

**BROOKLYN LAB  
CHARTER SCHOOL**

# Building Culture Back Better

*Building Culture Back Better* investigates ways to address the ongoing realities of COVID-19 and systemic racism—and to rebuild school culture to be more effective, equitable, and joyful for scholars and educators. It aggregates strategies and insights from on-the-ground practitioners in school communities across the country as they focus on preparing for the 2021–22 academic year.

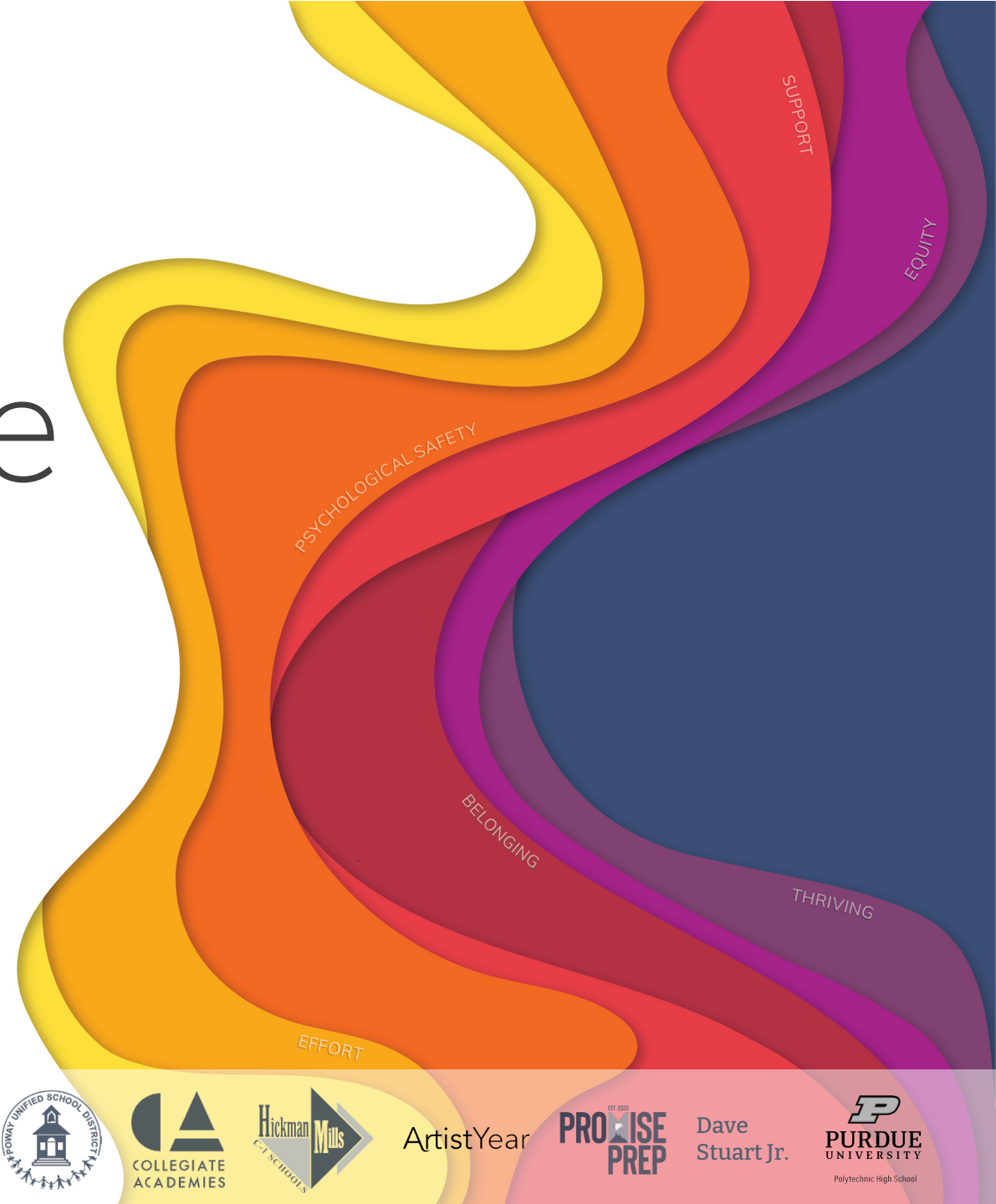
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ArtistYear



Dave  
Stuart Jr.



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# Foreword

These past 18 months—since March 2020—have had a seismic impact on our nation’s students, families, and schools. After unprecedented disruptions including in-person, virtual, and hybrid school formats, we’re now faced with two fundamental questions that can guide our plans for serving students this school year:

- What do our students most need in order to learn and thrive?
- How can we address the profound needs created by the pandemic and evolve our schools to be more effective, joyful, and equitable?

Concurrently, societal shifts have affected many people within our school communities. Like many other institutions, schools are reckoning with policies and systems that perpetuate systemic racism and a culture of white supremacy—prompting educators to ask:

- How can we shift policies and practices to disrupt the historically inequitable and disparate results of schools in America?
- What mindsets and approaches will best prepare our school to unlock the strengths and curiosity of young people and set them up to learn?
- How can educators create space for this much-needed change?

This guide shares insights from a design charrette grounded in these questions. It aims to support educators to **build school culture back better**, and is a part of the broader [EquityByDesign.org](https://EquityByDesign.org) initiative—which seeks to create a suite of actionable resources that any motivated school can use to generate and modify relevant, evidence-based solutions to longstanding challenges in education that have been amplified by the pandemic.

The specific strategies and broader conceptual recommendations described here can help schools equitably engage students, families, educators, and experts to ensure that school culture solutions meet real needs. This guide offers numerous examples, but it does not aim to be prescriptive, nor do the insights highlighted aim to be exhaustive. Rather, as schools explore the mindsets, approaches, and systems outlined here, we invite you to reference this guide and adapt high-leverage strategies to meet the unique needs of your community.

– Christopher Habetler, Chief Culture Officer and Deputy Superintendent  
Brooklyn Laboratory Charter Schools

# Introduction

The questions articulated in the Foreword may point to systemic challenges, but within our school communities, they are more pointed and personal. They're also more nuanced: Today's multiple and intersecting challenges mean that everyone's experience with the pandemic has and will continue to vary widely. Many students and staff are returning to school environments after 18 months of profound isolation and loss. Students who have historically been marginalized in America's inequitable system of education—including students who are Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC), students who live with disabilities, students who are English learners, or students who live with economic disadvantage—were more likely to experience the difficulties of learning in an entirely virtual setting.

As we prepare for the 2021–22 school year, it's imperative that we think critically about these issues and develop innovative ways to challenge long-entrenched practices, policies, and mindsets that maintain disparities and inequity in our schools. It's imperative that our work is grounded in the belief that every student is uniquely talented. When the right conditions are in place, and developmental relationships power belonging and learning, students will thrive in school and reach their full potential.

The partners and school communities who participated in this design charrette identified insights that have the potential to help us tackle these issues:

**What are the most impactful things schools can do to meet the unique and diverse needs of our students and create a thriving culture as they return to school during the 2021–22 school year?**



# A Design Charrette Aiming to Support Educators to Build School Culture Back Better

The COVID-19 pandemic has ignited the transformation of American education. Almost overnight, the country became a testbed as schools experimented with new ways to provide education to our nation's K–12 students. Eighteen months in, it's clear that our shared response to the pandemic has had both bright spots and challenges. Ultimately, the pandemic has exacerbated our country's and education system's existing inequities.

Despite the admirable efforts of many educators and school administrators, the mindsets, approaches, and systems enacted by schools have failed many students—particularly students who are low-income; Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC); learning English; or living with a disability. Too often, improvements in traditional education are mediated through slow moving systems and blunt instruments.

Too often our collective efforts to identify and refine promising mindsets, approaches, and systems are removed from real classrooms and lack the insights and lived experiences of the people within school communities. During the pandemic, American public schools have not had the luxury of waiting for solutions that meet the needs of their students, families, and staff. We needed immediate evidence-based solutions to immediate challenges, and we still do.

We are excited to share the work led by Christopher Habetler through the [EquityByDesign.org](https://EquityByDesign.org) initiative, and hope others are encouraged to try these approaches during the pandemic and into the future.

# Executive Summary

Brooklyn Laboratory Charter Schools (LAB) is committed to helping our students (whom we call scholars) navigate the complex transitions we will all face during the 2021–22 school year. Given the financial and health challenges created by COVID-19, as well as ongoing racial violence and oppression, scholars will need one-on-one support and a nurturing, trauma-responsive environment.

Together with partners across the country, we organized a series of conversations to understand the best ways to build educator and student culture back better.

While readers can and should glean specific practices from this document, our hope is that you also embrace the spirit and vision from which these practices emerge—that by centering values like equity, connection, and joy in our school communities, we can improve and evolve this upcoming year and beyond.

## Our conversations focused on how to:

- Support and accelerate meaningful connections with students and their caregivers.
- Refocus our efforts to create flexibility, curiosity, and empathy.
- Design for belonging to address systemic inequity and rebuild better.
- Hook students back into the “why” and put wind in their sails, while doing the same for ourselves.
- Prioritize psychological safety.
- Empower teachers with the knowledge and practices necessary to master classroom motivational dynamics.
- Engage staff, students, and families in cultivating principles and technical practices.
- Create a student-centered, effort-driven school culture in which students control their own academic success.

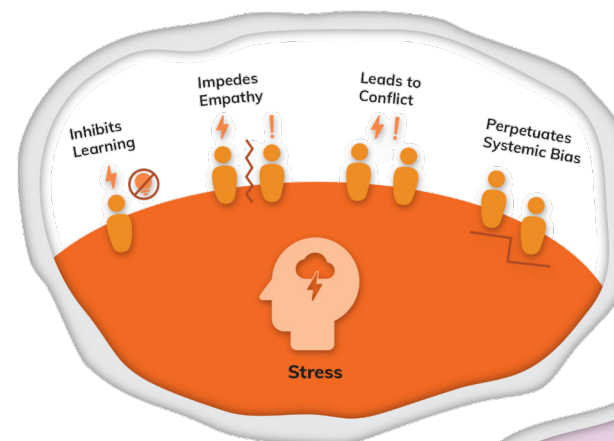


# What's in Building Culture Back Better?

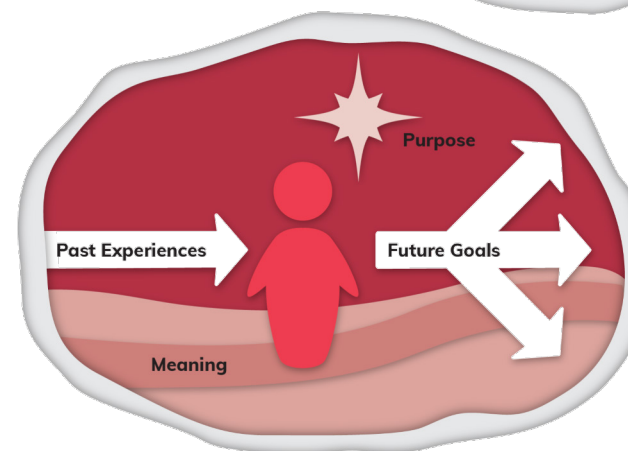
Collaborating with practitioners from school communities and leading organizations around the country, this charrette focused on a central question: What are the most impactful things schools can do to meet the multiple unique and diverse needs of our students and create a thriving culture as they return to school for the 2021–22 school year? We broke this question into three related inquiries:

- How do we address the deleterious social, emotional, and academic impacts of the pandemic?
- How can we build staff culture to prepare for the extraordinary demands of this upcoming year?
- How can we prepare for and navigate the school year to build more equitable adult mindsets and approaches?

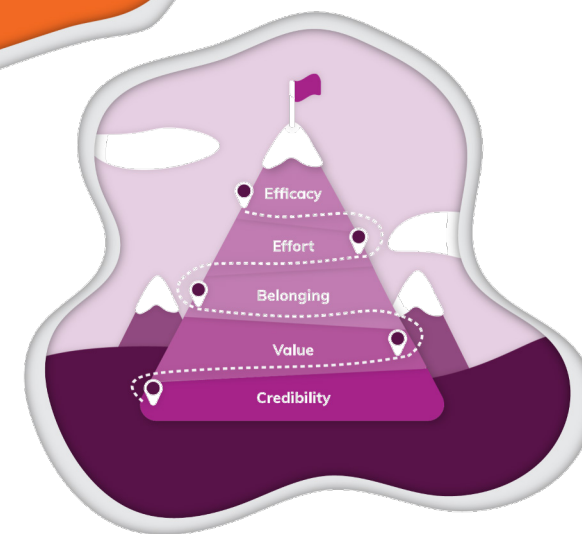
During a two-month collaboration, we discussed, honed, and distilled ideas, creating a guide filled with actionable frameworks, strategies, and practices that can help educators create more connected, joyful, and equitable school communities.



**Stuart Warshawer**  
Design for Belonging



**Yutaka Tamara**  
Belonging and Purpose



**Dave Stuart Jr.**  
Transforming School Culture

# About Brooklyn LAB + EquityByDesign

Brooklyn LAB was co-founded in 2013 by Erin Mote and Eric Tucker with the mission to eliminate the achievement gap by preparing scholars with the academic foundation, digital literacy, and leadership skills necessary to succeed in college and professional life. Brooklyn LAB is dedicated to serving the highest need students, regardless of their academic level, English language proficiency, or disability. Brooklyn LAB is committed to the principle that community stakeholder voice, and response to community need, is an integral component of public school governance, operations, and decision-making. Meeting the needs of students and families is our focus as we reimagine what the return to school will look like in the fall of 2021.

In response to COVID-19, Brooklyn LAB leadership launched [EquityByDesign.org](https://EquityByDesign.org), an initiative that applies learner-centered design approaches to a wide range of challenges that are necessary to address to ensure school communities are safe, healthy, and thriving. We invite you to join our school community's journey, follow along with your own design work, and embrace principles of user-centered, agile design as we build school back better. EquityByDesign exists to help education communities collaborate on tough challenges, honor the input of diverse stakeholders, and meet the needs of all learners.



# About the Charrette | Process

We took the following steps during our four-week collaborative process:

**Identify.** Charrette participants and Brooklyn LAB held initial work sessions to identify challenges associated with culture.

**Discover.** Design teams, including partner organizations, experts, and designers, collaborated with Brooklyn LAB to discover potential solutions for culture.

**Create.** Brooklyn LAB teachers, special educators, culture team members, counselors, instructional leaders, and administrators attended work sessions to focus on aspects of the challenges they were best equipped to address.

**Develop.** Teams developed ideas based on school and community needs and best practices to address social-emotional supports and foster a safe, supportive culture in which our scholars are prepared to learn and succeed.

**Identify**



**Discover**



**Create**



**Develop**

# About the Charrette | Partners

*Building Culture Back Better* aggregates strategies and insights from on-the-ground practitioners in school communities across the country as they focus on preparing for the 2021–22 academic year. We appreciate their time and energy and are honored by their contributions.



ArtistYear



Dave Stuart Jr.

# Thank you.

As a laboratory school, part of our mission is to advance design solutions and share tools that other schools can utilize. No school has the time or resources to do this alone. This presentation is part of our effort to share our approach.

We are better together!



**BROOKLYN LAB**  
CHARTER SCHOOL



## LEADERSHIP SPOTLIGHT

“**When I think about what our students need to learn and thrive,** I find myself leaning into the work of Dr. Gholdy Muhammad, and the need to start with joy. That means leading our classrooms with our hearts, putting students first, and celebrating every young person. We also need to take a look at the bigger picture of our classrooms and communities, and make sure each student can find themselves in the story of our content.”



**Megan Gross**  
Special Education Teacher  
Poway Unified School District

🔗 Learn more about [Poway Unified School District](#) and Megan's [Learner Variability Project](#) work.



Benjamin Ure

# **Strengthening Connections** with a Safe, Predictable, and Joyful Return to School

# Overview

Connection is the driving force in creating a safe, predictable, and joyful return to school. Connection to ourselves, our colleagues, our students, and the school community at large creates successful school structures and meaningful school culture.

In the face of a return to in-person education, as well as the uncertainty and trauma wrought by the pandemic, schools need to adopt practices that accelerate these connections and their impact on the school community.

As Leah Shafer said, “A culture will be strong or weak depending on the interactions between people in the organization. In a strong culture, there are many overlapping and cohesive interactions, so that knowledge about the organization’s distinctive character—and what it takes to thrive in it—is widely spread.”<sup>1</sup>

1. [“What Makes Good School Culture,”](#) Harvard Graduate School of Education, 2018

# Challenge

## Uncertainty, Loss, and Distance

Many students have lost almost two years of in-person education. The educational losses from this past year are daunting, but so are the ramifications for school culture. Virtual instruction and social distancing stripped away many relationships and activities that make learning social and enjoyable. Now that school campuses are gearing up for reopening, they must confront the fact that many high school students returning to school this fall will have never attended a high school.

Students will need help navigating an unfamiliar classroom environment, learning or re-learning school procedures and expectations, and integrating into a school culture in a shared physical space. In addition to providing supports to their students to ensure a safe return to in-person learning, schools have an opportunity to rebuild their school cultures in ways that intentionally plan for and highlight joyful aspects of being together again.

**This fall, how might we rebuild school culture to support and accelerate meaningful connections with students and their caregivers?**



# Solution

## Create the Conditions for Connection

### **Connection is the key to building back a thriving school culture this fall.**

Opportunities for connection are everywhere, but they can be difficult to engineer from the top down. Schools can succeed by building safety, predictability, and joy into the operations of the school, creating conditions wherein community members are empowered and encouraged to connect with one another.



#### **Predictability**

Unexpected and unpredictable change, like a global pandemic, can disrupt our sense of safety, our sense of purpose, and our position with other important social landscapes. Consistent structures and routines provide healthy limits and boundaries and help everyone manage feelings of uncertainty.



#### **Safety**

Students will return to school in different mental and emotional states, and caregivers will likely be focused on this aspect of reopening. Meeting these needs with robust support systems enables students to clear obstacles to learning.



#### **Joy**

The experience of learning can and should be a joyful one, and in high schools, that can only be done by highlighting student voices. Schools can choose to emphasize the joyful aspects of being together and reconnecting once more.



# Solution

## Create the Conditions for Connection



### Predictability

Mitigate feelings of uncertainty by considering and communicating policies and expectations with consistency.

- ✓ Reconsider school policies
- ✓ Collect buy-in from students and caregivers



### Safety

Ensure physical and emotional student safety by increasing support systems.

- ✓ Invest in mental health supports
- ✓ Leverage learning moments



### Joy

Accentuate and accelerate the peer-to-peer connections that make school joyful.

- ✓ Shape and repeat a positive reopening narrative
- ✓ Support student organizations



# Predictability

## Reconsider School Policies



The pandemic and the transitioning to online learning forced schools to upend routines and practices, and may have revealed useful educational insights or tools. In addition to this, the moment of racial reckoning in 2020 should compel schools to examine practices and policies for equity, justice, and inclusion.

Take time over the summer to reflect with stakeholders on school policies and practices in place before and during the pandemic. Carefully evaluate rules and policies to ensure they:

1. Keep students physically and emotionally safe;
2. Are consistently exercised and enforced by all staff; and
3. Bring student voice, identity, and leadership into as many spaces as possible.

### Implementation Recommendations

- Consider policy changes like moving school start time to later in the day to support adolescent sleep needs and build a more sustainable start time for students and staff. At Excel, the start time moved from 8:00 to 8:30am. We also made changes to uniform policies, suspension practices, and dean's office referrals as a result of discourse with parents, students, and staff.

### Resource

- ✍ The University of Chicago offers [surveys](#) to help schools measure the school experiences of parents, students, and staff.



# Predictability

## Collect Buy-in from Students and Caregivers



Students are returning from a quarantine period with few collective rules or structures to the routines and procedures of the school day. That dissonance, in addition to a renewed focus on racial justice, makes it incumbent upon schools to get partnership from those they serve.

Create partnerships with students and caregivers by discussing school policies and potential changes at grade level assemblies, school assemblies, and at other times.

### Implementation Recommendations

- Use existing advisory bodies like student and parent councils to raise concerns about and sign off on rules and policies.
- Have school administrators lead townhall styles talks during lunch or other breaks in the school day. During the meetings, share rationales for existing policies, and talk through where there's flexibility for change and where there is not.



# Safety

## Invest in Mental Health Supports

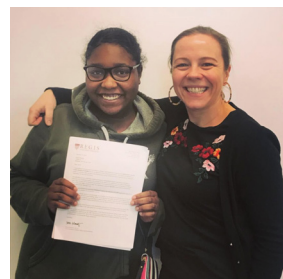
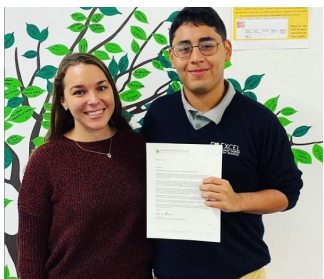


In the past 18 months, students may have been forced to confront an incredible amount of uncertainty, worry, stress, and grief. These emotional and mental burdens take a toll, and may manifest in several ways, including behavioral issues, low performance or motivation, and long term mental health challenges. Early intervention and access to mental health support can make the difference between reversing a brief downward slide and chronic and compounding mental health issues.

Schools need to anticipate these mental health challenges in their student population and prepare to handle a larger proportion of students in school support systems.

### Implementation Recommendations

- Invest resources in counseling and support staff, including hiring more staff in places of culture (Dean's office), mental health (counselors), and student supports (case managers).
- Where additional staff is not a possibility, rebalance responsibilities of deans, counselors, and case managers to take on higher volumes at peak times of the year like October, January, and March.
- Ensure counseling staff know how to navigate health care systems for or with families. The counselor setting up outside family counseling should navigate insurance practices, waitlists, and the selection of the right counselor alongside the student and family.



# Safety

## Leverage Learning Moments



We see each disciplinary moment as an opportunity to uncover a student's story, support them to re-acclimate to post-pandemic life, disrupt negative patterns, and move through obstacles that keep them from feeling seen and known in school.

### Implementation Recommendations

- Train student support staff to build an emotion map for students in a discipline situation, or a list of people on each students' team as a resource for who to turn to.
- Prepare to facilitate mediating conversations between students or students and staff. Restorative practices should balance traditional discipline responses.

### Resource

- 📄 Psychology Tools offers [examples](#) of how cognitive behavioral therapists map emotions, behaviors, and consequences as a method for considering people and their behaviors in a holistic context.



# Joy

## Create and Reiterate a Positive Narrative



The uncertainty surrounding this fall allows educators to take ownership of their school's reopening narrative. To an extent, schools can define for themselves what it means to return, so make sure that educators are consistently and often reiterating and re-narrating the narrative of school community, a successful return to school, and the successes (large and small) that mark the school's return to in-person education.



### Implementation Recommendations

- Ensure that all adults know and understand the school's reopening narrative. Reiterate this narrative consistently at school events and assemblies.
- Invest in programming that gives staff the time to build relationships with students and students to build grade-level camaraderie, such as field trips, special advisory time, and student organizations. Consider making school trips early in the school year to accelerate the process of forming these connections.

### Resource

- 📌 Point Loma Nazarene University offers [examples](#) of how leaders can use narratives to inspire others.



# Joy

## Support Student Organizations



Students returning to school from the social distancing and quarantine days will leave many feeling disconnected and unaccustomed to the busy social atmosphere they left two years ago. Students need connection and belonging with peers inside the classroom and out, and to build an identity by being a part of some group, skill, or sport.



### Implementation Recommendations

- Encourage students with social capital to take on leadership positions, particularly upperclassmen. Staff should work with these students to drive a positive, joyful narrative around re-starting student groups. It's going to be hard at first! Students take the risk to join other groups when it feels safe, which takes time.
- Ensure that schools provide a diverse offering of athletics, high impact extra-curricular groups like Model United Nations and Robotics, and affinity spaces for all identities.



# Creating Connection at School

Connection is a key driver of achievement, growth, and culture. When our students feel emotionally and physically safe, understand and accept their schools' patterns and policies, and find joy in the return to in-person education, they will be equipped to traverse the obstacles that returning to school will undoubtedly present. We believe that those obstacle—be they academic, social, or logistical—are tractable when connection is driving our interactions and choices.

“ I define connection as the energy that exists between people when they feel seen, heard, and valued; when they can give and receive without judgment; and when they derive sustenance and strength from the relationship.”

– Brené Brown





# Thank you.

[Excel Academy's](#) mission is to prepare students to succeed in high school and college, apply their learning to solve relevant problems, and engage productively in their communities. Excel Academy was founded in Massachusetts in 2003 with the mission to provide a high-quality education to students in East Boston and Chelsea, communities that are predominantly low-income and Latinx and historically have faced significant social and educational barriers. Our success in Massachusetts is proof that the opportunity gap can be closed.

[Benjamin Ure](#) joined Excel's staff in fall 2011 as an interim Learning Specialist and then served as an interim Associate Dean of Students. He is the founding Dean of Students at Excel Academy Charter High School. Prior to Excel, Ben taught high school in Philadelphia for two years through Teach for America. Ben holds a bachelor's in Political Science from Brigham Young University and a Teaching Certification from the University of Pennsylvania.



## LEADERSHIP SPOTLIGHT



 Learn more about [Brooklyn Laboratory Charter Schools](#) and the [Educating All Learners Alliance](#)

“ It is really important to make sure that our teachers and staff feel prepared.”



**Jasmine Tucker**  
Deputy School Director  
Brooklyn Laboratory Charter Schools



Jerel Bryant

# Establishing and Supporting Adult Culture in Schools



**Collegiate** Academies

# Overview

Collegiate Academies believes in being prepared. **When we create a school space with a strong adult culture, it sets the standard for what is possible for our kids.**

When the staff and adults in a school are prepared and practice beliefs that are aligned to values, it sets conditions where students can learn from and flourish within the school community and beyond. As we plan to go back to school this fall, this type of school culture will help us navigate towards a thriving and successful school year.

# Challenge

## Varied and Complex Student Needs

Adjusting the system doesn't always result in moving outcomes. Sometimes, it is the **enabling conditions our schools create** that play the biggest role in creating change. Creating these conditions starts with adults first.

Participating in and contributing to adult culture sets a **readily available model** for kids to follow, and can help **prepare staff for the obstacles to come**. Especially in 2021—in a time in which greater flexibility, curiosity, and empathy will be required in order to move our schools and nation forward—the ability to create these conditions matters.

**How might we refocus our efforts to create the flexibility, curiosity, and empathy required to move our schools and nation forward?**



# Adult Culture is Kid Culture

Culture is the result of shared stories, ways, and values that a group builds together. In a school setting, culture penetrates all members of that community. As adults, we get to elevate and practice the practices that will most advance both our peers and our kids. **Adult culture sets the ceiling for kid culture.** Regardless of where a school is in its journey, there are opportunities through Adult culture to drive our young people forward in an unsure world.

There are three key practices that can create and reinforce positive adult culture in schools:

- **Using Stories to Actualize the Vision**
- **Practice and Perpetuate Flexibility and Positivity**
- **Spiral Equity Practices into Daily Work**

The culture that we build and elevate will be reflective of what will make us successful in 2021–2022 school year.

## Meet Mary!

Mary is a fictional character who will help demonstrate how we build adult culture at Collegiate Academies. We'll see Mary work through each of the key practices in depth.



# Use Stories to Actualize the Vision

Stories are a powerful tool. We can use stories straight from our communities to paint what is possible for adults, instead of relying strictly on data, manuals, and outside research. We leverage the stories that we anticipate our adults need most in order to be successful.

Cultivating the stories that we want our school community to hear and see will help actualize the vision, values, and mindsets for the year. Additionally, storytelling helps to humanize the struggle, the journey, and the potential beauty of it all.

We have options. We can ask returning students, guardians, or community stakeholders to share their stories with their respective teams or individuals—with an eye towards underscoring their story as a model for how to approach this upcoming year. **Their stories bring our vision to life.**

## Implementation Recommendations

Consider a teammate, guardian, or student who is ready and inspired to share a story. It can be anyone in your community who has a story that embodies the values you have defined for your school.



# Use Stories to Actualize the Vision

## Scenario

Mary is a mathematics teacher at Collegiate Academies. She recently received her course schedule for the next year. In addition to her usual courses, she will be teaching a new course that has never been taught before and is feeling a bit nervous.

As she prepares her lesson plans, she thinks about ways to ease her anxiety and thinks about her fellow teachers.

Mary asks her principal for advice.

## Next Steps

Mary's principal asks Ben, a veteran teacher on staff, to share a story with the entire staff about a time that he exemplified a salient solution-orientation before COVID-19, when the needs of kids shifted. During his story, Ben shares how he is going to apply his lessons learned to preparing for the coming year. As Mary listens to his story and takes his advice, she feels more confident about this class for the next year.

In the future, a new teacher comes to Mary with a similar problem. Mary shares her story and continues to model a positive, helpful adult culture around school.





# Practice and Perpetuate Flexibility and Positivity

In 2021, let's get even more explicit about flexibility and positivity as we chase worthy outcomes for our kids. Let's emphasize our values before systems.

- **We get to be educators who drive results in unprecedented times.**
- **We get to be the educators who choose to be positive when faced with unanticipated circumstances.**
- **We get to be part of the solution.**

We can use before and after examples to capture exactly what can be different. Practicing and perpetuating values in our work are in-motion actions that add to our adult culture. We then get to acknowledge and celebrate these values in action through both micro and macro structures throughout the year. Through this reorientation, we enhance our collective capacity to do the work that matters the most.

## Implementation Recommendations

We can put our values into practice by changing our vocabulary. Try using **"I get to"** instead of **"I have to"**:

I have to...	I get to...
I have to review yesterday's lesson plan again.	I get to help our kids get a better grasp on what they learned yesterday.
I was told I was teaching Algebra 1 but now I'm told I have to teach prealgebra through October, because our students are further behind than we anticipated. This wasn't the plan.	Our kids are behind but I'm able to offer a Pre-Algebra course so they can catch up. I get to be part of the solution.



# Practice and Perpetuate Flexibility and Positivity

## Scenario

During mid-semester, many students are falling behind with assignments, impacting both GPAs and content mastery. Mary is frustrated by her overall performance.

Some of the students reach out to Mary for extra help, stating that they are having a hard time understanding the material. Mary is following a clear scope and sequence but also has to make sure her students are on track.

What are her next steps?

## Next Steps

Mary acknowledges her students workloads and remains flexible. She considers alternative assignments and additional tutoring blocks. She reaches out to other teammates who are experiencing more success.

Moreover, she keeps her students motivated and remains positive about their work habits. She gets to help her students continue to learn and understand the material before moving on.



# Spiral Equity Practices into Daily Work

**Equity work is the work in 2021–22** and it can be done in our daily practices.

We can bring an equity lens to everything we do, starting even with approaches to daily attendance. In this approach, we build stronger communities, adult problem-solvers, and leaders.

**We can connect our existing priorities to equity work.** The work does not need to be separate from other programs and trainings. It can be spiraled into what is universal to us and what has been effective for kids. Spiraling equity practices reinforces and honors our previous thinking and the work we've already been doing. Equity can be thought of as an ethos, neither an initiative nor a separate workstream. In this upcoming school year, we can maintain an equity first mindset and set an example for adults and children to follow.

## Implementation Recommendations

Spiraling equity practices builds and expands our ability to locate and improve on a fair and equal workplace. Here are some existing policies and practices to consider through the lens of equity:

- Attendance Policy
- Grading
- GPA Goals
- College Access

Here's an example situation. Let's say that there are 10% of students who don't show up every day. We know that our current actions successfully get 90% of students to show up and work. We can accept the current results, or we can step back to reconsider. What additional actions can we take to get the remaining 10% to show up?



# Spiral Equity Practices into Daily Work

## Scenario

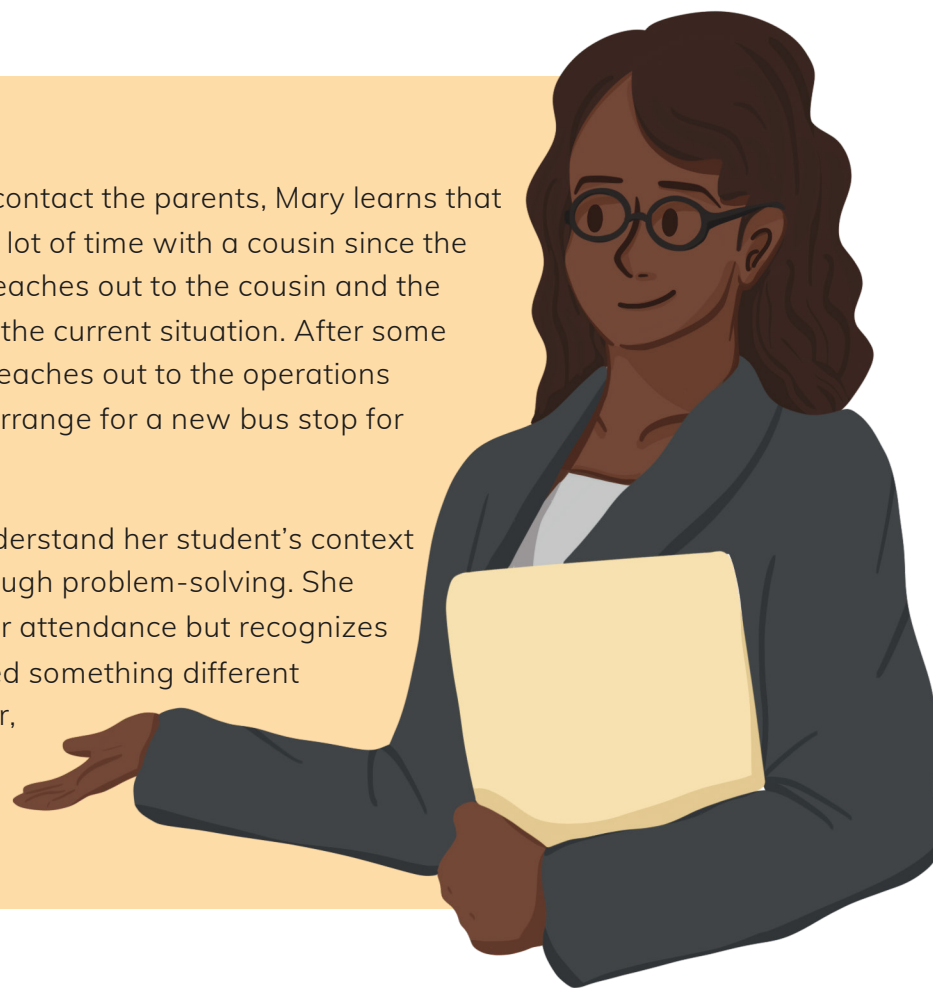
Lately, Mary notices that one of her students is missing school consistently. Instead of letting it go, she is worried about her student and tries her best to contact the parent. She phones home but no one answers. She tries again. She documents her efforts.

What are her next steps?

## Next Steps

After not being able to contact the parents, Mary learns that her student has spent a lot of time with a cousin since the pandemic began. She reaches out to the cousin and the student's aunt explains the current situation. After some problem solving, Mary reaches out to the operations coordinator and helps arrange for a new bus stop for the student.

Mary did her best to understand her student's context and practice equity through problem-solving. She doesn't lower the bar for attendance but recognizes that students might need something different in order to meet that bar, and that she is the right person to take action—regardless of her role.



# Thank you.

[Collegiate Academies](#) builds world-class public schools that prepare all students for college success and lives of unlimited opportunity. We enroll students starting in 9th grade, believing deeply that every one of our students can access college and a life of unlimited opportunity. Our approach centers on a strong adult culture and building teams who put students at the center, find solutions, and constantly improve.

Jerel Bryant is the Principal of Collegiate Academies' George Washington Carver High School. Jerel was named the 2021 Louisiana High School Principal of the Year.

## LEADERSHIP SPOTLIGHT



 Learn more about [Purdue Polytechnic High School](#)

“The most important things students need to learn and thrive in schools are relationships.”



**Shatoya Ward**

Principal  
Englewood Campus  
Purdue Polytechnic High School



Stuart Warshawer

# **Design for Belonging:**

## Three Strategies for a More Equitable School Culture

ArtistYear



# Overview

Belonging is the feeling that one is respected and valued in a given context. Research shows that a sense of belonging is a key driver of student motivation and success, both in terms of academic outcomes and personal well-being. As students return to classrooms after surviving a global pandemic, it is critical for adults at school to foster a sense of belonging and rebuild relationships in their school communities around equity and anti-racism.

Schools can pursue three strategies to manifest a culture of belonging:

1. Share power with school communities.
2. Replace punitive discipline with restorative practices.
3. Educate staff on stress and the brain.

These strategies work together to create a sense of belonging by building meaningful relationships, increasing empathy, and disrupting implicit bias in service of more equitable student outcomes.

# Challenge

## Stress, Anxiety, and Isolation

Schools in our country produce inequitable results. Students who identify as Black, Indigenous, and persons of color (BIPOC) are disproportionately more likely to experience a lack of educational opportunity during their academic careers and feel a sense of anxiety about whether they belong. The COVID-19 global pandemic has highlighted and exacerbated this reality: last year, young people suffered from learning loss and increased feelings of stress, anxiety, and isolation.

Now more than ever, as students return to in-person instruction for the 2021–22 academic year, there is an opportunity for schools, networks, and districts to engage with substantive, long-needed changes to foster inclusive, anti-racist cultures that enable student success. Existing measures to address inequity in schools and school systems through staff trainings and courageous conversations are critical yet insufficient. Schools must intentionally redesign their culture and systems to root out harm and rededicate themselves to cultivating high-quality relationships in their school communities.

**How might school leaders design for belonging in order to address systemic inequity and rebuild better, more equitable school cultures?**

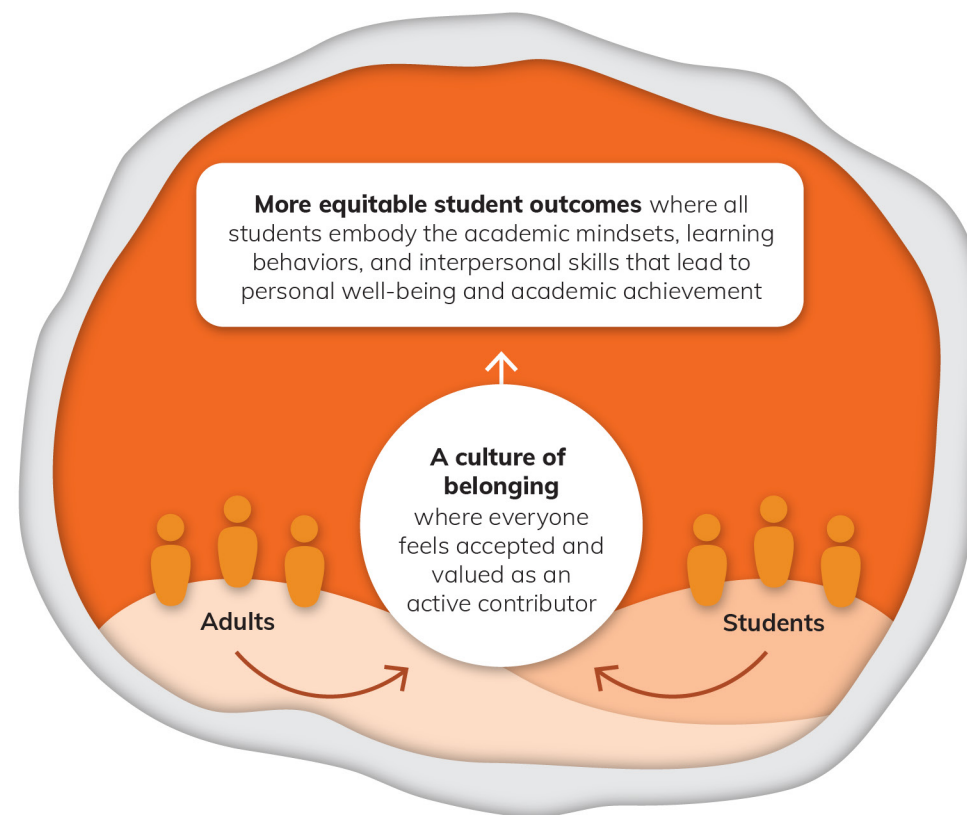


# Solution

## Belonging, Equity, and Student Outcomes

[Belonging](#) is the feeling that one is respected and valued in a given context. Studies by the [Chicago Consortium on School Research](#) identify “a sense of belonging” as a key mindset that enables students to achieve academically. Every educator has likely experienced that student achievement occurs when students feel a sense of belonging and ownership. This does not and should not occur as happenstance. School leaders must approach designing for belonging with the same level of intentionality and focus as they would any mission-critical work.

In an equitable school environment, everyone belongs more deeply and is more likely to feel a sense of agency and ownership over their learning, growth, and development. In order for students to have a sense of belonging and ownership, adults at school must have it, too. School leaders have a direct impact on staff ownership and can work towards creating a more equitable environment.



# Create a Culture of Belonging

## Three Key Strategies



### Share Power with School Communities

Disrupt a key characteristic of white supremacist organizational culture by actively sharing power instead of hoarding it.



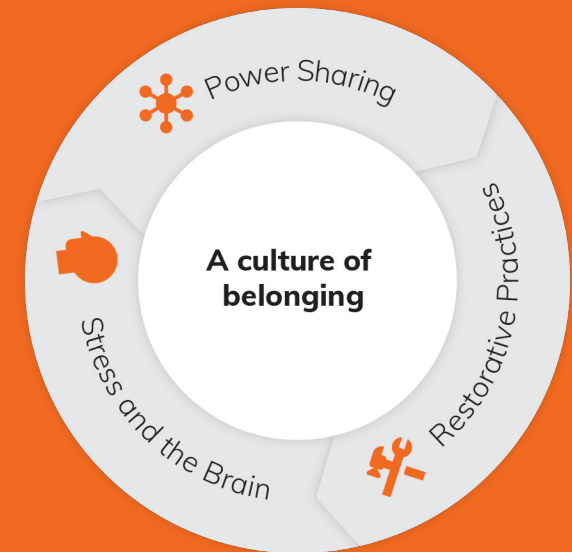
### Replace Punitive Discipline with Restorative Practices

Increase a sense of belonging by focusing on restorative practices instead of punitive discipline and formal authority.



### Educate Staff on Stress and the Brain

Educate staff and students on how stress impacts the brain to disrupt implicit bias and bring self-awareness and empathy to escalated situations at school.



# Share Power with School Communities

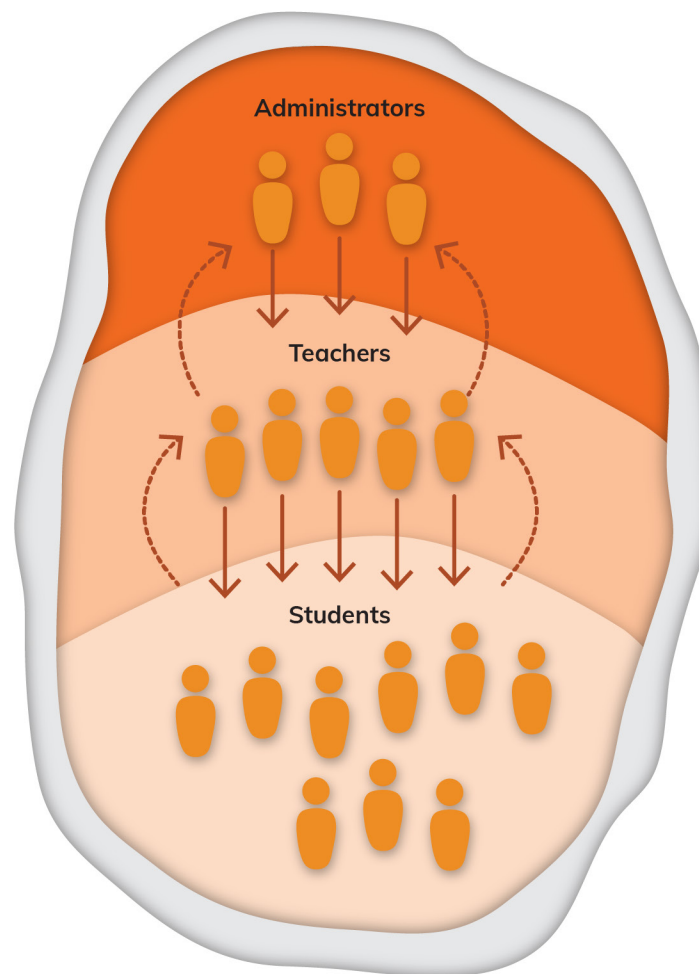
## What It Means

### Sharing power is a critical step towards equity at school.

When those with power—school leaders, administrators, teachers—share it, they invite the school community to take agency and ownership over their experience at school.

### Sharing power is an antidote to power hoarding.

Tema Okun identifies power hoarding as a characteristic of [white supremacist culture](#). Okun states that power hoarding shows up when those with power assume they have the best interests of the organization at heart and assume those wanting change are ill-informed, emotional, and inexperienced. In schools, this can manifest in many ways. For instance, professional development and coaching are generally top down, where administrators tell teachers what to do. Additionally, school or district administrators often solicit input from staff members regarding initiatives or change only within narrow and specified domains. Teachers and staff are not positioned to offer substantive feedback about school issues.



### How Power Hoarding Works at School

Administrators know best and **issue top-down mandates** to staff, and teachers to students.

Teachers and students are invited to **provide feedback** only on narrowly defined, specific issues. Feedback may or may not be acted upon.



# Share Power with School Communities

## How to Do It



### **Clarify decision making power in the school.**

Who has the authority to make which decisions, and within what boundaries? Create a chart or other artifact that outlines decision-making domains and share it.



### **Shift teacher coaching model from top-down to collaborative.**

Coaching is most powerful when goals are set primarily by the individual striving to achieve them. Agree on the goals and give teachers agency to reach them using their unique abilities.



### **Treat community members as experts of their own experience.**

As leaders, we must remember we do not always know what is best for our school communities. Ask for feedback frequently, publicize results and trends, and act on them. If you cannot act, tell people why.



### **Create teams that share meaningful work and have decision-making power in clear domains.**

Equip these teams with a budget to pursue their goals as they see fit. For example, utilize a [PLC framework](#) to organize groups of teachers around achieving student outcomes within or across disciplines.



### **Create a student government and help them shape organizational priorities to benefit the student body.**

Equip students with capable mentors and a budget to pursue their goals.



# Replace Punitive Discipline with Restorative Practices

## What It Means

**A restorative culture is one in which mistakes are used as opportunities for growth and deeper connections, rather than as actions that demand only a punitive response from the school.**

When students do not display the behaviors that are expected of them, schools tend to respond through the lens of compliance and consequences instead of restoration. When adults at school act restoratively, they build relationships, repair harm, and invite cooperation amongst community members for the benefit of all.

Schools have a critical opportunity this fall to replace harmful systems of punitive discipline (such as classroom removal rooms, demerits, uniform policies, rules for student movement, and rules for posture in the classroom) with restorative practices. **This change matters because the compliance and consequences approach results in exclusionary disciplinary practices that disproportionately impact BIPOC students and students with disabilities.**

**Example:** Two students are “playfighting” in the hallway between classes.

### Punitive Discipline

**Reacts:** This behavior is wrong.

Interaction focuses on **action and consequences**. “Stu, playfighting is an automatic detention.”

**Student sits in a detention.** It is unclear whether the student learns a new way of thinking and acting.

### Restorative Practice

**Reflects:** Understands behavior as age-appropriate and unacceptable.

Interaction focuses on **impact of the behavior on the community**. Consequences are logically connected to actions in service of student learning. “Stu, when you playfight you’re less aware of your surroundings and could hurt somebody.”

Staff and/or administrators engage students with affective statements/questions, a parent conversation, or another restorative structure to **gain mutual understanding and check for student learning.**



# Share Power with School Communities

## How to Do It



### **Train administrative teams on Restorative Practice.**

The [International Institute for Restorative Practices](#) offers inexpensive, industry-standard courses.



### **Dedicate professional development and collaborative time to build staff capacity to act restoratively.**

Make space in the schedule for this purpose throughout the year.



### **Systematize restorative structures by outlining the roles and responsibilities of administrators and staff.**

An example handbook that integrates clear expectations with a restorative approach can be found [here](#).



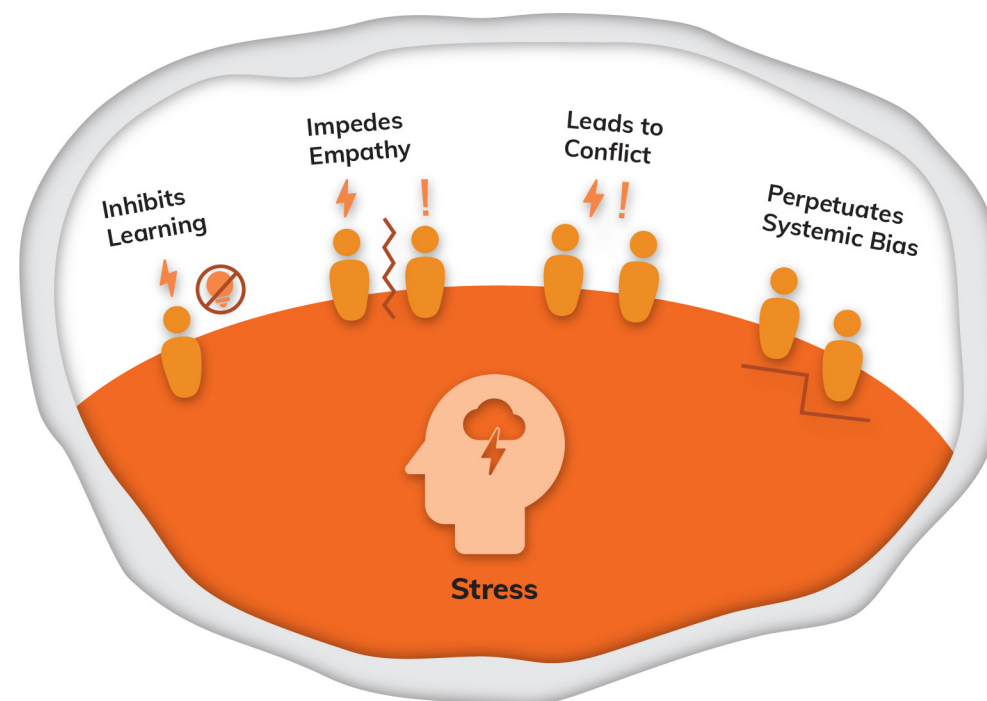


# Educate Staff on Stress and the Brain

## What It Means

**A stressed brain struggles to learn and to empathize with others.** Every individual in a school brings unique experiences, gifts, stressors, and trauma. Adults at school tend to focus on behaviors and consequences, with little clarity on the neurological and physiological root causes for behaviors: namely, emotional regulation and the effect of stress on the body and mind. Stress inhibits effective teaching and learning, impedes empathy, and often leads to conflict. **Stress is also a vehicle for inequity and exclusion,** as systemic racism is perpetuated in schools through stress responses in adults. Adults are poorly equipped to deal with this form of stress in part because they are not aware that it is happening, and often respond through an escalation of formal authority and consequences. The impact on BIPOC students—a lack of psychological safety, loss of learning time, and more—can be devastating.

**Staff and students should be equipped with an understanding of brain science—how the limbic system and pre-frontal cortex shape our experience—as well as practical tools to help us deepen self-awareness, manage strong emotions, increase empathic understanding, and reduce stress.** These tools are powerful ways to disrupt patterns of conflict and implicit bias. When staff are aware that they are emotionally triggered, they have the power to choose to de-escalate and treat young people with empathy and compassion rather than judgement.



# Educate Staff on Stress and the Brain

## How to Do It



### **Use off-the-shelf curricular and training materials to begin the journey with staff and students.**

For middle and high school students, the [Neurologic](#) curriculum is a great entry point. For lower school students, [7 Mindsets](#) is a broad, widely used Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) program that includes many of the same components.



### **Designate a staff member to be the primary leader of your school's Brain Science initiative.**

This should apply in addition to administrators receiving training.



### **Schedule weekly "mini-PDs" to familiarize staff with content.**

Give staff exposure and practice at least one week prior to students receiving that content.



### **Schedule time for explicit instruction and practice.**

Utilize Homeroom, Advisory, SEL block, Electives, College and Career Readiness, or another block of time. If it's not built into the schedule, it won't happen.



### **Build grade-wide or school-wide excitement and exposure regarding content.**

Adults (and especially administrators) should model and practice skills and celebrate when students do the same.



### **Learn more about the concept of racial stress.**

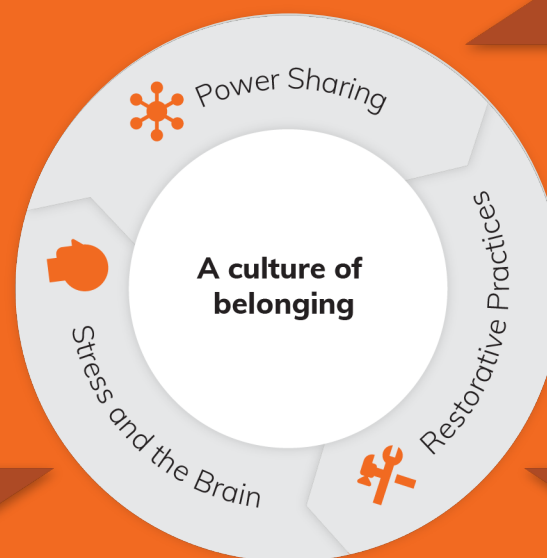
Dr. Howard Stevenson's [Promoting Racial Literacy in Schools](#) is an excellent resource and starting point.



# Persist for a Culture of Belonging



**A culture of belonging isn't built overnight.** Persist when things get difficult. Shifting long-embedded cultural norms will take time, courage and perseverance.



Distributes formal authority to a bigger, more diverse group

Students and staff feel a sense of belonging and are more likely to be motivated and successful

**More equitable student outcomes** where all students embody the academic mindsets, learning behaviors, and interpersonal skills that lead to personal well-being and academic achievement

Reduces effects of implicit bias and increases self-awareness and empathy

Reduces reliance on formal authority and increases meaningful relationships and connectedness



# Thank you.

Stu Warshawer is currently the Chief Program Officer with [ArtistYear](#). From 2014–2021, he served as a school leader in Philadelphia and Camden. Previously, Stu served in the Bronx and Brooklyn as a teacher and Dean of Students. In 2019, the school he led in West Philadelphia was recognized with an award for advancing two categories on the city’s School Report Card during his tenure as school leader.

Stu remains actively committed to building a more equitable future through education and access. He is also a father, husband, rock climber, and competitive athlete who appeared with his West Philadelphia students on season 10 of [American Ninja Warrior](#).

To learn more, seek collaboration, or continue the discussion, [contact Stu](#).

## LEADERSHIP SPOTLIGHT

“ **We must recognize that pre-pandemic practices aren’t serving our students and encourage educators to engage students in new ways.** Societal racism is pervasive in our educational system, and the only way we can rebuild better is by naming and dismantling unfair rules, practices, and structures. We must invite and acknowledge all voices. Everyone, from school boards and district administrators down to teachers, students, and parents, must be willing to make changes with urgency. This generation of scholars deserves a new kind of education that integrates culturally rich programs—with the inclusion of Black, Brown, women, LGBTQI+, and Indigenous people—to encourage learning in a holistic environment.”



**Dr. Lynne D. Shipley**

Instructional Coach, ELA and Social Studies  
Hickman Mills C-1 School District  
Kansas City, MO

[!\[\]\(74d4806277d7e73349d8e8c0897931e9\_img.jpg\) Learn more about Hickman Mills C-1 School District](#)



Yutaka Tamura

# **Belonging and Purpose:** Rebuilding Connections to Ourselves and Others



# Overview

Many of us—as well as our students—are far from thriving. The global pandemic, persistent institutional racism, and radical change to our learning environments have disrupted our pursuit of two essential human needs: a sense of belonging, and the capacity to make meaning.

We need a comprehensive and integrated solution anchored in:

- Connection to ourselves and others to (re)build a sense of belonging
- Connection to a sense of purpose to allow for meaning making

# Challenge

## A Lack of Thriving

**Many of us—as well as our students—are far from thriving** given the challenges of the global pandemic, persistent institutional racism, and radical change to our learning environments.

Educators now face the daunting challenge of welcoming our students back in person, which means addressing their academic needs, rebuilding a sense of belonging, making meaning of the past year, reigniting a sense of direction for their futures, and tending to their emotional well-being. We believe that **connection and belonging** along with **meaning-making and purpose** are critical missing pieces of the puzzle for student success in any school year.

[CASEL](#) defines social-emotional learning as “the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions.”

**In the coming school year,  
how might we find a way to  
hook students back into the  
“why” and put wind in their  
sails, while doing the same  
for ourselves?**



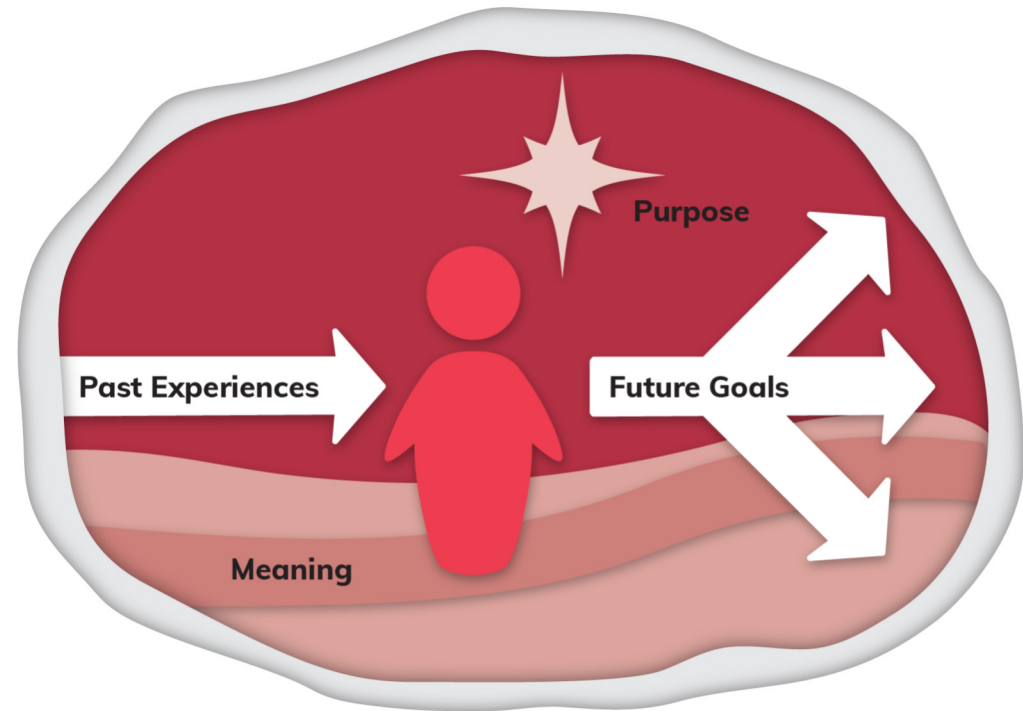


# Solution

## Meaning, Purpose, Connection, and Belonging

Purpose is central to our ability to connect to ourselves and to others and allows us to foster a sense of belonging. **Connecting to our purpose is also essential because it allows us to make meaning of our past and our future.**

Never has there been a more critical time for us to process and digest all that has happened in our past—especially over the last year—and determine how to move forward as we navigate continued uncertainty. Purpose is a unique concept because it provides a framework through which to process and integrate both our past and future.

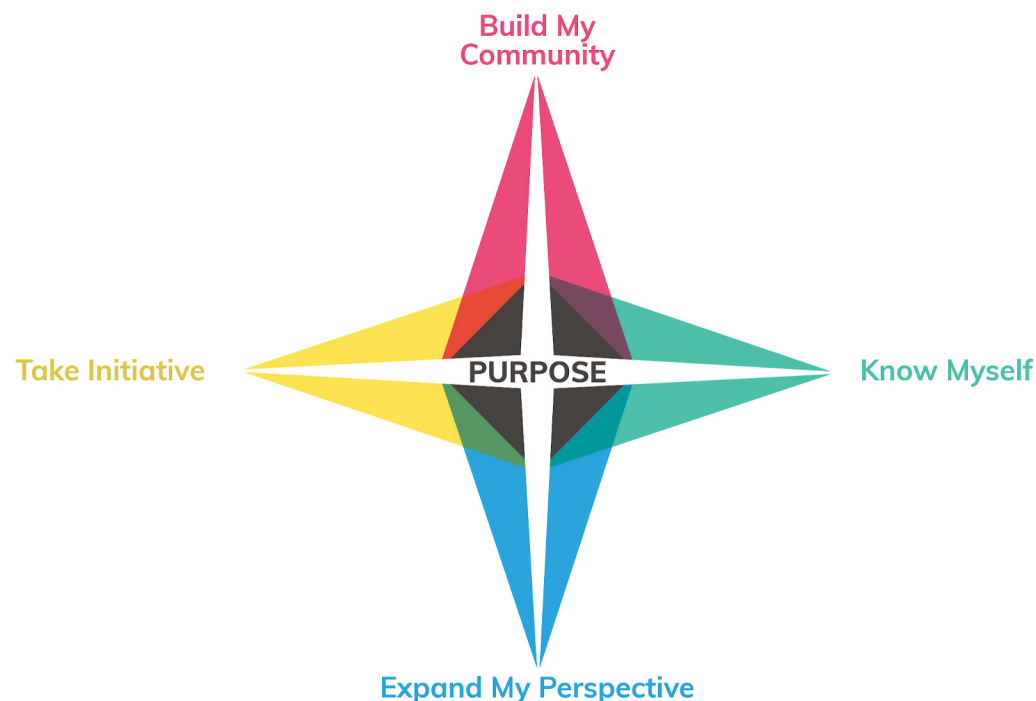


# Solution

## Meaning, Purpose, Connection, and Belonging

**The Compass** is nXu's research-based four-phase purpose development methodology that builds on the metaphor of purpose as an inner compass.

The Compass orients students toward the social-emotional skills necessary to **live purpose-filled lives aligned with their highest potential.** This approach intentionally supports connection and meaning making.



### Build My Community

nXu first fosters a sense of belonging. Students build their community, a secure base from which they can safely do this important inner purpose work.

### Know Myself

After having established that safe environment, nXu fosters a strong sense of self-awareness, including by making meaning of their past and future.

### Expand My Perspective

nXu builds upon that strong sense of self by encouraging students to step out of their comfort zones, expand their perspectives, and look toward their future with openness.

### Take Initiative

Finally, nXu helps students develop a sense of agency. nXu prepares them to take initiative and to look toward their future.



# Why Purpose? Why Now?

**Wellbeing, resilience, and engagement are more important this year than ever**, as educators and teachers are struggling with the cumulative impacts of the global pandemic, persistent institutional racism, and radical changes to learning environments.

## Teacher Wellbeing

**75%** of teachers report frequent job-related stress, compared to 40% of other working adults.  
[Chalkbeat](#)

**27%** of teachers report symptoms of depression, compared to 10% of other adults.  
[Chalkbeat](#)

## Student Wellbeing

**31%** increase in ER visits due to mental health crisis among 12-to-17-year-olds.  
[Edweek](#)

**46%** of low-income students learning remotely felt they fell behind.  
[Gallup](#)

## Impact of Purpose



A solid sense of purpose has been found to be correlated with [student wellbeing](#), [adult wellbeing](#), [student resilience](#), [greater student academic engagement](#), and [positive student career identities](#).



# SEL for Connection and Belonging

## Learning Design Objectives

We need a comprehensive and integrated solution anchored in connection: connection to ourselves, connection to others, and connection to a sense of purpose. Specifically, connecting to ourselves and to others allow us to (re)build a sense of belonging.

To create this connection, we need learning experiences that meet four design objectives: exploration of identity, processing of emotions, creating a sense of belonging, and consideration of needs in the world.



### Exploration of Identity

Learning experiences should encourage students to explore their identities.



### Processing of Emotions

Learning experiences should give students space and practice to consider and reflect upon their feelings and emotions.



### Sense of Belonging

Learning experiences should foster a sense of belonging by creating space for students to learn about, appreciate, and affirm one other.



### Consideration of Needs

Learning experiences should allow students to consider and investigate the needs in the world that motivate them.



# SEL for Connection and Belonging

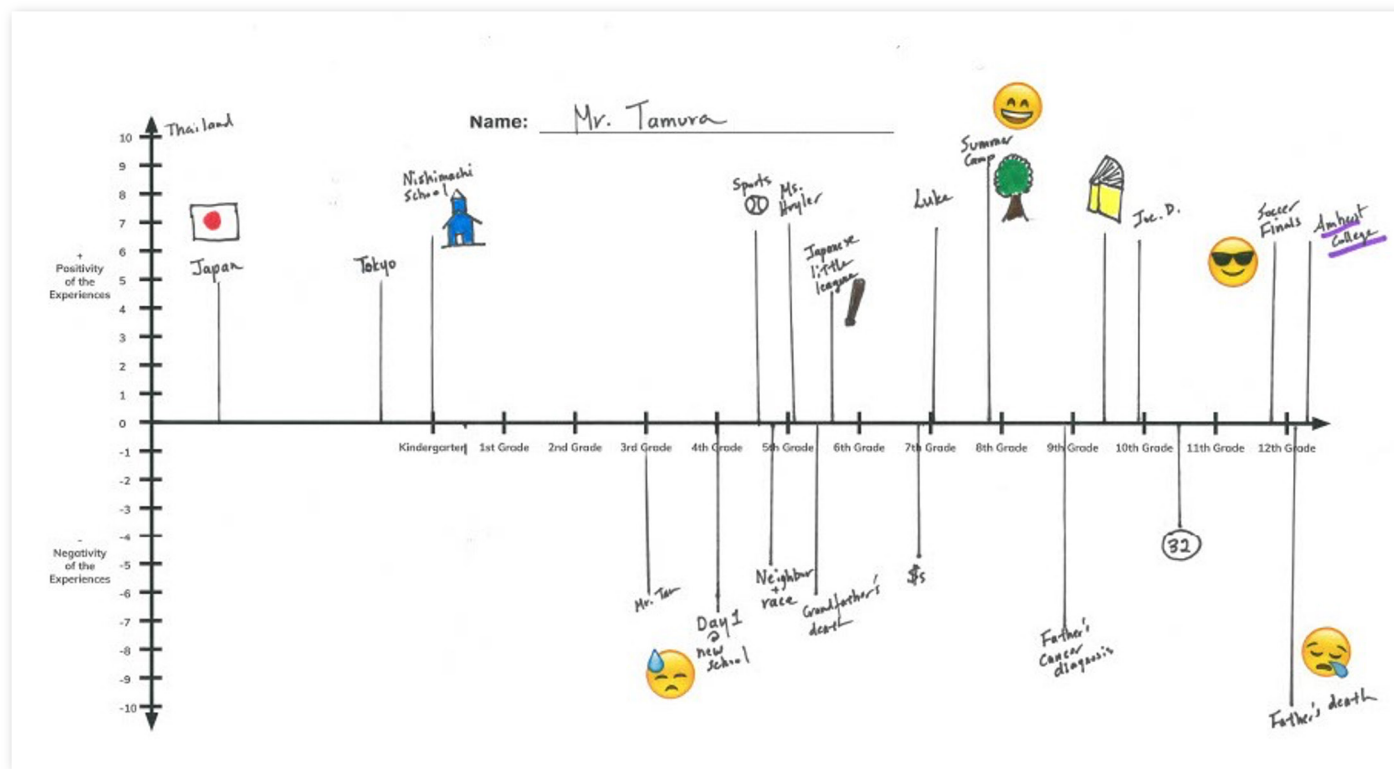
## Example Exercise: Life Timeline

### What Students Do

Students reflect on their personal histories, detail positive and challenging experiences from their lives, and then organize them on a timeline which they share with their peers.

### Why It Works

- Students deepen understanding in their **identity** by reflecting on their past.
- Students build a **sense of belonging** by affirming each others' life stories.
- Students cultivate self-awareness of their **emotions** about the range of life experiences they've had.
- They reflect on pivotal past moments that will inform their future motivations, including the **needs in the world** that will activate them.



Click [here](#) to access Life Timeline lesson resources.



# SEL for Connection and Belonging

## Example Exercise: Elements of Purpose

### What Students Do

Students engage in a paired interview process and reflect on:

- **What am I good at?**
- **What do I enjoy?**
- **What needs in the world activate me?**

Students codify these three inputs of purpose into a personalized statement shared with their peers.

### Why It Works

- Students deepen understanding of their strengths, interests, and the needs in the world that activate them, and therefore, their **identity**.
- Students build a **sense of belonging** by learning about each other.
- Students cultivate self-awareness of their **emotions** about their strengths, interests, and the needs in the world that activate them.
- They engage in initial consideration about the **needs in the world** that activate them which will inform their future direction.

Click [here](#) to access *Elements of Purpose* lesson resources.

“As a young, Black, first generation American man from a Jamaican family who values uniqueness and knowledge, and is curious about communicating and reflecting to inspire others, my purpose in life is to use my leadership, adaptability, thinking and storytelling, combined with my love for exploring and creating to take down the biases in the world and implement unity within minorities and people of color to achieve justice.”

– Donniae, NYC  
after completing *Elements of Purpose* exercise



# Shifting School Culture

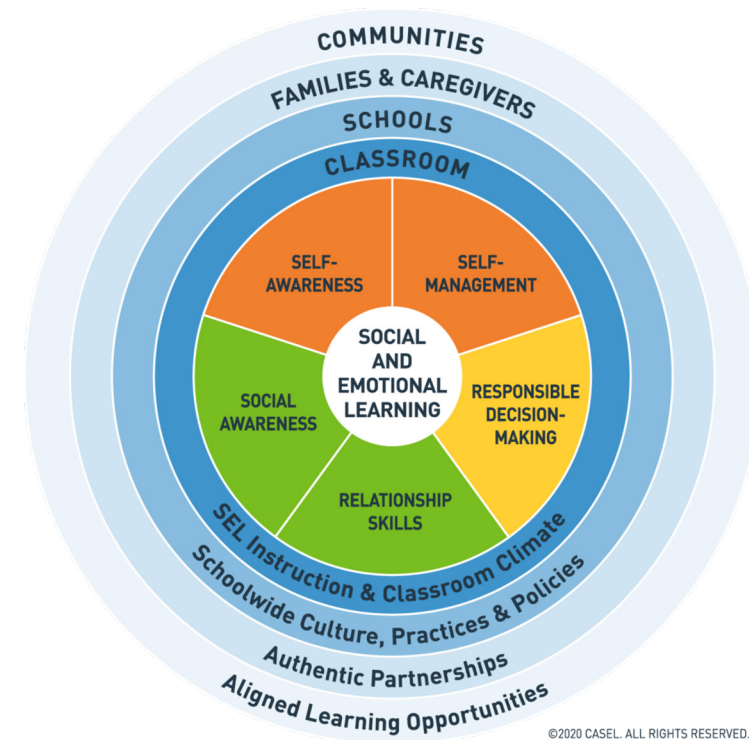
## Transformational Social-Emotional Learning

Learning experiences that meet the four design criteria offer opportunities for transformational Social-Emotional Learning (SEL), encouraging students to express themselves, affirm their identities, and take action. Through such learning experiences, we start to **shift the school culture**, especially when educators participate alongside students.

After just five days of learning experiences that nXu offered to one school, a teacher said to a student:

**“I’ve worked with you for several years, and I got to know you more in the past five days than I did in three years.”**

The teacher shared that he felt rejuvenated as an educator by connecting so profoundly differently with students and reconnecting with his own purpose.



# Shifting School Culture

## Start Where You Are

Over the past 4 years, nXu has evaluated the efficacy of different levels of its development model and curriculum. The nXu team has been able to repeatedly generate growth in purpose and related SEL constructs across different dosages, thereby giving schools a broader set of implementation options.

As schools consider how to proceed, they may want to consider partnering with an external organization to address their needs.

	Introduction (Light)	Adoption (Medium)	Integration (Full)
Intention	Generating interest and basic learning	Program adoption (potentially only one grade)	Program adoption for institutional culture change
Student Programming	Introductory workshops/ lessons	Curriculum plus assessment system	Curriculum plus assessment system
Educator Programming	Introductory workshops/ lessons	Initial training	Initial training, ongoing PD and coaching, and impact assessment for educator development
Pros	Minimal time and resources	More substantive student impact	Deep impact on students, educators, and culture
Cons	More limited impact	More time and resources	Significant time and resources





# Thank you.

[nXu](#) is a national nonprofit organization that provides a culturally-affirming, purpose development model that prioritizes liberatory social-emotional learning practices, positive identity development, and purpose-driven action so that educators and students can cultivate supportive relationships, amplify their resilience, motivate toward their futures, and ensure a thriving life.

Our model can be deployed in-person, online, and on a blended basis. We offer a training program as well as a purpose and SEL development curriculum to educators and schools, and we also directly implement student programming. We've proven the efficacy of our model by repeatedly generating measurable growth in purpose among students (including in comparison to control groups of students), and more recently, among the educators we have served. We have anchored around purpose given the research of William Damon, Heather Malin, Angela Duckworth, and others who have illustrated a correlation between purpose and [greater academic engagement](#), [resilience](#), [well-being](#), and [positive career identities](#).

## LEADERSHIP SPOTLIGHT

“**The pandemic exposed the need for educators to create and nurture a strong sense of student belonging,** especially for those who have been marginalized from school and society. Not only does this make students feel respected, it supports the development of a positive identity. Establishing the trust found in belonging is the first step to make learning achievable for every student.”



**Barbara Pape**

Director of Policy and Communications  
*Digital Promise,*  
*Learner Variability Project*

🔗 Learn more about the [Learner Variability Project](#) and their [Sense of Belonging](#) work.



Chuck Jones

# Psychological Safety in Schools



**BROOKLYN LAB**  
CHARTER SCHOOL

# Overview

Psychological safety is a belief that **one will not be punished or humiliated for speaking up with ideas, questions, concerns, or mistakes.**

Psychological safety is **critical for learning**, especially after a global pandemic. In duality, there is no fundamental trade-off for students between psychological safety and high-performance standards. Instead, they are mutually reinforcing and empowering one another when prioritizing through the experience of families.

The more that a school can create spaces for psychological safety, the more they can create diverse learning outcomes. In particular, while readjusting back from a virtual learning environment, psychological safety allows educators to push scholars who are having extreme difficulties and engage with them, as well as ensure supportive communication structures. In addition, **schools can use existing data tracking and design tools to more reliably understand the environments and learning that they nurture in this way.**

# Challenge

## Authentic, Inclusive Learning Spaces

Adults and students alike may bring new personal struggles with them as schools return to in-person learning. The consequences of not creating psychological safety in schools are greater than ever and **it is especially important to create secure spaces when people might not find themselves in environments inclusively like-minded, focused, or driven based on stigmas or prejudices.**

In addition, even in environments where adults and students feel psychologically safe, schools typically lack tools to properly track, assess, and understand the levels and degrees in which people feel; schools can maintain that impact.

**How might we prioritize psychological safety and continually track our performance against our goal to end racial oppression—ensuring an optimal learning environment for every student?**



# Solution

## Establish and Measure Psychological Safety

Psychological safety is a way to **actualize inclusivity** and allows people to operate in spaces that would normally be **implicitly biased by race, class, or privilege**.

To produce **equitable** environments where students can learn, adults must embrace inclusive leadership characteristics that mitigate bias. Psychological safety can mature into racial consciousness for historically marginalized families and service providers. School leadership is responsible for creating an inclusive and diverse infrastructure to actively innovate the environments created by adults, enabling and influencing psychological safety among stakeholders.



### Establish Shared Leadership Competencies

Have staff reflect on and establish a shared set of leadership outcomes for student learning and thriving.



### Support Through Professional Development

Roll out a professional development program for adult competencies in psychological safety, using both group conversations and individual growth coaching.



### Monitor Progress

Monitor progress using Net Promoter Scores to get continuous feedback on key indicators defining your outcomes. Survey students on teacher performance and teachers on administration performance.



# Establish Shared Leadership Competencies

## Start with Reflection



Psychological safety is the next frontier as we create systems of equity around race, economics, and social change in our schools. Schools should ask their staff and families to reflect on the following qualities and questions.

The ways they answer these questions will show up in tangible ways for scholars and their ability to express themselves in a psychologically safe environment.

### Know Yourself

Get clarity on your superpowers and motivators to find what makes you tick.

- What do your friends and colleagues ask you for advice on?
- What comes naturally to you?
- When you've had a great day (or not), what have you been doing?

### Know Your Aspirations

Defining your dreams and legacy enables you to start defining your future, now.

- What 3 words would you like someone to use to describe you when you're not in the room?
- What impact do you want to have in your role and on your team in the next six months?
- Imagine yourself one year in the future. Looking back, what would make you most proud?

### Know Your Impact

Get clarity on your superpowers and motivators to find what makes you tick.

- What does your feedback tell you?
- When did you last seek out and ask for feedback and what did you do with it?
- How diverse is the feedback you have? Do you need more feedback on other areas? Or from a wider range of stakeholders?



# Establish Shared Leadership Competencies

## Mindsets for Psychological Safety



In setting this example, there are several standards for adults in establishing a culture of performance and psychological safety.

Rubrics like this can convey the desired attributes for leaders to establish a culture of psychological safety. In alignment with a clear rationale staff mindset, staff actions influence and justify student mindsets. Student actions justifying inequity hurts all, and anti-racism protects all.

### Adapts With Resilience

- Thrives in a fast-paced environment and is ready to create and seize opportunities
- Remains focused, optimistic, and calm despite challenges or ambiguity

### Creates Meaningful Connections

- Focuses on “we” and not “me” with collaborative, inclusive relationships
- Openly and thoughtfully shares ideas and information; helps others in need
- Demonstrates empathy, respect, and fairness

### Delivers Against Goals

- Action-oriented and efficient: gets things done without waiting for direction
- Is trusted to deliver quality, timely work
- Takes ownership and follows through on commitments

### Embraces Growth

- Sees challenges as opportunities to grow
- Acknowledges failure courageously and quickly; learns from mistakes
- Generates unique and innovative ideas based on what’s happening around them

### Makes Good Decisions

- Asks questions, challenges assumptions, and considers alternative viewpoints
- Makes effective, timely decisions even with limited information or under pressure
- Continuously evaluates the impact of decisions; changes course when necessary

### Builds Trust

- Leads by example, acknowledges mistakes, and demonstrates integrity
- Communicates openly and empathetically
- Creates an environment where people are valued for differences and trusted to deliver



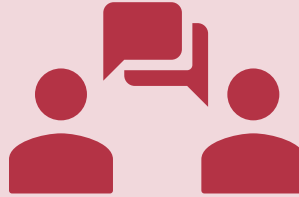


# Support Through Professional Development

## Developing Staff for Psychological Safety



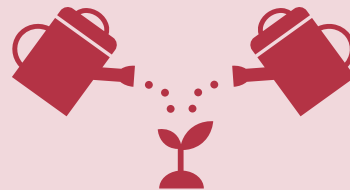
Schools can establish psychological safety among staff using small community circles that create space for cooperative progress, feedback, and constructive decision-making. **Staff-wide discussion circles** and **individual-focused growth circles** can be implemented in tandem to secure and grow psychological safety practices among adults and, consequently, scholars.



### Discussion Circles

*Differentiated trainings for entire school staff*

- Create space for stakeholders to invest experience and respond to needs to identify a path forward
- Establish groups based upon their affinity of needs
- Create community and sparks motivation
- Foster humility, curiosity, and ownership



### Growth Circles

*Individualized development plans for leadership*

- Determine action using gaps seen in feedback
- Proactively support to pain points shared by families
- Facilitated by school leaders, groups are heterogeneous and not role-specific
- Focused on leadership competencies



# Monitor Progress

## Explicit Tracking to Ensure Psychological Safety



To foster development of psychological safety, it is hugely helpful for schools to monitor and progress through identifiable metrics. **Conducting and gathering data from regular surveys, even with just one or two questions, can provide real, actionable information.** Schools frequently neglect to survey employees until it's too late to use them. However, not giving a survey or not giving it on time does not change whether there are underlying issues.

While not typically used for market research, Net Promoter Scores (NPS) are one example of a measure for performance and satisfaction that can be used to understand competencies for psychological safety.



### Progress Tracking for Employees

*Surveys on administration performance*

- Gives organization insight into on-the-ground challenges
- Creates a venue for two-way accountability
- Makes employees feel heard



### Progress Tracking for Scholars and Families

*Surveys on school and teacher performance*

- Gives employees real-time understanding of their service delivery
- Creates recognition for outstanding impact
- Establishes unbiased data for improvement



# Experience Surveys for Psychological Safety

## Simple Numeric Scales for Clearer Insights

Frequent experience surveys create an actionable stream of data to create impacts and to ensure an environment in which students know they are heard and can participate in their instruction. When teaching is informed by feedback, students have a direct impact on how their performance is developed.

Surveys can be simple numeric scales gauging success from questions based on that school's priorities for development and psychological safety. **They may include two or three questions**, or for students, even one question as simple as **"Do you feel supported and heard inside of your classroom?"** Schools also can set quantitative goals for their survey responses based on specific learning and development goals.

Strongly Disagree

Strongly Agree

Do you feel supported and heard inside of your classroom?

1 • 2 • 3 • 4 • 5

Please tell us more about your score.



# Experience Surveys for Psychological Safety

## Example Timeline

**Journey mapping** is a design exercise that can help you identify opportunities to gather feedback from scholars, educators, and different stakeholders within the school. This example shows how a school might lay out survey touchpoints throughout one semester to gauge and forecast areas of improvement—allowing for no primary stakeholder not to be under-represented or heard when evaluating school-wide inclusion and safety.

Survey	First Impressions	Getting Settled	Early Adjustments	Milestone Check-In	Near Semester End	After Semester End
<b>Goal</b>	Does our school foster a welcoming environment that actively shows a safe place for new families?	By way of random selection, does the family feel like the school is producing a setting that will lead to growth for their student?	Check in after two weeks based on student's least strong subject	Does the student feel supported and fundamentally psychologically safe?	Has the student been able to grow between surveys through the semester?	Throughout the semester, was there a time that stuck out to your scholar that you remember a staff member going above and beyond to help your scholar to meet your goal?
<b>Frequency</b>	48 hours after first school tour	Within seven days after first day of school	By third week of school	Within 7 days after first report card	Within final two weeks of semester	48–72 hours after last day of school
<b>Audience</b>	Families	Scholars and families	Educators and scholars	Educators, families, and scholars	Educators and scholars	Educators, families, and scholars

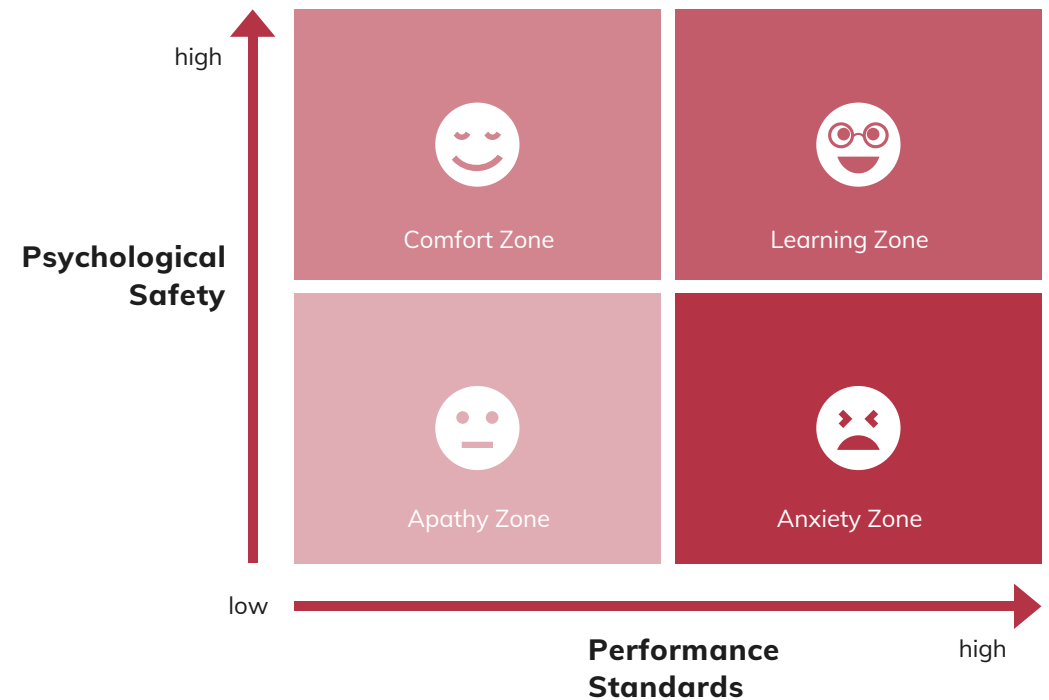


# Psychological Safety and Achievement

## Complementary Priorities

While psychological safety is all about building the cooperation and security through which people feel safe to speak their minds and experiences—free from structured judgment and bias—it is still important to set clear expectations for student achievement in psychologically-safe school environments.

Often when adults coach scholars with no-nonsense nurturing without establishing psychological safety, they may come across as condescending or act on implicit biases they hold. However, failing to hold students to high performance standards in a safe environment passes up the opportunity to build truly constructive relationships between instructors and scholars.



A large, solid red abstract shape on the left side of the slide, resembling a stylized profile or a splash of paint.

# Thank you.

Charles Wesley Jones' serves as the middle school director for Brooklyn Laboratory Charter Schools. His experiences range from creating advocacy programs for historically marginalized communities of color, to building career development curriculums for first-generation college students, to managing the operations experience and revenue of the world's most intriguing startups! Charles' work exemplifies a passion for communication and creating space for equity, resulting in human-centered design content, informed instruction, and restorative decision-making that inspires the best in others. His ultimate goal is ending racism by creating psychologically safe environments for stakeholders to achieve their goals in amplifying racial consciousness and belonging.

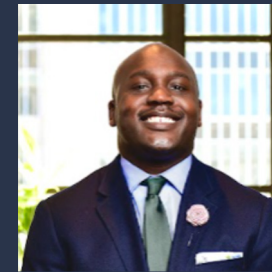
In 2021, Charles obtained his Masters of Science (in Media Advocacy) from Northeastern University, an offering that diversifies his ability to design, coach, and dissect equity systems influenced by everyday media and perspective. Originally a native of North Carolina, and proud Alumni of North Carolina A&T State University, Charles can be found spending his free time with his son, where they often explore the impacts of HBCUs, Social Justice, and their family's legacy.

## LEADERSHIP SPOTLIGHT



 Learn more about [Brooklyn Laboratory Charter Schools](#) and the [Educating All Learners Alliance](#)

“ Oftentimes, we think about academics and culture as being two siloed, different things.”



**Charles (Chuck) Jones**  
Middle School Director  
*Brooklyn Laboratory Charter Schools*



Dave Stuart Jr.

# **Transforming School Culture:**

Five Key Beliefs to  
Motivate Students



# Overview

Pre-pandemic there was **increasing lack of motivation** from students as they continued their education past the 5th grade. The pandemic has added to this motivation fatigue and it has also impacted the motivation of teachers.

In order to remedy this, teachers and leaders need a **language for discussing the fundamental dynamics of classroom motivation**. Ideally, this language would suggest avenues for both analyzing and acting on issues of student motivation, thus allowing for a renewed sense of agency amongst teachers and purpose amongst learners.

**This is what the five key beliefs methodology offers:** a way of understanding, analyzing, discussing, and doing something about the various motivational hurdles that face students and teachers in Fall 2021.

# Challenge

## Motivation Fatigue and Micromanagement

There is not a context of higher leverage in a school than the classroom.

The difficulty here is that **the classroom is a complex space**. No teacher can fully manage all the variables in a room. Many variables are invisible; many others are outside of the teacher's control.

The good news is that micromanaging the classroom context isn't required for creating a space that cultivates student motivation. Through learning about and focusing on five key beliefs beneath motivated student behavior, **teachers can grow in their mastery of classroom motivational dynamics**. The end result of this work is teachers feeling empowered to efficiently, sustainably produce life-giving learning spaces for all students.

**How might we empower teachers with the knowledge and practices necessary for mastering classroom motivational dynamics—and help them unleash students' intrinsic motivation?**



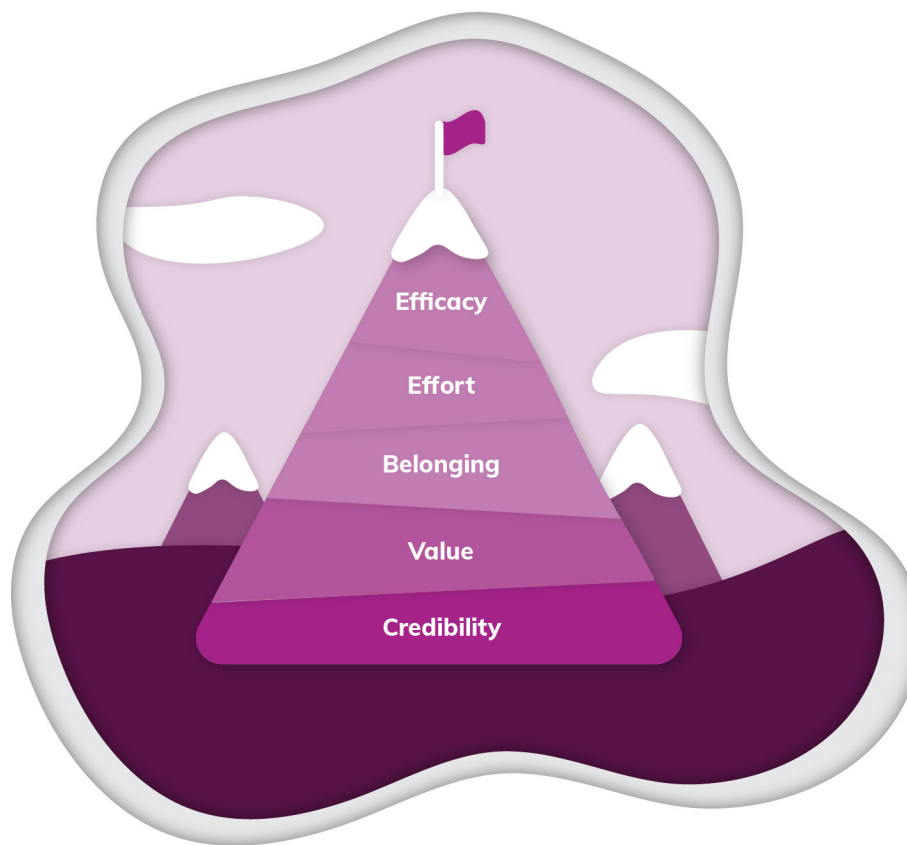
# Solution

## Key Beliefs that Impact Motivation to Learn

**Technically, learning behaviors can be coerced...but you can't coerce care.** For students to grow—and to enjoy growing—we need to go to the heart.

The heart of each scholar has within it five key beliefs (or questions, or fears, or unbeliefs) about a given learning situation: credibility, value, belonging, effort, and efficacy.

We'll look at each belief in turn, but before we do that, don't miss the reality that **these beliefs are malleable, for better or worse.** It's possible for teachers to move these beliefs positively or negatively.



**Educators can influence student beliefs through both analysis and action:**



### Analysis

Understanding what is happening in the motivational layer of a classroom is a critical first step to teacher empowerment. When you understand your students' current beliefs in each of these areas, you can determine the best steps for moving forward.



### Action

Certain interventions have been demonstrated as significant levers for influencing these beliefs. We'll describe some useful interventions on the next few slides.



# Credibility

## In the heart of a scholar, credibility sounds like:

“My teacher is good at her job.” “He knows what he’s doing.”  
“She can make a difference for me.” “He cares.”

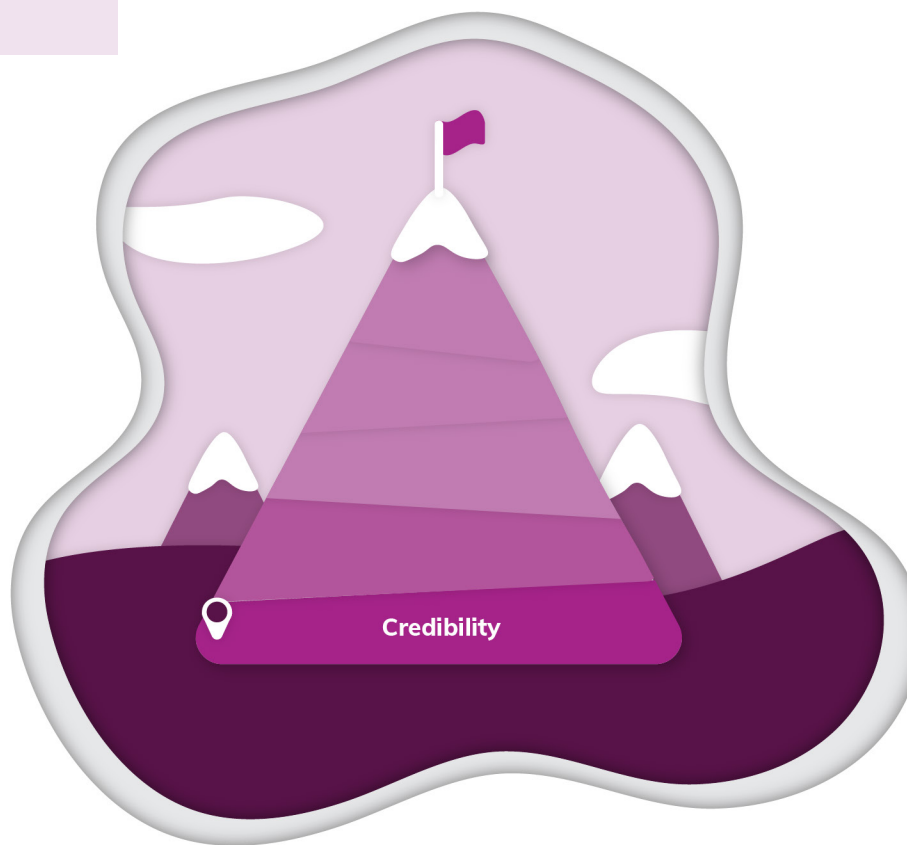
## What it is:

Teachers cultivate credibility by demonstrating Care, Competence, and Passion. This “CCP of Credibility” is a helpful mental shorthand.

## What it is not:

Credibility is not about popularity or favoritism. There can be only a finite number of popular or favorite teachers, but 100% of a faculty can be credible.

While credibility is especially malleable on the first days of class, it’s not impossible to improve at any point in the year. Hope is never lost.



## Try this strategy:

- Teacher prints list of student names on a single sheet of paper and places this list on a clipboard.
- Teacher attempts to make every child on the list feel valued, known, and respected.
- Teacher keeps track as these attempts are made; attempts are brief “moments”—30 to 60 seconds, before or after or during independent work time.

Learn more at  
[www.davestuartjr.com/credibility](http://www.davestuartjr.com/credibility)



# Value

## In the heart of a scholar, value sounds like:

“This work matters to me.” “This is important.”

“This is interesting.” “This will pay off.” “This is meaningful.”

## What it is:

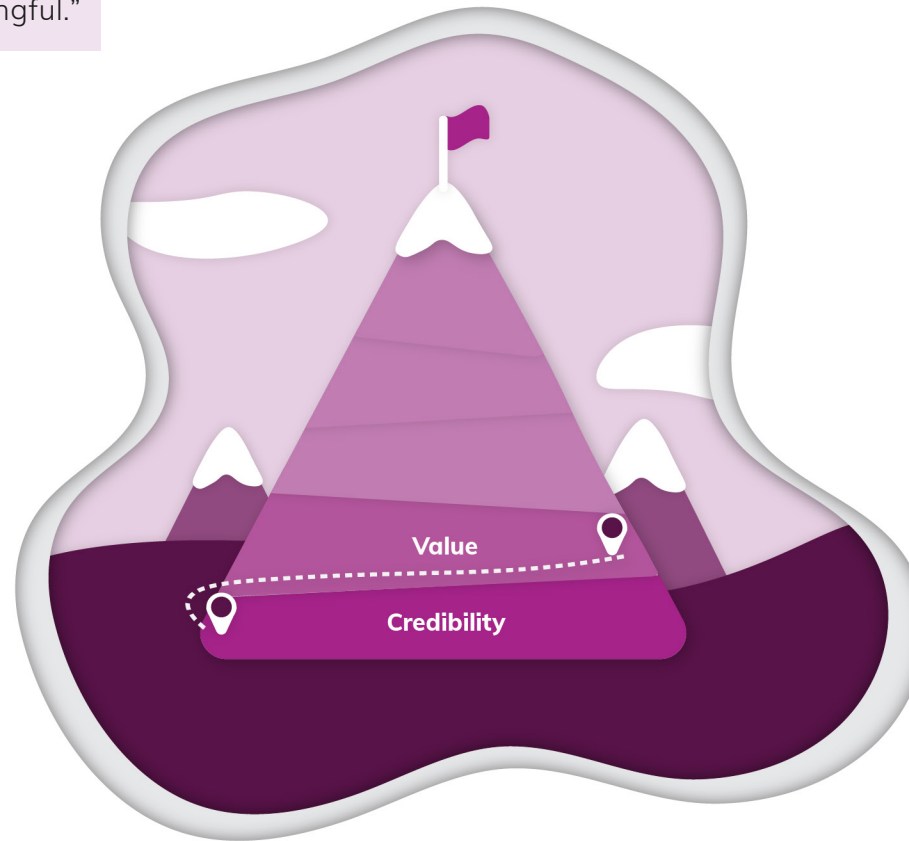
In a classroom or school, value is shaped two ways:

1. By credible adults;
2. By individual students.

Students can arrive at value through myriad pathways.

## What it is not:

Value isn't arrived at *just* through relevance, or *just* through choice, or *just* through pro-social purpose, or *just* through utility (e.g., “When will I use this in real life?”). One-dimensionalizing value is a common way teachers underleverage this belief.



## Try this strategy:

- UVA researcher Chris Hulleman has demonstrated the effectiveness of an intervention called “Build Connections.”
- He periodically asks students to brainstorm connections between content learning in class and things they value outside of class.

Learn more at [www.davestuartjr.com/value](http://www.davestuartjr.com/value)



# Belonging

## In the heart of a scholar, belonging sounds like:

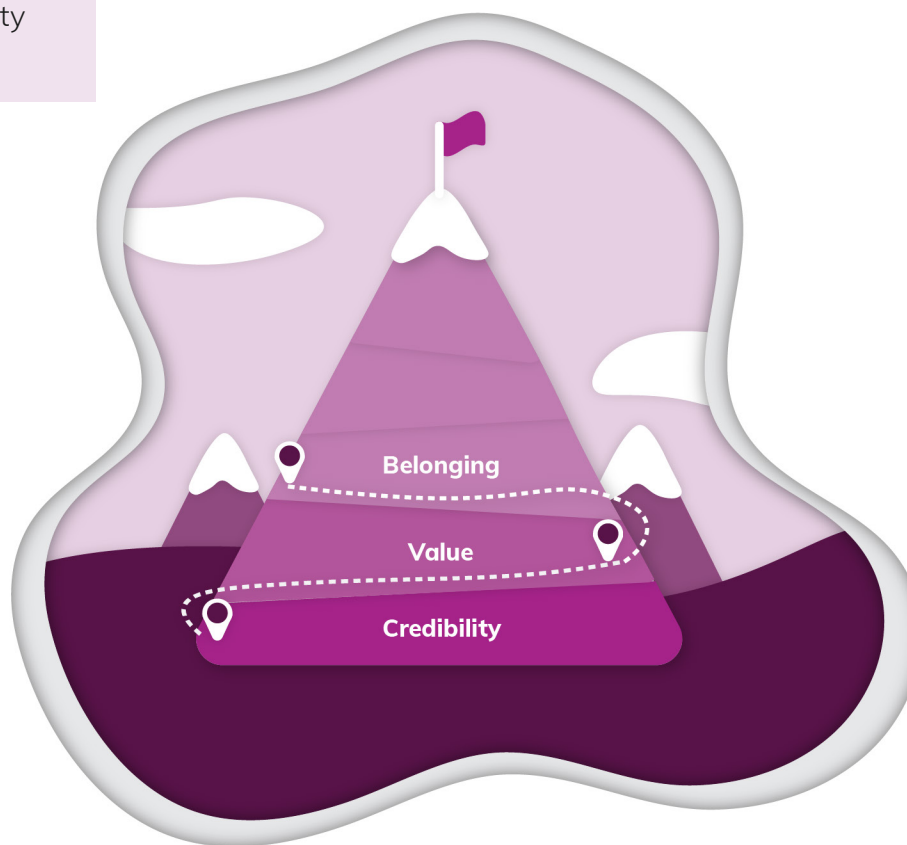
“People like me do work like this.” “I belong here – in this class, in this school.” “I fit in this disciplinary community doing disciplinary things.”

## What it is:

Belonging is what happens when learners sense a snug fit between their sense of self—their identity—and a given academic context.

## What it is not:

Like all the beliefs, belonging is affected not just by a given learning space but also by what is currently happening in that space. For example, it’s not uncommon for a learner to exhibit a strong sense of belonging during a debate in science class, but a low sense of belonging when taking notes on an interactive lecture.



## Try these strategies:

- Track moments of genuine connection.
- Incorporate birthday buddies.
- Plan instructional examples that are both diverse and inclusive.
- Refer to students as scholars rather than kids.

🔗 Learn more at [www.davestuartjr.com/belonging](http://www.davestuartjr.com/belonging)



# Effort

## In the heart of a scholar, effort sounds like:

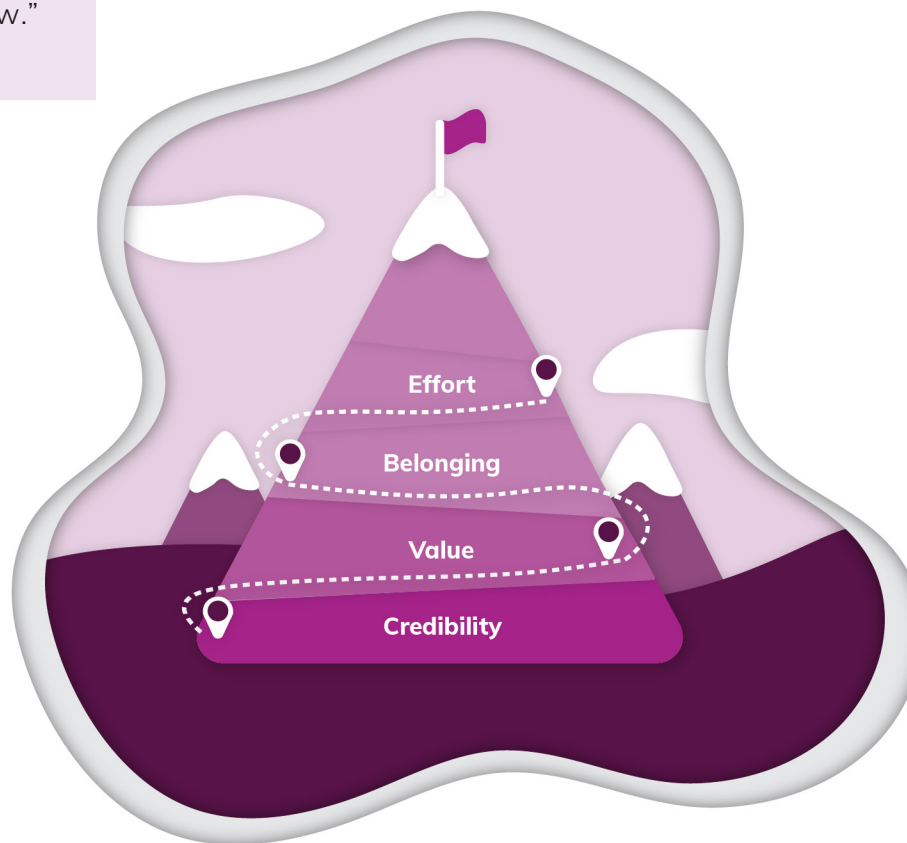
“I’ve got lots of room to grow.” “If I work at this, I can get better at it.” “Challenges are chances to grow.” “I’m a beginner, and that’s good news.”

## What it is:

Effort is commonly referred to as “growth mindset.” It’s the idea that I’ve got room to grow in a given area and my effort will affect whether or not that growth occurs.

## What it is not:

Effort is often oversimplified. For example, “praise the process, not the person” is a common saying linked with growth mindset. The trouble is that when a student’s process is ineffective, it should not be praised in the same way that effective student effort is praised. What students want is for their effort to pay off—for it to produce results. Learners don’t want a consolation prize, they want progress.



## Try these strategies:

- Explicitly teach and model effective learning behaviors and strategies.
- Praise effective effort when they see it.
- Share examples of ineffective effort in their own lives.

Learn more at [www.davestuartjr.com/effort](http://www.davestuartjr.com/effort)



# Efficacy

## In the heart of a scholar, efficacy sounds like:

“I know what success looks like in this situation.”

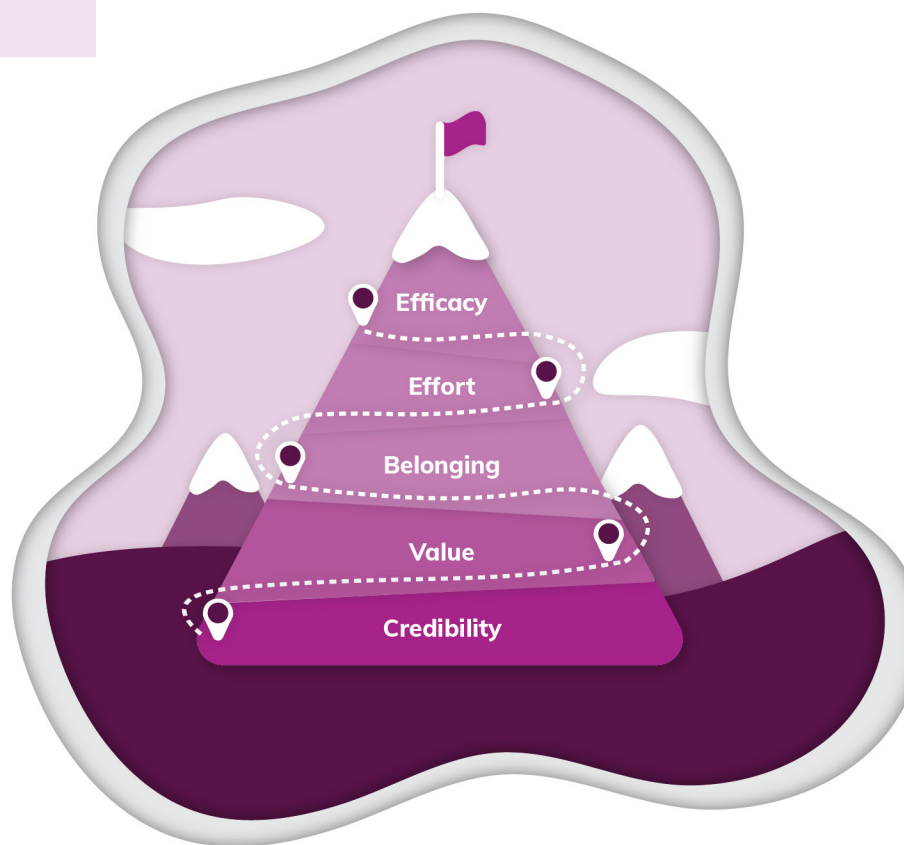
“I can succeed at this.”

## What it is:

Efficacy is best cultivated through success itself. This is why scaffolding is so important in every classroom. People like to do things that they think will be successful doing.

## What it is not:

It's best to think of efficacy not as empty telling students they can succeed at something, but rather breaking success down into its smallest components. For example, if you're teaching a small child to tie their shoes, you don't build efficacy by telling them they can succeed. You build efficacy by showing them first how to make the loop, then how to do the swoop, and so on.



## Try these strategies:

- Define success, clearly and often.
- Model success, especially by working through difficulty.
- Scaffold for success—start small and make challenges progressively harder as the year advances.

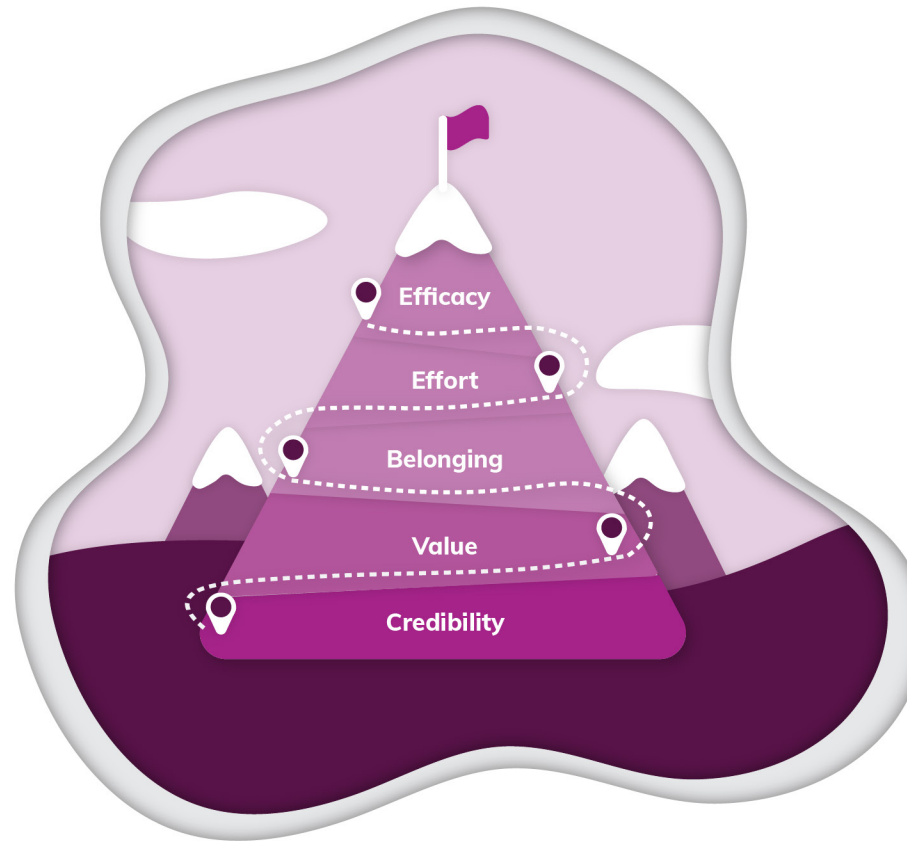
Learn more at [www.davestuartjr.com/efficacy](http://www.davestuartjr.com/efficacy)





# Creating Classroom Cultures

The goal here – the top of the mountain – is a classroom culture in which learners with diverse and unique needs and interests thrive. With the beliefs, we wisely start with the heart.




## Remember:

- All five beliefs are malleable.
- All five are influenced by the context you shape as a teacher.
- All enhance the joy and life-giving nature of a learning experience.



# Student Motivation and the Spectrum of Belief



	<b>Belief</b>	<b>Questioning</b>	<b>Fear</b>	<b>Unbelief</b>
<b>Credibility</b>	My teacher/leader is capable, caring, and passionate.	Is my teacher/leader capable, caring, and passionate?	What if my teacher/leader doesn't care or is incapable?	My teacher/leader is incapable, uncaring, and apathetic.
<b>Value</b>	My work matters. It means something. It'll help me.	Does my work matter? Will it help me? Is there meaning here?	What if this is pointless? What if I'm wasting my time?	My work is pointless. It makes no difference. No one cares.
<b>Belonging</b>	I fit here. My struggles are normal. People like me do work like this.	Do I fit here? Am I the only one struggling?	Do these people know how badly I fit in? How below-the-norm my abilities are?	I don't fit here. My struggles are unique to me. People with my identity don't do work like this.
<b>Effort</b>	I know the kind of effort that pays off. If I put that effort in, I'll become better and stronger.	Gosh, I'm working hard. Is this going to pay off?	What if no matter how hard I try, I won't improve? What if some people have it, but I don't?	I've seen that effort doesn't pay. It's talent that matters. No matter how hard I try, it won't get better.
<b>Efficacy</b>	I can succeed at this.	Can I succeed at this?	What if I fail?	I can't succeed at this.



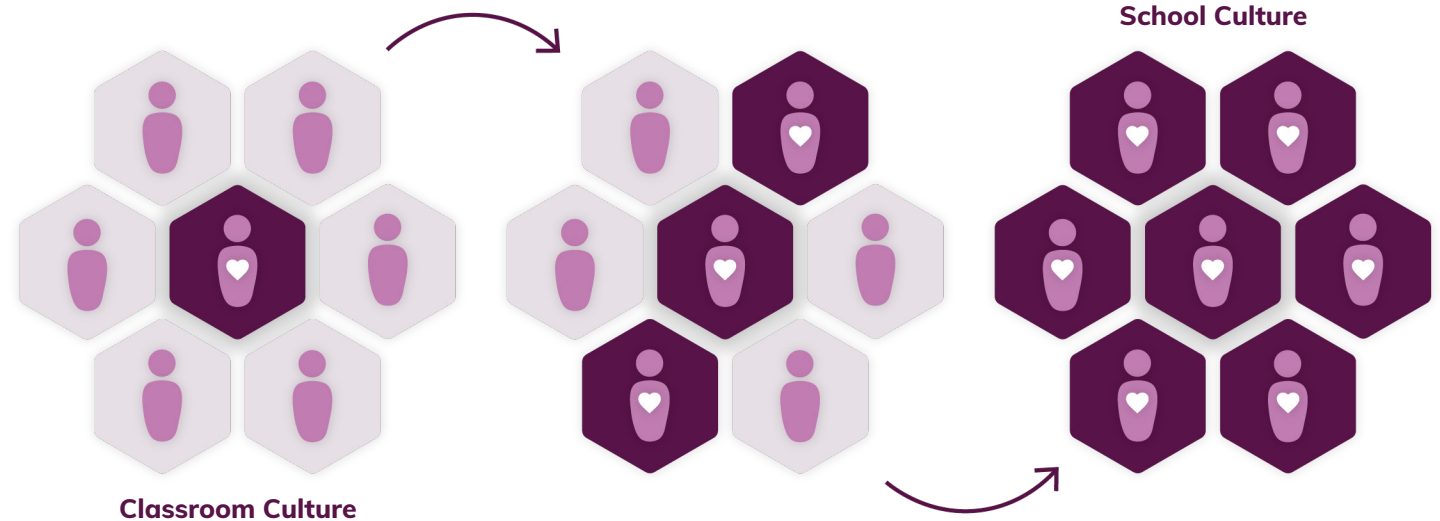
# From Classroom Culture to School Culture

The goal here—the top of the mountain—is a classroom culture **and ultimately a school culture** in which learners with diverse and unique needs and interests thrive. With the beliefs, we wisely start with the heart.

Fall 2021 is a moment of truth for those of us who believe in schools. Now is the time when our students and families will look to us to create the conditions for care-driven learning. Can we make the case, in all the signals we send, that school is a worthwhile and beautiful and emancipatory place?

The research is clear: we can. Through understanding and creating beliefs-rich learning spaces, we can create thriving cultures where learning is the best thing in the world.

It's up to us. And you know what the good news is? We've got this.



## Remember:

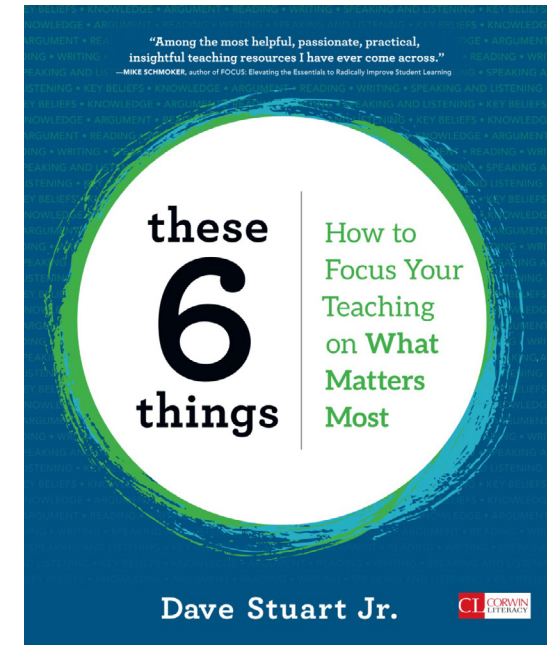
- All five beliefs are malleable.
- All five are influenced by the context you shape as a teacher.
- All enhance the joy and life-giving nature of a learning experience.



# Thank you.

Dave Stuart Jr. is a husband, father, and high school teacher who writes about education. He reads extensively across the disciplines so that he can create uniquely satisfying professional development experiences for his colleagues around the world. His mission is to encourage and equip educators on the journey to long-term flourishing and professional excellence.

Learn more about Dave's work by visiting him at [www.davestuartjr.com](http://www.davestuartjr.com), subscribing to his free newsletter at [www.davestuartjr.com/newsletter](http://www.davestuartjr.com/newsletter), or getting his bestselling book *These 6 Things: How to Focus Your Teaching on What Matters Most*.



## LEADERSHIP SPOTLIGHT

“ **Our students need authentically inclusive school communities that work together to meet the unique needs of all learners.**

We must work collectively to bring their voices to the table, tailor instruction to meet the needs of each learner, and reinforce behaviors that embrace a growth mindset for all. Our vision is that students with disabilities, along with their peers, get back on track to graduate from school ready to thrive and empowered to take on the world.”



**Sarah Sandelius**  
Founder  
The Ability Challenge

[!\[\]\(74d4806277d7e73349d8e8c0897931e9\_img.jpg\) Learn more about The Ability Challenge](#)



Chris Bostock

# Re-establishing an Ethic of Excellence in Schools



*Bostock Education Consulting*

# Overview

An “ethic of excellence” occurs when schools challenge students by setting clear expectations for high-quality student work and support students as they try to meet those expectations. As adults and students return to in-person learning after working and learning from home, it is critical for schools to re-establish an ethic of excellence as a cornerstone of their school culture. An ethic of excellence can help to identify and address the shortcomings of virtual learning during the pandemic and get everyone on the same page about what high-quality work looks like.

Developing an ethic of excellence requires that adults at school understand key principles as well as implement a series of technical interventions. By preparing adults at school, engaging families, and motivating students, schools can nurture an ethic of excellence and support their students in producing high-quality work.

# Challenge

## Disengagement and Learning Loss

Schools planning to reopen their campuses this coming academic year have much to contend with. During the COVID-19 global pandemic, schools struggled to adapt their systems and practices to a changing reality.

In many cases, school communities disengaged from education as they attempted to cope with emotional trauma, physical illness, changing family circumstances, and a dearth of social supports in the absence of in-person school.

Virtual instruction was a largely ineffective stopgap when compared to traditional instruction. Many students came to school already behind in their learning, and it is probably worse now. 50% of students have never learned in the building, and the same is true of first and second-year teachers. Experienced teachers and upper-class students are going to be rusty.

**In the coming school year, how might we engage staff, students, and families in cultivating the principles and technical practices necessary to achieve excellent student work?**





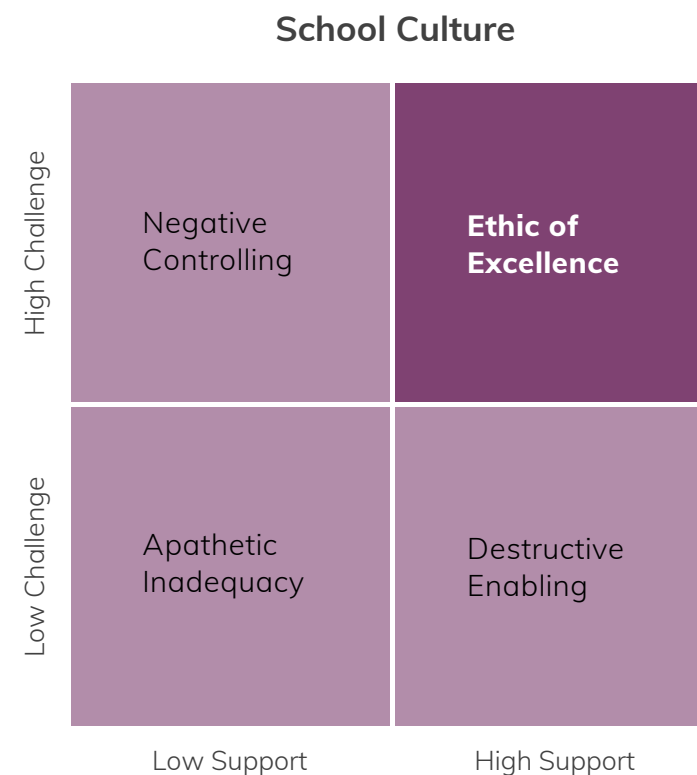
# Solution

## An “Ethic of Excellence”

A school culture emerges from patterns of behavior that are unique to a specific community. **As schools emerge from remote teaching and learning, now is the time to re-establish a school culture centered around what author Ron Berger calls an “ethic of excellence.”** This means challenging students by setting clear expectations for high-quality student work, and supporting students as they try to meet those expectations. It is up to school leaders to ensure that the whole school community understands what excellence looks like and believes that excellence is a worthy goal that all students can attain.

Re-establishing an ethic of excellence requires the following:

- A commitment to a set of principles that underlie an ethic of excellence on the parts of school leaders, staff, students, and families
- A set of technical practices that prepare educators for implementing excellence during the year ahead, and hold educators and students accountable for high-quality work
- Strategies to ensure that adults at school are committed and prepared for the work, families are invested, and students are motivated



# Ethic of Excellence: Guiding Principles

## **Every student is capable of high-quality work.**

Teacher expectations are the gateway to student outcomes: if teachers believe that all students can achieve at high levels, they are more likely to uphold an ethic of excellence. Diversity and inclusion work is critical here because schools are systems comprised of adults with beliefs that impact how we treat students.

## **Confidence comes through accomplishment.**

Students gain confidence through a series of accomplishments. By setting a high bar and supporting students in meeting it, they prove to themselves that they are capable and build their confidence.

## **Show and tell.**

Students and teachers need clarity about what is expected of them. In order to produce high-quality work, they need relevant examples in addition to messaging about the importance of excellence.

## **Teach to the top.**

Don't lower the bar or teach to the middle: pitch the rigor of your lesson to the level of the highest-performing student in the classroom. By setting a high standard and coaching kids to that point, educators can support students who are not able to reach the bar independently without lowering it for everybody.

## **Celebrate and advertise.**

Studies show that students who know that their work is going to be put on display are going to put more effort into it than if the expectation is that it will be put in a drawer or thrown out. Normalize multi-draft, genuinely impressive work as the standard.

## **Provide feedback early and often.**

Kids lose motivation and stop working hard when there is too big of a gap between submitting the work and getting feedback. Regular, timely, and actionable feedback allows them to course correct without losing steam.

## **Robust community support.**

While resources are finite, it is critical to ensure that schools have foundational supports in place. We must connect students and families to resources that mitigate the impact of factors like unemployment, housing, and food insecurity on their ability to learn—and follow up to make sure they have accessed these resources.



# Pathway to an Ethic of Excellence

## Implementation Phases



### Prepare adults at school

Align educators on what excellence looks like and prepare for helping students achieve it.

- ✓ Establish high standards for school culture
- ✓ Identify student needs
- ✓ Be ready to respond



### Engage families

Get families on board with school expectations for excellence.

- ✓ Build trust and enlist support



### Motivate students

Create the conditions for students to achieve excellence through effort.

- ✓ Plant seeds for a student culture of excellence



# Prepare Adults at School

## Establish High Expectations for School Culture



**An ethic of excellence starts at school.** Virtual instruction was largely ineffective and exacerbated existing inequities in our system, where even high-impact teachers struggled to adjust to a new modality of teaching. This fall, we need to reestablish expectations for excellence among educators, identify student needs, and have a plan to meet student needs when they return to the classroom.

- |                              |  |
|------------------------------|--|
| <b>PLAN</b>                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Set and communicate a Code of Conduct that has explicit parallels to real-world shared community norms (e.g., professional office space, airport, church, etc.). Train teachers on what these expectations mean.</li></ul>   |
| <b>LAUNCH</b>                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Train staff members on restorative practices and teach explicit trust-building techniques to ensure students feel seen and cared for by all staff.</li></ul>   |
| <b>MONITOR &amp; RESPOND</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Establish monitoring structures that allow for clear lines of sight into school culture.</li><li>Set goals anchored in equity, such as reducing the number of out of school suspensions, to ensure that we don't re-exclude students.</li><li>Respond to gaps in culture with a combination of high expectations and high support.</li></ul> |

### Four Year Reading Benchmarks (50<sup>th</sup>/90<sup>th</sup> Percentiles)

**1050L**    **9<sup>th</sup> Grade EOY Goals**  
Lexile Org.: 1205L–1520L  
KIPP Lexile Target: 1050L–1260L

**1150L**    **10<sup>th</sup> Grade EOY Goals**  
Lexile Org.: 1295L–1610L  
KIPP Lexile Target: 1150L–1335L

**1250L**    **9<sup>th</sup> Grade EOY Goals**  
Lexile Org.: 1295L–1610L  
KIPP Lexile Target: 1250L–1385L

**1350L**    **9<sup>th</sup> Grade EOY Goals**  
Lexile Org.: 1295L–1610L  
KIPP Lexile Target: 1250L–1485L



# Prepare Adults at School

## Identify Student Needs



**An ethic of excellence starts at school.** Virtual instruction was largely ineffective and exacerbated existing inequities in our system, where even high-impact teachers struggled to adjust to a new modality of teaching. This fall, we need to reestablish expectations for excellence among educators, identify student needs, and have a plan to meet student needs when they return to the classroom.

---

### PLAN

- Set clear grade-level benchmarks for student proficiency.

---

### LAUNCH

- Test every student using a combination of universal screeners and knowledge-based assessments on prior year's material.

---

### MONITOR & RESPOND

- Respond to data from universal screeners by ensuring students have access to appropriate reading and math interventions that supplement existing, grade-level curricula.
- Establish a strong intervention plan, including daily reading instruction. Create a daily window for small-group re-teaching.

### Code of Conduct

In this school we:

- Listen to each other's ideas.
- Care for each other.
- Push ourselves to think deeply.



# Prepare Adults at School

## Be Ready to Respond



**An ethic of excellence starts at school.** Virtual instruction was largely ineffective and exacerbated existing inequities in our system, where even high-impact teachers struggled to adjust to a new modality of teaching. This fall, we need to reestablish expectations for excellence among educators, identify student needs, and have a plan to meet student needs when they return to the classroom.

<b>PLAN</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Use the summer to shift to a knowledge-rich, college preparatory curriculum if one does not exist already.</li></ul>
<b>LAUNCH</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Train teachers on effective curriculum implementation and set up daily/weekly coaching reports (especially for new teachers who have only taught virtually).</li></ul>
<b>MONITOR &amp; RESPOND</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Observe implementation of the curriculum, daily, to ensure that students are succeeding on grade-level work.</li><li>• Support teachers with professional learning opportunities to support with implementation, including regularly reviewing student work as a department and making plans to re-teach.</li></ul>



# Engage Families

## Build Trust and Enlist Support



**Schools must repair the social bonds with their communities that were frayed during the pandemic.** Families who do not trust schools or are skeptical of our work will not be honest about the needs of their children. Family support is critical to setting high expectations for students.

### PLAN

- Make a plan to restart home visits from vaccinated team members. This has the benefit of a 100% denominator, in that schools can visit every student at home.
- Build a list of ready-made interventions for the most common anticipated community needs, including food banks, vaccination centers, and more.

### LAUNCH

- Go meet with students and their families in their homes before the year starts.
- Hold back-to-school events to reintroduce faculty, curriculum, and school expectations.
- Give families a concrete, recurring ask to create a pretext for regular communication (i.e., independent reading assignments; support with weekly math review homework; etc.)
- Name explicitly that the solution to lost learning time is more learning time, and that the school will need their help in closing the lost ground from last year: regular attendance, proactive outreach, homework completion, and monitoring grades.

### MONITOR & RESPOND

- Work with the district, social work team, and other partners to gather holistic wellness data for students and families.
- Use the data to create a heat map of recovery in the school community.

**Student Well-Being Index: Secondary (6<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup>)**

STUDENT NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

**DIRECTIONS:**  
Below is a survey that is going to ask you how you have been doing. For each question, please indicate the number that matches your thoughts, feelings or actions in the last week. Your response can range from 1 (None of the Time) to 5 (All of the Time). There are no right or wrong answers here.

In the past week...	None of the Time	Some of the Time	Often	All of the Time
	1	2	3	4
1. I've been active				
2. I've been thinking clearly				
3. I've been hopeful about the future				
4. I've been feeling heard by others				
5. I've been waking up feeling rested				
6. I've been getting along well with others				
7. I've been relaxed				
8. I've been feeling accepted for who I am (and not just the surface, not graded)				
9. I've been dealing with problems well				
10. I've been engaged in my daily activities				
11. I've been feeling cared about by others				
12. I've been in a good mood				

**Student Well-Being Index: Elementary (3<sup>rd</sup>-5<sup>th</sup>)**

STUDENT NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

**DIRECTIONS:**  
Below is a survey that is going to ask you how you have been doing. For each question, please choose the number that matches your feelings or actions in the last week. Your response can range from 1 (None of the Time) to 5 (All of the Time). There are no right or wrong answers here.

In the past week...	None of the Time	Some of the Time	Often	All of the Time
	1	2	3	4
1. I've been eating healthy foods				
2. I've been active				
3. I've been interested in my daily activities				
4. I've been getting enough sleep				
5. I've been in a good mood				
6. I've been feeling cared about by others				

**Turnaround for Children's Student Well-Being Index** is a free tool for assessing student well-being. You can access the Index [here](#).



# Motivate Students

## Plant Seeds for a Student Culture of Excellence



**Students who are motivated to work hard embody an ethic of excellence.** Motivating students to put forth effort towards meeting high expectations requires that adults create the conditions for students to succeed through a student culture that is safe, emphasizes effort, and celebrates excellence.

### PLAN

- Create the conditions for thriving, where students feel physically and emotionally safe. Adults at school should model predictability and consistently upheld standards of behaviors among themselves and among students. Discourage students laughing at each other, for example.

### LAUNCH

- Teach students about a growth mindset, how it manifests in school and in life, and what it sounds and feels like. Students are not bad at math or good at math: they can develop new skills and learn new things by putting in effort.

### MONITOR & RESPOND

- Communicate and celebrate excellence. Ensure students understand and have examples of high-quality work to emulate and make student work public regularly.

### Building Blocks of Student Culture





# Potential Limitations and Challenges

## **Establishing an ethic of excellence takes time.**

If we think of school culture as a set of repeated behaviors over time, it's clear that time and repetition are key ingredients. Establishing what high-quality lessons and high-quality student work looks like at the beginning of the year is not enough. It takes time, vigilance, and dedicated feedback.

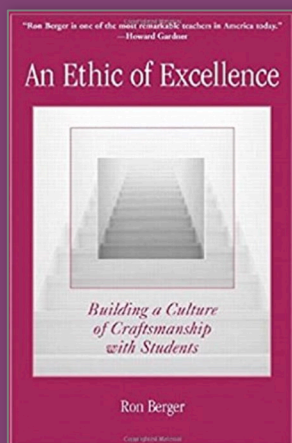
## **Implementation emphasis is dependent on school context.**

The ways that a school implements an ethic of excellence over the course of the year will depend on their unique context and community. A school with only a handful of new teachers might not require as much coaching support as a school with a higher degree of staff turnover.

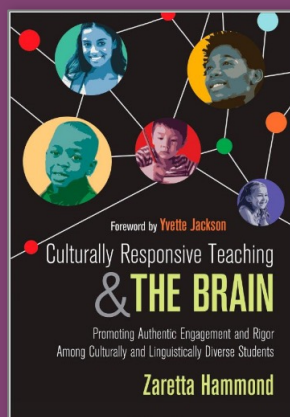


# Resources

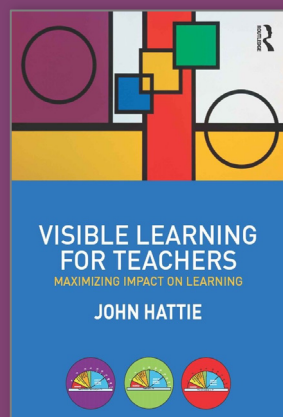
The following resources have contributed to developing the ethic of excellence framework:



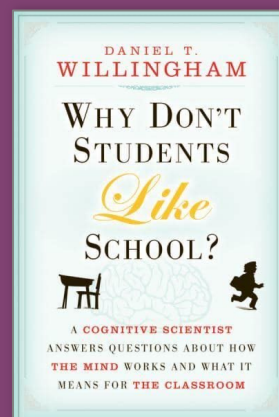
An Ethic of Excellence: Building a Culture of Craftsmanship with Students  
by Ron Berger



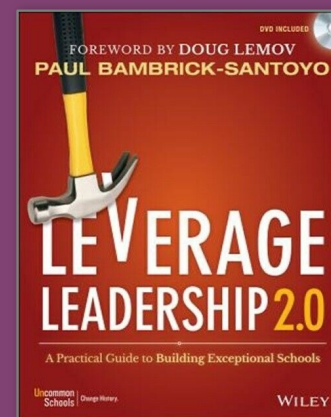
Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain  
by Zaretta Hammond



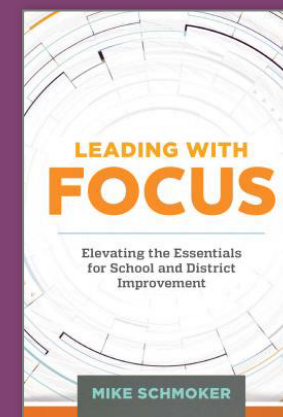
Visible Learning for Teachers  
by John Hattie



Why Don't Students Like School?  
by Daniel T. Willingham



Leverage Leadership 2.0  
by Paul Bambrick-Santoyo



Leading with Focus: Elevating the Essentials for School and District Improvement  
by Mike Schmoker



# Thank you.

Chris Bostock is the Managing Director of High Schools for KIPP New Orleans Schools. Prior KIPP New Orleans, he served as the Director of High School Leadership for the KIPP Foundation. Prior to that, he was principal of Achievement First Amistad High School, as well as Achievement First Brooklyn High School.

Learn more about Chris and continue the discussion by visiting him at <https://www.linkedin.com/in/chbostock/>.

## LEADERSHIP SPOTLIGHT



 Learn more about [Brooklyn Laboratory Charter Schools](#) and the [Educating All Learners Alliance](#)

“Communicate as best as possible with both students and families all the changes that are coming.”



**Cecile Kidd**

Bursar  
Brooklyn Laboratory Charter Schools



Geoffrey E. Fenelus

# **Vision, Empathy, and Effort:** A Three-Step Process to Create a Thriving School Culture

# Overview

The challenges brought on by COVID-19 and the prospect of returning to entirely in-person education require a re-commitment to building a thriving school culture. **But school culture doesn't start with students, it starts with a strong and cohesive adult culture.**

Only once this adult culture is instantiated can the school communicate a shared vision of empathy, effort, and achievement to students and build a thriving culture.

# Challenge

## Win or Lose Mindset

Black and brown students and students from disadvantaged backgrounds frequently encounter the societal narrative that they're either going to make it or they're not. They might be less likely to view success as an ongoing process that requires sustained effort, even when they encounter setbacks.

As students return to school, they will be making implicit and explicit decisions about whether and how they belong. Without the proper school culture and support, students who don't meet standards of achievement can solidify a self perception (or identity) as someone who can't—or won't—succeed academically. Conversely, in a thriving school culture, students feel a sense of control over their own academic success and are driven to put in high effort regardless of where they land on an achievement metric.

**In light of pandemic-induced learning regression, how might we create an effort-driven school culture where students control their own academic success?**



# Solution

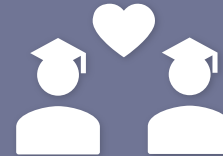
## A Three-Step Process

As students return to the classroom and schools' endeavor to build back their culture, there should be a deliberate effort to reconnect and reconsider the school's basic mission, vision, and values. Once this vision is articulated, schools can turn their focus to student culture, creating an empathetic and effort-driven classroom environment. These steps are intended to be completed sequentially, with each new phase building on the work of the previous one.



### Adult Culture

Clarify institutional and individual mission, values, and vision (MVV).



### Student Culture

Create an empathetic and effort-driven environment for students.



### Motivate students

Create the conditions for students to achieve excellence through effort.





# Adult Culture

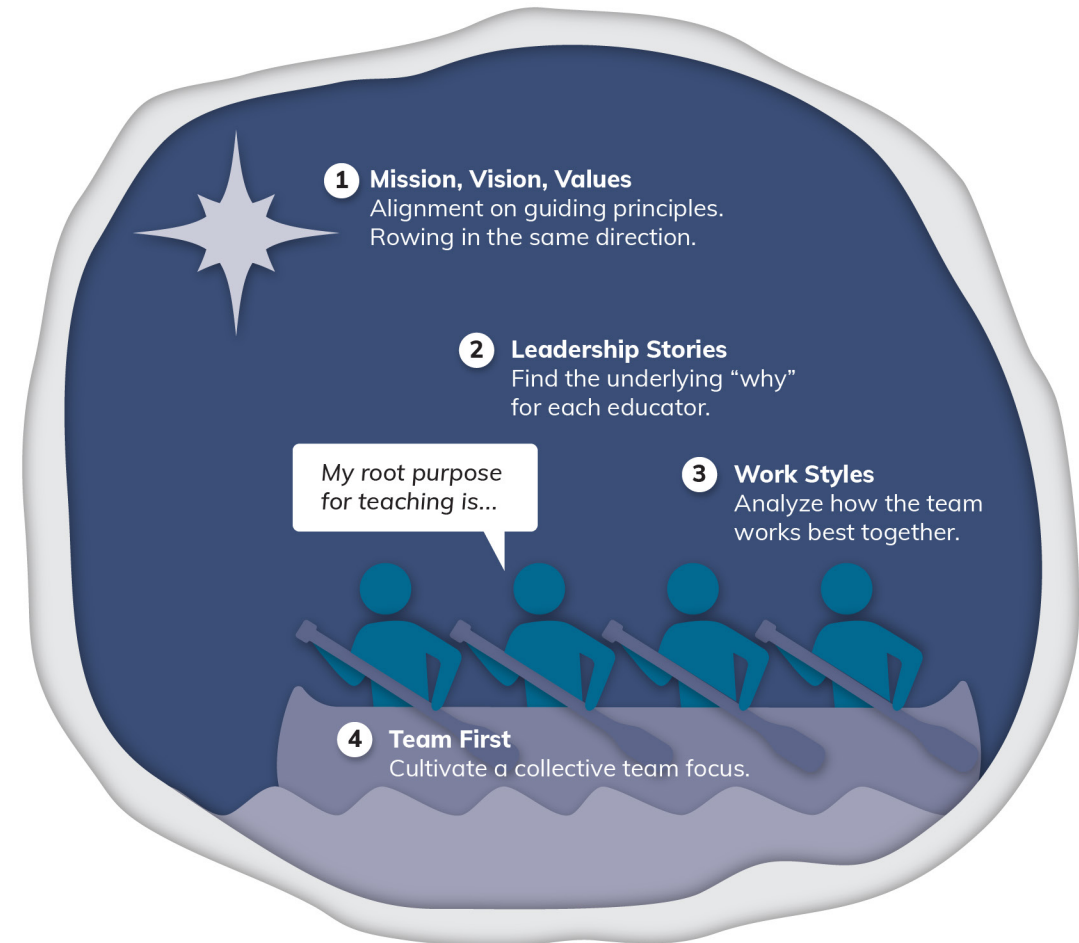
## Unity and Empathy



Creating a culture of adults who are empathetic and supportive of each other—and committed to common goals—is the first step to a thriving school culture.

There are four key variables for establishing a strong adult culture:

1. Mission, Vision, Values
2. Leadership Stories
3. Work Styles
4. Team First



# Adult Culture



## 1. Mission, Vision, Values



**Clarify and announce your mission, vision, and values.**

Ensure that all adults have knowledge and buy-in on the overarching goals of the school. This step is about creating consensus and clarity around the school's MVV.

Without MVV clarity and buy-in, schools will create dissonance between adults that will ultimately effect students.

## 2. Leadership Stories



**Encourage each staff member to articulate and refine their driving purpose through leadership stories.** Ask all adults to explore what drives them and talk through underlying motivations for what they do. Revisit these stories on a regular basis to get to progressively closer to the underlying “why” for each educator.

Create space for emotional vulnerability, which sets the stage for empathy between adults.

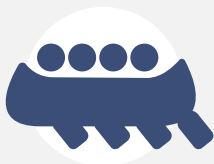
## 3. Work Styles



**Talk openly about your staff’s work styles and re-evaluate their strengths.** Take time to reflect on and discuss how educators work best and where their strengths and weaknesses lie. COVID-19 has upended how people work.

Make space for staff members to discuss areas of overlap where they collaborate.

## 4. Team First



**Rally the team to focus on the collective—emphasizing personal connections and shared goals.** Being an educator is emotional, strenuous work. Collectively, make sure that the adult team acknowledges this emotional labor and build time to be vulnerable and empathize with one another.

Make space for staff members to discuss and acknowledge the high stress of the past year-and-a-half.



# Adult Culture



## 1. Mission, Vision, Values



### Clarify and announce your mission, vision, and values.

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## Example Leadership Story

By asking your team to share their leadership stories repeatedly—maybe as frequently as every one to two weeks—you will hear their story evolve. Their sense of purpose will become clearer, and how they describe it will become more concise and impactful as their connection to that purpose deepens.

*“I teach because I think it’s important for kids to get an education. They need these skills to gain access to opportunity. I had a teacher who taught me the value of education, and I want to play that role for others.”*



*“I teach because my mother never learned to read, and I saw how that impacted her life.”*

These conversations help staff understand each other’s personal stories, life contexts, and motivation. By openly discussing what matters deeply, adults cultivate empathy and connection, and become invested in each other’s success.

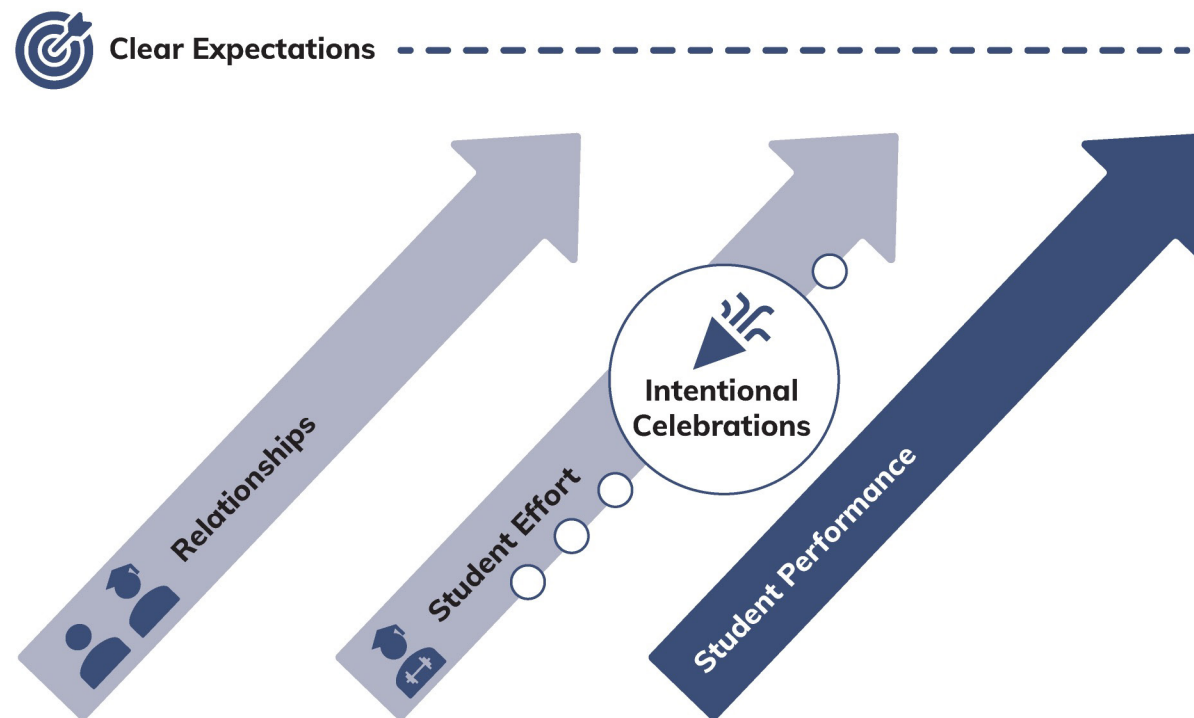


# Student Culture

## Respect, Dignity, and Effort



A rich student culture of love, respect, dignity, effort, and accountability becomes the fertile soil that brings students in and encourages them to re-engage with school after the global pandemic.



# Student Culture



## 1. Set Clear Expectations



**After a year of upheaval, educators owe students clear expectations.** In re-entering schools, educators need to take time to create strong tier one systems with flexibility and humility in mind. Strong tier one systems benefit all students. Once these systems are functioning well, then schools can drill down into the 10-20% of students for who tier one systems are insufficient and other interventions are needed.

## 2. Nurture Relationships



**To succeed as an educator, you need to develop relationships with your students.** Speaking and listening to students is crucial to understanding where they're coming from and the challenges that may get in the way of their success.

## 3. Emphasize Effort



**Over the long term, effort is a better indicator of success than achievement.** Especially as students return to the classroom, educators need to celebrate the effort that students put in and cultivate high effort behavior. Creating a culture around working hard gives students a sense of control over their success and achievement.

## 4. Celebrate with Intention



Students and families have shouldered an enormous burden over the past 18 months.

**Finding ways to celebrate students and families helps them feel appreciated and engaged in their education.**



# Student Culture



## Effort as a Pathway to Achievement

Discuss student effort as a metric of achievement and reward student work that demonstrates high effort. Create classroom practices like double-checking answers to homework and rewriting assignments to make them better. This teaches students to revisit their assignments repeatedly.

In the classroom, teachers should frame discussions of student work around effort and hold kids accountable for the level of effort in their work. This might look like teachers rewarding students for double checking their answer or revising their essay. It can also mean acknowledging and celebrating kids when they meet an effort milestone.

Many of the variables impacting our students' lives feel far beyond their control, but we can teach them to prioritize the level of effort they put forth as something they can always impact directly. We can reinforce the wins when the effort pays off and tie their successes to the efforts they've put forward. When an effort culture exists, students feel a sense of control over their success and are constantly striving to do better, instead of shooting for a singular marker of achievement.

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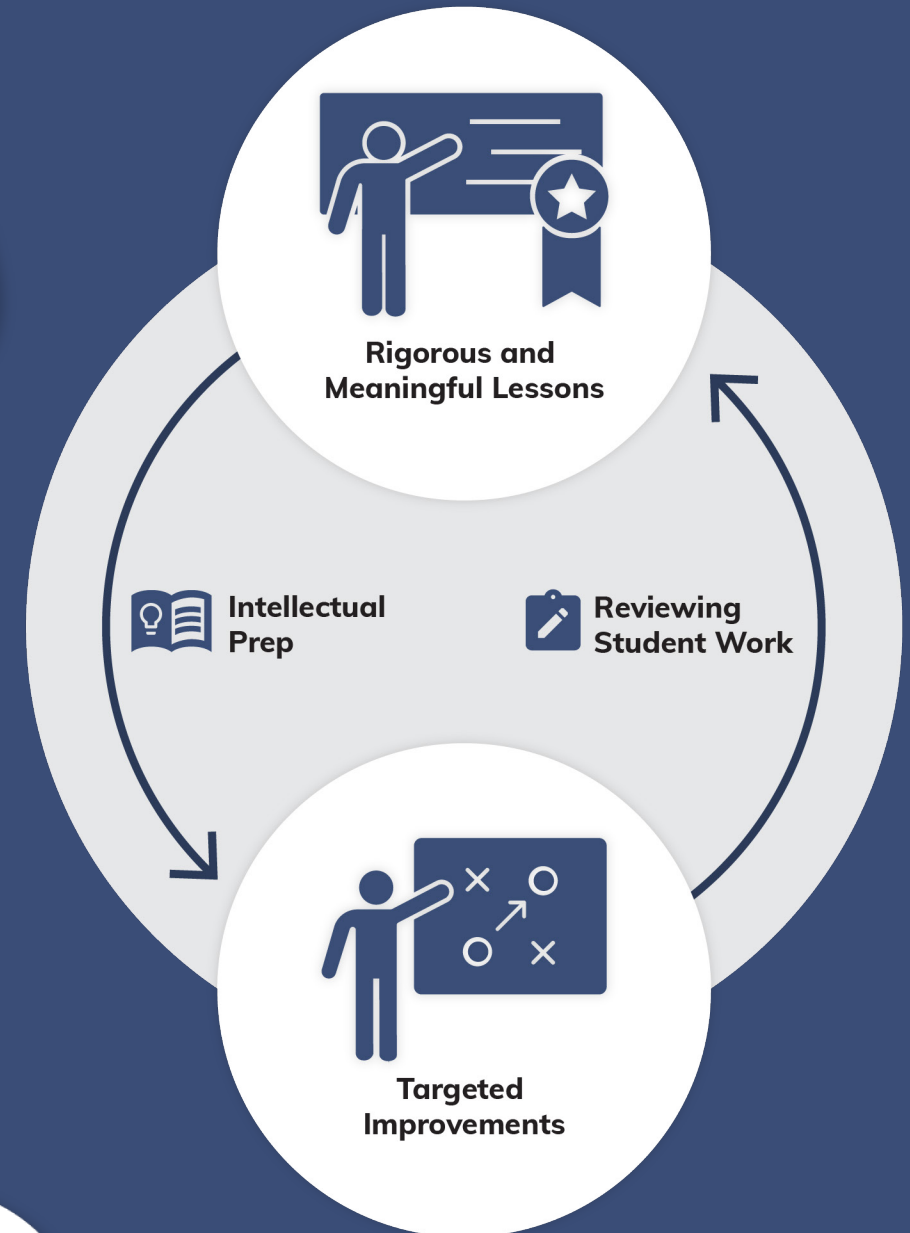
**Finding ways to celebrate students and families helps them feel appreciated and engaged in their education.**



# Achievement

## Thoughtfulness and Rigor

As a school, our number one priority is to ensure our kids are achieving academically and personally. As educators, we must create the conditions for great teaching and learning. Teachers must be able to consistently deliver meaningful and rigorous instruction on grade level lessons that push kids to be at grade level or above.



# Achievement



## 1. Intellectual Prep



Teachers need the time and resources to prepare their lessons. Preparing rigorous and thoughtful lessons allows educators to know their content, anticipate misunderstandings, and understand whether students are meeting their objectives.

Highly prepared lessons allow administrators to make more targeted and successful professional development interventions.

## 2. Reviewing Student Work



As administrators get further from the classroom, they also get further from the work being produced by students. Successful administrators need to ensure they continue to review the work students are producing, because it's extraordinarily telling. From student work, administrators get a close perspective on how students are performing and being evaluated.





# Achievement



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## Student Work as a Tool for Driving Effort Culture

There's enormous power in seeing what students are producing. By taking time to review student work, you not only see student outputs, but the ways those outputs are being evaluated by teachers. Looking at student work is also a time efficient way to see what's happening in the classroom. Administrators may only be able to observe one class a week, but they can review work from across the school in a matter of hours.

*"I see students are struggling with arithmetic on two- and three-digit numbers. I'm noticing a pattern that students are not showing their work before answering the question."*



*"Teachers need to push students to show their thinking, so we can know what specific concepts they're struggling with."*

Administrators taking 60-90 minutes twice a week to look systematically at student work can yield big results. It can help administrators to not get lost in macro-level achievement data and help them find targeted ways to improve teaching practices and student outcomes.



# Thank you.

Geoffrey E. Fenelus is the Founder and Executive Director of Promise Prep. Mr. Fenelus has served students in grades K-12 across all education sectors for 10 years. Throughout his career, he has worked as a teacher, dean, assistant principal, and turnaround principal in traditional, independent, and charter schools. Mr. Fenelus worked at one of the highest-performing charter school networks across the country, where he was a school leader and led a turnaround effort of a neighborhood school.

He is dedicated to increasing access to high-quality schools for all children and leads Promise Prep in service of that mission. He is a graduate of Relay Graduate School of Education's National Principals Academy Fellowship and holds a certification in Teaching Urban Adolescents with Disabilities from the New York State Department of Education, an M.S. in Education from Long Island University, and a B.A. in Economics from Wheaton College.

[Promise Prep's](#) mission is to ensure all students, regardless of their family's income, race, or zip code, have access to a high-quality education that enables them to become critical thinkers, have choices, capitalize on opportunities, and secure continuing economic advancement to positively impact their community.

*The ideas represented in these slides are the compilation of a variety of conversations, observations, and past research from friends, colleagues, and institutions. Special thanks to Matt McSorely, Harold Turner, Tatiana Francis, Denyana Collins, Surge Institute, Sarah Meyers, Patrick Jones, Ava Fenelus, Chris Habetler, Unbound ED, Dr. Anthony Muhammad, Kevin Lohela, Success Academy, Knowledge Reigns, Kristy Jones, Ma'at Lands, and Nicole Sioleski for their contributions to this project.*

## LEADERSHIP SPOTLIGHT

“ **As we look to reopen schools, we must ask ourselves an important question: How can we consistently build happiness in our schools?**

For our students, we can cultivate happiness and help them thrive by supporting three key needs: They need to feel safe, connected, and cared for. For our staff, we must remember that we are working with humans whose work and time is meaningful. We must make sure they know their voices are heard and their expertise is valued. We spend so much time at school and together, that happiness and fulfillment need to be a main priority for school and district leaders.”



**Layla J. Stanley**  
Principal, Crown Point Elementary  
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, NC



Learn more about [Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, NC](#)

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Deputy Superintendent and Chief Culture Officer

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Chuck Jones, Brooklyn Laboratory Charter Schools  
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Shawn Harris, Dean of Culture  
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Kristen Lambertz-Berndt, Instructional Lead  
Kristin Levine, Academic Committee  
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