

## **Protective Leadership Factors to Lower Anxiety and Increase Community Resilience**

At Continua Consulting Group, we have the unique experience of serving school districts throughout multiple states and municipalities. Our clients represent a broad socio-economic, political and demographic representation of our nation. As we have provided SEL supports to educators across our portfolio during the COVID\_19 Pandemic, we have witnessed their fears, frustrations and exhaustion. A persistent concern expressed by educators is a desire for consistent messaging from their leadership.

Throughout the pandemic, inconsistent universal messaging from the federal government, as well as contradictory or disinformation about the virus, has instilled confusion throughout communities. Without clear guidance and resources to respond effectively and consistently in an evidence-based manner to the pandemic, state, county and local governments have strived to make decisions in a vacuum of information. Additionally, in most school districts, community members are divided as to how and when students receive instruction onsite at schools. Educators have provided extraordinary support to the communities they serve during this crisis. Often, in spite of their efforts, they have experienced hostility from members of their communities and felt under-valued or unsupported by their leadership in response. Limited, unclear and sometimes contradictory communication from system leadership has exacerbated educator anxiety and exhaustion, from our observations.

### ***Continua's Recommendations for School District Leaders:***

- Predictability: Consistent communication in multiple modalities to ensure equitable access
- Transparency: Clarity on what known and what is not yet known
- Optimism: Messages of hope and belief in collective capacity to persevere
- Unity: Reminders of shared values, agreements and dreams

**Predictability:** Leaders can support their educators and community members by committing to consistent, predictable communication. Via email, website, robocalls, webinars, newsletters, etc., leaders can send clear messages on a consistent basis such as every Monday morning or Friday afternoon. When people can predict when they will be updated, it can help prevent stress caused by the unknown. System leaders should attend to some key, repeatable messages to ensure common language, while modeling for building leaders to replicate and repeat those same messages. Consistent messages throughout the organization of safety, collaboration and unity should be received regularly at all levels and in all languages/modalities necessary to ensure equitable access in all communities.

**Transparency:** Human beings look to their leadership for honesty, consistency and commitment during challenging times. Brutal honesty is needed today. Our leadership should demonstrate a commitment to staff that they are protected from the vitriol of community members who are outraged when schools remain closed due to a global pandemic. Community members should be reminded that educators are solving new challenges and working harder than ever, taking on the roles of instructor, social worker, counselor and online platform experts. Leadership should affirm their absolute commitment to the wellbeing of their staff as well as the community they serve. Both actions do not need to be diametrically opposed.

**Optimism & Unity:** The communities we serve need a vision for the future as well. This may require messages that are not popular with all stakeholders. Committed and informed decision making doesn't always result in winning the popularity contest. Consistent messaging and reminders of the goals you are committed to as a community provides staff and community members with hope and a sense of belief in the resilience necessary to prevail through the pandemic. Leaders can actively help educators and community members reduce anxiety levels by reminding them of their confidence in the collective capacity to endure and thrive.