

# Core Practice Continuums Overview

## Purpose

Educational practice and research in developmental science converge on a set of core practices that drive toward an equitable, whole-child approach for all students. These core practices are articulated in Turnaround for Children’s Whole-Child Design Blueprint. Turnaround’s Core Practice Continuums are a set of tools designed to prompt reflection and empower growth across roles in a school by providing rich descriptions of quality and categorically different images of practice across levels.

## Audience

The Core Practice Continuums are intended for use by individual educators who engage with students in various ways in a school community, including: **teachers, student support staff, instructional support staff, school leaders and administrators**. See additional considerations for individual and schoolwide use below.

## Structure and Function

Each continuum is intentionally framed to show a developmental progression of practice and pathways to improvement. While rubrics are a commonly used assessment tool in education spaces, the table below highlights key distinctions between the functions of rubrics and continuums.

A rubric ...	A continuum ...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Can be used for planning, implementing, reflecting and assessing</li> <li>○ Serves as a summative measure of quality at a specific point in time</li> <li>○ Is a linear tool specific to each cycle, used to assess achievement at a certain point in time, based on several specific criteria</li> <li>○ Is an evaluation/summative tool primarily used to measure an expected outcome</li> <li>○ Descriptors reflect a range of abilities from poor to proficient</li> <li>○ Describes levels of achievement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Can be used for planning, implementing, reflecting, and assessing</li> <li>○ Is for self-assessment and reflection</li> <li>○ Serves as an indicator of how educators can move forward in the practices, examining their existing actions and experiences</li> <li>○ Has descriptors of quality; often uses categorical differences, rather than changes in frequency across levels</li> <li>○ Descriptors are accompanied by ideas and pathways to help educators move forward and improve</li> <li>○ Reflects a developmental view</li> </ul>

When reading across each continuum, development of a practice is shown through **Emerging, Developing, and Advanced** levels of quality:

- At the **Emerging** level, indicators articulate the implications of practice that is not consistent, not uniform, or not grounded in a shared commitment and understanding across the school. This level often showcases common challenges and pitfalls related to the practice, including those that occur even when adults are trying to make good faith efforts. Descriptors at this level can help educators interrogate bias, align to developmental research, and consider the impact that the absence of structures or support can have on the practice.
- At the **Developing** level, indicators may describe how a practice may be inconsistent or partial in the sense that there is evidence of both Emerging and Advanced structures or practices. Often at this level, structures, adult skills, or student experiences are approaching high quality, but equity and inclusion are missing or execution of a practice at the Advanced level is not true for diverse groups of students. This level reflects developing, but not universal, adult buy-in about a particular practice, and the framing offers ideas to develop the practice, pointing to how to get from “here to there.”
- At the **Advanced** level, indicators paint a picture of what happens when high-quality practice is in place and all students experience that practice. At the Advanced level, there is schoolwide consensus around the practice and the structures that support development of the practice. For many practices, Advanced indicates that the school functions as a learning organization that engages in continuous reflection and growth.

## Additional Considerations for Use

As educators engage with a Core Practice continuum in different contexts, consider the following:

- ✓ **Remember that the continuum categories are porous.** This means that elements of your practice may be in different levels of development for different areas. For example, an educator's practice may look "Advanced" for Activating Background Knowledge but still in "Emerging" for Reflecting on Language Learning.
- ✓ **Remember that the continuum is recursive;** it needs to be revisited and reconsidered as you adjust your practice and progress.

### Applying the lens of an individual educator:

For several continuums, the Advanced level describes what the practice looks like when it happens schoolwide. An individual teacher may not feel they have a window into how this practice looks for all educators in the building. In this case, consider:

- ✓ Is there shared agreement across the school on what is meant by a specific practice and what it looks like?
- ✓ What opportunities are available for shared ownership and collective growth in the identified area (e.g., peer learning, observation, resource sharing)?
- ✓ What type of coaching or professional development is needed to advance your practice?

### Applying the lens of a school leader:

Although the continuum is geared toward individual educator practice and reflection, some continuums explicitly signal the importance of an integrated schoolwide perspective and commitment. Leaders utilizing the continuums should consider the implications of all the layers that go into supporting quality practice across a school. They can do this by applying a lens of leadership in addition to reflecting on their own individual practice. Some ways to do this are:

- ✓ Consider how you, as a leader, embody and explicitly model the skills, mindsets, and practices present in the continuums.
- ✓ At the "Advanced" level, look for indicators of the practice happening beyond any one individual's practice, such as: "*happens almost always,*" "*demonstrated by all adults,*" "*is the experience of all students.*" If there are large inconsistencies for a practice, consider whether you are proactively creating the context and conditions for *all* staff to be able to demonstrate that skill or engage in that practice.
- ✓ Consider what **Inclusive Leadership** looks like: Is there shared agreement across the school on what is meant by a specific practice and what it looks like?
- ✓ Consider the role of **Staff Relationships & Collaboration**: Is there a culture of collaborative learning for the staff connected to this practice? Do all staff feel empowered to identify common problems of practice and propose solutions that move the whole school toward improvement?
- ✓ Think about **Capacity Building**: Do you see the development of the skills, practices, and mindsets captured in the continuum as an ongoing process and as one of your main leadership responsibilities? Have you worked collaboratively to build a strong, shared commitment to a point of view/expectations/understanding of these practices with staff? What opportunities do you see to provide coaching or professional development around a specific practice area?

## Core Practice Continuum: Supporting Student Agency

Integrated and ongoing teaching and supports that draw upon individuals' prior knowledge, experiences and strengths to build holistic skills and mindsets for learning, growth and agency.

### Emerging

### Developing

### Advanced

#### Time and Space for Skill Building

School staff, leadership and caregivers have different perspectives on what skills and mindsets matter for students and why. For example, a school's mission might focus on civic identity and self-direction, yet staff might be concerned that students are struggling to behave and get along. Alternatively, staff might see their role as strictly to teach "academics," assuming students learn these other skills outside of school. When skills are supported, they often support the agenda of those in power within the school (e.g. a focus on compliant behaviors, rather than student advocacy).

Minimal time is allocated for support of social, emotional and cognitive skills, and the time that is allocated may be siloed into a separate block. Because of this, students do not have consistent opportunities to apply and practice skills across contexts. The supports that do occur may come from a prescriptive program and/or may be driven by only staff's perception of what skills matter, and may focus on student deficits (e.g., "some of my students are so mean," or "they can't control themselves").

Leaders and staff may agree on a narrow set of skills and mindsets to support, but they may be overly aspirational, not appropriately rigorous, or focused on fixed traits rather than malleable skills (e.g., *grit*). Alternatively, there may be varying perspectives across staff, leaders, caregivers and students about what skills matter and the role of schools in supporting skill development. In some instances, some students may receive supports for skills like self-advocacy. However, this is not consistent.

Intentional learning experiences guide students to learn and practice skills in some varied contexts across their school day, including during academic and non-academic times. Responsibility may fall more heavily on some adults than others. Sometimes, students have input in shaping this time and are generally asked to draw from their strengths and knowledge as they participate. They are invited to share strategies, learn from one another's experiences, and problem-solve together.

Leaders, staff, caregivers and students agree upon a holistic and diverse set of skills and mindsets that are important for students (e.g., *emotion regulation, conflict resolution, executive function, growth mindset*). They see connections between higher-order and foundational skills and support them both. Shared goals for skill development include student agency and critical consciousness. Students are encouraged to take action against injustices in their school and community and supported in the skills that help them do so.

Holistic skills like emotion regulation, conflict resolution, social skills and executive functions are supported and taught to all students during academic instruction and non-academic times (e.g., *recess, class meetings, math class, etc.*). There is shared responsibility for consistently integrating skill-building throughout students' school experience. Educators seek to understand each students' needs, experiences, cultures, strengths, values and interests to plan and improve this time, and all students actively participate and contribute in ways that work for them.

## Integrated Strategies and Supports

While students are at school (*whether in class, during a community meeting, at lunch or recess, etc.*), supports tend to be for either “behavior” OR “academics,” and do not always support skills and mindsets. For example, during a group science project, students may be told the behavior expectation is to work together respectfully and the academic task is to complete an experiment, but they may not be supported in building integrated skills like managing conflict as a scientist.

Supports for skills and mindsets might perpetuate inequity in one of the following ways: a “no excuses” approach that punishes students when they struggle with skills or do not conform to school culture or a lack of clear, shared expectations and support for skills, creating a chaotic and dysregulating environment.

## Modeling and Metacognition

Adults do not consistently act as models of holistic skills and mindsets like stress management, organizational skills, and strong collaboration, and the modeling that does happen may not build off all students’ cultural backgrounds and values. Adults rarely think aloud or intentionally model how they are using holistic skills. Students may guess how to demonstrate skills based on their own observation of adults or may appear unskilled due to lack of support.

Students do not have shared ways of talking about their skill development. When working together, they may struggle to talk about what is going well and what might be getting in the way of their success. For

Most students have strategies for skills like stress and conflict management, but they are inconsistent across contexts and receive varied support from adults. For example, students might be able to manage their relationships with peers with independence in their homeroom class because of ongoing practice but might struggle in other environments where they have not been supported in applying these skills.

Most of the time, the supports that adults provide are flexible to each student’s needs, strengths and experiences. At times, students might not have the independence they need to grow, make mistakes and learn OR they might not have enough support.

Sometimes, adults are models of holistic skills and mindsets such as stress management, organizational skills and strong collaboration. Modeling might build off what adults know about students, (*e.g., when thinking aloud about emotion regulation, adults may share a metaphor based on students’ interests*). However, modeling may predominantly reflect a singular worldview about how to do things like manage emotions or interact with others. Adults recognize that an important way for students to learn is by observing and interacting with others.

Students are often able to describe their thinking, how they are using skills and where they might need

It is common to see all students using shared strategies and accessing supports for holistic skills and mindsets throughout the school day. This practice is consistent across contexts, emerging both naturally as students grow and through facilitated opportunities.

Adults consistently take an equity-focused approach to support skills and mindsets, actively working not to weaponize the process as a means of enforcing only White, patriarchal, or other dominant-group norms for behavior. They regularly revisit how to best provide support while honoring different strategies for skills (*e.g., expressing emotions, solving conflicts, and managing time*), which may vary according to the diverse cultures and perspectives of the school community. Students have enough support to do their best and have the independence to grow, make mistakes and learn.

Adults show up as consistent models of the holistic skills and mindsets students are developing while reflecting on the cultural contexts in which they learned these skills. Adults make these skills visible by sharing their thinking and narrating how they use skills and strategies. Because of this, students experience consistent, though not uniform, examples of ways to demonstrate skills across cultures and contexts, all of which are valued at school.

It is common to see all students describing their approach to academic, social, and personal projects and problems. They have shared language to describe their thinking and make the use of skills visible to others.

example, during a group project or while trying to play a game at recess, students may spend the bulk of their time negotiating roles and materials. Adults do not give regular feedback on holistic skill development.

### Adult Reflection and Capacity Building

Adults lack time and space to reflect on and practice their own skill development. When students have lagging skills, adults might become quickly frustrated or struggle to maintain a growth mindset, as they might for other types of learning challenges. Because of this, students may be punished or excluded, rather than supported, when they struggle with a skill or mindset about school. Biases may further exacerbate the consequences of this for students from minoritized cultures who may express emotions, communicate and interact with peers outside of dominant norms. Students may be asked to demonstrate skills like emotional regulation or social awareness in situations that are not emotionally safe for them, and/or where they do not have a strong sense of belonging.

support but may still struggle to do so across contexts. Sometimes, adults give feedback that helps students apply experiences and see growth in their skill development.

There is some time and space allocated for adult reflection on their own use of holistic skills. When students have lagging skills, they often receive support but may also face punitive consequences or adults may rely on others, such as caregivers, to provide the support. There may be some understanding of cultural differences, but not yet much active reflection on how biases and beliefs about students inform what skills and approaches are valued at school.

Adults help them to integrate experiences to grow, and there is meaningful feedback on the development of skills over time.

Adults collaboratively work to recognize their own use of holistic skills and mindsets. When students have lagging skills, adults respond with curiosity about how to meet their needs and matched supports. They acknowledge triggers that may cause them to struggle with their emotional constancy and growth mindset and see challenges as opportunities to develop their skills. For example, if they notice that they are getting frustrated with a student's behavior and responding accordingly, they reflect on what beliefs they hold about the student and refine their approach. All adults recognize that holistic skill development requires emotional safety and belonging and strive to create such supportive environments.

## References

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