

Public participation spectrum ■

The community can be engaged on at least four different levels, according to International Association of Public Participation’s Public Participation Spectrum:

| | INFORM | CONSULT | INVOLVE | COLLABORATE |
|---------------------------|--|--|---|--|
| Public participation goal | To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives and/or solution. | To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives, and/or decision. | To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public issues and concerns are consistently understood and considered. | To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution. |
| Promise to the public | We will keep you informed. | We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision. | We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision. | We will look to you for direct advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible. |
| Example techniques | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fact sheets • Websites • Open houses | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public comment • Focus Groups • Surveys • Public meetings | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshops • Deliberative polling | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Citizen Advisory committees • Consensus-building • Participatory decision-making |

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As the chart indicates, the levels of participation increase from left to right, depending on how much decision-making authority the board is willing and able to share at any given time. Each level has specific strategies, which will be explored in more detail in the next section. The board needs to decide the level of engagement to which board members wish to commit. Partnering requires some level of shared power. This means giving up a certain amount of control, even though board members retain their trustee role and ultimately decisions on any issue are the board's to make.

Fully developed public engagement goes beyond just “informing” the public. However, a well-informed public is a prerequisite to higher levels of engagement. By practicing deliberative reflection, clarifying their understanding of public issues through a community engagement process and then following up with deliberative public action, the board can demonstrate its desire to include all of the diverse voices in the community.

It is important to keep in mind that as the board builds these partnerships with the community the ultimate end goal of community engagement is to enable school boards and public schools to work effectively as truly democratic institutions that provide a collective benefit. The benefit is public education. This requires us to grow our thinking and recognize student success as going beyond student achievement as defined by test scores alone. Student success as a result of public education is better defined as productive citizens who understand and carry forward the inherent values of our democracy.