



For Education Leaders **Power Boosters**

Connection: “The act of connecting: the state of being connected...” *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*. That sounds simple enough but feelings of loneliness often caused by a lack of physical or emotional connectedness are increasing almost daily among Americans. Brené Brown, PhD and author of five best-selling books defines connection more expansively, “as the energy that exists between people when they feel seen, heard, and valued; when they can give and receive without judgment; and when they derive sustenance and strength from the relationship.”

A new nationwide survey from health insurer Cigna found that nearly half the Country feels lonely or isolated. Loneliness and isolation can lead to depression. Depression leads to lack of energy and focus and sometimes even to death. It is always a good time to reinforce established connections and to ignite new ones.

Complex human connections within school communities are in some ways analogous to electrical connections. Most electrical problems can be traced to different versions of the same essential problem: wire connections that are made improperly or that have loosened over time. Similarly, if people aren't connected to the environment, people and work around them there is likely to be an absence of optimal success or “electricity”.

One of the most dramatic examples of the impact connections can have on students occurred in Minnesota. A middle school principal theorized that truancy was at least partly a result of the lack of connection some students felt within the system. The principal negotiated with the county to have designated court truancy resources redirected to the middle school to provide greater connectivity between chronically truant students and a specific person at the school. At the conclusion of the school year, the formerly truant students who later attended school regularly were invited to go on a group canoe trip. The truancy rate for these students went to zero. As the principal suspected, it was all about connections.

The same is often true for adults. Some questions to ponder: Why does a person frequent the same coffee shop or restaurant again and again when nearby coffee shops offer similar brews? It is likely because they are recognized – maybe by name or their “usual” order. Similarly, preference for a specific restaurant may have as much to do with a manager that strolls from table to table conversing and gathering feedback as it does with the food. Why do people repeat visits to the same places of worship when their communities have alternatives to offer? Loyalty often depends as much on the provider's engagement as it does on their product. The common factor is connection. An organization's ability to connect with stakeholders is clearly related to increased support and improved success.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs identifies four human needs built upon the most basic **physiological needs** of food, water, etc. You may have noticed; all of the subsequent tiers relate to a person feeling valued and included. The second tier is

physical and emotional **Safety and Security** including family and stability. The third tier is **Love and Belongingness**. This includes friendship, family, intimacy and connections. That tier is followed by **Self-esteem** needs including confidence, achievements, respect of others, connections, and individuality. The pinnacle of the pyramid is **Self-actualization** where a person's met needs have encouraged the morality, creativity, acceptance, experience, purpose, meaning and inner potential. Maslow conjectures that each tier provides the building blocks for the next.

Ideally, public education supports students, staff and other stakeholders as they travel their optimal paths to Maslow's top tier of self-actualization. Connected people are most likely to be engaged and supportive of their public schools. If those same people aren't connected in and with the public education system they will find connections elsewhere possibly through criticism, misinformation, or resistance.

Simple Wiring 101

- ✓ Learn names and use them in greetings and conversations.
- ✓ Make sustained eye contact during all in-person interactions—however brief.
- ✓ Listen before launching.
- ✓ Come away from substantial interactions with at least one new learning. Make a note of and absorb that learning.
- ✓ Provide training for employees to fully realize the importance of connections.
- ✓ Make a plan for Wiring 102 in your district.



These materials are provided by
The Minnesota Association of School Administrators

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