

Creating Consensus for a Culture of Collective Responsibility

A culture of collective responsibility is based on two fundamental beliefs:

1. The first assumption is that we, as educators, must accept responsibility to ensure high levels of learning for every student. While parental, societal, and economic forces impact student learning, the actions of the educators will ultimately determine each child's success in school.
2. The second assumption is that all students can learn at high levels. We define *high* levels of learning as *high school plus*, meaning every student will graduate from high school with the skills and knowledge required to continue to learn. To compete in the global marketplace of the 21st century, students must continue to learn beyond high school, and there are many paths for that learning, including trade schools, internships, community colleges, and universities.

Discussing the following critical questions will assist the school leadership team in creating consensus for a culture of collective responsibility aligned with these beliefs.

1. **How will we provide a compelling case for change?** For someone to change, they first must see a compelling reason to change. In other words, one must show why there is a need to change. Raising test scores or meeting district, state, or federal mandates hardly meets this goal. Instead, look to paint a picture of what adulthood will likely look like for students who don't succeed in school.
2. **What must we do differently?** Besides a compelling reason to change, one must also provide a doable plan. The noblest cause is useless if the changes required are seen as unrealistic. Staff members want a clear picture of exactly what changes are necessary to achieve learning for all students.
3. **How do we know these changes will work?** Having experienced the pendulum of school change for the past decades, many educators are skeptical of change processes. What evidence is available to demonstrate the validity of the recommended changes? (Besides the research quoted in *Simplifying Response to Intervention*, the website www.allthingsplc.info has dozens of schools and hundreds of pages of research validating the elements of PLCs and RTI.)
4. **What concerns do we expect, especially from staff members traditionally against change?** The leadership team should brainstorm the concerns staff members will have regarding the recommended changes. What will be the leadership's response to these concerns?
5. **What is the best setting or structure for the conversations needed to create consensus?** One of the leadership team's greatest leverage points is its ability to determine the location, structure, and timing of the conversations to create staff consensus. All stakeholders must have a voice in the process, but not necessarily in the same meeting. Sometimes the feelings of the silent majority can be drowned out by the aggressive opinions of a loud minority resistant to change. Consider a series of meetings with teams, grade levels, or departments. Also, set clear norms for the meeting, as professional, respectful dialogue is essential.
6. **How will we know if we have reached consensus?** Remember, it does not take 100 percent approval to get started; it takes consensus. Consensus is reached when all stakeholders have had a say and the will of the group has emerged and is evident, even to those who disagree. Consider how many key people will be needed to create the tipping point necessary for consensus.

In the end, true commitment comes when people see that the changes work. So the key is to build consensus, then get started doing the work. You will never get commitment until you start doing the work, but you cannot start until you get consensus.

Source: Adapted from Buffum, A., Mattos, M., & Weber, C. (2012). *Simplifying response to intervention: Four essential guiding principles*. Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree Press.