



# RESTORATIVE RESOLUTIONS

## Handout 2

### Cultures that Influence Achievement

I use two diagrams to illustrate the difference between creating impersonable metrics- standards driven cultures and more personable student/stakeholder driven cultures in districts and schools. The major difference to pay attention to is what/who is in the center of each diagram. The first diagram below shows a framework of a standards-metrics driven culture. In many districts and schools, curriculum standards, their associated metrics (testing, diagnostic testing, etc.), and white privilege influenced dominant culture behavior policy are the standards that most substantially influence the educational culture. This represents a standards-metrics driven culture because these principles are the major priorities, and they govern the culture as well as the direct and indirect policies associated with schooling. In this type of setting, schools and districts spend the largest chunk of time attempting to figure out how to improve students through mastering standards and/or enforcing the metrics. Because so much of the time is spent on the formalities of standards, protocol, and associated metrics, the human elements (students, parents, teachers, staff, and social capital (people of a student's community who have positive influence over them)) are on the outskirts of the triangle. This creates an engagement disconnect between the stakeholders because a high amount of focus is placed on standards, protocol, and metrics associated with bureaucratic expectations. Because mainstream students have more familiarity with these types of systems and structures, they are more likely to be the students who make good grades, score high on tests, and behave appropriately in a standards and metrics engagement model. Also, one of the parents of mainstream students are probably more likely to have experienced a degree of success in this type of setting. Because these parents and their children experience success in this type of setting, the parents as well as the social capital of these students usually are more bought into this type of culture. Therefore, the parents and social capital for these students will likely be more engaged and supportive in this type of setting as compared to students and families who have less familiarity and/or success with this type of setting. It is important to reiterate and clarify that the reference to standards (in this model) is more than the academic curriculum. It should also include the associated policy and protocol of behavior.

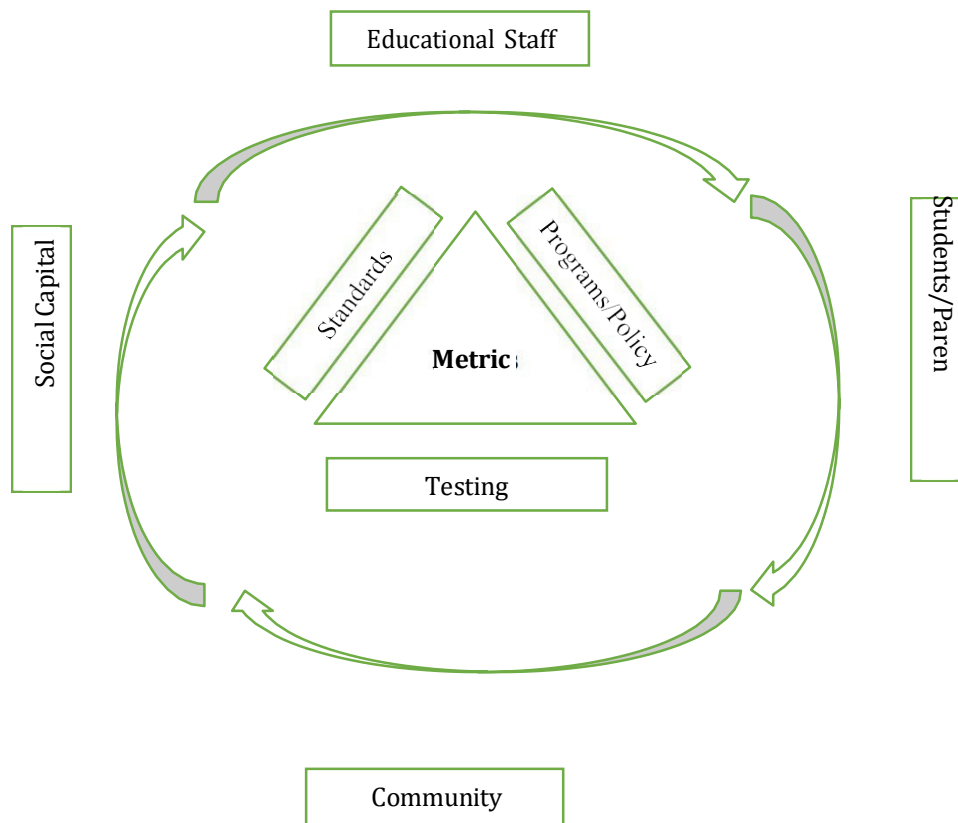
The term 'standards-driven' is also applicable when considering behavioral policies and other protocol that represent influential staples within an educational culture. It is important to note that a considerable amount of 'standards-driven' protocol, whether academic or behavioral, are a byproduct of the white privilege perspective of 'good' rule and/or 'good' order - power. For example, in many elementary school settings, the behavioral standard/expectation for students walking in the hallway is to walk in a line in and to not talk. I have experienced instances where students caught talking (even at a level of a whisper), receive



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negative reprimands and/or consequences for doing so. Additionally, the teacher whose class is permitted to talk in the hallway is perceived as a subpar classroom manager or having an inability to follow school protocol. Understandably, the concepts of rules and order are essential to teach students, and there are definite instances where rules and expectations may need to be non-negotiable (e.g. safety issues). However, an environment that places more emphasis on reprimanding students for whispering or talking softly in a hallway line while transitioning to lunch, recess, or other routine activities would be an example of a standards and metrics focused culture because adherence to the standard takes noticeable precedence over the needs and/or interests of the students. Similarly, from an academic context, the school and/or classroom environment that gives considerably more recognition to honor roll students or the students who have the highest test scores (which quite often are the same students) than students who have simply brought up grades and made improvements would also be an example of a standards and metrics focused culture.

## Standards & Metrics Focused Engagement Approach





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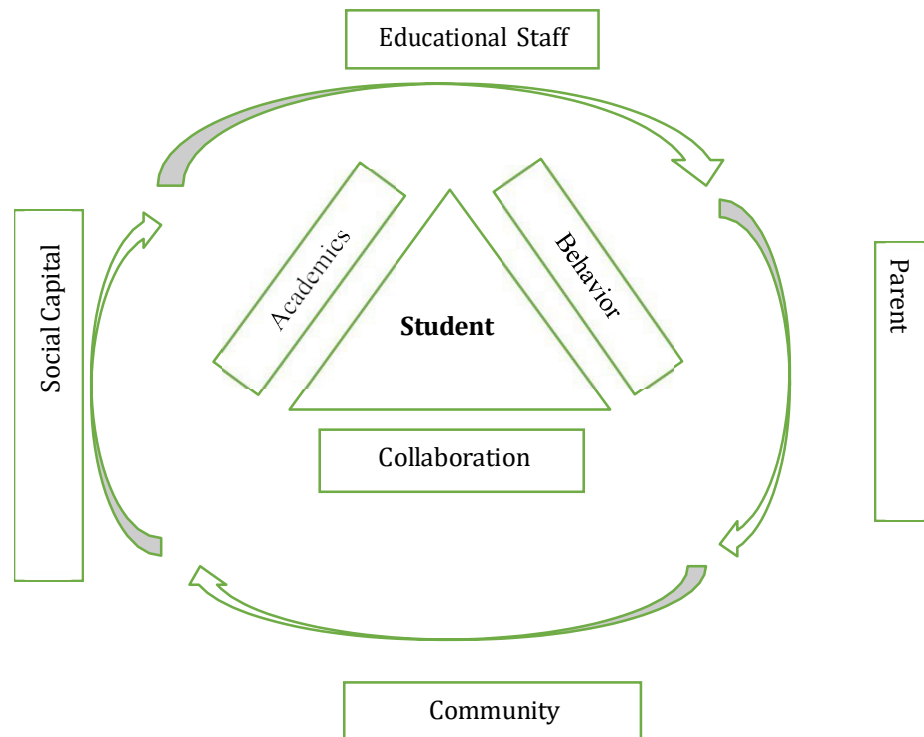
In a perfect world, all home and community support would resemble mainstream students who are accustomed to school norms, but the reality is that this group often represents a smaller contingency of stakeholders in many districts and schools. In many instances, nonmainstream students, their parents, and home/community supporters have not experienced the same level of consistent success in school. So, a standards and metrics focused culture will be more of a challenge for them to embrace and excel in. While parents and social capital for these students want to see them do well, their lack of familiarity as well as lack of interest in the standards and metrics used to govern these environments deters their motivation to be supportive or involved. The fact is if they and/or their children have not been successful in this type of environment, it is less likely that they will buy into engaging their full support because standards, protocol, and metrics will never be more important to them than the overall well-being of their children. Thus, as long as these stakeholders feel that standards, curriculum, testing, and policy are the focus of the culture within the educational community, a culture that already has not produced a high level of success for many of them as well as their child, it is highly unlikely they will fully buy into it with active engagement and support. If this is true, it also increases the likelihood that the children these parents have influence over will also not be fully engaged in this type of setting.

Consequently, maintaining a standards and metrics focused culture will perpetuate the cycle of the same high achieving students while doing little to improve achievement for many other students. Further, this type of culture frames things from more of a context of ‘us against them’ rather than a context of partnership. It always seems to generate a narrative that pits district/school versus parents/home/community – which produces numerous complaints and counter complaints or empty promises. For example, districts/schools assert that many parents are not involved the way they should be, and arbitrarily conclude that they (the parents) do not care. Conversely, many parents and the communities claim that the only time they hear from districts/schools is when they have an agenda, it is time for a conference, or if their child is in trouble. To these stakeholders, it appears that the district/school does not care. The outcome is that both sides only deal with each other at surface level or in abrasive ways (i.e. artificial smiles and salutations during encounters while making derogatory comments in private, parents coming to school to curse a staff member out, etc.). So, while the standards and metrics driven culture may be deemed as important in some arenas within the educational community, it is less important to nonmainstream students, their parents, social capital, and/or communities.



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## Stakeholder Engagement Approach



The above diagram illustrates the framework for the pedagogy of stakeholder engagement. In this diagram, the most essential stakeholder, the student, is in the center of the diagram, and all other components revolve around the student. Advocating this type of culture means that everything (standards, behavior protocol, data, collaboration, etc.) should be governed based on the needs of the student. Additionally, you will notice that metrics is not present in this framework. The thought behind this model is when the student is placed at the center with everything and everyone else revolving around them to meet his/her needs, the metrics, test scores, and other associated bureaucratic expectations will take care of themselves. Essentially, the Stakeholder Engagement Approach emphasizes the idea that the more student needs are met through a collaborative effort of human resources, the better he/she will perform and the more cohesive the overall environment will be to accomplish this task. For example, instead of immediate disciplinary actions – which quite often seeks to remove the student from the classroom setting - the student needing behavior intervention due to behavior challenges would begin immediate positive collaboration with human resources (staff, parents, community, and social capital) at school and home. Ultimately, the goal of this type of model is to build efficacy and agency in the student through student reflection, progress monitoring, and collaboration with more experienced others. Further, this approach builds a team of support around the student and equips



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him/her with the tools to become more self-sufficient in taking an ownership role in their growth and development. So, this type of culture requires an all-inclusive and bias free accountability system for ensuring that students' needs are met. Whether behavior or academics, students' needs drive the collaboration, the data, as well as the plans of action in this framework rather than the needs for fulfilling the standards, metrics, and protocol.

Some may be tempted to declare that their educational setting already has a student - centered focus. However, one of the intended purposes of this chapter is to urge districts and schools to be careful not to base their success relative to stakeholder engagement or student success on test results or other bureaucratic accolades they may have achieved. Doing so actually perpetuates the standards and metrics engagement approach and embraces the mile wide and inch deep approaches that lessen the likelihood of longer-term success and achievement for certain students or group(s) of students who are already marginalized. So, it is essential that educational communities thoroughly investigate their cultures below the surface because this is where the standards, protocols, and policies that stifle achievement for many students can exist if there is an absence of deep organizational reflection, evaluation, and/or assessment.

It goes without saying there are an abundance of curriculum materials, behavior programs, computer applications, etc. that are adopted by districts/schools under the pretense of being student – centered. I am not saying that these programs do not have the potential or capacity to meet the needs of your students. However, implementing programs and resources into an educational community is not what makes them student-centered, create a student- centered culture, or create a culture that is rich with stakeholder engagement. If there is no local process in place to evaluate the effectiveness of programs, protocol, and resources, it is possible that these resources can do more harm than good relative to meeting students' needs. Therefore, it is essential that districts, schools, and the education community frequently evaluate and assess resources and practices to ensure their effectiveness for meeting the needs of ALL students within an educational setting. It is suggested to utilize the themes identified in the next several chapters as guiding components in creating an effective framework for evaluating and assessing school programs, policy, and resources to ensure they are creating a rich stakeholder engaged and student-centered culture.

*Excerpt from Barksdale, T.J. (2021). First Things First: Putting Students Before Standards – A Practical Guide for Building Positive and Engaged Learning Communities. Simpsonville, SC: Hadassah's Crown Publishing. Chapter 1, p. 17-24*