Trust is the on-ramp to building collaboration and collegiality

I recently listened to teachers who concluded that new forms of job-embedded professional development could not be successful without trust. Trust, it seemed, needed to be developed between and among staff members as well as between the principal and staff in order for teachers to embark on new and seemingly risky form of professional development.

Bryk and Schneider's (2003) longitudinal study of 400 Chicago elementary schools reached the same conclusion: "Recent research shows that social trust among teachers, parents, and school leaders improves much of the routine work of schools and is a key resource for reform" (p. 40). They concluded that relational trust is central to building effective educational communities.

Trust, according to the authors, is elusive, engaging, and essential to meaningful school improvement. Trust is the expectation that another's word, promise, or statement can be relied upon (Rotter, 1980). Relational trust involves more than creating high morale; it is developed through ongoing interaction each day as people work together on improving student learning.

To encourage and build teacher collaboration and use job-embedded professional development strategies, principals need to **build a school culture that is characterized by trust** (Roy & Hord, 2003). Trust, in a school setting, involves **making educational decisions that put the interests of students above personal and political interests**. Trust is built when teachers believe student welfare and high levels of learning are the foundation of school decisions. When decisions seem to be based on personal or political factors, trust erodes.

Collaboration:
Staff development that improves the learning of all students provides educators with the knowledge and skills to collaborate.

The principal also **needs to keep his or her word.** When principals do what they say and follow-up with promised actions, staff members can believe their words. Principals also need to **believe in teacher ability and willingness to fulfill their responsibilities effectively**. Trust is built on a foundation of respect; a component of social respect is competence. Principals need to show that they believe in teacher competence and believe that educators operate with the best interest of students in mind. Yet trust can be undermined when incompetence is allowed to persist. As a result, the principal also needs to **address incompetence fairly and firmly**. Bryk and Schneider's study showed that trust within a school eroded quickly when the principal did not tackle personnel issues related to incompetence.

Principals demonstrated competence by **communicating a strong vision for the school and clearly defining expectations that are upheld for all faculty members**. These administrator skills allowed the school staff to accomplish common goals and maintain a cohesive professional community characterized by collective responsibility for student learning. This cohesive community is lubricated by respectful interaction and courtesy among administration and staff members.

Trust and respect is the on-ramp to building collaboration and collegiality. Trust is the "connective tissue that binds individuals together to advance the education and welfare of students" (Bryk & Schneider, 2003, p. 45). This means principals need to spend time considering how interpersonal interactions build trust and respect among staff. The principal needs to monitor his or her actions and those of the staff to build and sustain trust.

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