

Further references/resources on community engagement supporting student achievement

Steve Lamb article - As part of that long-term commitment, a board can choose from several strategies:

Community Conversations: The traditional "public forum" format is used to present a plan, then seek public comment upon that plan. But that format does little to help school boards understand the underlying values, concerns and priorities of the community. Community conversations are designed to allow a dialogue among citizens, covering a broad range of ideas and mixture of interests. Citizens are asked to weigh options, analyze benefits and tradeoffs, and identify common ground for action. The Institute of Educational Leadership and National Issues Forums provide two models for such community conversations.

Study Circles: A study circle is a process for small-group deliberation. A study circle is comprised of 10-15 people who meet regularly over a period of weeks or months to address a critical public issue. A community-wide study circle program engages large numbers of citizens - working in small groups - on a public issue such as race relations, crime and violence or education. Participants gain ownership of the issues and, as the results of the discussions are gathered and analyzed, provide input to policy makers.

Focus Groups: Focus groups are facilitated meetings of small groups of people brought together for a specific discussion. They can be a useful way for education systems to develop a clearer understanding of the issues they face. Focus groups can be used as a step toward conducting a larger community conversation - that is, as a way to help establish the agenda or anticipate public reaction to key points.

Polling: Surveys, needs assessments and other polling tools won't provide the depth or reveal underlying thinking the way community conversations or study circles do. However, these tools can help boards understand the broader public's thoughts about educational goals, student performance, priorities, and views on specific issues.