

ASSET-BUILDING IDEAS FOR SCHOOLS

Schools have a unique opportunity to promote asset building. Often, they are at the center of community life, providing families with shared experiences that connect them to one another. In communities with highly transient populations, schools are frequently the only formal institution or service connected with families. Thus, schools have tremendous potential and responsibility for doing more than just transmitting information to students. When schools fulfill their leadership potential and "use their unique position to be advocates for children and families, facilitators of partnerships and collaborations, and creators of safe spaces, they become asset builders for the entire community. Here are some ways to be an asset-building school or school system:

Asset Building in General

- **Support administration of the *Search Institute Profiles of Student Life: Attitudes and Behaviors* survey** in your district.
- **Use the developmental assets as a tool** for performance planning and evaluation.
- **Create asset-building task forces in each building** to inform staff, students, and families about the asset-building model and to develop strategies to actively promote asset building. Include students, teachers, administrators, unlicensed staff, and volunteers.
- **Encourage your school board to pass a resolution supporting asset building** and to make a commitment to promote it within the school system and the community.
- **Include information on asset building in each school newsletter.** Remind readers that everyone can build assets; asset building is about every individual doing what he or she can to make a difference for young people.
- **Educate parents about the assets** and use the asset language when talking with them about their children.
- **Share the asset-building model with coaches and other extracurricular leaders.** Make asset building part of the philosophy guiding extracurricular programs.
- **Use assignments, class discussions, and projects** to promote asset building.

Support

- **Keep class sizes small** to give teachers and staff more time with each student.
- **Encourage teamwork.**
- **Offer parents easy and convenient ways to get involved** in their children's education (Asset 6). For example, one-time activities such as tutoring high school students right before exam time can be perfect for a parent who wants to volunteer but cannot commit to regular involvement. For parents who never come to conferences, have an educator call them or go to their homes to meet with them.
- **Create a parent education program** that starts by serving breakfast to families. When the students start their class day, invite the parents to stay for a message on parenting or child/adolescent development. Also offer learning opportunities during evenings or following conferences. Consider offering bus rides to parents who do not have transportation.
- **Invite senior citizens to have lunch with students.** It's a wonderful way to civilize a cafeteria, and it helps students connect with adults in the community.
- **Work with your parent-teacher organizations to build an educational component into their activities.**
Encourage them to bring in speakers on parenting and child/adolescent development.
- **Assign each class a building maintenance or cleaning project that requires them to work with the custodians.** It will sensitize the students to the care of the building and build bridges between the custodial staff and the students.

Empowerment

- **Engage students as leaders and decision makers**, including getting their input on school board decisions.
- **Seek learning opportunities** that take students out into the community and bring community resources into the classroom as well.
- **Invite students to discuss** their school experiences with the school board.

Boundaries and Expectations

- **Expect everyone to do their best.**
- **Set high standards for how students and staff are expected to behave.** Be consistent about following through with consequences when these standards are not met.

Constructive Use of Time

- **Work with congregations and cultural groups in your community to avoid scheduling school events that conflict with families' religious or cultural commitments.** Find out if your community has a calendar of events to help with this planning. If not, consider creating one.
- **Avoid scheduling practices or meetings that conflict with the dinner hour.** It is important for families to eat together.
- **Provide constructive before- and after-school programs** for young people who would otherwise spend the time unsupervised (and probably lonely). One way to do this is to link with existing programs and help expand them through financial, human, or in-kind resources.

Commitment to Learning

- **Have administrators greet students and staff at the door each morning.** The connection will create a caring environment (Asset 5) and reinforce the commitment students and staff have to one another (Asset 24).
- **Create a visual reminder of asset building.** For example, one school made an assets quilt that they hung in a prominent central location.

Positive Values

- **Work with parents, teachers, board members, and others to create a list of shared values for the school.** See the positive-values assets (26-31) as a place to start. Integrate these values into lesson planning, external communications, and boundaries and expectations for behavior.

Social Competencies

- **Train all students and staff in nonviolent conflict resolution.**
- **Open your building to community groups and organizations** during nonschool hours.

Positive Identity

- **Focus on students' long-term goals as well as short-term assignments and projects.** Help students develop plans and visions for the future and the skills to make those dreams come true.