

## Tips for Having Difficult Conversations regarding NECAP Results

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Communication with students and families regarding NECAP scores and potential consequences can be difficult. Students and their families may feel distraught, vulnerable, and defensive. Throughout the process of supporting students in meeting the RI Diploma Requirements we have described “continued support from school” for students to meet the requirements but what does this mean for a student and parent?

We have assembled the following tips to assist you with these difficult conversations. Initially, it is important for school leaders and staff to embrace a belief that student growth is possible given the right academic and social and emotional supports. While a substantially below proficient score may not feel like an opportunity, the requirements around what the school needs to do to help students demonstrate growth academically illustrate an expectation that academic growth is possible. As you prepare for meeting with students and parents, consider the following tips.

**Examine what your purpose and expectations are for the meeting.** What are the ideal outcomes? Explore any concerns or feelings you may have concerning the student and their family. This reflection will enable you to engage in a supportive discussion with a going forward approach.

**Frame the communication about the graduation requirements as supportive of adolescents.** The expectation that all students are academically and emotionally well prepared for college and career is about believing in and advocating for students. The past does not equal present in terms of academic performance. Communicating that your school will be providing the academic and social supports to support student growth will be important.

**Clarify student and family perceptions of the problem.** What contributed to the outcome and most importantly what they believe will help them have a more desirable outcome? This is an opportunity for students and parents to talk about concerns related to failure including impact on graduation.

**Listen empathetically to what the student and their families say.** Reframe their concerns to demonstrate your understanding. Then, connect those concerns as appropriate to school based interventions designed to support that individual student’s growth. Explain specifically how these interventions are designed to support student growth. This may include the supportive role of school staff as well as connecting content to real life experiences and applications.

**Identify other concerns that may not been addressed.** Explore with the student and family how those needs could be met. This may also involve other school support staff and/or support from outside of school.

**Develop a new slate for learning.** This will include new and mutual agreements discussed in the meeting. The conversation provides the foundation of a formal understanding among partners necessary to change the trajectory for underperforming students. This may include other support staff to help meet the needs of students and families as appropriate. It should also include achievable short term learning measures. For schools that are already implementing school wide Multi-Tiered Systems of Support -MTSS (RTI and PBIS), there is a natural structure for establishing targets and measures.

**Check in frequently.** This approach will promote personalization by creating a structured and supportive environment to discuss school retention, college and career readiness leading to youth ownership of their future.

**Provide opportunities for staff** engaged with struggling students to meet and support efforts.

### References:

- Center For Mental Health in Schools. Working with Disengaged Students.
- Jensen, C. (2012). How Can We Handle Difficult Conversations.
- Ringer, J. (2006). We Have to Talk: A Step-By-Step Checklist for Difficult Conversations.