

Fostering Communication and Developing Community and Relationships

"The art of communication
is the language of leadership."

—James Humes

"What" First

Peter Smith is principal of a large middle school in the center of a city facing violence and gang wars. He struggles with discipline. At an administrative meeting, he talks with other principals who share a rule they have implemented: All students wearing hoodies must have the hood down at all times in the school. Principal Smith decides that this is a great rule. He goes back to the school and announces the immediate enforcement of this rule. There are no conversations with staff or students about "why." By noon the next day, the students are revolting. Led by a few students, all students begin wearing their hoods all day.

"Why" First

Principal Ramona Davis attended the same meeting and liked the no hood rule. She went back to her school and called a morning meeting with staff to review the agreements they made together at the first of the year and to ask if they thought the no hood rule aligned or did not align with their expectations of student behavior. The staff considered the rule through the lens of their previous agreements and discussed feeling uncomfortable when students have their hoods up, since they cannot see their faces or determine who they are from a distance. They also felt that the hoods disrespected the no hat rule that had always been in place at the school. The staff agreed that they should introduce this to the students. Principal Davis met with each grade for a few minutes that morning. She quietly explained the teachers' concerns and listened to the students' concerns as well. Some of the students spoke up and agreed that it would help for safety if all students had their hoods down. The rule went into effect the following day without incident.

Reflection/Discussion

What is the difference in these practices and in what ways can you relate to either or both examples?