

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: Cohesive School Vision

A cohesive school vision that names a set of holistic and integrated outcomes for students is co-constructed with the broader school community, and used to shape school design, culture and decision making at all levels of practice.



necessarily reflect the values and hopes the community shares for its children.

Focusing only on these outcomes represents a continuation of an education system designed to track and sort student by performance, which reinforces inequitable ideas about which students are capable and deserving of success (e.g., *working to solve an “achievement gap,” problematizing students instead of the system that does not support them as whole people*).

Continuously Aligning Vision and Practice

The school vision is put on paper (e.g., *in a mission statement, portrait of a graduate, core values, school motto*) so that it can be used in perfunctory ways (e.g., *to meet accreditation requirements or to have content on the school website*), but not in ways that meaningfully shape practice. The stated vision for the school and the actual driving forces for its design, culture and decision making may be at odds.

Big-picture goals and priorities (e.g., *annual school and staff goal-setting processes, selecting initiatives or “big rocks” for the year, long-term planning*) may be set according to differing perspectives, various external or internal pressures, or in an attempt to “put out fires.”

Without a cohesive vision, leaders and staff are not able to align their day-to-day practice with an overall direction. When it comes time to reflect on successes and challenges, evaluate choices, and problem-solve, individuals may be left to figure it out for themselves or, conversely, given little to no autonomy (in leaders’ effort to create cohesion).

visioning process was only somewhat inclusive, these outcomes do not reflect the values and hopes the community shares for its children.

The school vision is both put on paper (e.g., *in a mission statement, portrait of a graduate, core values, school motto*), and most school community members can describe the vision, but it does not often show up meaningfully in their practice. The vision is used to shape limited aspects of school design, culture and decision making.

Big-picture goals and priorities (e.g., *annual school and staff goal-setting processes, selecting initiatives or “big rocks” for the year, long-term planning*) are set using the school’s vision, although external pressures sometimes take precedence (e.g., *new district initiatives or state requirements*).

Similarly, leaders and staff try to use the vision in day-to-day practice to reflect on their successes and challenges, evaluate choices and problem-solve. However, competing priorities and unexpected obstacles may derail these efforts.

When the vision is consistently used to reflect on practice, it gains investment from leaders, staff, students and the

Focusing on these holistic outcomes represents going one step further than previous education system reforms – in contrast to a system designed to track and sort students by performance, these outcomes position school as a developmental endeavor (rather than an achievement-oriented one).

The school vision is a shared, living set of ideas and ongoing conversation. Beyond just being put on paper (e.g., *in a mission statement, portrait of a graduate, core values, school motto*), school community members deeply understand and have internalized the vision, and use it meaningfully in their day-to-day work and interactions and for long-term planning. It shapes all aspects of practice, driving school design, culture and decision making at all levels (e.g., *using language from it in daily interactions with adults and students, using it to guide instructional choices*).

Big-picture goals and priorities (e.g., *annual school and staff goal-setting processes, selecting initiatives or “big rocks” for the year, long-term planning*) are set accordingly. When external pressures arise (e.g., *new district initiatives or state requirements*), they are inputs into, but not sole drivers of, practice.

Leaders and staff also use the vision in day-to-day practice to reflect on their successes and challenges, evaluate choices and problem-solve – empowering

Lack of a cohesive vision results in either disjointed efforts and perpetually changing direction or stagnation (e.g., *adding program after program that do not work in cohesion, abandoning new initiatives after a setback, or resistance to any significant change to the way things are*), at the risk of losing any momentum and investment from leaders, staff, students and the school community.

school community – but when there is inconsistency, this momentum dissipates.

individuals to both make decisions in their roles and collaborate with shared direction.

This ongoing reflection against the vision allows for “staying the course” on continuous improvement towards goals (e.g., *learning from successes and failures, anchoring in priorities instead of jumping to the next new thing, without rigid adherence when something isn’t working*). This maintains momentum and investment from leaders, staff, students and the school community – laying the groundwork for shared leadership and ownership.

References

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