

# W3 Collaboration Resource Guide

Elk Mound

*A process or activity that has contributed to the effectiveness of our collaborative efforts is one we refer to as* MAINTAINING TRUSTING RELATIONSHIPS.

**DESCRIPTION OF THE PROCESS:** *A brief description of the steps involved in describing what took place.*

Ground level

- Teachers/Staff being valued - Feeling like we are listened to and informed of all information
- Administrator/Teachers – Having large group formats & small group formats & 1:1 time to establish relationships, etc ...
- Board/Community – Establishing mechanisms to allow the community to have the opportunity to be heard and their input valued.
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**CONTEXT/BACKGROUND:** *What was the context or situation that prompted this to occur? How long has it been occurring?*

In the mid-1990's there were a series of negative negotiations sessions that led to teacher actions. In the end there were hurt relationships among teachers, administration, board and community. With more extensive board development activities and the installation of a new administrative team, there was a concerted effort to work in a dignified and respectful manner with all stakeholders. Professional development is encouraged, expected, and modeled throughout the district.

**HOW WAS THIS INITIATED?** *Who go it started?*

It began with the school board digging into their own board development activities and, eventually, becoming a part of the Iowa Lighthouse Study. The new administrative team was devoted to helping the board with its developmental activities. The administrative team focused on systems with teachers and the community that were non-confrontational, inclusive, open and respectful. Some specific activities that were begun included:

- Building referendum –involving all staff, bus drivers, food service workers, custodians, community, board members, and administration. Input is valued from all people involved:
  - A community group was formed to guide the process that included members of all stakeholder groups
  - A population study was commissioned and completed.
  - A community survey was developed, administered and evaluated using a consultant for objectivity with school help in design.
  - Many meetings and open houses were held to keep the public informed
  - Special mailings went out to all households about referendum specifics
  - (The district has a history of public support of referendums having passed 5 referendums, on the first try, since 1992)
- Process in place where people are listened to
  - Faculty
    - Grade level meetings occur weekly at the elementary school
    - Collaborative team meetings occur weekly at the middle school
    - Department level teams meet regularly at the high school
    - Staff members meet throughout the year with administration regarding updates on ongoing evaluation process

- Strong committee structures that allow faculty to lead:
      - In-service committee
      - At-risk committee
      - Scheduling committee
  - Community
    - Extended Early Release days twice each year have an evening 1.5 hour component to bring community members to school such as:
      - Drug awareness programs
      - Hmong Awareness Day speakers
      - Grandparents Day events at the elementary school
  - Board
    - Two board members are available prior to each board meeting for community members who may wish to air a concern; the focus of the board members is to educate about proper processes
    - Annual Holiday Tea at Christmas time; all staff and families invited; no agenda but to socialize
    - Staff Recognition Day in May; recognize years of service, retirees, and other staff members who may have received other honors throughout the year.
    - Monthly, brief, column from the board about one specific issue; only non-confrontational issues and a tool to educate and inform
    - Recognize one person each month in the district newsletter for “Notable Educational Contribution”
      - Can be anyone; parent, student, staff
      - Board presents the “Starfish” award with a \$25 certificate at the next board meeting
    - Each year one student is selected as a student representative to the board; this person attends board meetings as a non-voting member and communicates student ideas and initiatives.

**WHO WAS INVOLVED** (*positions or titles, no names please*)? *Has this changed over time?*

Students, parents, staff, administration, board members. As we did with our strategic planning process, when we developed the community “Growth Committee” we included clergy, business, senior citizens, minority reps, students from all three buildings, teachers, support staff, administration, local political people, etc.

**DESIRED OUTCOME:** *What did you hope to accomplish?*

We wanted all groups to see other groups as valuable to moving our students, student achievement, and district mission forward.

**ACTUAL OUTCOME:** *Did this meet your expectation? Exceed? Fall Short?*

We have exceeded our expectations

- Our board was recognized as a highly effective board at the national level
  - 2008 Magana Award winning board
  - One of 16 boards nationally mentioned as highly functioning in a Harvard Press book, *The Essential School Board Book*.

- Since 2003 all negotiations with staff have been amicable and settled agreeably
- Our students, staff, administration and board care about each other
  - Not very measurable but can be felt

**SUSTAINABILITY:** *To what degree have you been able to keep this practice active and useful? How have you done this?*

The programs and processes have been developed to be ongoing and changeable. One example; after construction began, a special mailing (similar to the pre-referendum vote mailer) was sent to each household to update them on the construction process. Our board has committed to keeping the public informed at all times; not just during a referendum process.

**HELPFUL HINTS:** *What are some lessons learned, do's and don'ts that might be of assistance to those who wish to do this?*

- *Do's*
  - Allow leadership in school committees to come from staff; not just administration and/or board
  - Include all stakeholder subgroups in school activities
- *Don'ts*
  - Destruction of collaboration efforts:
    - Dishonesty
    - Condescending
    - Incorrect information

**ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:** *Written materials, references and individuals who could serve as a resource to this process*

Walser, Nancy, **The Essential School Board Book**. Harvard Education Press, Boston, 2009.

2008 Magna Awards, A supplement to American School, *Developing Board Leadership*, p. 10. 2009.

**WHO COULD BE CONTACTED IF OTHERS WANT TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THIS?** *Name and contact information*

Tim Sivertson – Elk Mound Area School District, School Board President

Jim Holte – Elk Mound Area School District, School Board Vice President

Ron Walsh – Elk Mound Area School District, District Administrator

Eric Hanson – Mound View Elementary School, Principal

Janis Larson – Mound View Elementary School, Teacher

Becky Marine – Elk Mound High School, Teacher (Wisconsin Special Needs Teacher of the year 2007)

