

DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

Making better decisions and elevating district culture with inclusive conversations

Dr. Jason Andrews and his team at Windsor Central School District deeply value open input and inclusive conversations with their school community.

For a long time, the Windsor team faced the same challenge many districts encounter in their aspirations towards inclusivity: How to put those values into practice.

“It’s about aligning our practices with what we say our beliefs are,” Dr. Andrews shares. “It’s one thing to talk about being inclusive. It’s another thing to have systems in place that facilitate inclusivity.”

Over the past three years, the Windsor team has been using Thoughtexchange to help bring those values to life by consistently listening and responding to feedback from all their stakeholders.

“We’ve used Thoughtexchange in a variety of ways, from very small conversations among leadership teams to broad-based community discussions regarding important policy decisions,” Dr. Andrews shares. “It has allowed these to be conversations where everyone has an equal voice, and all voices are valued.”

Discovering the blind spots

For Dr. Andrews, the most significant value of these conversations has been in their ability to uncover perspectives that might otherwise have gone unnoticed.

“In just about every exchange we do, we’re surprised by some of the perspectives we hear,” he notes. “They’re not the top thoughts that the majority agree with, but they’re dissenting views and maybe even some isolated voices that have provided incredibly valuable perspectives for us.

“I think we had some blind spots that we weren’t even aware of. These conversations have given us the ability to make much more deliberate and thoughtful decisions.”



Thought Leader

Dr. Jason Andrews

Title

Superintendent



Industry:

K-12 Public Education

Location:

Broome County
New York

Size:

1,747 students, 4 schools



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Dr. Jason Andrews, Superintendent



“Meeting our mission and reaching our vision”

Dr. Andrews shares the example of an Exchange on grading, which revealed that while students and teachers agreed that grading policies needed to be changed, parents were happy with the status quo. Dr. Andrews says that information was critical in shaping the plan for change and communicating with stakeholders.

Hearing student voice in a school safety exchange gave his team unexpected insights about high school students’ opinions on bathrooms, which informed decisions for planning facilities upgrades.

“We heard privacy is important to kids, so we designed private, unisex bathrooms for our high school,” Dr. Andrews says. “I think that’s empowering for students and it also improves the overall climate of the building.

In that same exchange, the Windsor team learned that the community valued a driver education program that had been cut many years ago.

“No one was talking about it internally, but this idea of driver education rose to the top as something our community really wanted,” Dr. Andrews notes, adding that they’re now working to bring the driver education program back.

“In each of these cases, we were able to utilize the input we received as a result of Te to make better decisions for kids that improved outcomes and enabled us to truly work toward meeting our mission and reaching our vision.”

Elevating the conversation

Along with better decision-making, Dr. Andrews says the practice of consistently listening and being transparent with his school community has impacted the quality of every conversation the district has.

“When, over time, you send deliberate messages that you truly value everyone’s voice, and that you’re going to listen and show some vulnerability, that improves all your discussions,” he shares.”

He adds that Thoughtexchange has been an essential tool for making that happen.

“Thoughtexchange is helping us elevate our conversation, to really think about our learning environments, and to truly make progress on school climate and district culture,” Dr. Andrews says.

“If you truly want multiple voices to inform your decision making, then you need to have Thoughtexchange. I don’t think you can afford not to have a tool that lets you hear multiple voices and make good decisions. And I’ve never seen anything that compares to the Thoughtexchange platform when it comes to doing that.”

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THE QUESTIONS

1. What are your thoughts about changing grades to 1-4 rankings?
2. What are some important ideas we should consider as we work to make our schools safe and welcoming for all students, staff and families?



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Dr. Jason Andrews, Superintendent