**5 Minute Chats with Staff**

Concept and content contributed by Gracie Branch, Associate Executive Director, Professional Learning, National Association of Elementary School Principals

**Initiate –** – If you already have a personalized relationship with the staff member, open the conversation as you would start any informal discussion with that person. If this is a relationship you are working to build, say/text/email something like:

Do you have a few minutes to chat? I’m working on connecting with everyone on staff to get a better sense of what everyone is feeling and thinking about, and how I can be supportive.

**Learn about the person –** Let them know that knowing about them as a person is your first priority by bringing it up on the front end of your conversation.

* What’s new in your life since last time we talked?
* How is your family?
* What has changed for you since last school year?
* Any concerns or ideas on your mind that you would like me to know about?

**Learn about their priorities –** Transition to asking about their role at your school.

* How is everything going with [your classes, recess, your caseload)? Any bright spots or challenges?
* What are you spending the most time and energy on?
* What would you like to see happen this school year?

**Invite more feedback –** Show your conversation partner that you value their perspective and are open to making changes based on their input.

* What do you and your colleagues need most right now?
* What do you think we’re getting right so far, that we can build on?
* What do you think we should be doing differently?

**Close –** End on an optimistic, forward-thinking note.

* This was helpful for me. Thanks for being open.
* You’ve given me some things to think about. I’m going to take some time to process what you shared, and we’ll make some time to talk again in a few days.
* Thanks for taking a moment with me. I’ve been hearing similar things from others as well, so I’ll be sharing about what I’ve been learning and some possible next steps at our next all-staff meeting.

School administrators demonstrate their openness to feedback and set the tone for a caring and supportive environment through repeated, positive interactions with their staff. An informal chat is one simple and effective approach. Chats help school administrators understand the experiences and perspectives of those they support while strengthening communication and trust.

**How to use this template:** Use this basic structure and prompts as a loose guide when you check in with staff throughout the year. Five minutes will go by quickly, so don’t try to ask every question, and be prepared to adjust as you learn what your conversation partner most wants you to know. If possible, meet with all staff including your administrative team, teachers, support staff, security, transportation, custodial, and nutrition staff. Depending on the size of your school, it may be necessary to divide up responsibility among the larger administrative team so that all staff have a one-on-one conversation with someone they see as a school leader with the power to make decisions.

After you have met with staff individually, share in an all-staff meeting what you learned (without singling out individual feedback), how you will act on their feedback, and why the experience was valuable to you. This is a good opportunity to share goals for family and student outreach – [staff can take a similar approach with the students](https://schoolguide.casel.org/resource/5-minute-chats-with-students/) and families they serve.

**Preparing to chat:** The primary purpose of the chat is to hear about your conversation partner’s experience and perspective so that you can know them as an individual, be responsive to their needs, learn from them for the benefit of the school, and build relational trust. If you feel an impulse to rationalize or defend against their feedback, resist it. Remember that your purpose is to learn from their perspective, even if you don’t entirely agree.