Promoting a "no fault" framework:
Moving from a culture of "blame" to a more trusting, collaborative school climate

Frequently Asked Questions

What is a "no-fault" framework?
A no fault framework refers to the idea that people in a community agree to take responsibility for what they have done (and/or not done!) with a shared intent to (1) learn from what we have done well and not so well and (2) to work together to improve school life.

Why is a "no-fault' framework important to establish?
So, often schools are characterized by a culture of "blame" and "excuse". Naturally, this contributes to people being more distrusting, fearful and defensive. And, this will – necessarily complicate learning and working together in a collaborative manner. In fact, there is very powerful educational research (conducted by Anthony S. Bryk) that supports the notion that when educators trust each other less rather than more, it undermines student achievement and school improvement efforts.

Why are so many schools colored by a culture of blame and excuse?
Good question. One important reason is that people don't talk about what kind of climate they want in their school and then think together about what are the steps we need to take to move towards this goal. It is also natural that when we are frustrated and/or hurt, we can easily fall into a 'blaming position": it is your fault! Although there may be truth to this feeling, it is rarely a helpful framework if our goal is to really make things better in school. Meaningful school change typically does take the "whole village": we need to work together as educators, parents, community leaders and students!

Does a "no-fault" framework overlap with a number of other ideas like an authentic learning community?
Yes. Although James Comer was the first person to talk and write about the importance of a "no fault" framework, this overlaps with the idea of "authentic learning communities" or "communities of practice" (www.ewenger.com/theory/). A "no fault" framework is also an important implicit component of the "Communities That Care" prevention model that has supported by the US Department of Education (http://ncadi.samhsa.gov/features/ctc/resources.aspx)

There is a great deal of talk about the importance of authentic learning communities where educators are learning from one another. We suggest that one of the reasons that there is more talk than practice here is that it is so challenging to establish a non blaming or "no fault" framework in school communities.

<u>Establishing a "no-fault" framework seems like an easy goal to state but a very challenging one to actually achieve. How do you do it?</u>
You are right! This is a challenging goal to achieve. But, we suggest a fundamentally important one.

An integral component in establishing a "no-fault" framework is the creation of a highly effective professional learning community (PLC). Professional learning communities establish norms, values, and goals that encourage and support collaborative and courageous leadership, academic, social, emotional and ethical learning, and ongoing reflection, and evaluation.

There is no simply formula that educators can follow that fosters this. However, here are a series of questions and steps that we have found useful:

A. What is courageous and collaborative leadership?
Courageous and collaborative leadership is the ability to help others achieve great things.

B. How do you create effective Professional Learning Communities?
A Professional Learning Community is the creation of an atmosphere where all constituencies are committed to learning, growing and achieving together. They share a common vision, a common language, and a common knowledge base grounded in a "no-fault" framework. This vision is clearly articulated throughout the district.

Through team building, consensus building, and the establishment of norms, professional learning communities begin to develop a sense of trust among each of the constituencies. This allows members of the PLC to take-risks, trust the input of the professionals, and buy-in and support efforts that will allow for continued growth as a district. These efforts will bring about systemic change and impact the fabric of the school community.

C. What is a reflective practitioner?
A reflective practitioner continually re-examines, re-thinks, and re-aligns what they are doing in order to meet the diverse needs of the student population throughout the district.

D. How do you encourage consensus building?
You create consensus building by selecting a process that will allow all voices to be heard. Agreement must be reached with respect to a comfort zone that will allow all participants to buy-in with respect to the initiative at hand. If agreement cannot be reached, new ideas need to be brainstormed until a comfort zone is reached.

E. Should norms be universal or customized to your school setting?
Sample norms need to be shared with participants and they need to actively participate in re-working the norms to meet their specific needs.

F. Should perceptions that are not a reality be addressed by the PLC?
Whether something is a perception or a reality it is necessary to address any concern that is important to members of the school community. Through these efforts a common vision, built upon trust and a "no-fault" framework is articulated throughout the school community

G. How do we build bridges in establishing a "no-fault" framework?
It is important to allow PLC to brainstorm the "small things" that they are currently doing that fit into a "no-fault/no-blame framework." This will create a strong foundation by building bridges among existing strategies and procedures that reflect a "no-fault" framework. Making connections to past accomplishments, what is presently working well, and linking these achievements to future goals will provide validation and encourage continued growth. All constituencies need to be involved in this process and the entire school community needs to be educated on the course of action that will be implemented. This will enable the PLC to continue to learn, grow, and achieve together.

H. Does a "no-fault" framework exist in the real world?
Yes, a "no-fault framework exists in the real world and the book The Power Of Nice by Linda Kaplan Thaler and Robin Koval (NY Times bestseller list) shares many real-life situations.

   Questions we need to answer . . .

- Who is the leadership in our district?
- What qualities, values, and strategies do we want to utilize in being reflective practitioners?
- What method of consensus building will we use in making decisions?
- What are the norms that we agree on?
- What is our vision of a "no-fault" framework as it relates to our district?

- What do we already do on as a school/district to promote a "no-fault" framework?
- What are the potential obstacles/barriers to initiating or sustaining a "no-fault" framework in our district?
- What can we do in order to eliminate these barriers in order to create a "no-fault" framework?
- What staff development, planning time, resources, etc. is required for our "no-fault" framework effort to be successful?

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