Building a School and District Culture Where Everyone Grows

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Why is it important for my district or school to focus on adult development and culture?

Healthy adult culture at the site and district level is essential to continuous improvement. One of the biggest barriers to sustaining improvement is organizational culture. Growth culture is about growing and learning together, building trust, and supporting one another. Lack of organizational growth culture decreases the impact of improvement initiatives and professional development. Adults, students, and communities can flourish and continuously improve together when participants engage in personal and professional growth.

2. How does adult development impact student outcomes?

Research shows that professional development alone does not influence a high level of impact without conditions where adults are able to regularly practice growth. When technical professional development is blended with significant improvements in district and school cultures, you can expect a positive impact on the long-term implementation of strategic initiatives and student achievement.

3. What are some key readiness factors that organizations should be thinking about before they begin growth culture work?

One of the key readiness factors is buy-in from the unit that is undertaking this work, particularly district or school leadership. The leader or leaders should be willing to set the conditions that will promote building trust and model the kind of openness and vulnerability needed to promote growth culture. Additional readiness factors are commitments to continuous learning, willingness to design and undertake manageable “experiments,” and building capacity for giving and receiving continuous feedback.
4. Who do you need buy-in from before you start a process like this?

If your district is looking to achieve cultural improvements, it is crucial for the superintendent to champion this work. However, growth culture work can also begin on a smaller scale with a principal at a school site or within a department, like Human Resources. The key to creating a growth culture is to flatten structures and create a space where teams can model vulnerability and grow. Complete support from “the leader” of the unit taking on the work is essential to creating those conditions.

5. What should my organization expect if we take on this work?

From our experience working with districts, there is an overwhelming need for healthy organizational cultures that support growth. Our baseline survey results show that when this work begins, participant aspirations typically exceed their current reality; meaning, the majority of participants are enthusiastic and supportive of the work. There are many different ways to implement and support a growth culture. Implementation should be job embedded and not an additional aspect of the organization’s work. To jumpstart the process, organizations can have “design teams” to collaborate within a cross-functional, problem-solving unit. These initial design teams can engage in baseline work to understand and practice the fundamentals of growth culture.

6. How can Pivot support my organization to develop a growth culture?

Pivot can partner with your school or district to evaluate, develop, and implement a growth culture in classrooms to the central office. With a data-driven approach through focus groups, surveys, and observations, we can evaluate current organizational strengths, needs, and opportunities. We can also support your site to assemble and facilitate a cross-functional design team to lead this initiative and find sustainable solutions for change in alignment with mission-critical needs. We can provide your school or district with the tools, practices, and strategies to create a culture where all educators and staff members flourish.

For more information on how Pivot Learning can support your organization to promote growth culture and continuous improvement, contact Robert Curtis at rcurtis@pivotlearning.org.