



RESOURCES FOR CREATING POSITIVE WORKPLACES

JANUARY 2025

What Can You Do Now

Background

Most people don't know much about charter public schools, including staff and members of our school communities. This handout provides a partial list of suggestions and examples of steps school leaders can take to enhance transparent communications and help to ensure a common vision and collective accountability for student and school success. This guidance is intended to be broad and applicable across the diverse schools in Rhode Island.

To build a positive workplace environment for teachers and staff that sustains creativity, flexibility, and team problem-solving, keep these things in mind:

- Everyone wants to feel hopeful and to be treated fairly.
- Charter public schools = flexibility & creativity.
- Lack of transparency = misinformation, perceived unfairness, and staff concerns about decision-making can lead to tension.
- Knowing your team requires formal and informal mechanisms to understand what matters to them and their concerns. Authentic group and one-on-one engagement is critical.
- Assume a general lack of knowledge about charter public schools, as well as school operations, finance, and budgets.

If You Can Only Do Two Things

If you can only implement two actions in the near term, we recommend these two:

- Budget and financial transparency – identify at least one opportunity to share the budget and/or audit with your staff.
- Recognize staff – share stories that demonstrate the school's uniqueness connected to being a charter public school, which permits staff members to identify a problem and work collaboratively with leadership to solve and/or improve.

More Core Actions

#1 Know What Makes Your School Unique

- Create a document that shares your school's story, history, mission and what makes it unique. Explain how your school meets individual student needs, can pivot quickly to be responsive to the community and engages passionate teachers to make a difference.
- Identify key moments in your school calendar and life cycle to share the document and its core messages (e.g., teacher recruitment, onboarding, first staff meeting of the year, open house with the school community, etc.).
- Connect every action – policy changes, problems solved based on staff and/or family feedback – to your ability to be flexible as a charter public school.

- Frame the characteristics of your school – ability to respond to the community needs, ability to provide additional support to individual children – to the fact that you are a charter public school provided with flexibility.
- Share stories of your support for teacher creativity in the classrooms to meet individual student needs.
- Demonstrate your school values daily, showing how you are a leader invested in meeting the needs of your staff and community with unique approaches to problem-solving and/or communications.
- Identify and debunk charter public school myths (e.g., cherry pick students, lack accountability, are private, etc.) regularly.

#2 *Communicate Your Vision for the School*

- Most people have very little knowledge about charter public schools. Even fewer were likely part of your school community when your school was founded so they may not know the history of the “why” of your school. Communicate regularly through existing meetings and channels the history, what makes your school unique, and how you leverage being a charter school to meet student, staff, and community needs.
- Be explicit in your messages: because you work at a charter school you are able to meet staff needs (e.g., personalized professional development and support) and be responsive to issues that staff identify.
- Ensure your recruitment and onboarding activities emphasize the “why” of your school and how much you value the creativity, flexibility and team problem-solving that makes your school a great place to work.

#3 *Be Visible and Build Connections*

- Be visible. Walk the hallways. Interact with staff informally throughout the day and week.
- Do not rely on an “open door” policy. Visit your staff where they are.
- Leverage existing structures/meetings/events to connect with staff.
- Connect with staff members who are perceived to be leaders within the school regardless of title or role.
- Conduct pulse surveys (short one or two question surveys) once a month on specific issues. Ask staff what is most satisfying and least satisfying about their work. Be sure to share how you used the information to make decisions.
- View every policy or decision through the eyes of your least experienced staff member and recognize decisions will have different impacts on different folks.

#4 *Be Transparent on Budget and Finances*

- Use every moment in the budget process as an opportunity to communicate (e.g., external moments like the President’s federal government budget proposal, state budget proposal, news stories about budget, audit process, end of calendar or budget year.)
- Use total compensation reports to show employees that they earn more than a salary.

- Connect the dots between your priorities and the investment of resources (funds, talent) in your budget.

#5 Recognize Your Employees

- Use every staff meeting to recognize a staff member's actions linked to problem solving or creativity in the classroom.
- Ensure you understand what kinds of recognition individual staff members value.
- Write personal, preferably handwritten notes regularly. Ensure you reach each staff member over the year.
- Share feedback from a parent or community member about someone's work and impact.
- Share areas in your staff satisfaction surveys where you do well and be clear what areas you know need improvement and how you plan to get there.
- Identify awards within the community to which you can nominate staff.
- Leverage existing celebrations during the year to feature stories about staff/teachers on social media, in school newsletters, on your website/blog, and at events/meetings (e.g., National Charter Schools Week, Teacher Appreciation Week, Women's History Month, etc.)

Articulating Your “Why?” As A School Leader

Why do your school’s flexibilities and autonomies as a charter public school matter? What do they enable you to do? How do they positively contribute to a positive school culture for both staff and students? What’s at stake if you lose some of those critical flexibilities? In other words, what is YOUR “why?” Before we can articulate this “why?” to our school communities, we need to reflect on and fine tune our individual messages and approach. During our in person session on December 10, we will create these “whys?” as a community of charter public school leaders. In order to maximize our time together, we ask that you review the key components of a strong “why?”

Part 1: Your Core Values

What are the key values of your school/network of schools? What are the elements of your school/network that are core to your success?

- Trust & Transparency
- One Team (No Us v. Them between staff and leadership)
- Academic Excellence
- People-First
- College & Career Ready
- Whole Child Approach
- Relationship-Based

Part 2: What’s At Stake?

What are your critical autonomies? What would you give up if you were to lose them?

- Overall Flexibility
- School-Centered & Flexible Budgeting
- Little-to-no Bureaucracy
- Able to Keep High Performing Staff
- High Accountability for All
- Strong Student Outcomes

Part 3: Your Personal Story & Experience

How have you seen a lack of autonomy or flexibility negatively impact a school community?

- How Your Personal Experience(s) in a School System Shape Your “Why?”
- How Your Upbringing and Personal Stories Also Shape Your “Why?”

Part 4: Research & Anecdotes

We will talk about this more on December 10, but how can you leverage data, research, and the lived experience of others to further buttress your “why?”

Part 5: Our Current Political Environment

Every element of your “why?” should take our current political environment into account. How is your “why?” affected by being a public charter school in Washington DC? How might critical autonomies, flexibilities, and a sense of community with local decision-making power better equip your school to navigate these political times?

Your Why Worksheet

<p><i>What do you/your network care about and value? What makes your school unique?</i></p>	<p><i>What aspects of your work would be at stake?</i></p>
<p><i>What's your personal story/experience?</i></p>	<p><i>What are the most compelling research and anecdotes you can leverage?</i></p>

Leveraging Staff Satisfaction Survey Results: Risks for Retention and Workplace Culture

We know from experience and from what both teachers and charter leaders share, that there are several areas measured within staff satisfaction surveys that can be helpful in terms of gauging risk at a school for teacher turnover and the degree to which a workplace environment is perceived by staff to be positive.

When we can determine that staff are feeling powerless, overwhelmed, and/or undervalued, as well as when they experience significant instability in their workplaces, there are likely some challenges that school leaders should address.

Below is a chart that outlines questions that school leaders could use to determine how staff feel in each of these four categories. The second chart below, pulls specific questions from the TNTP Insights survey, a survey often used by charter schools, to provide school leaders with specific questions they might review to help identify challenges at their school campus.

Staff Feelings	Type of Questions That May Help You Address the Challenge
Staff feel powerless	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Perceptions of leader communication on school vision and expectations ● Confidence in the fairness of leadership decisions and systems ● Perceptions of staff voice and involvement in school decision-making
Staff feel overwhelmed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Perceptions of school environment and safety ● Perceptions of meaningful supports for teachers and staff ● School or network size (increasing or declining enrollment)
Staff feel undervalued	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Compensation and perceptions of compensation ● Perceptions of retention and career progression practices ● School or network viewed as high profile
Staff experience instability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Teacher actual retention ● Teacher and staff planned retention ● Teacher age ● School growth or structural change ● Leader retention

Sample 1: Questions from TNTP Insights Survey

Risk Category	Components	Specific Questions to Review
Teachers and staff feel powerless	Perception of leader communication on school vision and expectations	<p>Teacher Questions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The expectations for effective teaching are clearly defined at my school. - Teachers at my school share a common vision of what effective teaching looks like. - I understand how my actions contribute to school priorities and goals. - When I am asked to do work outside of my core instructional responsibilities, leaders clearly explain how the work benefits students. - - - When my school leadership commits to a program or priority, they follow through. - My school leaders articulate a clear overarching vision that drives priorities, goals, and decision making within the school. <p>Staff Questions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - When my school leadership commits to a program or priority, they follow through. - My school leaders articulate a clear overarching vision that drives priorities, goals, and decision making within the school.
	Perception of teacher and staff voice in school decision making	<p>Teacher Questions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Leaders at my school value my feedback. - I have a voice in key decisions that affect me. - Leaders at my school value diverse opinions and ideas. - Teachers at my school have the opportunity to provide input on their work schedules. - My school leadership values feedback teachers give on this survey. - My school has involved teachers in efforts to improve school culture. <p>Staff Questions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Leaders at my school value my feedback. - I have a voice in key decisions that affect me. - Leaders at my school value diverse opinions and ideas.
	Confidence in the fairness of leadership decisions and systems	<p>Teacher Questions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - At my school evaluation ratings are accurate reflections of teacher effectiveness. - I agree with the criteria that will be used to evaluate my performance as a teacher. - My school leaders model the behavior they hope to see across the school community. <p>Staff Questions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I agree with the criteria that will be used to evaluate my performance. - My school leaders model the behavior they hope to see across the school community.

Risk Category	Components	Specific Questions
Teachers and staff feel overwhelmed	Perceptions of school environment and safety	<p>Teacher Questions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Interactions between students and adults at my school are respectful. - School leaders promote a safe and productive learning environment in my school. - Teachers and leaders at my school immediately address misbehavior in shared school spaces like hallways and the lunchroom. - Students at my school value each other’s differences (e.g., gender, race, culture, ability, sexual identity, learning differences). <p>Staff Questions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Interactions between students and adults at my school are respectful. - School leaders promote a safe and productive learning environment at my school. - Students at my school value each other’s differences (e.g., gender, race, culture, ability, sexual identity, learning differences). - Staff at my school immediately address misbehavior in shared school spaces like hallways and the lunchroom.
	Perceptions of meaningful supports for teachers and staff	<p>Teacher Questions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I am satisfied with the support I receive at my school for instructional planning. - My school is committed to improving my instructional practice. - Professional development opportunities at my school are well planned and facilitated. - In the past six months, someone at my school or network has helped me develop new skills or content knowledge that I was able to apply in my own classroom. - When I get feedback after an observation, I receive support to implement those changes (e.g., someone models suggestions for me, I have time to practice outside of class). - I can consistently accomplish essential work during my regular planning time. - Over the long term my workload as a teacher is sustainable. <p>Staff Questions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - PD opportunities for my team are well planned and facilitated. - In the past six months, I have developed new skills that I was able to apply in my role. - When I get feedback, I receive support to implement those changes. - I can consistently accomplish essential work during my standard work hours. - Over the long term my workload is sustainable.

Risk Category	Components	Specific Questions
Teachers and staff feel undervalued	Compensation and perception of compensation	<p>Teacher Questions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I am compensated fairly for the work I do. - I understand the criteria that are used to determine my compensation. - My school’s approach to compensation makes sure that great teachers are paid well. - I am confident that I earn as much or more teaching at my school than I could at another school in the local area. <p>Staff Question</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I am compensated fairly for the work that I do.
	Perceptions of career progression and retention practices	<p>Teacher Questions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Leaders at my school work hard to retain effective teachers. - There are opportunities for me to advance at my school. - The teachers who deserve leadership positions at my school are the most likely to get them. - Someone at my school is thinking about my career progression. <p>Staff Questions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - There are opportunities for me to advance at my school or within the network. - Someone at my school is thinking about my career progression.
Teachers and staff experience instability	Teacher and staff planned retention	<p>Teacher Question</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Percent of teachers who do NOT plan to leave in the next 2 years. <p>Staff Question</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Percent of staff who do NOT plan to leave in the next 2 years.

Sample 2: Questions from the Spark Survey Tool Developed by Attuned Education Partners

Item	Topic	Questions
1	Satisfaction	How satisfied are you with your school as a place to work?
2	Satisfaction	<optional> How satisfied are you with your network as a place to work?
3	Satisfaction	How likely is it that you would recommend working at your school to a friend or colleague?
4	Satisfaction	How likely is it that you would recommend working at your network to a friend or colleague?
5	Satisfaction	I am content with my profession.
6	Satisfaction	I find my work full of meaning and purpose.
7	Satisfaction	I am enthusiastic about my job.
8	Satisfaction	My work inspires me.
9	Satisfaction	I am proud of the work I do.
10	Strategy	The school/network's current vision and strategy is on the right track.
11	Strategy	Leadership is prioritizing the right work to advance our strategy.
12	Intent to Return	Are you planning to return next year?
13	Intent to Return	Do you see yourself still working with our school/network in 5 years?
14	Intent to Return	What are the most important factors influencing your decision?
15	Intent to Return	Over the long-term, my workload is sustainable.
16	Belonging	How much are you able to be your authentic self with your colleagues at school?
17	Belonging	How connected do you feel to other adults at your school?
18	Belonging	How much do you matter to others at your school?
19	Belonging	Overall, how much do you feel like you belong at your school?
20	Belonging	I am encouraged to speak up on important issues and my ideas are heard.

21	Belonging	I am acknowledged for the strengths, experiences and background that I bring to my school.
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22	Basic Needs	I know what is expected of me at work.
23	Basic Needs	I have the materials and resources I need to do my work right.
24	Basic Needs	My school is a safe place to learn and work.
25	Growth and Advancement	There are opportunities for me to advance at my school/network.
26	Growth and Advancement	I have a specific development goal or project for the coming year that excites me.
27	Growth and Advancement	Team members who deserve leadership positions at my school are the most likely to get them.
28	Growth and Advancement	In the last six months, someone at work has talked to me about my progress.
29	Growth and Advancement	This last year, I have had opportunities at work to learn and grow.

30	Identity <optional>	How conducive is your school to supporting your identity development?
31	Identity <optional>	How well does your school help staff incorporate social justice issues into their work?
32	Identity <optional>	How comfortable are you discussing issues that relate to identity with your colleagues?
33	Identity <optional>	How confident are you that adults at your school can have honest conversations with each other about identity?
34	Identity <optional>	How are you navigating issues in your work that arise from local and national conversations on identity? [open-ended]

35	Leadership	How clearly do your school leaders identify their goals for team members?
36	Leadership	How positive is the tone that school leaders set for the culture of the school?
37	Leadership	How effectively do school leaders communicate important information to team members?
38	Leadership	How knowledgeable are your school leaders

		about what is happening in classrooms?
39	Leadership	To what extent do school leaders acknowledge your feedback?
40	Leadership	How effective are the school leaders at creating the conditions for student learning?
41	Leadership	How much do your school leaders improve the quality of your work?
42	Leadership	How effectively do school leaders foster an environment that develops and honors different perspectives?

43	School Climate	On most days, how enthusiastic are your colleagues about being at school?
44	School Climate	How positive are the relationships between team members and students?
45	School Climate	How optimistic are you that your school will improve in the future?
46	School Climate	When new initiatives to strengthen the overall learning environment are presented at your school, how supportive are your colleagues?
47	School Climate	Overall, how positive is the working environment at your school?
48	School Climate	How inclusive is the working environment at your school?
49	School Climate	How much do you feel your colleagues are contributing to an inclusive school environment?
50	Overall	What about your working experience this year is most positive? [open-ended]
51	Overall	What about your working experience this year is most challenging? [open-ended]
52	Overall	Is there anything else we should have asked or that you want to share? [open-ended]

Sample School Communications Calendar

This is a sample calendar of all the ***potential*** communications topics throughout the school year that present good opportunities to showcase your “Why” and increase positive, authentic staff engagement over time. We are not necessarily recommending that you create new or additional events, but rather these opportunities should be feathered into your ongoing communications and events (e.g., meetings). Remember, if you can only do 3 things when it comes to internal communications:

- Take every (or almost every) communications opportunity to educate staff on what a public charter school is (what it isn’t), and embed your “Why” focused on flexibility and accountability. This does not mean you have to create new comms. but rather adapt what you already do. New staff orientation? Embed a Charter 101. Returning staff orientation? Advocacy Update.
- Present to all-staff on your school’s budget at least twice a year. One time in the fall, focused on overall education: how are public charter schools funded, what is different than the district/what are the inequities, who perpetuates these inequities, how much of the budget is salaries v. fixed costs, where did our final budget land in terms of enrollment, etc. And one time in the spring, focused on the upcoming budget (opportunities and challenges).
- Ensure your LT highlights teacher-led initiatives or other moments that allow you to showcase the value of flexible decision-making and teacher leadership!

Back to school staff training	What is unique at your school	School leader	Mission, vision, values, shared goals
	Your “Why” messages	Teacher who worked at district school prior and now at your school	Specific examples of how your school leverages flexibilities (importance of staff-facing flexibilities)
Early fall	Context of the charter school community – national, state, local	School leader	How many public charter schools and students, enrollment data, performance data
Fall	Accountability – describe ways in which your school is held accountable	School leader Board Chair	School/state test results School accountability report cards Operational/financial Who (board, authorizer, parents for results)
End of calendar year	School achievements to date tied to your “Why”	School leader	List key achievements Describe problems solved by the team
	Total compensation reports prior to W2 issuance	Board treasurer, CFO, HR	Clearly show employer contributions

Beginning of new calendar year	Presidential State of the Union and release of federal budget	School leader, Board treasurer, CFO	Talk about Title I, IDEA funding and how much your school will benefit
	District legislative session and budget	School leader	Any pro- or anti-charter bills proposed and state budget implications for the school
Winter	Enrollment process	School leader Enrollment manager	Enrollment lottery results Open to all kids/do not cherry pick
May	National Day of the Teacher	School leader, Board, school community	Recognize teachers
	National Charter Schools Week	Teachers, students, families	Write about why they love their public charter school
End of school year	School achievements tied to "Why"	School leader Board Chair	Graduations Ways your school leveraged flexibilities for student, staff, and community success
Charter renewal - Timeline - Site visits - Reports - Authorizer actions	Accountability for achieving results Share charter petition and/or renewal petition with staff	School leader, Board Chair	Describe charter renewal process, how your school is held accountable, what data and criteria are used for renewal, invite staff to participate in the process (e.g., letters of support, speakers at authorizer meetings, etc.)
Annual audit process	Throughout the audit process leverage third party independent review of your school's finances	Auditors, Board members	Invite auditors to present to staff Share copies of the audit Post audit on website Explain what the audit means when there are findings (or none) Explain how the school uses the audit
Other official document submissions	990 Annual report	School leader, Board members	When they are submitted or made public, share them, explain what they show
School budget process	Share information throughout the process – federal/state budget implications, proposed budget feedback, budget discussion at board, approved budget	School leader, CFO, Board Treasurer	Describe process Types of funding and how they can be used Salary and benefits comparisons to other schools

Review Existing Charter School Policies

Charter School Visitor Policy

- Many schools already have this policy, but we recommend reviewing it with an attorney to ensure it is comprehensive and in good standing.
- This policy should clearly outline who can enter your building, during what hours, and the procedure they need to follow to be cleared/approved for entry.
- This policy should be explicit about who constitutes a visitor (e.g., anyone NOT employed by the school and/or a student).
- This policy should be framed as essential to student and staff safety.

Employee/Non-Employee Solicitation and Distribution Policy

- Many schools do not have this kind of policy and will require working with an attorney to draft new content and attach it to the appropriate handbooks and manuals.
- Because permissibility varies from state to state, you must engage an attorney when drafting this policy.
- This policy should outline, but not be limited to, the following:
 - Solicitation stance (e.g., No solicitors allowed on school property.) Note: This needs to be enforced equally across all kinds of solicitors.
 - Use of school property (e.g., computers, printer, photocopier, etc.)
 - Use of school phones, email, social media, website, and other means of communication including Intranet
 - Use of bulletin boards, bathrooms and other common spaces (e.g., who can post what and where)
 - Use of school grounds and meeting spaces (Note: If you have a policy that permits the rental of school facilities, you may want to review it to ensure that it includes details about pricing, which facilities may be used, and procedures to access the school. Should you choose to do so and/or should your attorney deem this permissible, you could specify that facility rentals are only open to 501(c) 3 and/or governmental entities.)
 - Language regarding confidentiality as it relates to school/staff information. Note: If you place staff emails on your website they are considered public information; if you don't, and someone wants to access them, they will need to send a public records request.

Other Policies/Items to Keep in Mind

- Most schools have a policy and/or procedure related to the sharing of family information. If your school already has this policy, you may want to include it in your attorney's review of materials. If you do not, you may want to create one. Is it an opt-out for families? Are there only specific entities that can access this information (e.g., Association/League, Dept. of Education, etc.)? (Note: If your school shares family lists with some entities they may have to share it with all entities unless you specifically codify it in your policy, for example, who is exempt).