

Setting the Tone: Launching the Right Faculty & Staff Culture in a Challenging Time

Especially in a turbulent year, it's crucial for school leaders to use opening faculty and staff meeting time to set a tone for the year and intentionally build the culture they know their schools need. Here are six big ideas — and associated tips and resources — Folio recommends these six big ideas as a framework for leaders to build resilient, innovative, responsive, and inclusive cultures for 2020-2021.

Focus on purpose and set priorities

When everything is important, nothing is. What matters to your school? How will you stay true to those values? In a challenging year, what are we going to focus on, in our work and in our professional growth, and what are we going to de-prioritize?

Create space for reflection and grounding

In moments of chaos, we tend to run from one thing to another, without pausing to check in with ourselves and each other. What's going well? What's hard? What's most important?

Celebrate, celebrate, celebrate

As long as celebrations are authentic, crowdsourced, and specific, there's no such thing as too many of them. Celebrate people, teams, practices, and school-wide successes. Celebrate the personal as well as the professional.

Acknowledge the challenge and remain optimistic

The challenges and the trauma are real and are all around us; it is important to name these and give space for others to do the same. Simultaneously, keep focused on the wins and the powerful opportunities and creativity that can be born out of crisis.

Build community any way you can

In times of crisis, trauma, and change, we need each other more than ever for collaboration, learning, and support. It is also harder than ever to connect with each other and harder to make the time for community-building.

Model what matters

When it comes to building a culture and setting a tone, leadership by example is the most valuable tool available. Be reflective and vulnerable. Talk about how the crisis has affected you. Speak personally about priorities and purpose. Model praise, celebration, and optimism.

Setting the Tone: Tips and Resources

Focus on purpose and set priorities

- What elements of your school's mission or philosophy provide guidance about how to respond in this moment, what to prioritize, and how to support each other? Draw these connections for faculty and staff, or invite them to do so for themselves in small groups during a meeting.
- Select a small number of themes to focus the work of the faculty and staff this year, themes that will run through meetings, goal-setting, conversations, and professional development opportunities. Talk about these themes at every chance, in clear and consistent language. Explain why you selected them and why they matter.

▶ ["A Shared Purpose" blog post](#)

▶ [From Folio: Getting Started with Themes](#)

Create space for reflection and grounding

- Build a ritual around faculty/staff reflection — reflecting either individually or in pairs — at the start of every faculty meeting, and ask department chairs and other leaders to do the same. Consider using the Mindful Minute tool in myFolio.
- In your feedback and conversations, look for opportunities to take a stance of curiosity and questioning: "Tell me more about..." "How are you feeling about how things are going?" "How does this connect to your goal of...?" "What kinds of solutions have you considered?"

▶ [Ten Teacher Questions for Self-Reflection](#)

▶ [Why You Should Make Time for Self-Reflection \(Even If You Hate Doing It\)](#)

Celebrate, celebrate, celebrate

- Spend 10-15 minutes per week (or more!) writing thank-you notes to faculty and staff members, specifically appreciating something they have done or something about the way they do their work.
- Normalize and encourage "shoutouts" by faculty/staff of each other, either in meetings or in an electronic format. Start the practice using some "plants" if you need to, and remind people that even little wins are worth celebrating.
- Consider using myFolio's Spotlight tool as a lasting form of praise that is tied to other elements of their professional growth.

▶ [40 Ways to Celebrate Teachers](#)

▶ [5 Ways to Show Gratitude at Work](#)

Acknowledge the challenge and remain optimistic

- Speak personally — and publically— about how you are feeling and how the crisis has affected you. In times like this, we need to know our leaders are human and vulnerable.
- Resilient people accept the reality of tough situations but then quickly move to "what's next" and "where do I go from here." Orient all of your communications and conversations around this approach
- Take every opportunity you can to celebrate and encourage the small innovations and silver linings that will naturally arise from this year's challenges.

▶ [What Makes Some People More Resilient Than Others](#)

▶ [The three secrets of resilient people](#)

Build community any way you can

- As a leadership team, make sure that you have a clear system for checking in on faculty/staff and each other. Who is checking in on who? And how often will your team meet to think about how individuals and the collective are doing?
- If faculty and staff are remote or cohorted, encourage them to build in social time through "no work talk" Zoom lunches or phone-in walks. Consider setting up a sign-up sheet to facilitate this.
- Get silly and bond! Don't be afraid to play team-building games virtually, and encourage everyone who leads meetings to do the same.
- If you are asking faculty/staff to reflect via the Mindful Minute in myFolio, use the Insights dashboard to get an "at a glance" view of faculty morale

▶ [How to continue building inclusive communities when you're remote](#)

▶ [12 road-tested team building activities that work for real-life remote teams](#)

▶ [Maintaining Relationships While Working Apart](#)

Model what matters

- Build your own reflective practice - journaling, working with a coach, or whatever works for you.
- Build your own community by forming or joining your own PLC or Mastermind group, likely with counterparts at other schools.
- Let down your guard and be vulnerable with your colleagues and faculty/staff.
- Set your own priorities, and give yourself a break; let a few things go this year.

▶ [Leaders Are Crying on the Job. Maybe That's a Good Thing](#)

▶ [What is an Educator Mastermind, and Why Should You Join One?](#)

