7 STEPS TO GUIDE SCHOOL CHANGE

When superintendent Angela Piazza started at Cassopolis Public Schools (CPS) in Southwestern Michigan, she was resolute that the district needed change for the K-12 schools. Through her previous roles at New Tech Network (NTN) schools, Piazza knew it was the right framework for CPS to put students ahead of the curve for the state's educational initiatives and ready for the workforce of the future. Read her advice on bringing a district and community on board with school change.

1. BE HONEST: EVALUATE THE NEED

When Piazza first became superintendent at Cassopolis Public Schools (CPS), she didn't sugarcoat the facts. "Immediately I started having conversations with my board about the existing test scores and data and said, here's a real picture of where we are. Here are our needs; here is where we're failing students," said Piazza. CPS needed a model that fit their diverse community in rural Michigan, a model that would meet the needs of K-12 students from different ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds.

2. SOURCE COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

One of the most valuable tactics for engaging the Cassopolis community with New Tech Network was sourcing community feedback through Business Education Roundtables. Piazza gathered business leaders together to learn about her vision and voice their desires. "The very first thing I had them do was to describe their ideal employee candidate. They listed things like communication and work ethic, and **Piazza realized that the skills they were looking for aligned with our [NTN] Learning Outcomes.** We want the same things – the same things I'm looking for in the graduates for my district, they're looking for in successful employees. That exercise opened a lot of doors and gained so much support."

3. FIND WHAT "WORKS" FOR YOU

"We needed a model that met the needs of our individualized district, and that's what we love about New Tech Network – **it's a framework, not a canned curriculum**." In addition to her appreciation for the adaptability of the model, Piazza acknowledges the benefits of being a part of the Network. "As a rural community, being connected to the Network for us is huge. Anytime you're connected in a network, it strengthens your program, and no one else in our area is doing this framework with project-based learning (PBL). The Network gives us a chance to connect with others doing the same thing."

4. VISIT NTN SCHOOLS

"[...] We were able to see schools that had all the bells and whistles in the classroom, and others that didn't. **When cost and resource are a concern, it's nice to see that NTN offers customizable options** that support good teaching and learning," said Piazza.

5. INVOLVE STUDENTS REGULARLY

Piazza **regularly schedules students to present final projects at school board meetings**, which serves two purposes: 1. Students gain practice with oral communication and presentation skills 2. Board members can see the level of competence and confidence students display in their learning.

6. UNANIMITY IS NOT THE GOAL

"You're never going to get 100 percent buy-in," says Piazza. She emphasizes that while there will always be a small group of naysayers or traditionalists, **showing stakeholders why school transformation is important and achievable and keeping the focus on what's best** for the teachers and students is the ultimate goal.

7. CELEBRATE!

Since implementing the NTN model, two CPS schools have been recognized with an MIBALSI award (Michigan's Integrated Behavior and Learning Support Initiative) **"Discipline has been so minimal compared to what we've experienced before,"** said Piazza. "In implementing PBL as our culture, there's been an impact on discipline. That's the accountability and agency piece and being consistent."

New Tech Network