**Best Practices for Navigating Leadership Changes**

**Change is difficult. Change in leadership can be even more difficult.**

That said, change is not uncommon or insurmountable. In relying on strategies from change management and being realistic about the course ahead, organizations can go through change and hopefully grow along the way. More formally, “Change management is the discipline that guides how we prepare, equip, and support individuals to successfully adopt change in order to drive organizational success and outcomes.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

**Stay focused and remember who you really work for (hint: it’s the youth).**

In times of uncertainty or ambiguity, it is easy to get caught up in concern and gossip and get distracted from the work at hand. Transitions in leadership take time and are stressful. As a rule, try to remain focused during this interim period.

One strategy for staying focused is to remember who you are really working for at the end of the day. When central office or institutional politics become distracting, take time to, individually and/or as a team, reconnect to your mission and your why.

* What brought you into education?
* What motivates you?
* Share a recent positive experience with a young person or educator that reaffirmed your belief in this work.

**Take care of yourself; Take care of one another**

Change is emotional. Especially in situations where a reorganization is expected or announced and people’s jobs are potentially on the line, anticipate that some people may have a strong reaction and need time to adjust.

Ensure you are allowing people space to take care of themselves. Be gracious with yourself and one another. Allow time for individual and group processing.

If there is a strong transition plan, the change is expected, and the new leader is knowledgeable about and supportive of SEL, the timeline for adjustment may be shorter and fewer supports may be required. See if you can get SEL specifically stated in the transition plan.

If the change is sudden or unexpected, and/or the new leader is not familiar to the district and/or SEL, the adjustment may take longer and need more support.

**Then, keep it going…**

Oftentimes, transitions in leadership can be so distracting that actual work falls to the wayside. Once the initial shock wears off and everyone has had a moment to process, try to refocus and keep the work moving.

One best practice, especially in times of transition but also generally, is to hone in on continuous improvement processes or systems that track progress towards data-driven outcomes. In a context where next steps are uncertain, demonstrating the impact of the team’s work can speak volumes.

Then, elevate that narrative. Let your impact data tell the story and look for opportunities to tell it. Through whatever channels already exist - newsletters, email updates, meetings/check-ins, etc. - communicate the positive work happening by providing real-time feedback to teams and sharing successes with leadership.

**Communicate with new leadership about SEL implementation**

In the first few months once the new leadership is instated, find opportunities to provide messaging about SEL. Frame this conversation as the first of an on-going line of communication about this exciting initiative that is bringing together school staff, families, out-of-school time partners, and other community stakeholders toward aligned, transformative SEL.

Communicate that SEL work will continue as a priority and that it’s expected that people are still growing and learning. Include accomplishments and next steps in these communications.

If the new leadership isn’t willing or available, seek the highest available leader to communicate that SEL planning and implementation will continue while inviting feedback and taking concerns seriously.

**Lean on your external partners.**

As leadership shifts occur, loop in external partners that you trust to help navigate the process. They may be able to offer support, resources, guidance and thought partnership on how to manage the change without being muddled in internal politics or dynamics.

**Expect a dip.**

Expect a dip in participation or commitment from some staff as a response to the change and provide opportunities to re-engage with the work. While some may require time and space to process the transition and take care of themselves, try to create opportunities to re-engage the team in due time. For those who have been hesitant to buy into this work, assume that they may revert back to prior ways of working or at least stop doing SEL for now. This may be a way they seek comfort with the familiar or ensure they can demonstrate their impact as a new leader assesses the effectiveness of their work.

1. <https://www.prosci.com/resources/articles/what-is-change-management> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)