KEEPING STUDENTS FIRST:

Building Community Labor Partnerships for Strong Schools

EXERCISE 2: NETWORK MAPPING

Schott 25 FOUNDATION *for* PUBLIC EDUCATION *years*

Building Movement Project

EXERCISE 2:
NETWORK MAPPING

PURPOSE OF THIS TOOL:

This tool is based on a method developed to conduct ethnographic research in the field. It allows researchers to understand the networks surrounding an individual and the influence that network has. Here, we've positioned a student at the center in order to help participants identify their own role in a student's life, as well as the other players who impact the student.

HOPED-FOR OUTCOMES:

› Establish goals and next steps towards a shared vision

› Identify allies and partners who can be a part of this work

› Identify targets that need to be moved or overcome in order to reach the shared vision

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HOW TO PREPARE

The hope is that this tool will not only allow teachers, students, and parents to identify networks surrounding students and understand their role(s) within these networks, but also allow them to identify and discuss potential allies who support students' academic progress and overall well-being, as well as people or groups who impede students' progress and well-being and can become "targets" to be moved or addressed in some way.

It's important to keep in mind that depending on which community members are invited into the space, their motivation might not be solely the enrichment of students. Schools may just be seen as sites of democratic practice or a place to start advancing a larger vision for the community (i.e. more community empowerment, greater racial equity, increased commitment to fair labor practices, etc.) and some people may view the school as the entry point because it is an organized institution. While most people will be committed first to children, consider the larger motivations that might be at play if you are trying to build larger alliances.

This tool can be used on its own. However, we recommend using it as a follow-up to the Schoolhouse exercise.

Below you'll find suggestions for preparation, which vary slightly, depending on whether you are part a labor union or a community group. Feel free to use anything that is helpful in putting together this exercise, and leave out what is not. You'll also find different sets of suggested questions based on how ready your group is for discussions about race and class. If you need additional support in guiding those discussions, you will find suggested resources at the end of this toolkit.

It is important to consider carefully who will facilitate this meeting. If you choose not to have an outside facilitator, we highly suggest having a representative from the community in addition to a teacher or school staff member and/or a student co-facilitate so that all groups are represented in the planning process and in front of the participants.

Building a Planning Group:

☐ It is important to ensure that representatives from each invested group are part of the process from the beginning. If you decide to do this exercise internally first, it can still be useful to get input from outside representatives.

☐ **For community groups, parents, or outside facilitators:** Begin by identifying either a teacher, school staff member, and/or a student.

☐ **For union members:** Begin by identifying a community member, parent, and/or a student who would be willing to co-plan this meeting with you.

☐ The goal of this meeting is to bring together stakeholders from the school/community (parents, teachers, students, and other community activists and leaders) who will have different perspectives on how we can best improve our schools. With that in mind, and together with your planning partners, identify who would want to participate in an exercise such as this, and who "needs" to participate.

› Who would most benefit from hearing from other participants in the group?

› Alternatively, who does the group need to hear from to fully understand the networks that exist around students?

› Strive to get as representative a group as possible that includes all those involved in the school/community, as well as potentially those outside the community who still impact students.

Building a Planning Group (cont.):

☐ Talk about the roles that each of the planners will play. This could include:

› Recruitment   › Agenda Development

› Logistics   › Facilitation or Securing Outside Facilitation

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Planning the Meeting:

☐ Identify what you'll need for the meeting logistically (including space, food, and supplies) and figure out who will be responsible for each piece.

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☐ Plan out the meeting itself. Remember to pay attention to who traditionally holds power in these spaces and put in place methods and practices to make sure that everyone is represented and feels fully able to participate in the experience. This may include setting ground rules with the group during the introductions.

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☐ Because this exercise is centered around students, it is helpful to think about which students in particular you'd like to focus this meeting on. You will want to describe this group of students during the exercise. For example:

› Are you talking about students from families with lower incomes, recent immigrants, students learning English as a second language, or students of color?

› Is there a particular group that is facing elevated levels of scrutiny of difficulty in the current system?

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☐ Schedule the meeting and reach out to participants.

What You'll Need:

☐ Flip charts, white board, or chalkboard

☐ Pens, markers, dry erase markers, and/or chalk

☐ Post-it notes in three colors (optional)

☐ Printed copies of the exercise for all participants

☐ Large-scale version of the network map for facilitation (optional)

SAMPLE AGENDA

The following agenda is an example of how you might set up a gathering centered on this exercise. You'll want to plan for anywhere from 2 to 2.5 hours for completion.

The version below assumes a low level of exposure to facilitated discussions around race and class. You will find additional discussion questions that you can use if your group is more ready for those discussions, or if you have an outside facilitator whose purpose is to lead you through this process.

Welcome and Introductions

10-20 MIN.

- Start by welcoming people into the space and explaining the purpose of the gathering.
- We strongly suggest doing this exercise after going through the Schoolhouse exercise in order to establish a shared vision or goal. If you have done this, make sure to write up that vision/goal at the front of the room and review it with participants.
- Then, begin a round of introductions where people say where they're from, their relationship to the school, and respond to the following question(s):
    › Who had/has the biggest impact on your education?
    › [If this is your second meeting together]: What was one takeaway you had from our last discussion together and why was it important to you?

Note: The facilitator should adjust according to the number of people in the room. For larger groups, consider having folks introduce themselves to the person on their left and right. Then, invite four or five people to introduce themselves to the entire room.

Introduce the Tool

15 MIN.

- Explain that the goal of this exercise is to help participants identify the networks surrounding students and understand not only their own role, but also potential allies who can be partners in this work, as well as people or groups who impede students' progress and are potential "targets" to be moved or addressed in some way.
- Also explain that the student is at the center of this map because it reminds parents, teachers and community members about who is at the core of all our efforts around improving and reforming schools. It is helpful to think about the various people and systems that they come in contact with every day, and the effect and impact that has on students' lives and experiences with education.
- While introducing the exercise, pass out a copy of the network map tool to each participant. Describe who the student is in the center of the map based on what you've decided at your pre-meeting planning sessions.
- Point out that the rings around the student represent how direct an influence or impact people have on those students' academic progress and overall well-being – the closer in, the more direct the impact. Remind them that this can be either a positive or negative impact.
- Ask participants to take a couple minutes to think of the students you've described and reflect on their current role in those students' lives, then write their own name where they think it goes on the map.

Small Group Work

25 MIN.

- Once people have had a chance to reflect, ask them to form groups with similar participants. In other words, a group of teachers and/or staff, a group of parents and/or community members, and a group of students if they are participating.
- Give participants 15-20 min to fill out the network maps, adding as many people and groups as they can think of who impact students and writing the name of each person or group in the appropriate quadrants and rings.
- Remind participants that it is important to keep real students in mind and try not to make assumptions.
- As they work, ask them to think about the following questions:
  › How much contact does a student have with each of the people and groups listed?
  › What type of impact does each of these people or groups have on students' academic progress and overall well-bing? Positive? Negative? Neutral?
  › Is it a relationship of trust? What would be needed to make it one?

Full Group Discussion

40-45 MIN.

- Ask everyone to come together as a group to share their responses. Ask a representative from each group to share their network maps.
- As they present, have a facilitator note key takeaways on a flip chart, white board, or chalkboard. Note areas of agreement or disagreement, including:
  › Any 'A-ha!' moments from the group discussion
  › Where the group struggled
  › Any discrepancies between groups. For example, what's missing from some groups? And where are there similar answers, but in different rings.

Optional Facilitation: Alternatively, here you can print an enlarged version of the Network Map to hang in front of the room and ask people to place post-it notes on the map. This allows the facilitator to move and group the responses on the post-it notes as people place them on the map. If you decide to include the Barriers and Opportunities section below, the post-it notes can be three colors based on whether the impact on the student's academic progress and overall well-being is positive, negative, or neutral.

- As a group, discuss:
  › What are some common people/groups and placements we all agree on? What surprised you?
  › Where are there differences in our answers? What are some of the misconceptions we have?
  › What are some ways we can address those misconceptions? What tensions exist?
  › Who isn't here and why is that? *(Note: As a facilitator, you might need to be prepared to point some of these out for the group if they can't think of any.)*

Barriers and Opportunities - Optional

20 MIN.

Note: If you decide not to do this portion of the exercise, it is important to mention that not all the impacts on students' lives are supportive ones. When there are pieces of the system impeding students' growth or harming their potential, then it is important to recognize those influences and either steer students around them, or target those influences as people and groups to be shifted or moved toward s your greater shared goal.

- As the large group is speaking, one of the facilitators should list on a flip chart, white board, or chalkboard the people or groups who were noted as positive impacts in one column and negative impacts in another.

Barriers and Opportunities - Optional (cont.)

- Beginning with the positive list, as a group, discuss:
  - › Who on this list are we not yet connected to? Who could be an ally in this work?
  - › Who are we already connected to who we can involve more deeply?
- Then, looking to the negative impacts, as a group, discuss:
  - › How can these impacts be counteracted?
  - › How do we want to address those having negative impacts on students?
  - › What would an alternative to those negative impacts be?

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10 MIN.

Closing and Evaluation

- Ask people to share:
  - › Something they learned, or a moment in the discussion that surprised them.
  - › One thing they liked and one thing they would change about the conversation.
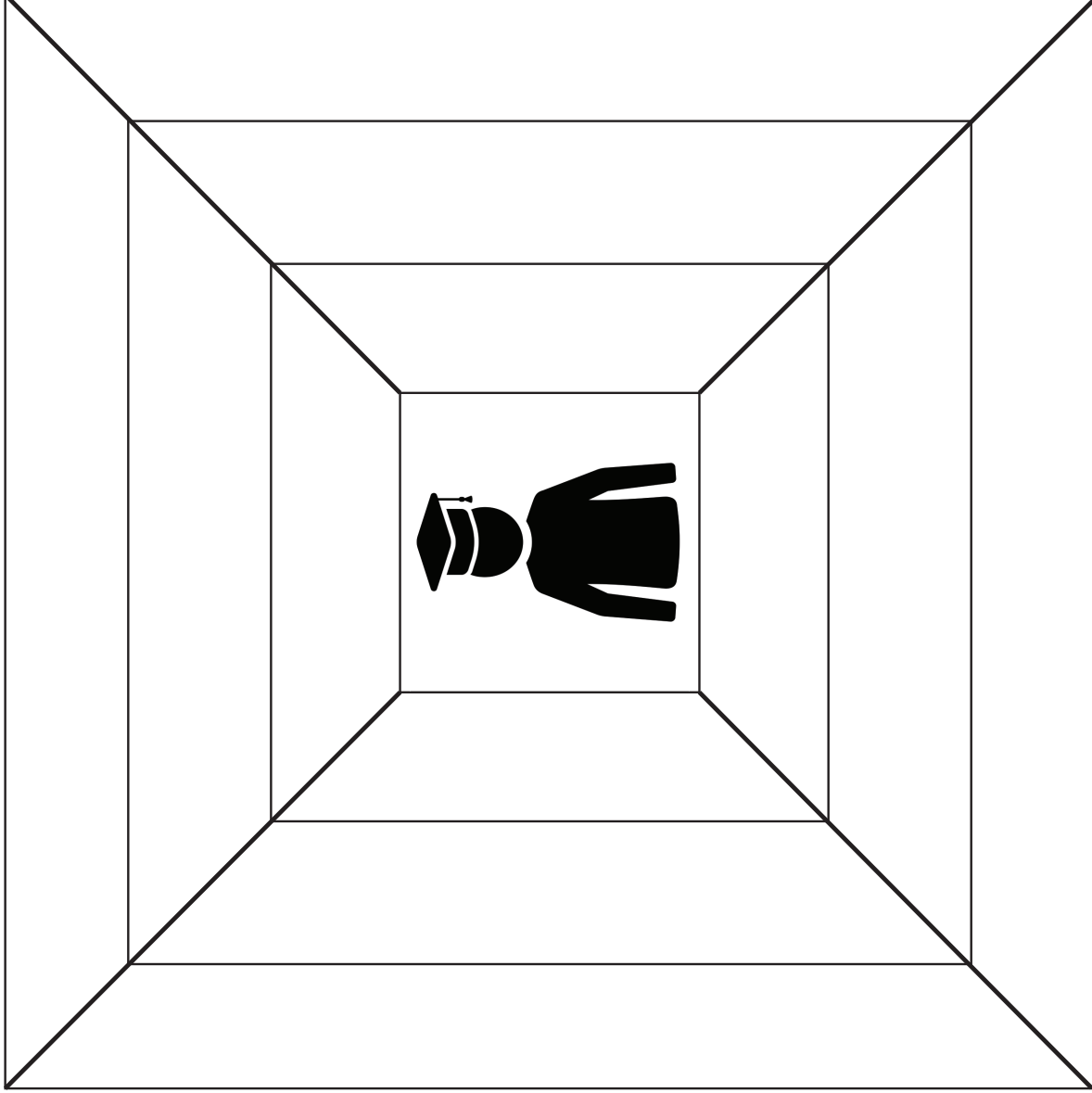- Close the discussion and thank people for their participation.

Note: If there was energy about continuing to work together, invite people to volunteer to participate in a planning group or a follow-up meeting.

ALTERNATIVE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

The following questions can replace or be added to those in the sample agenda above in either the small group or large group discussions for those groups that are more familiar navigating discussions involving race and class:

1. What can we do if one of the people listed in the negative holds institutional power?

2. What can we do if their influence is a result of negative systemic oppression? How can we neutralize this person or make them a positive influence.

3. How could race and/or economic status change this student's relationship to any of these people listed?

Family/Individual Supports

Community Organizations/Leaders

Policy Makers/Institutional Figures

Educators

Note: The closest ring to the student = the most direct impact on the student's life
The furthest ring out = the least direct impact

Building Movement Project

For more information, please visit
The Building Movement Project at
www.buildingmovement.org

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2018