

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?

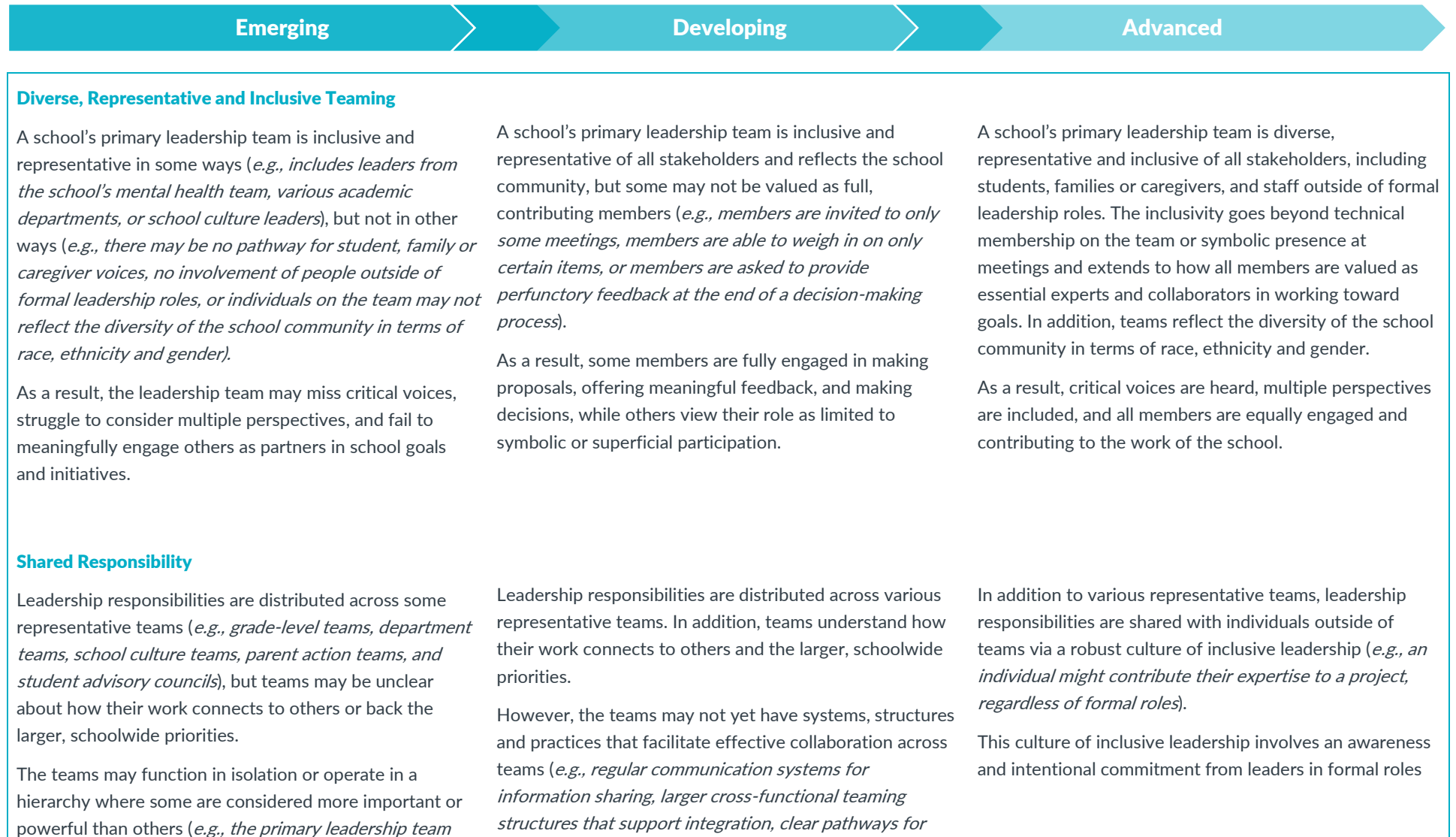
Applying the lens of a school leader:

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: Inclusive Leadership

Leadership behaviors and mindsets that help resist top-down, high-control models for change by including, listening to, valuing and empowering others.



may “own” an initiative and simply direct other teams on what to do, or a school culture team may be asked to contribute in less substantial ways than a department team).

Without a clear understanding of how they function together, the various teams may struggle to collaborate, solve problems and share responsibility of holistic schoolwide goals.

Responsive and Empowering Decision Making

Leaders approach decision making from a top-down, one-directional perspective (e.g., a group of leaders decide something, and then other staff members are informed and expected to execute). When leaders attempt to be inclusive, responsive or empowering in their decision making, it is usually reactive (e.g., after someone has advocated for more power, a bigger say, or more inclusion).

Alternatively, leaders may attempt to be inclusive but may struggle to find ways to include more than just a few people (e.g., overly relying on the qualitative experiences of a few vocal staff members, only including those with whom they have the best relationships, only inviting those with the most seniority to contribute to an idea, failing to consider how their own implicit or explicit bias may be influencing who they choose to include or empower).

A school struggling to empower others in decision making may experience stakeholders becoming increasingly disengaged because their voices have not mattered or been included in important matters.

providing multidirectional feedback, or norms that support collaborative decision making).

As a result, teams may take some shared responsibility (e.g., when their work clearly overlaps or collaborating is easy), but at other times, they may default to waiting for directions from other teams or competing against each other for control.

Leaders sometimes approach decision making in responsive, empowering ways by using inclusive processes and protocols (e.g., processes for collecting input, shared protocols for providing feedback, or frameworks for making proposals).

However, these inclusive efforts may be limited to only certain kinds of decisions (e.g., individuals may be empowered to make decisions for their own classroom but are not included in decisions being made for the whole school), or they may be experienced inconsistently (e.g., one time, a staff member may be praised for trying something innovative in their classroom, and another time, a staff member may be disciplined for trying something without explicit permission).

Because of the inconsistent experiences, a school may find some stakeholders reporting they feel included in decision making and empowered in their own roles, while others do not (e.g., these inconsistencies may fall along the lines of race, ethnicity or gender, as leaders' implicit or explicit bias influences who is or is not included).

to disrupt historical patterns of exclusion, especially of people furthest from positions of power and authority.

Not only do teams and individuals understand how their work connects, but they also have systems, structures and practices that facilitate effective collaboration. As a result, all teams and individuals can integrate their work and share responsibility of holistic schoolwide goals.

Leaders approach decision making in multidirectional, responsive and empowering ways (e.g., integrating multiple perspectives into planning, making changes based on the experiences of others, and inviting others to decide).

Leaders proactively include others and avoid high-control models for decision making, because they understand these actions perpetuate harmful patterns of oppression by stripping individuals of autonomy and power. In addition, they regularly commit themselves to reflecting on the role their implicit or explicit bias may play in their decision-making practices.

In schools where people are engaged in responsive, empowering decision making, leaders focus less on who decides and more on facilitating shared understanding of purpose, shared investment in goals, and shared capacity building to support those goals. That way, everyone can align their individual actions toward shared goals. If leaders make unilateral decisions, staff understand how and why decisions were made and feel confident that their interests were understood and considered.

Equitable Listening and Communication Practices

Leaders communicate in some accessible ways but may not have consistent practices established. As a result, staff are sometimes unclear about how or when different communications will be prioritized. For example, at certain times of the year, leaders might be available for listening and clearly communicate with staff (*e.g., at the beginning of the year, during evaluations, near parent conferences, or in quarterly meetings*).

However, other times, leaders are inaccessible or invisible, or large amounts of time pass without communication. Leaders may listen to some people but be dismissive of others, or may offer information to some people but not all. These inconsistencies may also fall along lines of difference as a result of unexamined implicit or explicit bias. Many communication practices happen reactively when people ask for updates or when people complain leaders are not listening.

Leaders communicate in accessible and consistent ways. This is most evident in proactive listening and communication systems, structures and practices (*e.g., systems for raising concerns or questions, structures for providing updates, and norms that support challenging discussions*). These proactive lines of communication are ongoing and do not depend on specific, time-bound invitations for listening and sharing.

In their communication, leaders focus on empathetic and active listening and offer the same communication opportunities to all staff, regardless of their roles, responsibilities or power within the organization. For example, a leader would engage in open dialogue about ongoing strategy development with any staff member, not just other leaders.

Leaders not only communicate in accessible and consistent ways, but also work to build a culture of equitable and multidirectional communication for all. For example, leaders may encourage staff to listen to students, model this behavior themselves, and facilitate this behavior in others by removing barriers for staff (*e.g., placing time in a teacher's schedule for student communication, creating systems for how to seek support in challenging conversations, establishing norms for how to make apologies*). Leaders would also model reflecting on the role bias plays in existing communication practices in an effort to learn, improve and disrupt inequitable patterns of listening and communication.

Strong, multidirectional listening practices are evidenced when leaders can articulate challenges and goals in ways that are inclusive of others (*e.g., their unique identities, desires and perspectives*), historical and systemic factors at play (*such as the role of systemic racism*), and root causes.