

WHOLE-CHILD DESIGN BLUEPRINT

A Framework for Transformational Change

Educators are given the critical and challenging task of creating classrooms and schools that truly support **each child and their holistic development**—so students will know their worth, discover their interests and passions, and develop their skills, competencies, and identities. Unlike prescriptive models and curricula, **Turnaround for Children’s Whole-Child Design Blueprint** is meant to be used as a visioning tool—supporting educators to look through the lens of whole-child development and design **and take action toward the change they seek**. The framework’s components and core practices together make up a way to think about, organize and integrate practices that are aligned with the ways the brain learns and how children develop. Practitioners can choose any entry point, but in all pathways, **we must directly confront and address institutional oppression and discrimination** based on race, ethnicity, class, language, disability, gender, etc. that has long prevented too many students from living the lives they choose. We also know that this required redesign will only be successful if we leverage and include the voices, assets and experiences of the entire community—educators, students, families, and communities. Together, we can create learning settings that are rich in protective factors, that promote wellness and protect children from the damaging effects of stress all at the same time.



Whole-Child Purpose

Start with a shared vision and commitment.



First and foremost, a school is grounded in its purpose—implicit or explicit. It sets the stage for school redesign by anchoring goals and priorities, creating shared direction, and defining what success will look like.

Setting a whole-child purpose often means redefining historic notions about the outcomes schools aim to achieve. Academic success is one important outcome, but equally critical is building students' cognitive, personal, and interpersonal competencies and identities.

Beyond simply having a vision and mission statement that talks about holistic development or equitable outcomes, a school truly committed to a whole-child purpose organizes its time, resources, commitments, and energies accordingly. It makes tough decisions to prioritize work that may not be measured on evaluations but is in the best interest of their students and community.

Ultimately, a whole-child purpose is ingrained in every aspect of school design—from curriculum to assessments, the structure of school scheduling and spaces, staffing and professional development, data review and progress monitoring, and more.

A whole-child purpose is NOT:

- Solely a vision or mission statement
- Focused only on academic outcomes (e.g., test scores, college acceptance rates)
- For only some students
- Forgotten among other urgent priorities

A whole-child purpose IS:

- ✓ An explicit commitment that lives in all aspects of practice and drives decision making
- ✓ Co-created with all school stakeholders
- ✓ Focused on holistic outcomes for all students to ensure success in life, work and citizenship
- ✓ Used to identify priorities and make tough choices in the best interest of students

CORE PRACTICE

Cohesive School Vision A whole-child purpose is an explicit commitment to holistic and equitable outcomes that lives in the school vision, mission, values and all aspects of practice, which drives school goals and priorities.

Supportive Environment

Create a context full of safety and belonging.



We know that for learning and development, context matters—and school and classroom environments are especially critical contexts as they are where students spend an enormous and influential portion of their lives learning about themselves. A supportive school environment is physically, emotionally, and identity safe, while creating a strong sense of community and belonging.

To create a true sense of safety and belonging, there must be a shared, authentic commitment to respecting, valuing, and giving power and voice to all community members—students, staff, caregivers, etc.—practicing inclusion even when it is difficult. This means designing the school culture itself together, as well as prioritizing mechanisms of support and repairing relationships, instead of only discipline, when challenges inevitably arise. As all voices are invited into the conversation, it is especially important that those with power are aware of how their identities and relative

institutional positions affect their role in creating a supportive school environment.

A supportive environment is NOT:

- Always highly rigid, structured, and educator-controlled for the sake of calm, quiet, and order
- Relying on authoritarian, punitive or exclusionary discipline practices to control students' bodies and choices
- Allowing unchecked stereotypes, bullying or microaggressions
- Limiting opportunities and choice based on assumptions about student potential

A supportive environment IS:

- ✓ Co-created around shared values, beliefs, and high expectations
- ✓ Co-regulating, predictable, and consistent, especially for students who have experienced chronic stress or trauma
- ✓ Culturally competent, meaning educators understand the role of culture in education and interrogate their own identity and biases
- ✓ Encouraging students to see themselves as accountable for their actions and as agents of social change

CORE PRACTICES

Expectations, Norms + Routines	Co-created expectations, norms and routines which represent the diverse perspectives and shared values of the larger school community, setting the stage for safety and belonging.
Culturally Affirming and Sustaining Practices	Practices that challenge inequity by understanding, uplifting and promoting the identities and cultures of all school community members, particularly those historically silenced and oppressed.
Co-Regulatory and Restorative Practices	Responses to conflict, dysregulation, or breaking agreed-upon norms that seek to address root causes and create resolution by building skills, maintaining safety and relationships, and empowering both the individual and community.

Developmental Relationships

Shift to relationships – among teachers, students, leaders, families - as the foundation.



Positive developmental relationships are the “active ingredient” in any effective child-serving system, characterized by emotional attachment, joint, reciprocal interactions, progressive complexity, and balance of power (Li & Julian, 2012). It is not simply about being friendly or caring, but knowing, respecting and valuing the background, interests and goals of students and families, while holding high expectations coupled with adequate supports that convey belief in students. Importantly, these relationships also buffer the negative impact of chronic stress. A focus on relationships is especially important for students who are more likely to be impacted by implicit or explicit bias. The centrality of relationships should extend beyond student-teacher relationships, to those between and among teachers, leaders, staff, families, and other community stakeholders.

Developmental relationships are NOT:

- Just being friendly to children and families
- Successful simply because we have good intentions
- One-size-fits-all
- Transactional and directive

Developmental relationships ARE:

- ✓ The responsibility of all educators and worthy of time and space within the school day
- ✓ Created on a foundation of trust
- ✓ Built through repeated, reciprocal interactions
- ✓ Bi-directional and ever-changing based on needs and growth
- ✓ A way to center traditionally marginalized groups in decision-making, culture building, and creating an identity-affirming environment

CORE PRACTICES

Student Relationship Structures	The intentional structuring of time and space to ensure that relationships among students and with adults can flourish.
Family, Caregiver and Community Partnerships	Inclusive partnership and shared power that values a wide network of adults as co-educators and community-builders with valued perspectives, skills, and contributions.
Trust-Building Interactions	Bi-directional and responsive actions and experiences in which individuals experience care and support, share power and challenge growth, all in the context of cultural and identity inquiry and recognition.

Knowledge, Skill, and Mindset Building

Set students up for success by integrating knowledge, skill and mindset development.



The science of learning and development tells us that learning is integrated—for example, no “math” part of the brain develops separately from a “self-regulation” part of the brain. Therefore, successful learning experiences intentionally include and simultaneously develop content-specific knowledge along with skills and mindsets including, for example, executive function, social skills, growth mindset or curiosity.

In classrooms, this means that academic instruction and student supports are most effective when they are driven by a holistic picture of the learner with unique skills, habits, mindsets, interests, relationships, experiences, knowledge, and goals. Growth and learning emerge through real experiences and authentic practice over time that shifts the balance of power towards students, recognizing them active agents within the learning process.

Knowledge, skill, and mindset building is NOT:

- A set of isolated curricula or programs, an add-on, or enrichment activity
- The same for each student, or rigor for some students and not others
- Seeing students as empty vessels to be filled up
- Irrelevant to students’ lives and interests
- Asking students to demonstrate grit or resilience without addressing sources of chronic stress, including structural racism and systemic oppression

Knowledge, skill and mindset building IS:

- ✓ Learning experiences that simultaneously develop content knowledge and disciplinary ways of thinking alongside essential skills, mindsets, and habits
- ✓ All students receiving holistic supports and enrichment that are matched to their unique developmental pathways and unlock potential
- ✓ Students being empowered to make choices and actively question and interrogate why things are the way they are
- ✓ Including curriculum that connects to historical and evolving cultural and linguistic practices, locally and nationally

CORE PRACTICES

Intervention + Enrichment Supports	Personalized academic, health, mental health and social supports that ensure all students learn and grow, regardless of needs, interests, strengths, vulnerabilities, and unique developmental pathways.
Learning Experiences in the Zone of Proximal Development	Lessons, projects, practice, and feedback that draws upon students’ interests, prior experiences and skills to inspire and support growth: meaningful, engaging, and relevant.
Supporting Student Agency	Integrated and ongoing teaching and supports that draw upon individual’s prior knowledge, experiences and strengths to build holistic skills and mindsets for learning, growth and agency.

Shared Leadership and Ownership

Engage in transformational change – together.



Designing towards a whole-child purpose requires transformation, not simply tinkering around the edges of existing systems. Effective shared leadership and ownership facilitates this type of change in schools, as all staff are empowered to drive towards meaningful, shared goals and are supported to continuously improve.

The spirit of shared leadership and ownership goes beyond defined or formalized leadership roles in schools. It encompasses a mindset of collective responsibility and strives to build a collective sense of efficacy among all stakeholders through inclusive decision-making and capacity-building. Effective shared leadership and ownership also honors the highly relational aspects of how change happens.

Shared Leadership and Ownership is NOT:

- Defaulting to top-down, high-control models for change, even if the initiative is seen as high-stakes
- Hoarding decision-making power
- Providing tokenistic opportunities for input, feedback, and participation in a change effort
- Using one-size-fits-all programs and initiatives that ignore the context, experience and expertise of others

Shared Leadership and Ownership IS:

- ✓ Naming, discussing and reflecting on values and beliefs when making decisions
- ✓ Including and valuing the expertise, skills, and experiences of others, especially those most proximal to the challenges and problems to be solved
- ✓ Embodying a continuous, multi-directional, multi-dimensional view of change
- ✓ Empowering others to make decisions, engage in collaborative problem solving, and engage in collective learning and development
- ✓ Creating time and space to build and deepen personal and professional relationships among staff members

CORE PRACTICES

Inclusive Leadership	Leadership behaviors and mindsets that help resist top-down, high-control models for change by including, listening to, valuing, and empowering others.
Capacity Building for Whole Child Development	Structures and processes that go beyond the adoption of programs or best-practices and instead support continuous improvement, ongoing learning, and active-skill building for whole child development.
Staff Relationships and Collaboration	Practices that foster a sense of belonging, trust, safety, and wellness among staff so that they can effectively collaborate and thrive as they work toward achieving comprehensive, holistic student outcomes.