**Establish Norms for Data-Informed Conversations**

**Purpose:** Data-informed conversations are a critical component of continuous improvement. This tool includes ways for facilitators to establish a space for safe and productive collaboration and recommended norms to ensure that the conversation is inclusive of all voices and results in concrete next steps. This tool can be used in combination with the [Rapid Learning Cycle Protocol](https://schoolguide.casel.org/resource/rapid-learning-cycles-for-continuous-improvement/) or [SEL Data Reflection Protocol](https://schoolguide.casel.org/resource/sel-data-reflection-protocol/).

**Step 1: Develop team norms**  
SEL teams should develop clear working agreements to set the stage for sustainable division of responsibility, productive meetings, and a team culture that values differences of opinion and inclusion. Reference the separate tool [Develop SEL Team Working Agreements](https://schoolguide.casel.org/resource/develop-sel-team-working-agreements/) if you have not yet developed norms with your SEL team.

**Step 2: Develop additional norms for discussing data**

When your SEL team begins to collect and reflect on data, you may find it necessary to add new norms to your list to ensure that all participate in the discussion with a lens of equity and inclusion and stay focused on what the team can do to improve implementation and outcomes.

Discussions about data should occur regularly within the SEL team, and it will often be valuable to invite representatives from the broader school community (e.g. students, families, community partners, other school staff members) to gain needed perspectives about what the data means and how to act on it. Because data-informed discussions are enriched by bringing in more voices, it is important to have norms to ensure all participants are made to feel welcome and valued and they are provided with what they need to understand the data and contribute thoughtfully.

**Before your first data-informed discussion, display your existing working agreements and pose additional questions to the team:**

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| **What does it look like to show respect and empathy for the people who are represented by data?**  **What does it mean to keep our discussion focused on factors that are within our control?**  **What would a new person in this group need to feel confident sharing their perspective?[[1]](#footnote-1)** |

Give time for all team members time to answer the questions in writing, then go around the circle inviting each person to share about what they wrote. Take notes on a screen or poster where everyone can see and agree to how their points are summarized.

Once all team members have shared, review the notes and ask for suggestions for additional norms:

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| **What norms can we add to hold ourselves accountable to the aims we have expressed?** |

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| Suggested Team Norm | Purpose | Facilitator Tips |
| Welcome new perspectives | Be aware of the power dynamic that is present between “staff” and “non-staff”, or when anyone new joins an existing group. To be inclusive, it’s essential that the new participants see that the group values their perspective and is ready to learn from what they have to say. | Take the time for introductions and a welcoming activity. Lift up the expertise of all those in the room, but particularly those who may be new to the group or less comfortable in the setting.  ***Facilitator:*** *Today we have four guests from our afterschool program, [welcome them by name]. They have known many of our students for years and they have a lot of perspective on ways students are using social and emotional skills in social settings.*  Present data in a way that no one will need specialized knowledge to understand it -- no one should feel unable to share their perspective because they don't feel confident that they understand what they're looking at. |
| Keep conversations ‘blame free’ | Blaming or assigning fault to individuals or groups erodes trust and distracts from the team’s role in facilitating improvement. | If a ‘blame statement’ is expressed, redirect by reminding the group that the aim is to focus on factors that are within their control and SEL practices as a lever for improvement.  ***Facilitator:*** *What might be the roadblocks to success for this grade level, and what can our team do about those roadblocks?*  Anonymizing student data may prevent team members from getting “stuck” on personal biases about individual students. |
| Honor students’ lived experience | While data provides valuable insights, it’s important to always remember it doesn’t tell the whole story of a student’s lived experience | If a group member proposes a solution based on an assumption about the data, use probing questions about what the issue may look, sound, and feel like in the students’ lived experience.  ***Team member:*** *Discipline referrals are higher in 7th grade, so they need more behavioral interventions.*  ***Facilitator:*** *Ok, before we propose solutions, let’s step back. What are the different factors in these classrooms that may contribute to more discipline referrals?* |
| Strive for equity of voice | People have varying levels of comfort with both talking about data and talking in large groups. Lopsided conversations can lead to incomplete insights. | Use purposeful strategies to encourage equity of voice. This could include giving plenty of think-time, asking team members to share with a partner before sharing with the full group, using a shared notecatcher that all team members can write on, or journaling to give plenty of opportunities to gather their thoughts before sharing out.  Encourage team members to watch that at least 2 others have spoken before they contribute a second thought (“2 before me”)  ***Facilitator:*** *I want to make sure we have the chance to hear from everyone before we circle back to those who have already spoken. Does anyone else want to add a thought?* |

1. For this final question, it can be helpful to give several examples of who could potentially be invited to a data discussion in the future, such as a parent who speaks English as a second language, students who have experienced challenges, an out-of-school-time staff member who recently graduated high school, etc. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)