3.6 Defining Trust in the Context of the School

Building trust is not easy, in part because it means different things in different contexts, requires different facets for different roles, and means different things to different people. (For example, in the military deference and obedience to higher ranks are vital, but less so in other professions.)

**Time:** 5–10 minutes to answer the questions; 1 hour for discussion.

**Activity:** Twenty aspects of trust are listed below, in random order, along with some blank slots for other aspects you believe are important. Rank each of these aspects from 1 to 5, with 1 being least important and 5 being most important.

1. Credibility
2. Consistency
3. Reliability
4. Honesty
5. Security
6. Belief
7. Courtesy
8. Competence
9. Open-mindedness
10. Dependability
11. Collegiality
12. Motivation
13. Attitude
14. Flexibility
15. Discretion
16. Respect
17. Safety
18. Willingness to Share
19. Ability to Listen
20. Focus on Others

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**Discussion**
Have someone (a neutral moderator, if possible) collate and average the counselors’ rankings and the principals’ rankings. Compare the two, then note and discuss the differences. Some questions to ask include:

1. How do the two groups differ?
2. How are they the same?
3. Which aspects of trust are absolutely required?
4. Do any of the aspects of trust ever conflict with one another (i.e., courtesy and discretion versus honesty)? How do you work around this?
5. How might any discrepancies in answers affect your students?
6. Is there a difference between personal and professional trust? Is personal respect necessary?
7. Is it equally important for principals and counselors to trust one another?

**Bring It Home**
Think of some situations in your school in which particular aspects are needed, and what the effect of establishing trust in this way can have on your students’ achievement. Begin with a successful situation that results in a positive outcome; then try to identify an issue with a less positive outcome in which trust could make a difference.