



## **Creating a Cohesive Community Cabinet for Community Engagement**

**Dr. Lily Matos DeBlieux, Superintendent**

**Pendergast Elementary School District**

One of the most promising practices in education today is Community Engagement. To support this effort in schools and districts across the country, the US Department of Education released its [Community Engagement Framework](#) that underscores the necessity for educators at every level to build a foundation of family and community support. The dual-capacity building framework clearly shows a continuum moving from ineffective to effective partnerships and the cornerstones that help with the model of success. Utilizing the areas of the four “C”s – the framework shares the vitality of Capabilities (skills and knowledge), Connections (networks), Cognition (beliefs and values), and Confidence (self-efficacy) as the lead elements to promote success.

To display a district that is utilizing the framework to build its model of Community Engagement, Pendergast Elementary School District is a shining example, a district that covers 20 square miles and serves the communities of Phoenix, Glendale and Avondale in Arizona. The District serves approximately 10,000 preschool through eighth grade students on twelve campuses. With an eighty-five percent ethnic diversity and seventy-four percent of the student population on free and reduced lunch, community engagement and support is vital to creating sustainable partnerships.

To this end, the Governing Board set its sites on improving communication and connections with the communities within its boundaries. The district administration did research on community organizations, businesses, and potentially interested parties who would want to become involved with the district. Then staff analyzed what would be the best way to engage the community and considering time factors and the 4 C’s mentioned above. PESD, under the direction of Dr. Lily Matos DeBlieux, the superintendent new to the district, talked with constituents and they decided on hosting a Community Cabinet Breakfast each month utilizing an action-packed one-hour format designed to engage all attendees.

The inaugural breakfast began in October 2014 with each month featuring a timely topic and speakers including: Maricopa County Integrated Health Systems introducing their Community Clinic housed in the Pendergast Community Center, Dr. Jennifer Johnson formerly of the Arizona Department of Education presenting the recent Teacher Recruitment and Retention Report, Donna Davis from Expect More Arizona presenting on Arizona Standards, Amberlea School sharing diversity experiences, Dr. DeBlieux presenting the Pendergast “Bee-liever” Roadshow and all Community Cabinet members engaging in a “Speed Networking” session.

Attendance at each breakfast averages between 50-80 people and each breakfast features a school performance highlighting the fine arts, running club, Green Team and special talents of students from each of the twelve campuses. The breakfasts have raised awareness about the district, generated money for good causes, collected books for needy students, promoted events and individuals and connected the community and Pendergast in meaningful ways. Attendees include legislators and board members as well as interested community members, educators and business leaders.

The partnerships and connections that have been spawned from the breakfasts include increased financial resources, voter support on bonds and overrides, additional volunteers in schools and increased media attention. The feedback and evaluation results have been phenomenal. The district uses communication tools including email blasts, Facebook, Twitter, Robocalls, flyers and postcards to remind members to attend each month. In keeping with the PESD Bee-liever theme, each person receives a bee sticker on his or her nametag for attending!

This model is easily replicated using the tried and true public relations RACE model of Research, Analyze, Communicate and Evaluate to create the optimal program for each district. Community Engagement is vital for districts today to build on community support for education and to instill the knowledge, skills and capacity outcomes we all desire to make our schools the center of our communities. In PESD, we want everyone to join us in being “BEE-lievers” because Pendergast “Bee”lieves in YOU! For further information, or to attend a Community Cabinet Breakfast, contact Lily DeBlieux, Superintendent at [ldeblieux@pesd92.org](mailto:ldeblieux@pesd92.org) or 623-770-2206.