom to help guide our decisions?

Guidepost #3 – Considering How to Proceed and Whom Else to Involve

Establishing a steering committee or an advisory board that will stay with the project as a permanent commitment to climate improvement and culture change can be one of the most important steps along the road to sustained development. Smaller, collegial groups of staff may be equally effective in guiding day-to-day implementation if there is a commitment to forming a professional learning community. A needs assessment or climate inventory can be an important step in checking to make sure that staff, student and parent perceptions are adequately unearthed before making planning decisions and may serve as a bench-mark for measuring later success.

Checklist

- ✓ Have we established a steering committee or advisory board that will stay committed to the project throughout the entire process?
- ✓ If you have assembled a steering committee/advisory board, are members of each stakeholder group present on the board, including students?
- ✓ Have we considered developing a smaller, collegial group of staff members to assist and guide day-to-day implementation efforts thus forming an effective professional learning community?
- ✓ Have we conducted a needs assessment or climate inventory to unearth school perceptions from staff, students, and parents? Such data will prove to be extremely helpful when making planning decisions.
- ✓ Does our school-level leadership team communicate regularly with the steering committee/advisory board to ensure that all stakeholders are similarly “in the know?”
- ✓ Have we talked to professionals from other schools or institutions who may have experience or wisdom to help guide our decisions?

Guidepost#4 – Developing a Dynamic Action Plan

Planning can be tedious, challenging and frustrating, but without it you enter new country with an inadequate map. If understood as a dynamic process of generating ideas grounded in desired outcomes and generating objectives and activities that can be monitored and changed when necessary, planning can be your best friend.

Checklist

- ✓ Is your team in agreement that planning for school change is not a linear process? The advisory board/steering committee should articulate this vision of school change as a dynamic process.
- ✓ Do your proposed activities have a reasonable chance of achieving the results stated in your objectives?
- ✓ Have you generated objectives and activities that can be monitored easily and modified when necessary?
- ✓ Are your program objectives and activities aligned?
- ✓ Are your planning ideas grounded in desired outcomes? Without crafting a roadmap of your desired location, it's difficult to ever reach your destination.
- ✓ Is the action plan and its corresponding progress or shortcomings a way of organizing discussion at regularly scheduled meetings?

Guidepost #5 – Implementing New or Revised Programs or Practices

Before and as you implement new social and character development programs and practices, it is critically important to determine the necessary and sufficient conditions for effective implementation in terms of professional development, stakeholder awareness and involvement. For character education to impact school culture, distributive leadership is important, as is monitoring your progress and using your advisory board or professional leadership team to troubleshoot and problem solve implementation issues in order to make necessary adjustments and provide necessary support.

Checklist

- ✓ Has your school effectively used professional development to nurture implementation efforts among administration, faculty, and students?
- ✓ Have conscientious efforts been made to include community stakeholders in program implementation?
- ✓ Has your district or school utilized distributive leadership practices and relied upon advisory boards and professional leadership teams to monitor progress and troubleshoot implementation issues?
- ✓ Have all stakeholders had a voice in determining program selection and have they been encouraged to actively participate in the process?
- ✓ Prior to implementation, have you determined the necessary and sufficient conditions for effective implementation in terms of professional development?
- ✓ If you are using an evidence based program, have you modified the content, delivery or scope to a degree that you can not expect the same outcomes as the research indicates you should achieve?
- ✓ Does your school practice the three C's regularly? (Collect information, communicate to all stakeholders, and continue forward?)

Guidepost #6 – Telling Your Story to Validate and Sustain Your Efforts

If no one knows what you have accomplished or what a difference it has made, sustaining your program will be less likely. In order to sustain commitment and expand resources, recognition of effort and celebration of successes are necessary processes that provide cohesive strength to all of your efforts.

Checklist

- ✓ Does your school have a functioning public relations protocol to spread news and celebrate achievements both in-school and outside of school?
- ✓ Have you built in reflection time for your students to share their opinions and experiences about a recent character education activity? Reflection can come in many forms - group discussion, independent journaling, conferences.
- ✓ Are all members of your school community aware of the programs being implemented? Faculty meetings are an ideal time to keep all staff "in the know."
- ✓ Have you asked staff and students to help in collecting digital images or video of key activities and culminating events that could be used for presentations? Perhaps there is an IT coordinator, staff member or student who would love to help collect, manage or prepare presentations of your project.
- ✓ Is someone responsible for keeping the project archives or history in hardcopy and/or digital format so that you can refer to them later?
- ✓ Have you tapped into local news media outlets (local TV or newspaper) to cover your school's efforts and to celebrate its successes?

Guidepost#7 – Using Your Plan to Track Progress and Make Changes for Continuous Improvement

Acknowledging that you are in this for the long haul and then following-up with a review of program outcomes and your action plan status requires discipline born of commitment and motivation. Having qualitative and quantitative data to measure changes in staff and student perceptions, behaviors and performance is ideal and encouraging and listening to voices from your primary stakeholders, including students, is necessary.

Checklist



- ✓ Does your steering committee/advisory board as well as school leadership teams routinely discuss and monitor program outcomes pointing to observable data? (e.g. less fighting, respectful student to student and student to teacher interactions).
- ✓ Having conducted evaluations of your program, have you, in consultation with your advisory board/steering committee, and other stakeholders, revisited your dynamic action and made appropriate changes based on the evaluative information?
- ✓ In order to collect baseline data, have you conducted climate inventory surveys or other formal or informal assessments from staff, students, and stakeholders on the needs of your school?
- ✓ Have you revisited school climate data to determine how, if at all, your program has helped to address the needs of your school?
- ✓ Do you regularly solicit qualitative data from teachers, students, and other stakeholders through interviews or focus groups to inquire about the perceived strengths and weaknesses in your program?
- ✓ Is data routinely presented at leadership meetings to keep all stakeholders informed and to ensure that decisions are evidence-based?