

Building Partnerships with School Admin

Eric Woodhouse
Executive Director of Operations
Alpine School District

Objectives

This workshop session will explore what **authentic partnership** looks like in practice, why it can **sometimes feel difficult**, and how PTAs and school leaders can **problem-solve together** to improve communication, strengthen trust, and improve shared outcomes for students.

1

What is possible in an effective school partnership?

2

Partnerships in practice

- Barriers to partnerships
- Improve communication
- Strengthen trust

3

Identifying, Measuring and Celebrating shared goals

Objectives

1

What is possible in an effective school partnership?

What's the purpose of a school/PTA partnership?



When you picture a school/PTA partnership, what would the ideal **look like** and **feel like**?



What would be the **measurable evidence** of an effective school/PTA partnership?

Objectives

2

Partnerships in practice:

- Barriers
- Communication
- Strengthen trust

Barriers to partnerships

Reflection Question:

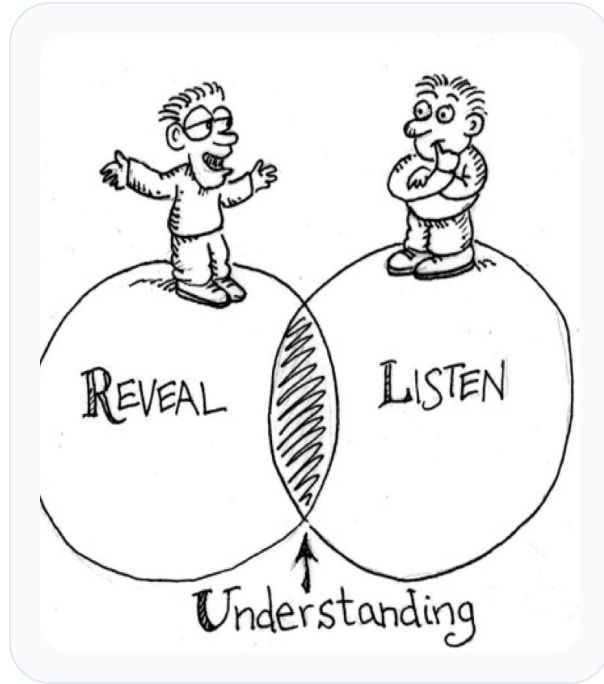
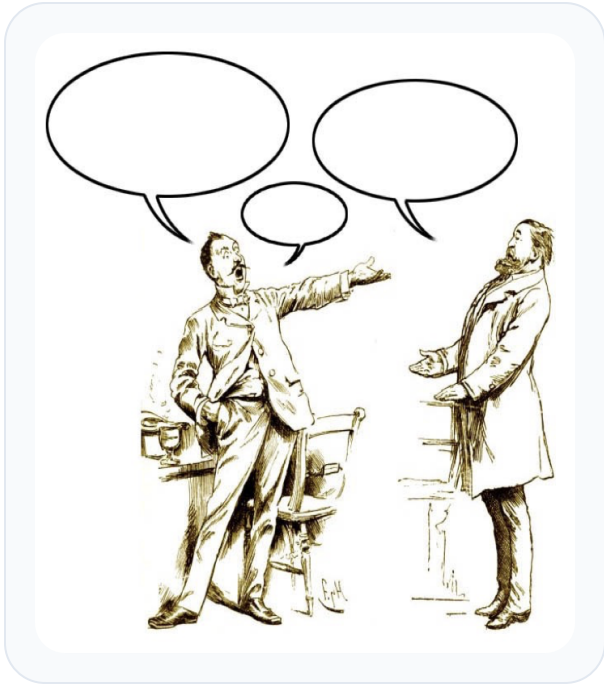


What are some of the common **barriers** you experience when working to partner with school administration/teachers, etc?

Improving Communication



discussion and *DIALOGUE*



How do they
SOUND,
FEEL,
and
DELIVER?

COMPARING DEBATE, DISCUSSION AND DIALOGUE*

	DEBATE <i>"Might is right"</i>	DISCUSSION <i>"The noisier, the smarter"</i>	DIALOGUE <i>"Connectivity for community"</i>
PARADIGM FOR COMMUNICATING ACROSS DIFFERENCE	Debate is oppositional: two sides oppose each other and attempt to prove each other wrong. Debate assumes that there is a right answer and that someone has it. In debate, personal experience is secondary to a forceful opinion.	Discussion tends to contribute to the formation of abstract notion of community. In discussion, personal experience and actual content are often seen as separate.	Dialogue is collaborative: two or more sides work together toward common understanding. In dialogue, personal experience is a key avenue for self-awareness and political understanding.
SELF-ORIENTATION	Debate creates closed-minded attitude, a determination to be right. Individuals are considered to be autonomous and judged on individual intellectual might.	Discussions often assume an "equal playing field" with little or no attention to identity, status and power.	In dialogue (esp. IGD) exploring identities and differences are key elements in both the process and the content of the exchange.
OTHER-ORIENTATION	In debate, one submits one's best thinking and defends it against challenge to show that it is right. Debate calls for investing wholeheartedly in one's beliefs. Debate defends assumptions as truth. Debate defends one's own positions as the best solution and excludes other solutions. Debate affirms a participant's own point of view.	Discussions are often conducted with the primary goal of increasing clarity and understanding of the issue with the assumption that we are working with a stable reality. In discussion, individual contributions often center around "rightness" and be valued for it. In discussion, the impact may often be identified and processed individually and outside of the group setting.	In dialogue, one submits one's best thinking, knowing that other peoples' reflections will help improve it rather than destroy it. Dialogue calls for temporarily suspending judgments. Dialogue reveals assumptions and biases for reevaluation. Dialogue causes introspection on one's own position.
EMOTIONS IN THE PROCESS	In debate, one listens to the other side in order to find flaws and to counter its arguments. Debate causes critique of the other position. In debate, one searches for glaring differences. In debate, one searches for flaws and weaknesses in the other position.	In discussion, one listens only to be able to insert one's own perspective. Discussion is often serial monologues. Discussion tends to encourage individual sharing, sometimes at the expense of listening to and inquiring about others' perspectives.	In dialogue, one listens to the other side(s) in order to understand, find meaning, and points of connection. Dialogue involves a real concern for the other person and seeks to not alienate but yet speak what is true for oneself. In dialogue, one searches for strengths in the other positions. Dialogue creates an openness to learning from mistakes and biases.
END-STATE	Debate involves a countering of the other position without focusing on feelings or relationship and often belittles or deprecates the other person.	In discussion, emotional responses may be present but are seldom named and may be unwelcome. Discussion is centered on content not affect related to content.	In dialogue, emotions help deepen understanding of personal, group and intergroup relationship issues. Dialogue works to uncover confusion, contradictions and paradoxes with an aim to deepen understanding.
END-STATE	In debate, winning is the goal. Debate implies a conclusion.	In discussion, the more perspectives voiced, the better. Discussion can be open or close-ended.	Dialogue remains open-ended. In dialogue, finding common ground is the goal.

* compiled and adapted by Ratnesh Nagda, Patricia Gurin, Jaclyn Rodriguez & Kelly Maxwell (2008), based on "Differentiating Dialogue from Discussion" a handout developed by Diana Kardia and Todd Sevig (1997) for the Program on Intergroup Relations, Conflict and Community (IGRC), University of Michigan; and, "Comparing Dialogue and Debate," a paper prepared by Shelley Berman, based on discussions of the Dialogue Group of the Boston Chapter of Educators for Social Responsibility (ESR). Other members included Lucile Burt, Dick Mayo-Smith, Lally Stowell, and Gene Thompson.

Discuss with a partner:

Think of a recent disagreement you had. How would the outcome differ by using each of these approaches-

A simple framework for approaching *DIALOGUE?*



The Foundation:
**Thoughts, Opinions,
& Convictions**

Building trust and strengthening relationships

VULNERABILITY

Openness and honesty about challenges

ACTIVE LISTENING

Hearing and validating diverse perspectives

PRACTICE DISCRETION

Maintaining confidentiality and respect

TRANSPARENCY

Clear communication and visible processes

CLARIFY INTENT

Setting clear expectations and goals

FREQUENT CONTACT

Regular check-ins to build momentum

Objectives

3

- *Identifying, Measuring, and Celebrating* shared goals

What do *PTA/School* partnerships look like in practice?



COMMUNICATION

Where is the intersection of communication to identify shared goals?



ALIGNED GOALS

Common goal with a clear metric



MONITORING

Frequent progress monitoring of goal



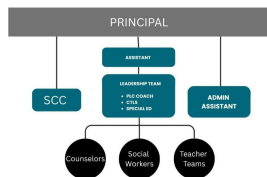
ACCOUNTABILITY

Reporting back to constituents

Spaces for *two-way* communication

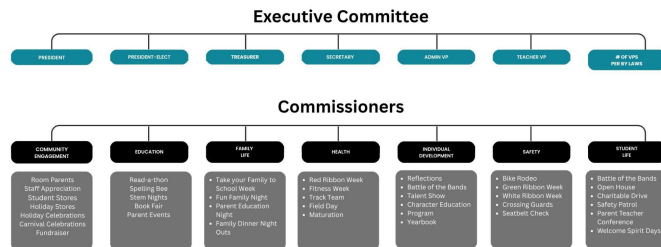
What does this look like in a **professional learning** community?

School Organizational Structure



What does it look like in a **PTA**?

PTA Organizational Structure



Are there spaces to overlap? Can we create that leverage utilizing the structures?

Group Discussion



What spaces are there within your school for *cross-collaboration* with school administrators/PTA?

Common goal with a *clear metric*

The Purpose of Partnership

The purpose of a PTA/school partnership is not simply to increase involvement; it is to **organize capacity** around a shared student-success goal.

A common goal:

- Focuses resources & builds trust
- Clarifies roles & shares power
- Makes it possible to measure whether the partnership is actually improving outcomes for children.



Common goal with a *clear metric*

Goals work best when they are specific, paired with feedback, and connected to action steps.

Research on goal-setting suggests that feedback is necessary because people need to know whether they are making progress and how to adjust effort or strategy. A common goal has to be more than a slogan. “We support students” is shared sentiment, not a shared goal.

Literacy & Reading

Target: May 2027

Our school and PTA will increase K-3 reading growth by helping families use simple at-home reading routines, aligning PTA literacy events with classroom goals, and providing monthly two-way communication about progress.

Student Belonging

Target: May 2027

Our school and PTA will improve student belonging by creating welcoming family networks, increasing student voice, reducing barriers to participation, and tracking belonging survey data and attendance patterns.

Chronic Absenteeism

Target: May 2027

Our school and PTA will reduce chronic absenteeism by identifying family barriers, strengthening school-family communication, connecting families with community supports, and celebrating improved attendance.

The strongest version is not "PTA will help with reading night." It is:

"Together, we are improving reading confidence, and reading night is one strategy in a larger shared plan."

Group Discussion

With a partner, share examples of common goals you have had in the past in the context of school/family/work, etc.

- *How did engaging in a shared goal increase the likelihood of reaching the desired outcome?*
- *Was there a benefit to engaging in the work together, even if the intended outcome was not reached?*
- *What are some of the challenges with a shared goal vs. an individual goal?*

Frequent *progress* monitoring



Builds Trust

Establishes transparency with your patrons and staff through consistent updates.



Listening Organization

Demonstrates that your organization values and acts upon feedback received.



Action-Orientation Builds Momentum

Even if data isn't favorable, the commitment to improvement creates a positive path.

Reporting back

Celebrate Successes

Celebration is how we teach the community, “This is what partnership looks like, and this is what it can accomplish”

Ways we approach celebrations through our partnership:



Show the impact

- Name the goal
- Share the progress
- Make the result visible



Tell the story

- Pair the data with student, family or teacher stories



Recognize the partnership

- Celebrate contributors

Wrap up -

Key Takeaways:

Dialogue creates clarity.

Common goals create alignment.

Progress monitoring creates momentum.

Reporting back creates trust.



Next Steps

What is one partnership goal you will take back to your school or PTA?



Shared Goals

What shared student-success goal could your PTA and school own together this year?

Connect with us on social media



FACEBOOK

- Utah PTA
- Utah PTA Advocacy
- Utah PTA Super Secondary
- Utah PTA Excellent Elementary
- Utah PTA Treasurers
- Utah PTA Reflections
- Utah School Community Councils
- Utah PTA Teachers
- Utah PTA Battle of the Bands

Connect with us on social media

INSTAGRAM - @UtahPTA



X - @UtahPTAOneVoice



PINTEREST - Utah PTA



YOUTUBE - Utah PTA One Voice



UTAH PTA SPONSORS

