

5-Minute Chats with Staff

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School administrators demonstrate their openness to feedback and set the tone for a caring and supportive environment by consistently interacting positively with their staff. An informal chat is one simple and effective approach. These chats help school administrators understand the experiences and perspectives of their staff while strengthening communication and trust.

How to use this template: Use this basic structure and prompts as a loose guide when checking in with staff throughout the year. Five minutes goes by quickly, so don't try to ask every question. Be prepared to adjust as you learn what your conversation partner wants you to know most. If possible, meet with all staff including your administrative team, teachers, support staff, security, transportation, custodial, and nutrition staff. Depending on the size of your school, it may be necessary to divide up responsibility among the larger administrative team so that all staff members have a one-on-one conversation with someone they see as a school leader who has the power to make decisions.

After meeting with staff individually, share what you learned in an all-staff meeting (without singling out individual feedback), how you will act on their feedback, and why the experience was valuable to you. This is a good opportunity to share goals for family and student outreach – [staff can take a similar approach with the students](#) and families they work with.

Preparing to chat: The primary purpose of the chat is to hear about your conversation partner's experience and perspective. This will allow you to get to know them as an individual, be responsive to their needs, learn from them for the benefit of the school, and build relational trust. If you feel the urge to rationalize or defend yourself against their feedback, resist it. Remember, your goal is to learn from their perspective, even if you don't entirely agree with it.

Initiate – If you already have an existing personal relationship with the staff member, start the conversation as you would with any informal discussion. If you are working to build this relationship, say, text, or email something like:

Do you have a few minutes to chat? I'm trying to connect with everyone on staff to understand how I can be supportive and what everyone is feeling and thinking about.

Learn about the person – Let them know that getting to know them as a person is your first priority by mentioning it at the beginning of your conversation.

- What's new in your life since last time we talked?
- How is your family?
- What has changed for you since last school year?
- Do you have any concerns or ideas on your mind that you would like me to know about?

Learn about their priorities – Transition to asking about their role at your school.

- How is everything going with your classes, recess, and caseload? Are there any bright spots or challenges?
- What are you spending the most time and energy on?
- What would you like to see happen this school year?

Invite more feedback – Show your conversation partner that you value their perspective and are open to making changes based on their input.

- What do you and your colleagues need most right now?
- What are we doing well so far that we can build on?
- What do you think we should be doing differently?

Close – End on an optimistic, forward-thinking note.

- This was helpful for me. Thanks for being open.
- You've given me some things to think about. I'm going to take some time to process what you shared. We'll schedule another time to talk in a few days.
- Thanks for taking the time to talk with me. I've heard similar things from others too, so I'll share what I've learned and some possible next steps at our next all-staff meeting.