Confronting the Crisis of Engagement

Creative Leadership Solutions

CreativeLeadership.net

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Three Part Series

- **Today – Confronting the Crisis of Engagement – national perspective, focus on connections and conditions**
- **January 12 – collaboration, challenge, control**
- **May 11 – Your success stories on engagement from the classroom to the boardroom**

Learning Protocols

- Safe place for divergent thinking
- Two-minute drills, followed by 5 second countdown
- Focus technology on the moment

Free Resources

- CreativeLeadership.net – Videos, articles, research, and tools

- FinishTheDissertation.org

- Personal follow up for questions, challenges, and success stories

The Ohio Context

- Teacher and leadership turnover
- Solid OEA recommendations
- Dropouts – 28,000 fewer 12th graders than 9th graders. 87% graduation rate
- Double funding cliff – loss of federal funds and losses due to declining enrollment

Research Update: The Single Best Practice in Change Leadership

- May 2023 new results from the "science fair" - teachers share a challenge, professional practice, and results

The Results in May 2023

- **High school math failure rates down more than 80%**

- **3rd grade reading at grade level quadrupled from fall to spring 2023**

- **Fights down 85%; vandalism to zero**

- **Writing proficiency at all grades increased significantly**

Define Best Practices for Student Engagement

- Based on what you have learned in these seminars and your ow professional experience, what are the best practices to increase student engagement?

Protocol for Today

- Three points to share:
  - What was my challenge?
  - What were my professional practices?
  - What were my results

Example

- **Challenge: In classroom observations, I found students with their heads on the desks and completely checked out and other students with earphones in**
- **Practice: Administrators, coaches and peer observers monitored every classroom weekly for the % of students engaged and the use of best engagement practices**
- **Results: % engaged rose from 33% to 55% and % of observations with best practices rose from 22% to 45%**
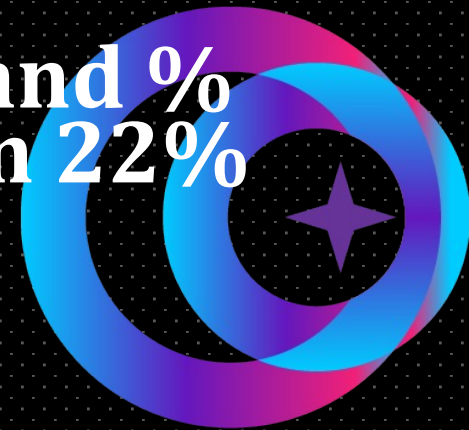
Research Update

- Science Fairs – Single best way to change classrooms, schools, and systems
- Dramatic decrease in D/F rate, suspensions, and behavioral problems
- Summer intervention – minimal impact - .1 effect size and 4 percentile points – a tiny fraction of the impact of effective feedback

National Perspective:

1) Staff shortages – superintendent driving busses, principals covering classes, no subs – 20% of teachers leaving profession – 53% would leave if they could. Substitute teachers and paraprofessionals are following out the door

National Perspective:

2) Behavior – starting in pre-school - students (and staff) re-learning norms

National Perspective:

3) Student leadership – the key to better attendance, behavior, engagement, and academic performance

National Perspective:

4) Basic skills – Some 3ʳᵈ graders don't know letters and numbers or how to hold a pencil

National Perspective:

5) Time, Time, Time – why would you have the same schedule in the 22-23 year as you had in the fall of 2019?

- Staff meetings
- PLC meetings – great feedback on PLC coaching
- Power Standards

National Perspective:

6) Psychological Safety – "Fearless Classrooms" – Safe to make mistakes and learn from them – from the classroom to the boardroom

National Perspective:

7) Self-Care for Leaders and Staff
- Legitimize treatment for stress, anxiety, and depression
- Sacred time for families and personal care
- Stop the 24/7 madness

National Perspective:

8) Excessive Failure Rates:
- **Step 1: Ban the average – teachers must evaluate students based on proficiency, never the average**
- **Step 2: Practice in class, not at home – ban failures for missing homework**
- **Step 3: Require a "name and a need" BEFORE any D or F goes to students and parents**

Equity AND Excellence

- **Equity without excellence is a codeword for low expectations**
- **Excellence without equity is a code for exclusion**

Overview

- The Engagement Imperative
- Connections
- Conditions
- Collaboration
- Challenge
- Control
- Leadership for Engagement

A Word About Research

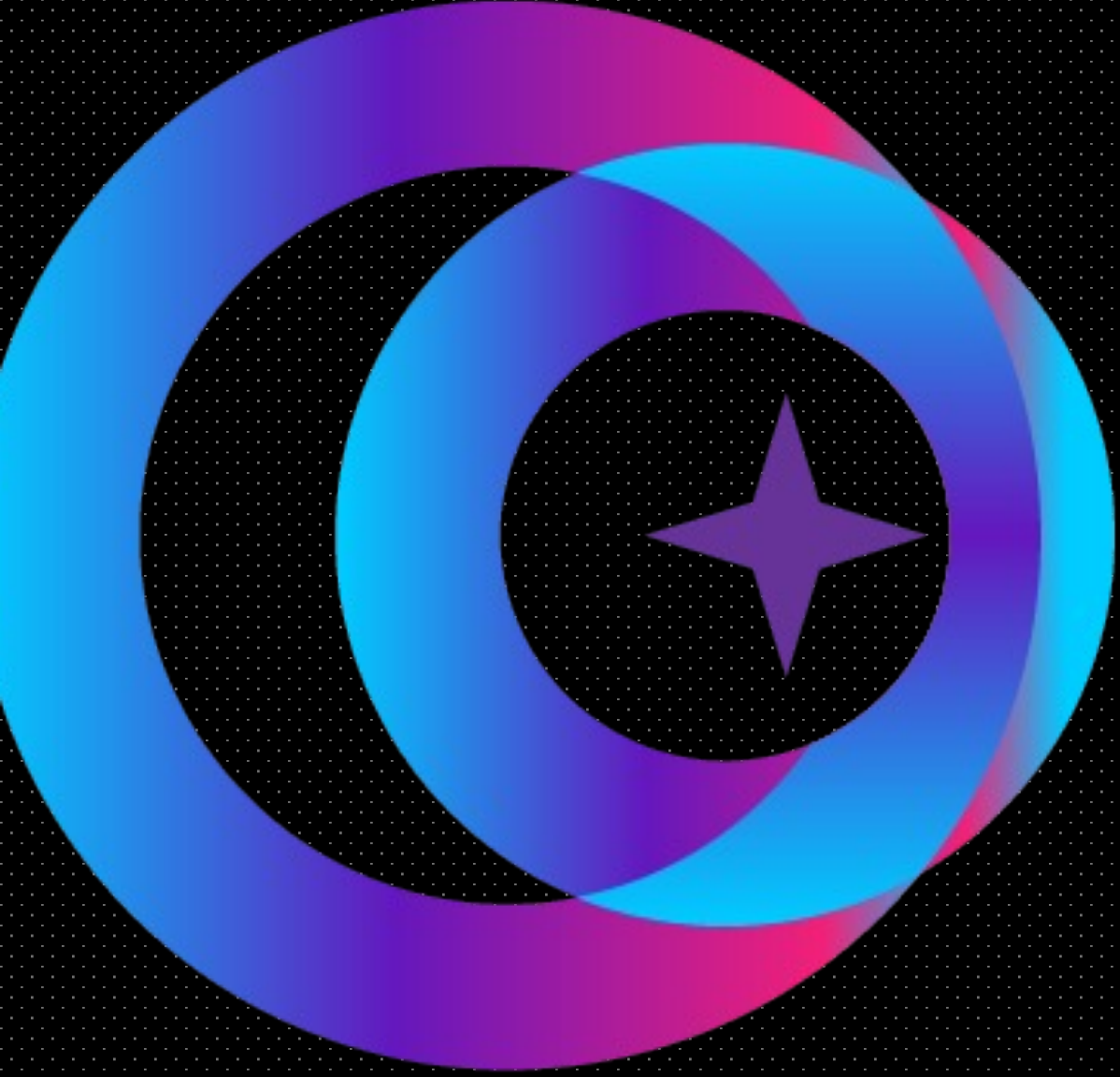## Why don't educators trust educational research?

Typology of Research Claims

1) Personal Beliefs
2) Personal Experience
3) Group Experience
4) Systematic Comparison
5) Preponderance of the Evidence

What is Engagement?

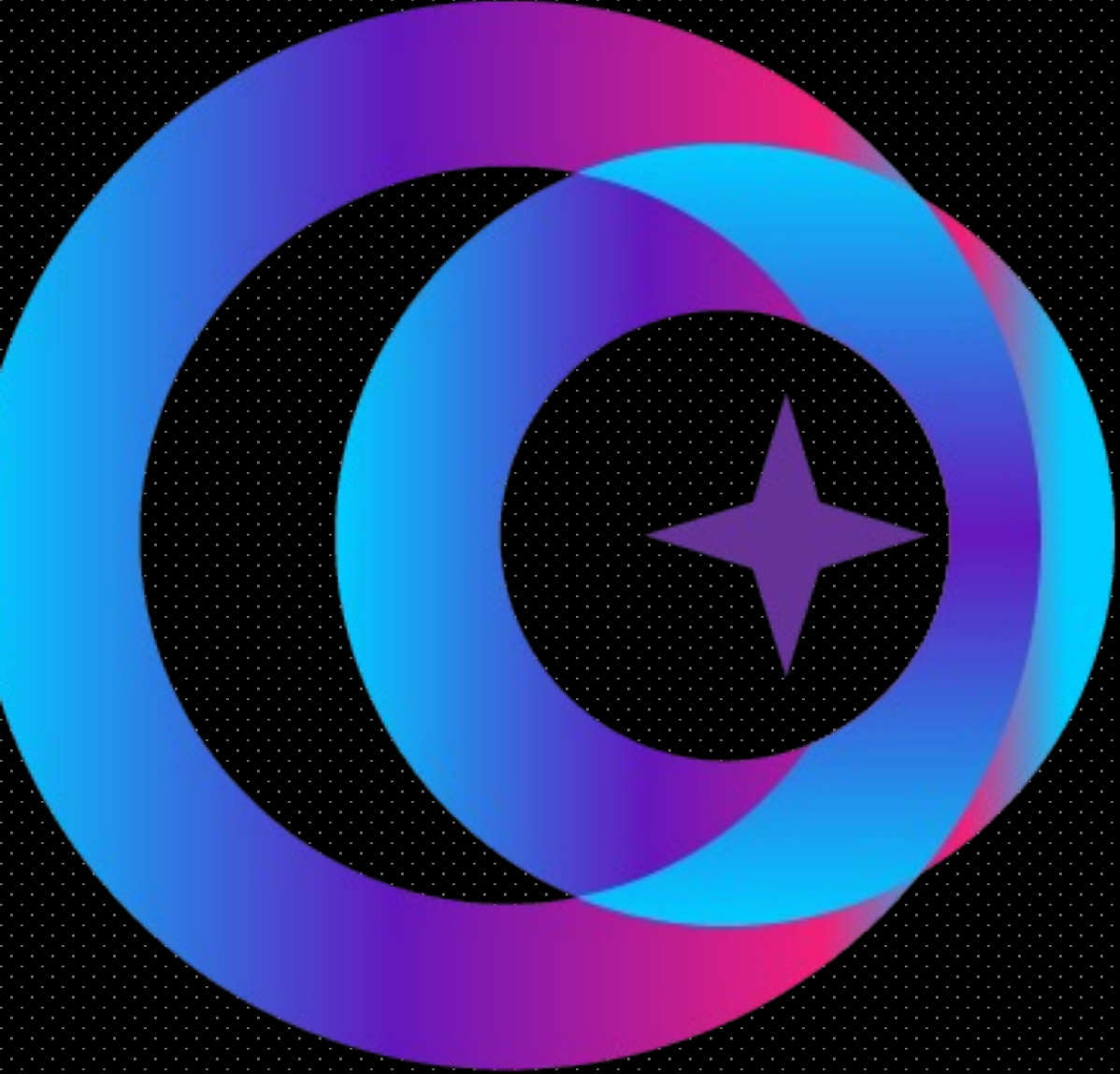*The mutually focused attention of students and teachers on curiosity, challenge, and learning*

"Mutually focused attention"

". . . curiosity, challenge, and learning"

The Engagement Equation

- Learning is a function of trust, safety, and engagement.
- If you don't have trust, you can't learn
- If you don't feel safe, you can't learn
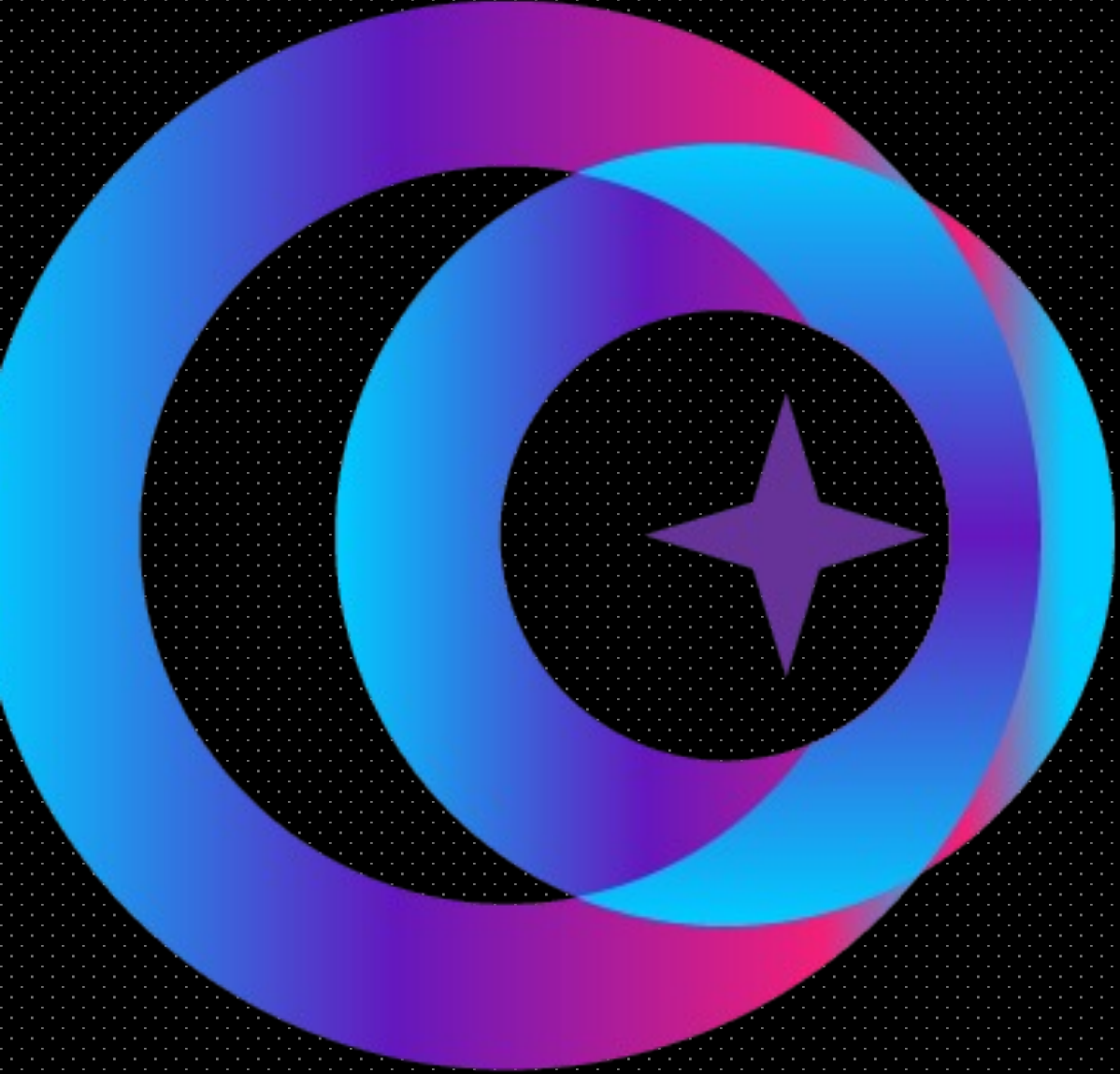- If you don't engage, you can't learn

The Engagement Imperative

- **Engagement depends on trust and psychological safety**
- **Pandemic's long-term mental health impact on students and staff**
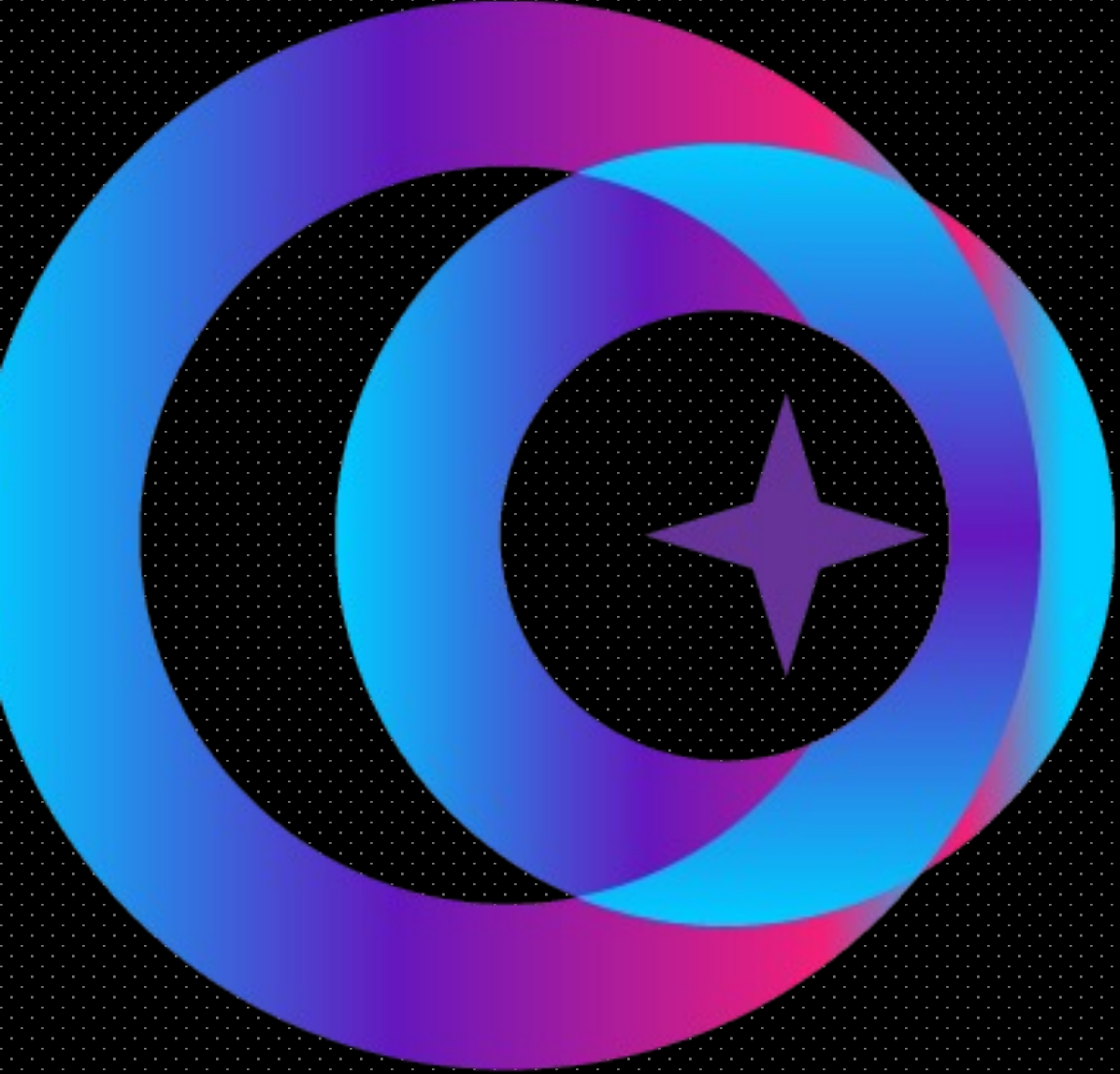- **Social and intellectual isolation during school closures**

The Engagement Illusion

- Eyes front
- Teacher in control
- Students always have the right answer
- *What's wrong with this picture?*

Reflect on your experience as a student. What did great engagement look like?

Connections

Connections

- The Nature of Relationships
- Safe and Meaningful Relationships
- Common Mistakes
- Student Leadership
- Staff Relationships
- What Teachers and Leaders Can Do Now

The Nature of Relationships

- Three-dimensional – not electronic
- Two-way communication
- Genuine attention – the opposite of multi-tasking and fragmented focus
- "Reclaiming Conversation" (Turkle)

Safe and Meaningful Relationships

- **Known, Valued, Loved**

Search Institute:

- *Agency* – "Works with me to solve problems"
- *Security* – "Standards up for me when I need it"
- *Encouragement and Challenge* – "Pushes me to go further"
- Essential for staff *and* students

Common Mistakes

- Speeches rather than conversations
- Technology rather than teaching
- "You guys" rather than names
- Coddling rather than expectations
- Evaluation rather than coaching
- Submission rather than perseverance

Student Leadership

- The superglue of engagement
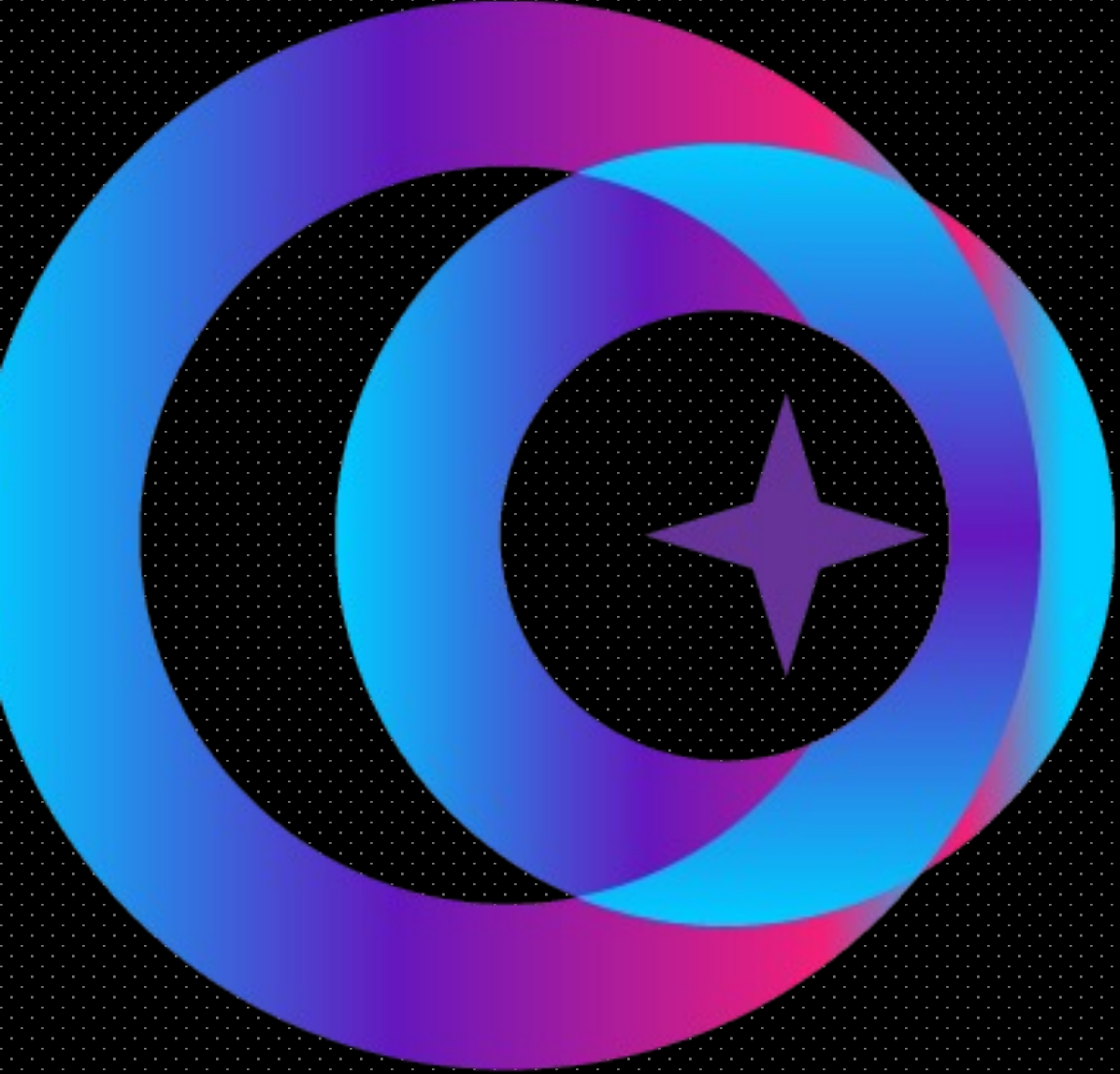- The rocket ship for disengaged students
- The right kind of peer pressure
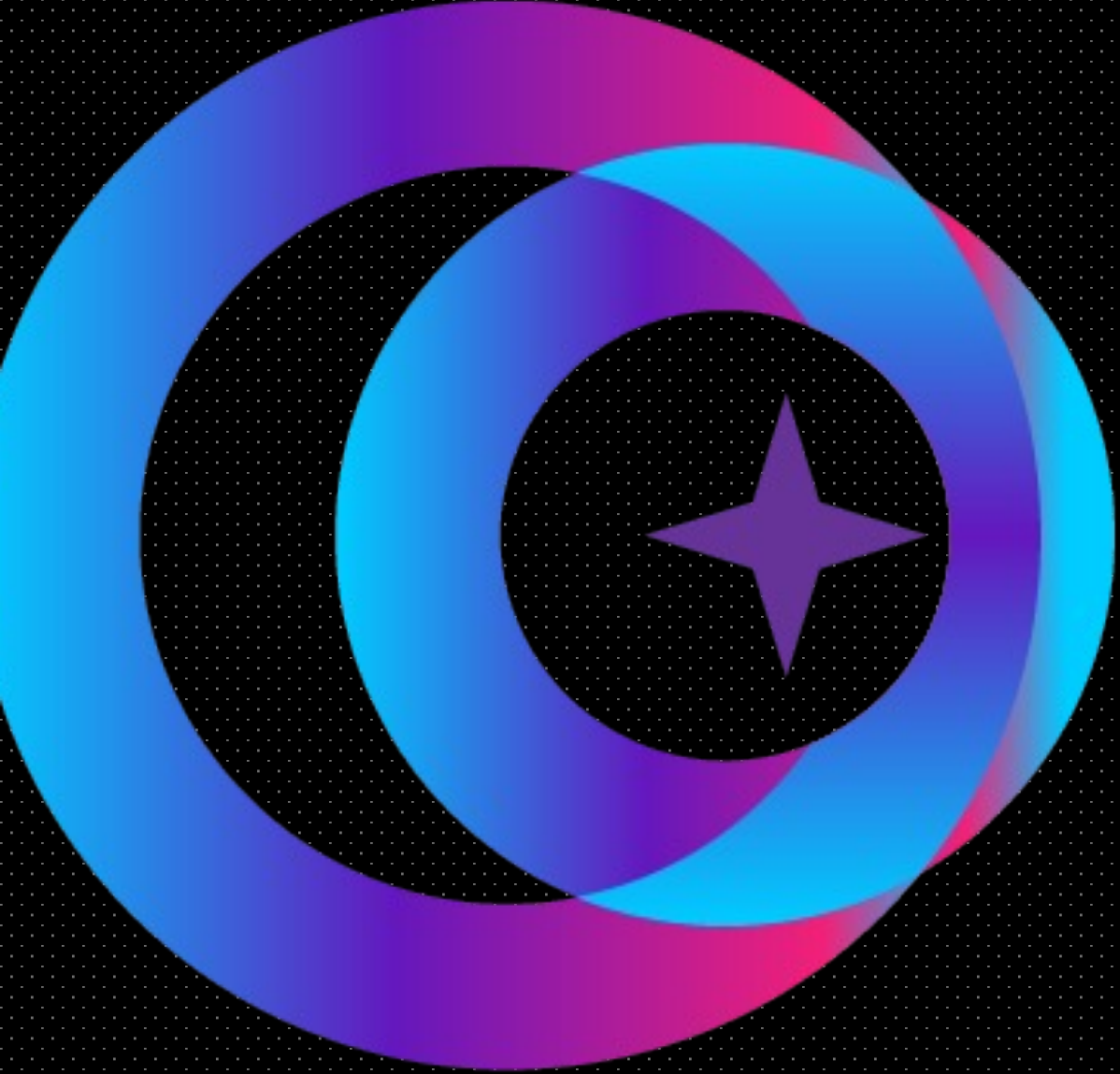
What is one action you can take immediately to improve connections for students and adults?

What Teachers and Leaders Can Do Now

- Human time in every classroom
- Know the names of every student and at least one thing about them outside of school performance
- Ask students how they know that teachers and administrators care about them
- Focus staff meetings on inquiry and deliberation, not announcements
- Identify disengaged students and actively recruit them

Conditions

Conditions

- **Communicating high expectations**
- **Systems to address attendance issues**
- **Active student participation**
- **Student-to-student interaction**

High Expectations

- As powerful as a year of learning – for better or worse
- Choice within boundaries
- Open-ended questions
- Praise based on learning, not merely accuracy
- Goal setting and feedback – and response to feedback

Attendance

- **Systemic support – transportation, communication, encouragement**
- **Immediate response – 1-minute reports**
- **Proactive communication – the "Ritz Carlton" wake-up call**

Active Student Participation

- **Universal response – 100% student engagement with emotional safety**
- *"Phone a friend"*
- *"Answer question with a question"*
- *"Partial answer"*
- *"Minute of think time"*
- **But NEVER checking out and disengaging from class**
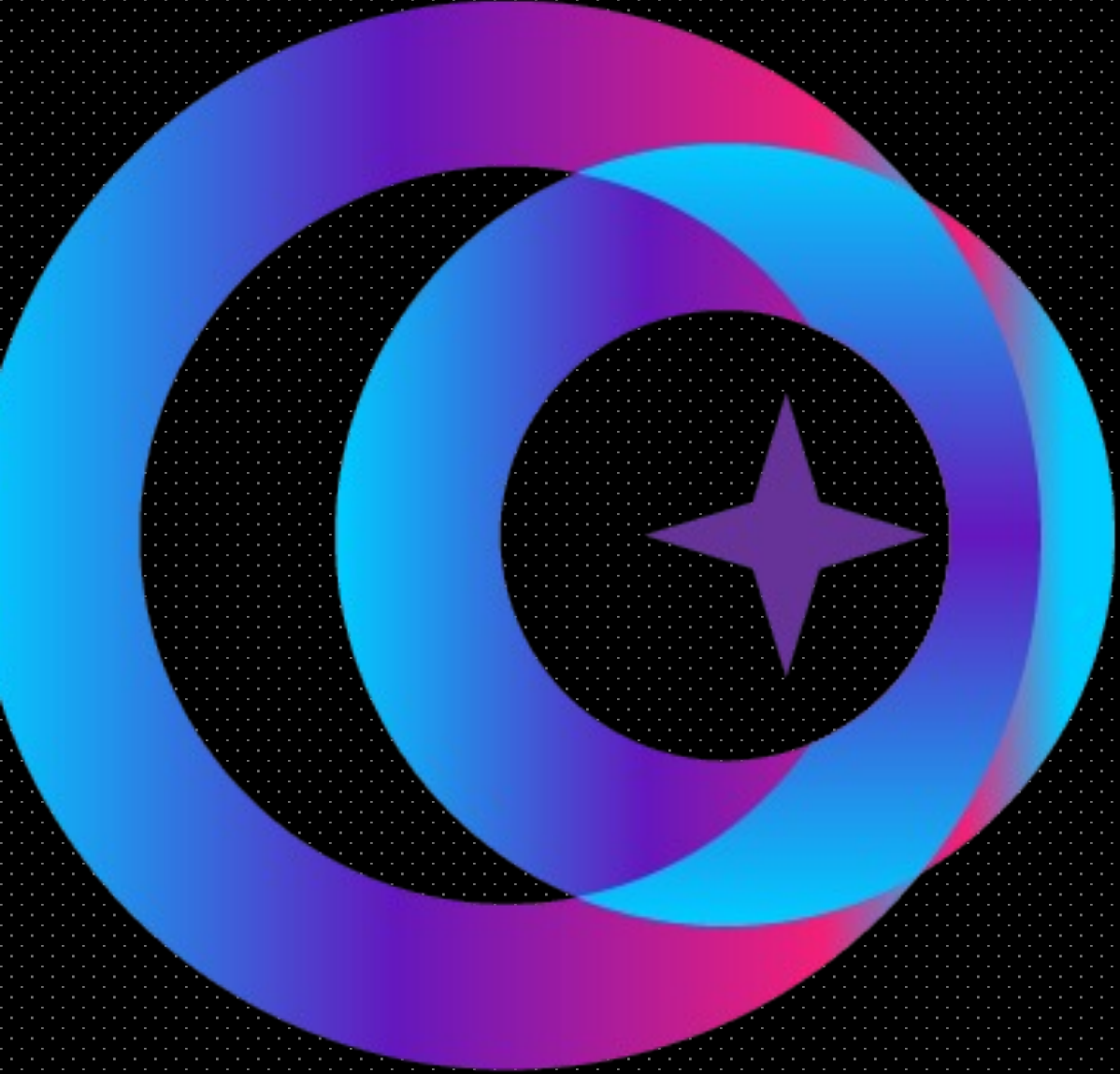
Student Peer Interaction

- **The key to motivation –** *competence*
- **Personal responsibility, feedback, and response to feedback**
- **Norms and routines**
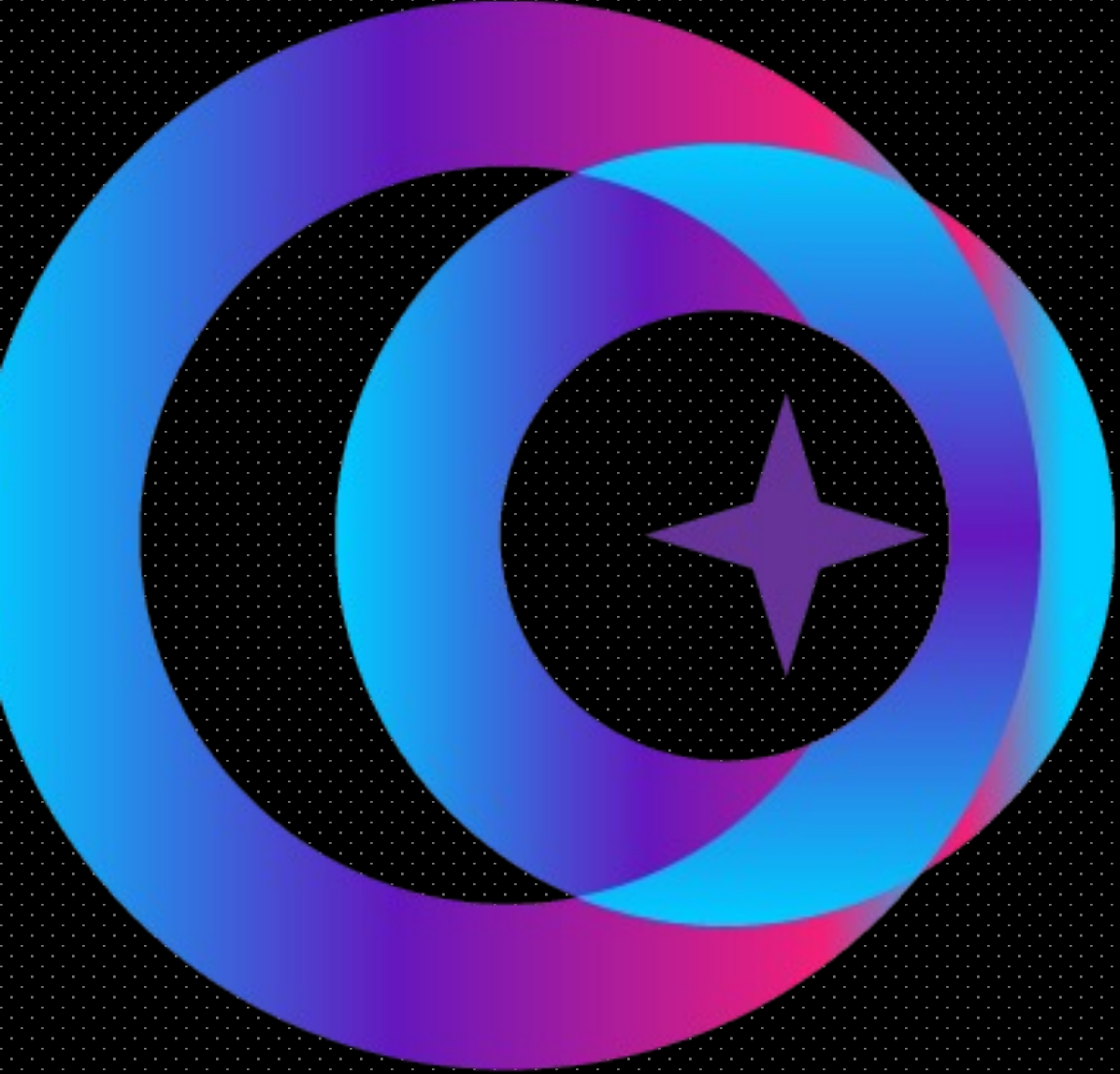- **Clear role definition for discussions**

What Teachers and Leaders Can Do Now

- Review classrooms to assess expectations
- Identify attendance challenges and identify root causes
- Review participation practices with a goal of 100% engagement

What advice would you give to a new teacher to demonstrate high expectations of students?

Collaboration

Collaboration

- **Engagement and Professional Learning**
- **The Collaboration Illusion**
- **Listen – Just Listen**
- **How Collaboration Helps Students**
- **Leading for Collaboration**
- **What You Can Do Now to Improve Co**

Engagement and Professional Learning

- The irony of lecturing about why lecturing is bad pedagogy
- Meetings focused on deliberation and inquiry
- Agenda items end with question marks, no periods
- Screaming respect for teacher time

The Collaboration Illusion

- *"PLC Lite"* (DuFour & Reeves)
- Bureaucracy, minutes, and forms undermine collaboration
- Four-line email:
  - Learning
  - Assessment
  - Support
  - Enrichment

Evidence of Effective Collaboration

- Safe space for divergent thinking
- Skeptics welcome (not cynics)
- Focus on adult actions – not just student data
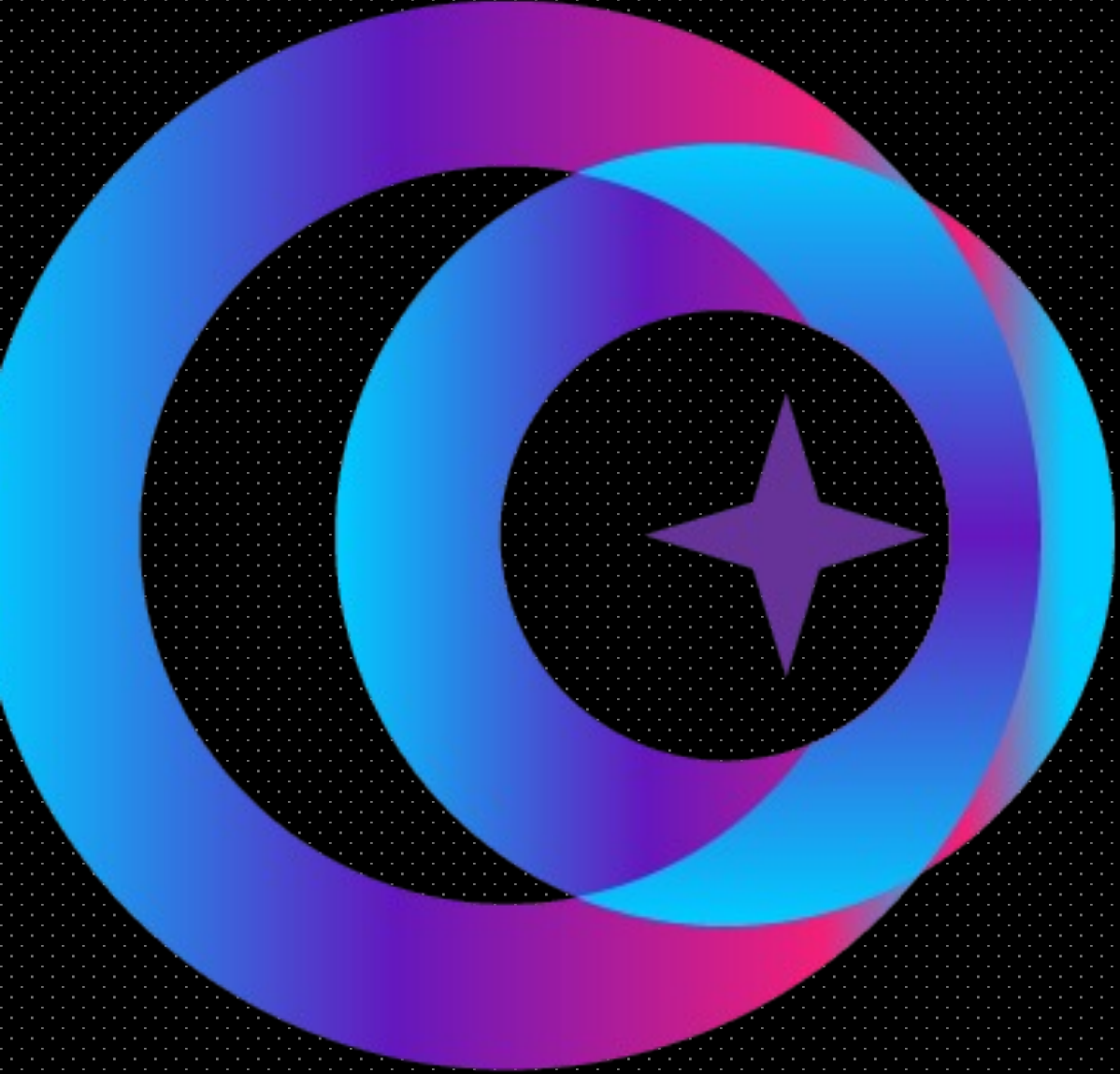
Listen – Just Listen

- How difficult is it to really listen?
- Try it for two minutes – no interruptions, no affirmations, no objections – just listen

How Collaboration Helps Students

- Decades of evidence support collaborative learning
- Teachers model collaboration with lesson design, assessments, and collaborative scoring
- Collaboration provides consistent, accurate, fair, and fast feedback

What are some pitfalls of collaborative projects for students?

The Illusion of Collaboration

- "Group Projects" of one student
- Common lessons without common assessments and collaborative scoring
- Focus on data without focus on instructional practices

Leading for Collaboration

- Modeling at every opportunity collaboration in action

- Rotating facilitator roles

- Classroom observations and expectations that focus on collaboration rather than compliance

What Teachers and Leaders Can Do Now

- Mutual mini-observations with explicit expectations of collaboration
- Track progress in teacher agreement and speed of collaborative scoring
- Deep inquiry through debate and civil discourse
- Relentless modeling of collaboration

Challenge

- The Failure of Failure Rhetoric
- Getting Motivation Right
- How Shame Destroys Motivation
- Putting the "L" Back in SEL
- Barriers to Engagement During Challenges
- How Leaders Model Perseverance Through Challenge
- The Psychological Safety Imperative

The Failure of Failure Rhetoric

- *"We value failure!"*

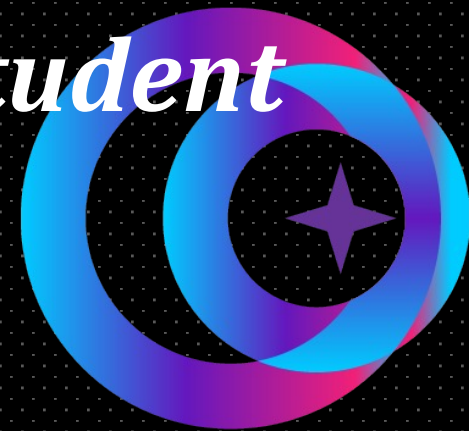   **Really? What happens in your schools when students, teachers, and administrators' make mistakes?**

- If the adults don't model learning mistakes, don't' expect students to believe in the value of failure

Getting Motivation Right

- **Grades?**
- **Punishment?**
- **Choice?**

- *Competence – what every student craves*
- *Avoiding incompetence – what every student fears*

How Shame Destroys Motivation

- Oxytocin is a powerful chemical in the brain.
- Oxytocin is associated with learning, confidence, resilience, and perseverance
- Fear, shame, and embarrassment destroys oxytocin levels.
- If you're afraid, you can't learn

Putting the 'L" Back in SEL

- *"We're not going to do curriculum and assessment this year until we have finished SEL."*
- **Students will not have emotional security if they feel incompetent.**
- **Learning is essential for SEL – not separate from it**

Barriers to Engagement

- Hand-raising
- Easy outs
- Fear
- Affirmation by teachers limited to correct answers
- Cold calling as a device for shame rather than learning
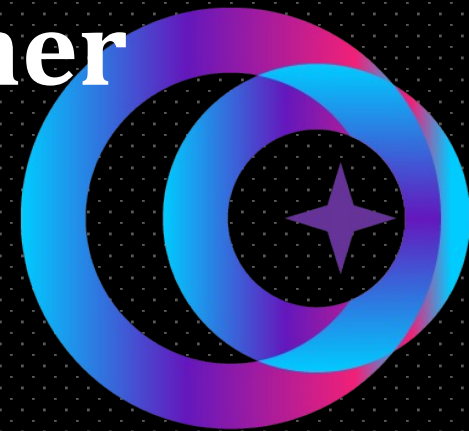
Perseverance Through Change

- The false promise of perfect research
- Leadership willingness for mid-course corrections
- Focus – including the "not to do" list

# The Psychological Safety Imperative

- **Psychological safety is the prerequisite for learning**
- **Students and adults cannot learn when preoccupied by fear**

What Educators and Leaders Can Do Now

- **Challenge the rhetoric of failure.**
- **Open a discussion about student motivation. Grades? Punishment? Gold Stars? *Competence.***
- **What are the barriers to engagements?**
- **How will you know that students and staff have psychological safety?**
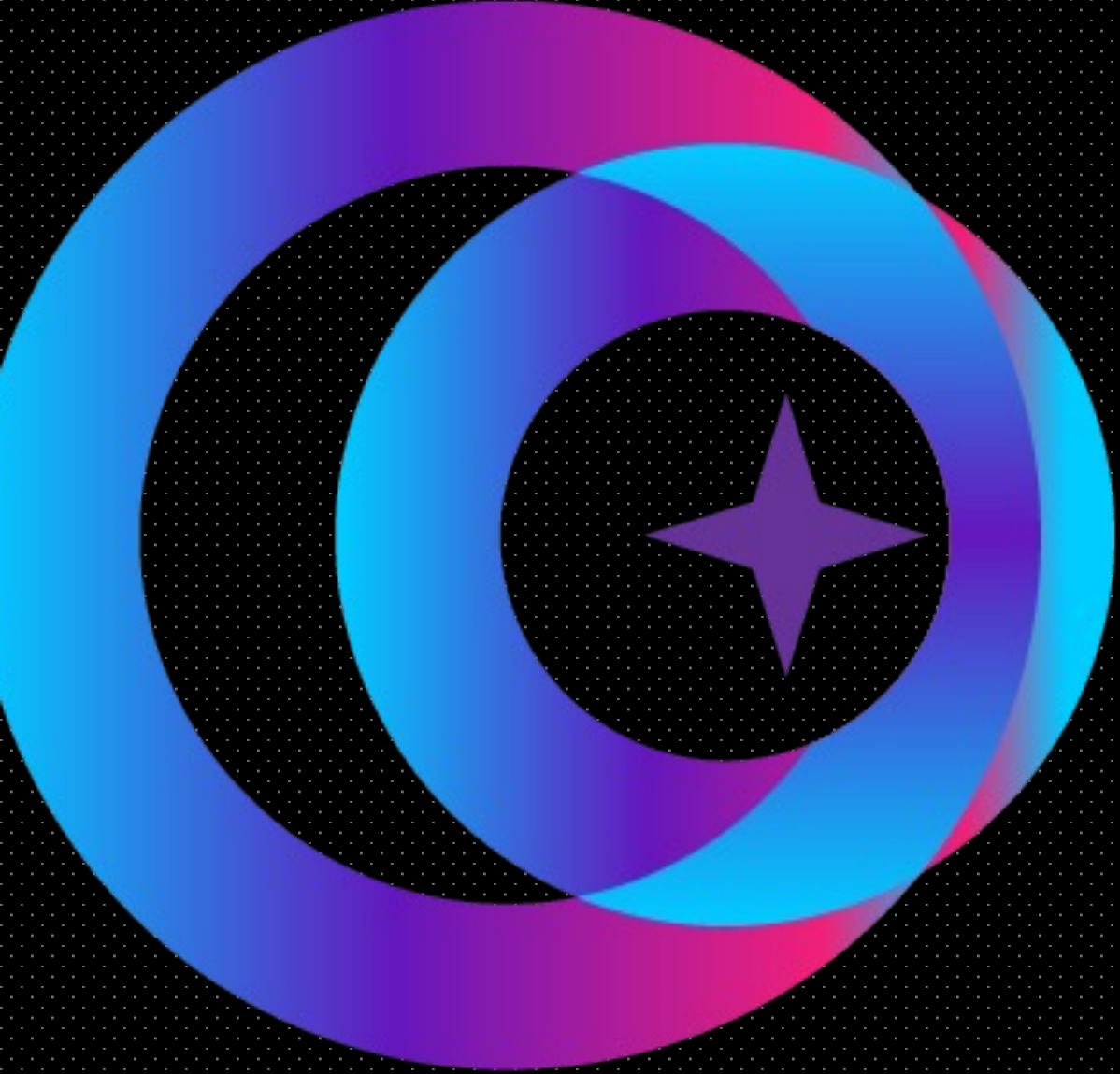
Control

Control

- Cognitive challenges to learning
- Student ownership of learning
- How students define learning
- How students monitor their progress

Cognitive Challenges to Learning

- Self-doubt
- Haunted buy failure
- Over-confidence
- Trauma
- False self-confidence in multi-tasking or magical thinking

Student Ownership of Learning – Students . . .

- Know their current performance levels
- Know what they are expected to learn .
- Select tools to guide their learning.
- Monitor their progress and make adjustments
- Seek feedback and know that errors are opportunities to learn.
- Recognize that they have learned and teach others.

How Students Define Learning

- Completing tasks
- Following directions
- Behavioral compliance
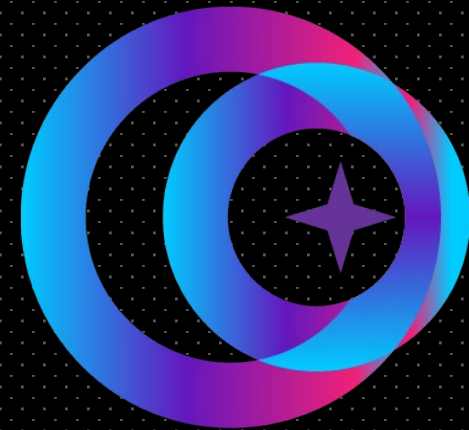
How Students Monitor Progress
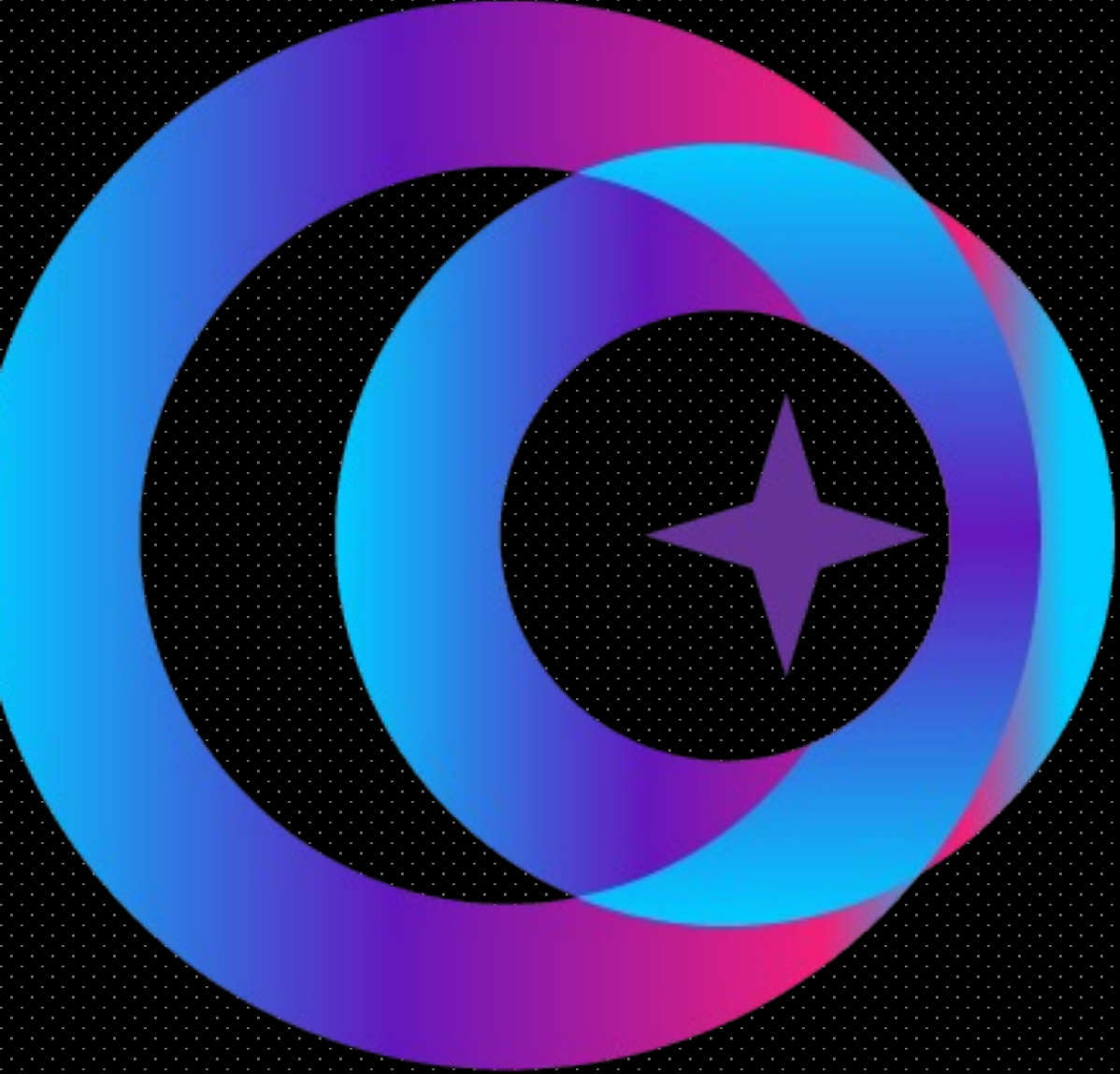
- Scoring guides in student accessible language
- Assessment of anonymous peers
- Self-assessment on every performance task

What Teachers and Leaders Can Do Now

- Engage with the cognitive challenges to learning
- Increase teacher clarity in every lesson
- Develop feedback and monitoring tools

Leadership for Engagement

Leadership For Engagement

- From the Classroom to the Boardroom
- Challenging the Leadership-Management Dichotomy
- How Leaders Support – and Undermine – Engagement
- The Hallmarks of an Engaged Staff
- Engaging Communities

From the Classroom to the Boardroom

- The board and cabinet set the tone
- Inquiry and deliberation, not presentations
- Defining levels of decision-making – teacher discretion, collaboration, and administrative and policy decisions

Challenging the Leadership-Management Dichotomy

- **The myth:** *"Leaders think great thoughts and have grand visions, and managers are just the schleps that actually make the school function."*

- **The truth:** You can't be a great leader if you do not have great skills in managing time, projects, and people

How Leaders Support – and Undermine – Engagement

- **The need: Students actively engage, with a bit of chaos, in learning. Teachers consider all sides of a question and engage in vigorous and respectful debate.**

- **The occasional reality: Quiet and orderly classrooms and staff meetings in which debate is unwelcome.**
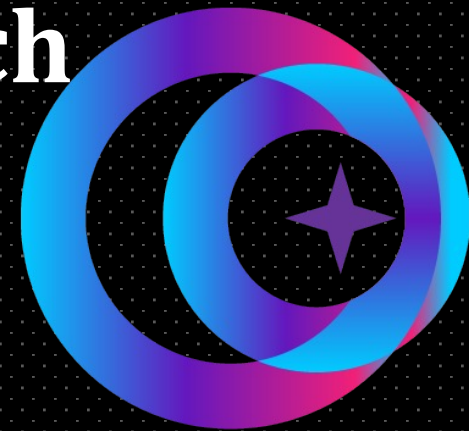
The Hallmarks of Engagement

- Joyful risk-taking by students and faculty
- Risk-free celebration of success and acknowledgment of mistakes
- Zero-tolerance for "tall poppies" syndrome
- Evidence displaces personal beliefs and past experiences
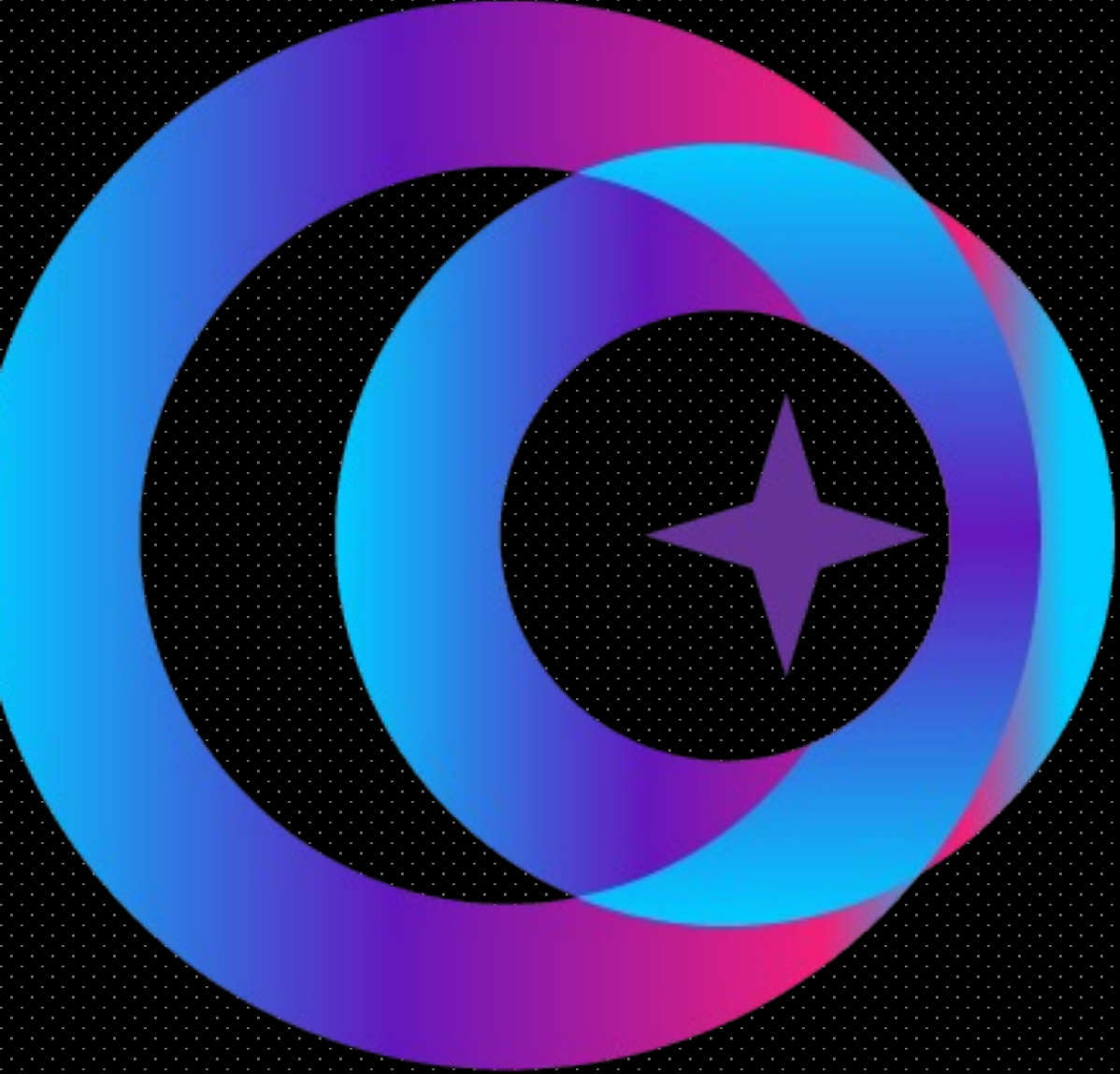
Engaging Communities

- **Finding common ground – students, parents, teachers, leaders, community members**

- **Clear view of the future – the 2060's**

- **Medical care – literacy is a safety and health issue**

- **Criminal justice involvement – the price we all pay for students who do not finish school**

Putting it All Together

- The Engagement Imperative
- Connections
- Conditions
- Collaboration
- Challenge
- Control
- Leadership for Engagement

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