

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

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 "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 continuums are 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 include:

- ✓ 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: Family, Caregiver and Community Partnerships

Inclusive partnership and shared power that regards a wide network of adults as co-educators and community builders with valued perspectives, skills and contributions.



Inclusive Partnership and Shared Power

Opportunities to engage in discussions and decisions that impact the school are often limited to school staff. This restricts opportunities for other members of the community to contribute their values, experiences, culture and expertise into shaping the school environment (including school goals, norms, policies and student supports).

Decision making and partnership are characterized by a top-down, high-control approach (*e.g., school leadership creates a policy that all school community members follow*) and engages a subset of families and community members in constrained activities and advisory input (*e.g., PTA meetings, logistical use of a community space for a school function*).

This type of perfunctory and limited inclusion can contribute to a schoolwide culture that signals school staff (often, school leaders) as the owners and exclusive experts on the needs of the school community.

Opportunities for more inclusive partnership and shared power between school staff, families/caregivers and community members are being explored and may be in place in certain venues or with certain partners.

Some traditional power dynamics are dismantled, giving greater voice and decision-making opportunities to a more diverse group of school community members. However, this is not yet a common practice across school settings and for all stakeholders. Often, the people who are given more inclusive and meaningful opportunities are identified as “safe” and “agreeable,” and/or have societally attributed power (*e.g., white families, community members of influence*). Traditional roles and power dynamics are often present in the most consequential school decisions (*e.g., decisions on schoolwide policies, curriculum, budget, annual goals*).

community stakeholders to better understand and remove obstacles.

Opportunities exist for all school staff, families/caregivers and community members to engage in meaningful partnership in the multitude of decisions and roles that impact the school community. All adults demonstrate shared investment in co-developed goals and collaborate to learn about and from each other. It is common to see a wide range of community and cultural resources integrated into the school, reflecting varied contributions of knowledge and capacities, and building a web of support systems into the fabric of the school (*e.g., partnerships with community health organizations and after-school providers, a network of mentors for graduates*). Trust is built as stakeholders in the school community see their perspectives, expertise and values reflected in the way the school operates.

Traditional top-down power dynamics and patterns of exclusion are consistently disrupted, especially for groups who have typically been institutionally underserved (*e.g., families from minoritized groups, low-income communities*). Sharing power is a feature of all school committees, meetings, and decision-making structures. There is a shared recognition that schools are accountable to the community, and this guides the ways that groups operate in multidirectional ways (*e.g., school leaders are a part of neighborhood coalitions and advocacy efforts, caregivers and community members are included in school policy and hiring decisions*).

Communication

Communication often takes place in one-way exchanges between individuals, with the purpose of sharing information, not opening dialogue (e.g., *notices sent home with students, a teacher phone call to report a concern, a presentation on a new policy*). Language supports are rare and must be advocated for. Students, or a subset of multi-lingual staff, often carry the burden of communicating and translating between school and home.

The content of the communication is largely defined by academic and behavioral topics and often occurs in a reactive manner (e.g., *student misbehavior, missing assignments*), which can result in strained or damaged relationships.

Due to a lack of normed and systematized communication practices, families and caregivers may experience vastly different frequencies of communication (e.g., *some never hear from a teacher, others are constantly being called by school staff*) and inconsistent access to information. Communication rarely reaches beyond current families/caregivers, neglecting the school as part of a larger community.

Inclusive and bi-directional communication may be present for some individuals in some spaces. For example, annual family/caregiver surveys are available in home language and format, but typical classroom forms and notices are rarely translated. Families and caregivers are able to utilize some standard methods for communication with the school (e.g., *phone calls, arranging a meeting, sending a note*), but the process may not be experienced as timely, and some families/caregivers may not feel comfortable engaging fully and authentically.

Some communications may reflect whole-child considerations, while others may not. For example, a class newsletter may detail academic studies, share a class list of strategies for stress management, and spotlight a member of the school community, whereas a progress report may focus strictly on mastery of academic standards. Communication sometimes references events and issues in the broader community, but the main focus is often on what is directly happening inside the school building.

Regular and bi-directional exchanges between school, home and community groups, through varied and inclusive communication pathways, is the norm (e.g., *surveys, phone calls, emails, newsletters, student-led conferences, home visits*). Language supports and framing that is culturally affirming and sustaining are consistent across all methods of communication (e.g., *translation supports are accessible to either party initiating a conversation, school staff work to understand and validate different cultural norms and practices within their school community*).

Communication consistently reflects the integration of whole-child considerations (e.g., *social, emotional, academic, cultural; recognizes diverse developmental pathways and student potential*) and situates the work of the school within the work of the broader community. Communication efforts are initiated in both proactive and responsive manners from all stakeholders. These efforts are not only for informative purposes; they strengthen relationships and trust and create coherence between the places and spaces that engage students.

References

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