

Kicking off the School Year with a Sense of Exciting Renewal: Generating Hope, Not Ho Hum

A new school year provides the opportunity to start with a “clean slate” and an agenda for renewal. With all the discussion about school climate in mind, this is the time to revisit school improvement planning to see how well it encompasses an exhilarating agenda for renewal.

Renewal begins with the events that kick-off the new school year. Too often such events are dominated by pressure to cover the many bureaucratic things that need to be understood (e.g., procedures, regulations, requirements, rules). When this is the case, a perception of “more of the same” is generated. Such a perception counters feelings of renewal and hope about the new year.

Creating an optimistic mood and a sense of excitement requires participatory activities that highlight

- how much all the stakeholders are valued and the critical role they play
- an exciting agenda for renewal
- plans for making renewal a reality
- new opportunities for stakeholder participation and taking on leadership roles

Making it Happen

(1) *Establish a “Kick-off” Workgroup* – ask this group to

- extract from the school’s strategic plan the various items devoted to renewal
- use the renewal items to create a variety of attractive ways to present and publicize what makes the coming year so special (e.g., a colorful handout, a feature on the website, a newsrelease, email announcements, a brief video, etc.)
- plan several participatory kick-off events, including
 - >keynote presentations by the leadership that focus on renewal and hope, followed immediately by small discussion groups focused on (a) ways each stakeholder can play a role in making renewal a reality and (b) clarifying what personnel and other stakeholders indicate they will need in order to take on a meaningful role
 - >**welcoming** events for teachers and staff, families, students, community members (including volunteers) – with buddy and mentor systems set up to support newcomers until they are functioning effectively (Note: Welcoming events are not information sessions; they are meant to be celebratory and relationship-building – the capstone for the series of welcoming events might be a communal potluck picnic open to all stakeholders.)
 - >first day and first week welcoming and transition supports for all students

(2) *Establish a Renewal Facilitation Workgroup* – ask this group to develop an implementation action plan for

- each kick-off activity
- each of the welcoming activities
- substantive orientations and support for newcomers (e.g., teachers, staff, families, students, volunteers)
- newcomer induction and transition supports
- building capacity and ongoing support and care related to the renewal agenda
- mobilizing and sustaining stakeholder engagement in moving forward with each renewal agenda item
- identifying and correcting any problems that arise early in the renewal process
- celebrating the work and publicizing outcomes

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As a key component in school improvement and renewal, the Center stresses the imperative of *transforming student and learning supports*. Such a transformation is seen as essential in addressing barriers to learning and teaching and re-engaging disconnected students and families. The emphasis is on unifying student and learning supports and then over a period of several years weaving school and community resources together to develop a comprehensive system of supports that enhances equity of opportunity for all students to succeed at school and beyond. For more on this, see <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/book/book.pdf> .

***Equity of opportunity is fundamental to enabling civil rights;
transforming student and learning supports is fundamental to
enabling equity of opportunity and promoting whole child development.***

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Use the Center's Online Clearinghouse Quick Finds to Find Resources Resources Relevant to Renewal*

Here are a few examples:

- > *Involving Stakeholders* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/stakeholders.htm>
- > *School Climate/Culture* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/environments.htm>
- > *School Improvement Planning* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/improvement.htm>
- > *School Turnaround and Transformation* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/turnaround.htm>
- > *Training and Presentation Resources* –
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/materials/trainingpresentation.htm#ce>
- > *Motivation, Engagement, Re-engagement* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/motiv.htm>
- > *Response to Intervention* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/responsetointervention.htm>
- > *Dropout Prevention* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/dropout.html>
- > *Parent/Home Involvement and Engagement in Schools* –
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/homework.htm>
- > *Mentoring* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/mentoring.htm>
- > *Community Outreach for Involvement and Support* –
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/commoutreach.htm>
- > *Volunteers in Schools* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/volunteers.html>
- > *Collaboration - School, Community, Interagency; community schools* –
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/p1201_01.htm
- > *Cultural Competence and Related Issues* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/culturecomp.htm>
- > *Diversity, Disparities, and Promoting Health Equitably* –
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/diversity.htm>
- > *Expanded Learning Opportunities* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/afterschool.htm>
- > *Social and Emotional Development and Social Skills* –
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/p2102_05.htm
- > *Social Promotion/ Grade Retention* – http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/p1104_02.htm
- > *Safe Schools and Violence Prevention* – http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/p2108_03.htm

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