

Part 2: Boldly Reimagining What Is Possible

Returning, Reimagining, Revamping



As a leader, you are juggling many different priorities, from the immediate needs of your students, families, and community members to the long term considerations as they relate to the upcoming school year.

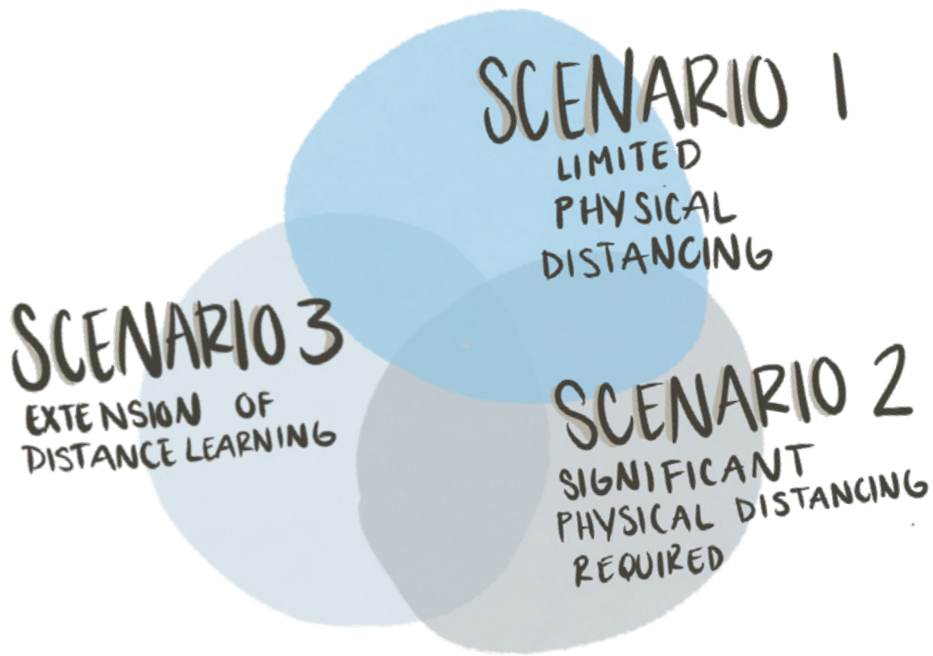
Much of what you are doing is living in what you know to be true (knowns) and the possibilities (similar to unknowns, but more exciting).

At this point, you have thought through your scenarios and you have an idea of “big rocks” that you know you must address ([if not, pause here and read Part 1](#)). You might even have a few people who have expressed interest in owning a topic, working group, or decision. It is now time to build prototypes, i.e., create possible approaches to address your big rocks. In this installment of Forging a Path Forward, we want to share how Education Elements thinks about designing with your values at the center.

These are uncertain times that require you to lead differently. Grounding yourself in the values your organization has committed to will be an important first step. Helping our leaders is a crucial next step. Organizations that operate using responsive practices and habits are the ones that endure through waves of decision-making when there are so many unknowns. It also allows organizations to reimagine without the traditional constraints of planning for perfection or aiming for consensus.



In [Part 1, Forging a Path Forward: Responsive Return Planning](#) we shared a 4 step process to begin Responsive Return Planning.



Since we published our first paper, we have helped numerous districts think through the knowns and unknowns as they relate to return to school. The first step is to codify scenarios.

SCENARIOS

Clarifying the requirement of physical distancing

Scenario planning helps you prepare generally for multiple realities while allowing you to stay nimble and respond to change. We have adjusted the language of our scenarios to account for one nuance. In Scenario 1 we had previously said there was “no physical distancing.” We have revised this to state “physical distance not required.” This is a result of feedback that “no physical distancing” implied that school would

go back to “normal.” We acknowledge that there is no going back to what was before COVID-19, but there will be districts that may not be required by the state or federal government to maintain physical distancing norms, though they may ultimately choose to put in place at least some norms due to feedback from stakeholders. Regardless of whether you perceive a scenario to be realistic, [it is important to think through them all](#) for two reasons.

First, it helps to unveil consistencies across many scenarios, giving your teams the confidence to act on decisions now because there may be some actions needed regardless of the scenario. Second, scenarios overlap and may need to be enacted at a moment’s notice. For example, one district might start the year with Scenario 1 but may have a disruption that causes it to activate Scenario 3 rather abruptly (as was the case this spring).

BIG ROCKS

Solidifying your priorities based on your core values

While every community has unique needs, we are finding themes across the country regarding topics with which leaders are grappling. These are the priorities we have heard repeatedly.

Health & Safety

How might we minimize the risk of illness?

Culture

How might we maintain a positive work culture during uncertainty?

Instruction

How might we ensure all students have access to high-quality instruction?

Staffing

How might we hire and maintain staff virtually who are prepared to tackle distance learning?

Wellness

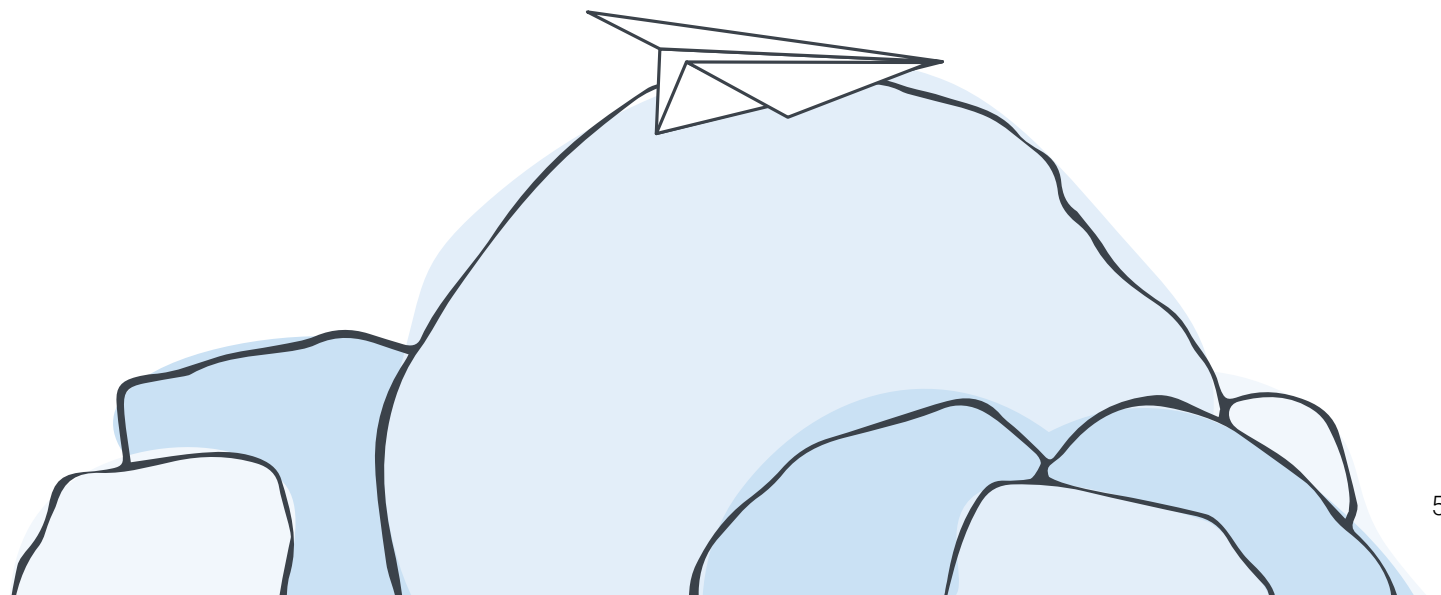
How might we meet the social and emotional needs of staff and students who have experienced trauma?

Operations

How might we create processes and systems that reflect our values and need for flexibility?

Finances

How might we align spending to support our values & the systems we want to create?

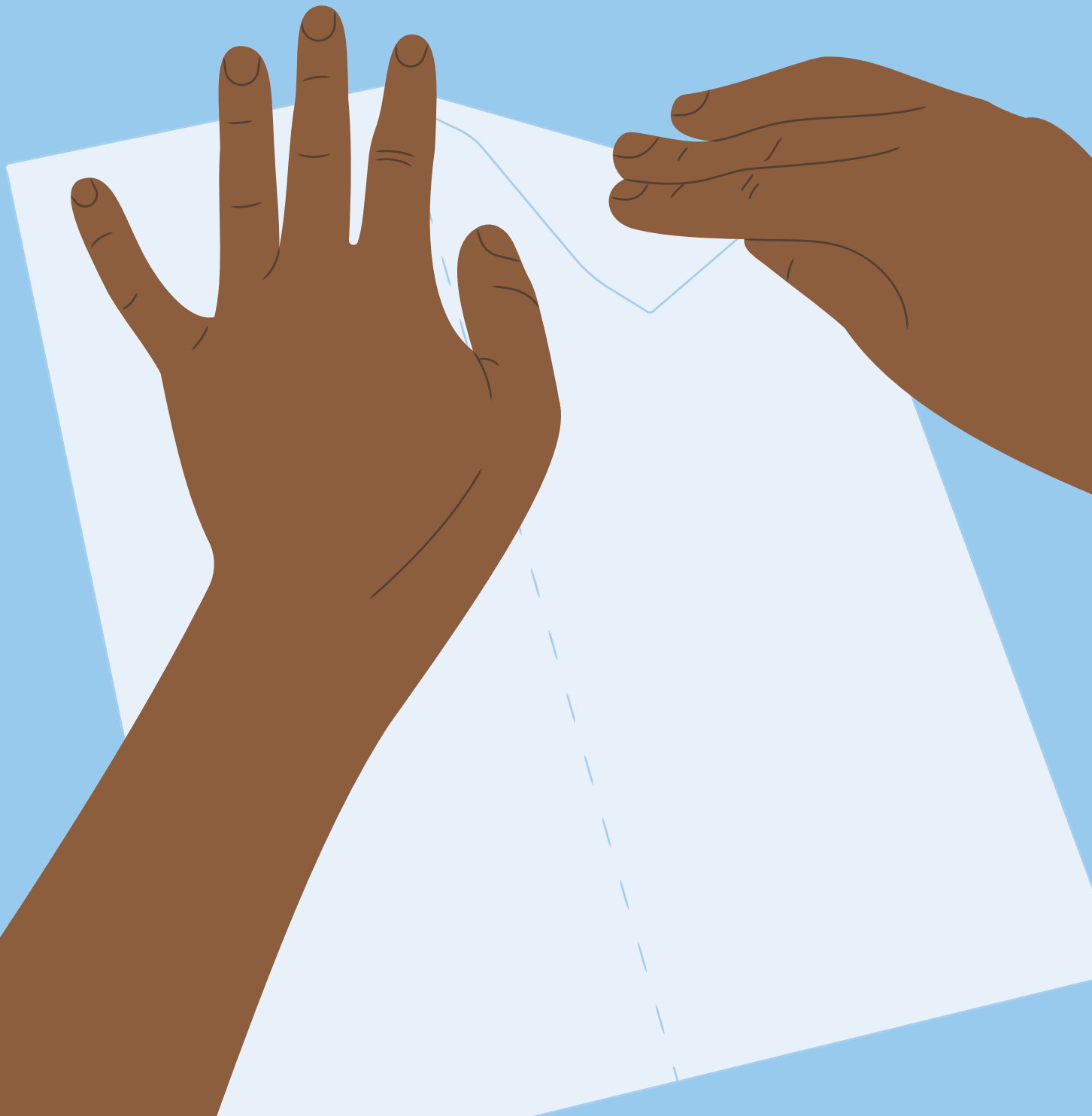


Our challenge for you is to consider how you will reframe these big rocks with your core values at the center.


Part 2:

Boldly Reimagining What Is Possible

Returning, Reimagining, Revamping



BUILDING HABITS FOR RESPONSIVENESS



I recently learned that the Greek root for the word 'crisis' means 'to sift.' It's such an incredible metaphor I think...to think about the sifting process and what that does... which is basically removing all the excess, the superficial, all that stuff that weighs us down and only leaving the essential. If we think about this crisis as a sifting process, it really is a rare opportunity for us to sift through our own lives, our communities, our connection and to think about: what is the most essential?

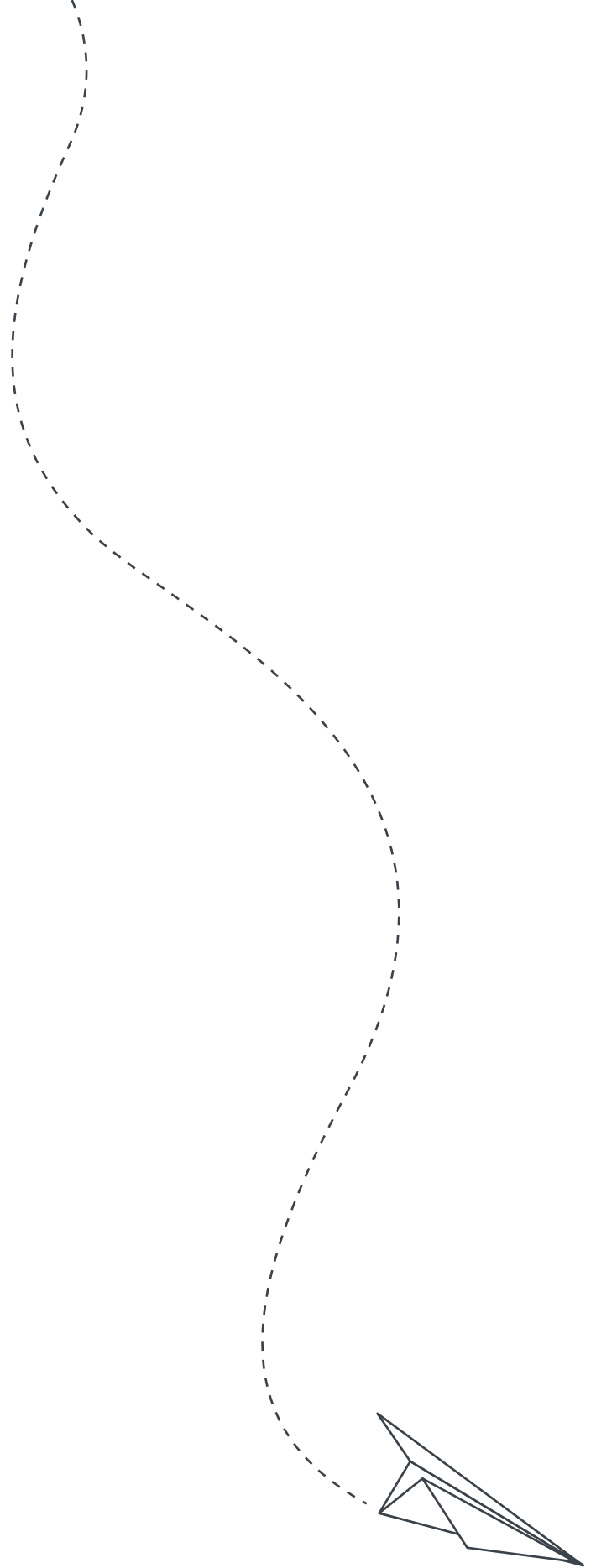
Golriz Lucina
Co-Founder + Head of Creative
Soulpancake

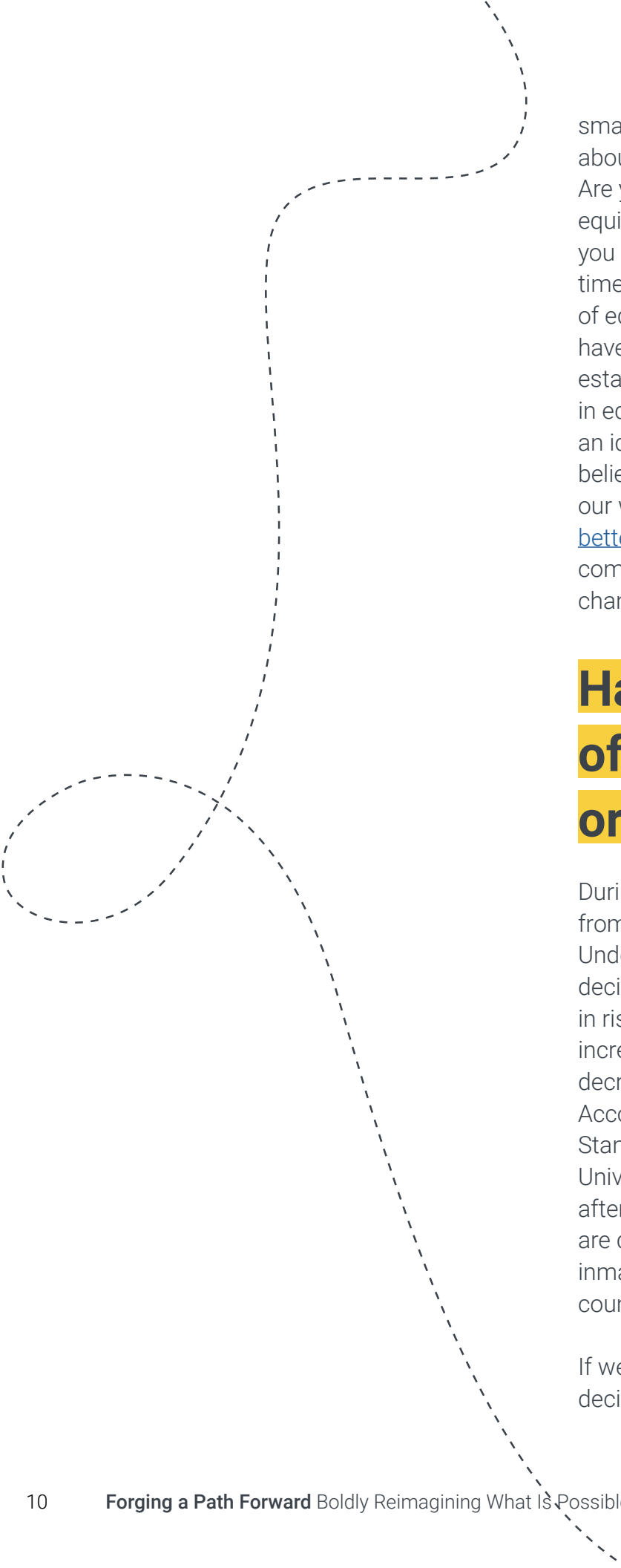
From virtual graduation ceremonies to mobile device distribution, we are seeing how

this crisis has proven that learners of all ages can be creative, action-oriented, and resilient in meeting new challenges.

We are seeing some impressive innovations that prove that the elimination of rigid structures, such as limitations on time, are only products of a certain mindset. Ninety-minute learning blocks can be flexible and repurposed into virtual office hours or asynchronous collaborative online work. We are experiencing first-hand what we knew all along: there are many different ways to teach and even more ways to learn. Some of the many barriers of time and space that limited us in meeting the needs of every student have been suspended, leading us at Education Elements to ask, "What is truly essential to creating high-quality and student-centered experiences?"

The need feels great as the flaws in our systems are more glaringly obvious. The injustices that have resulted from decades of abiding by antiquated systems that were designed to benefit the dominant group cannot be ignored. Education Elements is an organization that supports districts in building habits for responsiveness. We intentionally use the language of habits as it helps us create repeatable processes as individuals and as a team in service of a greater goal while spurring us to take actions that are



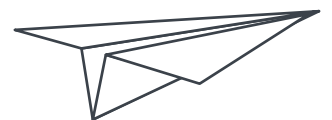


small enough to start. Now is the time to think about moving your identity as an organization. Are you going to be an organization that holds equity tight as a core value in name only or will you be an organization that intentionally uses this time to move from rhetoric to action on matters of equity? This is one area in which we, ourselves, have much room to improve, but we believe that establishing team habits and decisions grounded in equity now is the best lever to move towards an identity as an equitable organization. We believe that each small habit adds up and makes our world incrementally better every day ([1% better](#) some might say). These small changes compound over time and lead to transformational change in the long term.

Habits become part of the fabric of an organization's culture.

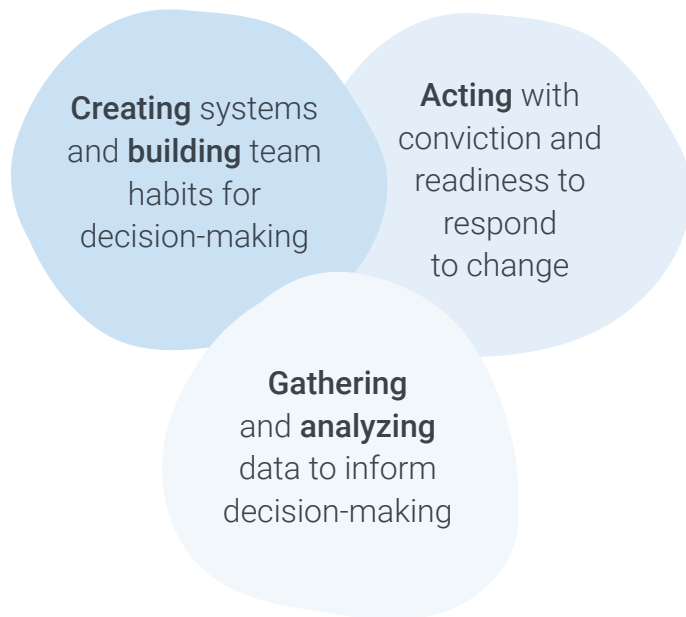
During these times of crisis, leaders often suffer from a heightened state of [decision fatigue](#). Under duress, leaders are making many different decisions that all feel urgent in nature and high in risk. It is important to remember that as we increase the number of decisions made, we decrease the quality of each of those decisions. According to a [study](#) by Jonathan Levav of Stanford and Shai Danziger of Ben-Gurion University, judges who preside over cases in the afternoon when their decision-making reserves are depleted are less likely to grant parole to inmates with the same charges as their morning counterparts.

If we build habits of responsiveness now, decisions become more routine and our



decision-making abilities are optimized. It is incumbent on leaders to prioritize building their team's habits to make certain decisions that are "safe enough to try," create an organizational identity grounded in equity, and make use of our team's untapped potential by distributing decision-making power to other willing and capable individuals. We call this the ability to "Decide Deliberately."

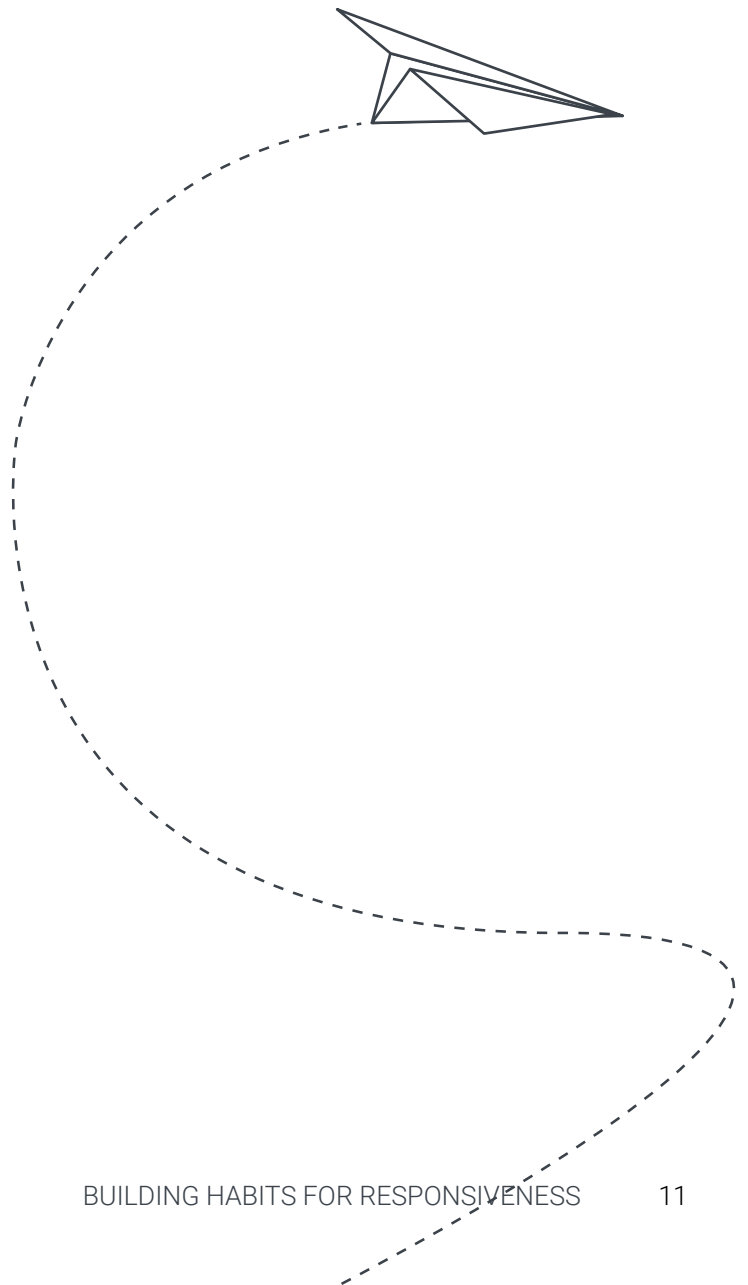
A leader who decides deliberately makes responsive decisions guided by purpose, priorities, data, and experiences. This looks like:



Year after year, schools try slightly newer ideas, spend millions of dollars on similar products and interventions, yet results for our most vulnerable children and the teachers that teach them remain slow to change. The majority of children born in this country are children of color, yet the school systems that will one day support them are not engineered for their success. Districts must stop putting bandages on an open wound and surgically repair it by tackling the inequitable district practices, policies, and protocols that have been outdated and ineffective for generations.

Districts and their leaders need new systems of equitable thinking and action

that will enable school leaders to make drastic improvements in their buildings for their teachers and students to experience transformation.





LEADERSHIP HIGHLIGHT

Dr. David Hardy, Managing Partner, Education Elements

The end of each quarter was a wonderful time for me. I would select my favorite tie and as I knotted it, my stomach would take a leap in excitement. I would be meeting with an honorable group of leaders: high school students from the district receiving the perfect attendance award. While commendable on its own, I loved being surrounded by students who worked towards their academic and personal goals, providing examples of excellence for their peers and the adults in our community.

I remember on one occasion the meeting did not go as planned. A rising senior approached me with a stern look on her face and said, "Mr. Hardy, I would like to speak with you about some personal matters, can I have time to speak with you?" In an instant, the years of experience as a teacher, principal, and superintendent dissolved as I felt like the tables had turned and I was now the student on the opposite end of the principal's desk. I accepted the request and I was in for an awakening.

The young lady approached my office carrying a large notebook with copious notes, post-it tags, and highlights. I welcomed her to sit at my round table where she laid out her notes and proceeded to review her list of ELEVEN concerns and requests.


As we approached the final item, she took a deep breath and showed me her course options for the upcoming year and alerted me to the fact that there were no advanced courses needed for college preparedness. There must have been a mistake. There was no way that we were graduating hundreds of seniors a year without meeting the

college requirements. I did my homework. By graduation standards, she had everything she needed to graduate high school but far from enough to prepare her for college. Her experience helped me understand why only 1% of the students in the school district I inherited graduated high school college and career ready. This was particularly concerning as we graduated mostly students of color. I was overwhelmed with so many questions but two things were clear: I had to learn more and I couldn't do this by myself.

I met with more students, counselors, teachers, and community colleges and other local partners. Together we studied the challenge and built prototypes to address the need: our students needed access to courses that made them competitive for college.

I am proud of what we accomplished. We revamped our early college [program](#), expanded our Advanced Placement options, and re-engaged our partnership with our local community college. We saw a 75% increase in students who received an Associates' Degree upon high school graduation.

This move towards equity all started with a young person's vision for themselves, a notebook, and a conversation. She expressed a vision that sometimes was for us, as adults, easy to overlook. To create a more equitable education system, we have to know names and experiences; aspirations and dreams. **We have to create with and not for.**



Here are some self-reflection questions to consider as a leader when deciding deliberately:

Elevate all voices

How can we adjust or redesign systems of decision-making to include voices and experiences representative of individuals or groups of varying identities that are positioned differently relative to privilege/oppression?

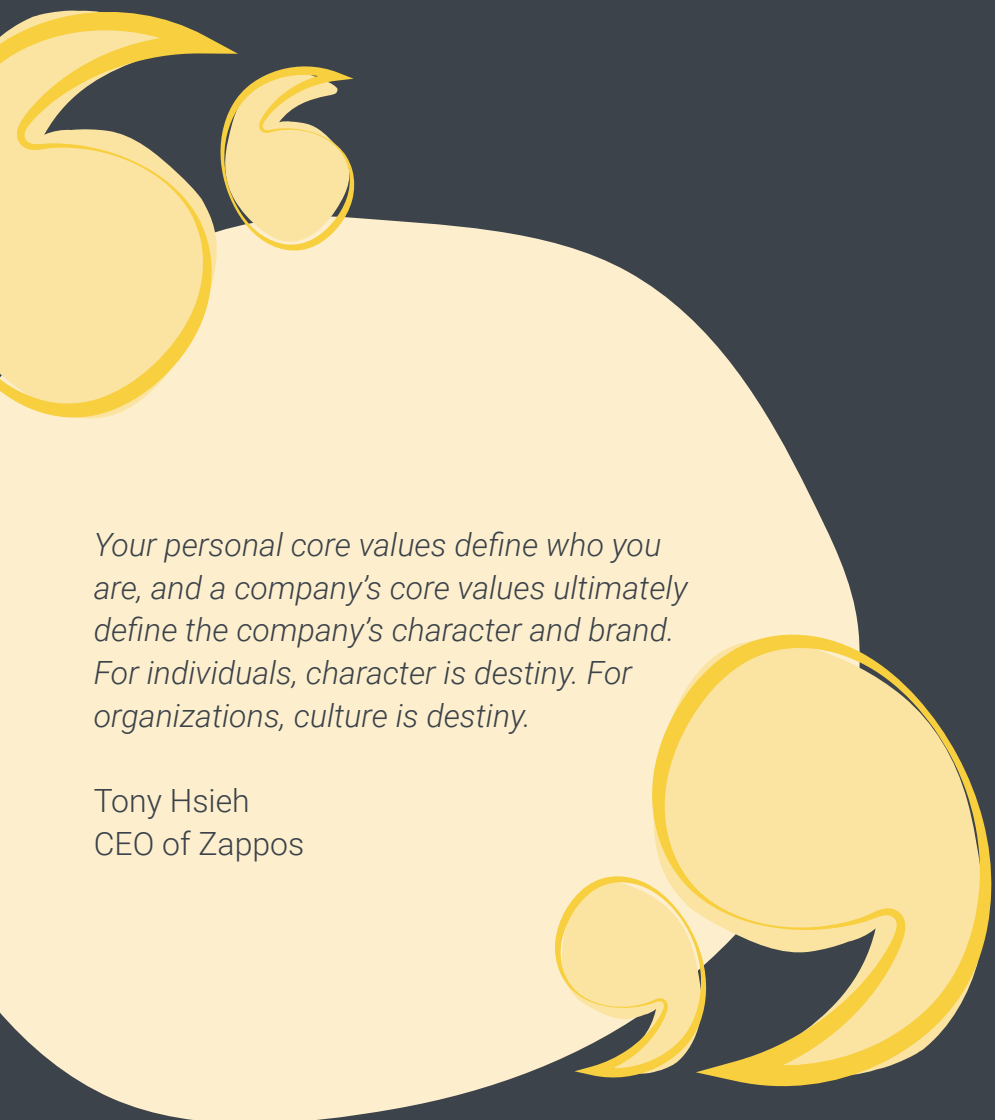
Design at the margins

How might these decisions impact individuals or groups of varying identities and positioned differently relative to privilege/oppression?

Recognize your bias

What blind spots might decision-makers have that could lead to unintended consequences and inequitable outcomes?

VALUES-ALIGNED DECISION MAKING



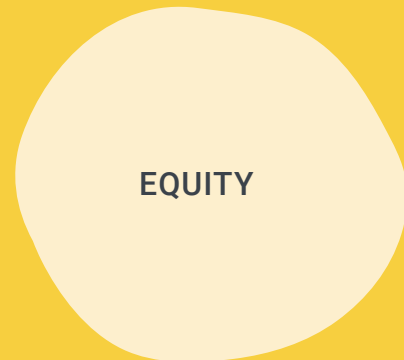
Your personal core values define who you are, and a company's core values ultimately define the company's character and brand. For individuals, character is destiny. For organizations, culture is destiny.

Tony Hsieh
CEO of Zappos

During uncertain times, it is challenging to determine “the right path” forward. After you have thought through the different scenarios, you know that there are many choices and that each takes you down a number of paths. You have a broad understanding of your areas of focus (big rocks) and you are ready to take action. You are also probably realizing that you will likely not activate one scenario on its own but will be required to move between different realities.

While there is a great deal of information you are waiting for, there is already a considerable amount of control you have within your organization to make an informed decision now.

It’s up to leadership teams to determine and communicate the organizational core values. When faced with many challenging decisions, organizations can look to their values as a guide for decision-making through ambiguity.



We offer these three values, among others, to guide reimagining systems as we return to school: equity, agility, safety.

Equity

Our Definition

Educational equity is the systemic recognition that our current racial and socioeconomic learning gaps are a result of deliberate action, and therefore require that a greater amount of attention and resources are dedicated to addressing biases and intentionally infusing anti-racist ideologies that advance the eradication of such barriers.

Our Charge

We know that [by staying silent we become complicit](#) in a long history of racial oppression. We recognize that it is a choice and a privilege to maintain our status quo – a status quo that was intentionally designed to elevate some voices while minimizing others. And if the status quo was designed this way, it is within our locus of control to redesign it differently. We can design equitable systems by co-creating these systems **WITH** our communities rather than **FOR** them. This cannot occur absent of individual anti-racist work.



Agility

Our Definition

The ability to remain nimble while providing structure and consistency. According to McKinsey, an agile organization is “[designed for both stability and dynamism] and is a network of teams...that operates in rapid learning and fast decision cycles.” During return planning, ambiguity must be faced with agility as a core value. In our previous guide, we discussed the concept of “Planning for change, not perfection.” We refer to this shift in mindset as a key ingredient to leading with agility at the center.

Our Charge

We want to help school districts operate with the agile mindset of deciding and moving forward with what is “safe enough to try” by adding the following three structures and concepts to their planning process.

1

Pivot

A change in strategy without a change in vision.

2

Sprint

A structure for managing work that enables teams to adjust and be responsive by planning for short blocks of time between 2-4 weeks.

3

Reversibility

According to Annie Duke, author and professional poker player, reversibility is described as the ease by which you can reverse a decision in order to determine the level of risk. By moving forward with a decision that has reversibility, teams are empowered to take action rather than risk delays in decision-making out of fear of making the “wrong one.”

Safety

Our Definition

Prior to school closures, many schools and districts interpreted safety as meaning physical safety within the school building. During the pandemic, however, safety took on a larger meaning as communities across the world experienced a collective trauma. The impact of social isolation and the sudden and dramatic loss of lives, health, economic opportunity, and a sense of wellbeing will be with us for some time. As schools and districts plan to come back together, they must consider ways to prioritize the mental and physical wellbeing of students, staff, and families, regardless of physical location.

Our Charge

We design systems that ensure the physical and mental health of our community by

Remaining informed on the local, state, and federal guidance regarding reopening

Engaging in ongoing conversations with our stakeholders to directly ask them to identify their needs

Creating systems to support and help people process the collective trauma we have endured

NOTE

A caution on "safety."

These values should not compete with one another. Safety as a value runs the risk of holding us back from moving towards more equitable systems. It also runs the risk of leading us to revert back to old, comfortable, and stable systems that do not allow for agility during uncertain times. While a safe return to school is paramount, it is time to boldly reimagine to meet the needs of ALL students.

DESIGNING FOR SOMETHING THAT HAS NEVER EXISTED BEFORE

**“Justice too
long delayed is
justice denied.”**

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

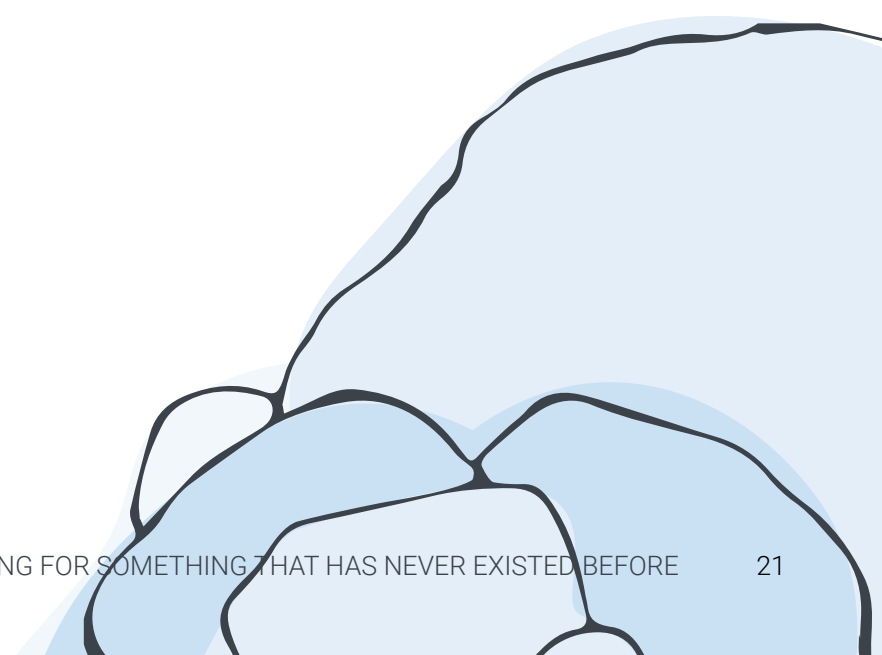
At this point, you and your team can clearly name systems and structures that will not work as previously designed against the different potential scenarios for SY 2020-2021.

To successfully open schools, you will need to design some new systems that have never existed before and make decisions with incomplete information.

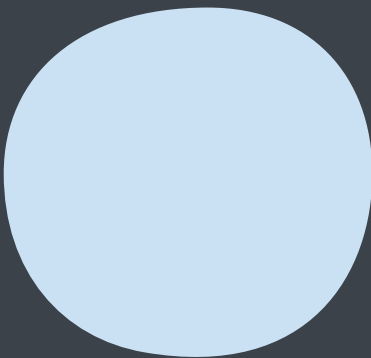
Through our Return Planning work with districts, we have encountered common “big rocks” that require attention and redesign. Within each big rock is a component or smaller system that needs to be considered. Before, during, and after building new systems you must take a critical eye to your current systems to see how they do or do not live up to your values.

We make this point because many of these big rocks have not worked for our marginalized communities. In fact, many of the systems within these big rocks were intentionally built not to work for marginalized people. This is not new information but as we face the unknown of the upcoming school year many of us are reevaluating our status quo to distinguish what is truly necessary from what is a tradition or

preference. As we adapt to change amidst a global pandemic we must also apply the lenses of safety and agility. This will allow us to create strong and resilient systems that are built to be dynamic and adapt to the many unknowns that the future brings.



**Here are examples
of the big rocks and
the components
you might consider
within each.**



Instruction

- Attendance and Student Engagement
- Staffing and Their Support
- Flexible Instructional Models
- Demonstration of Mastery
- Learning Loss
- Master Schedule
- Student Ownership



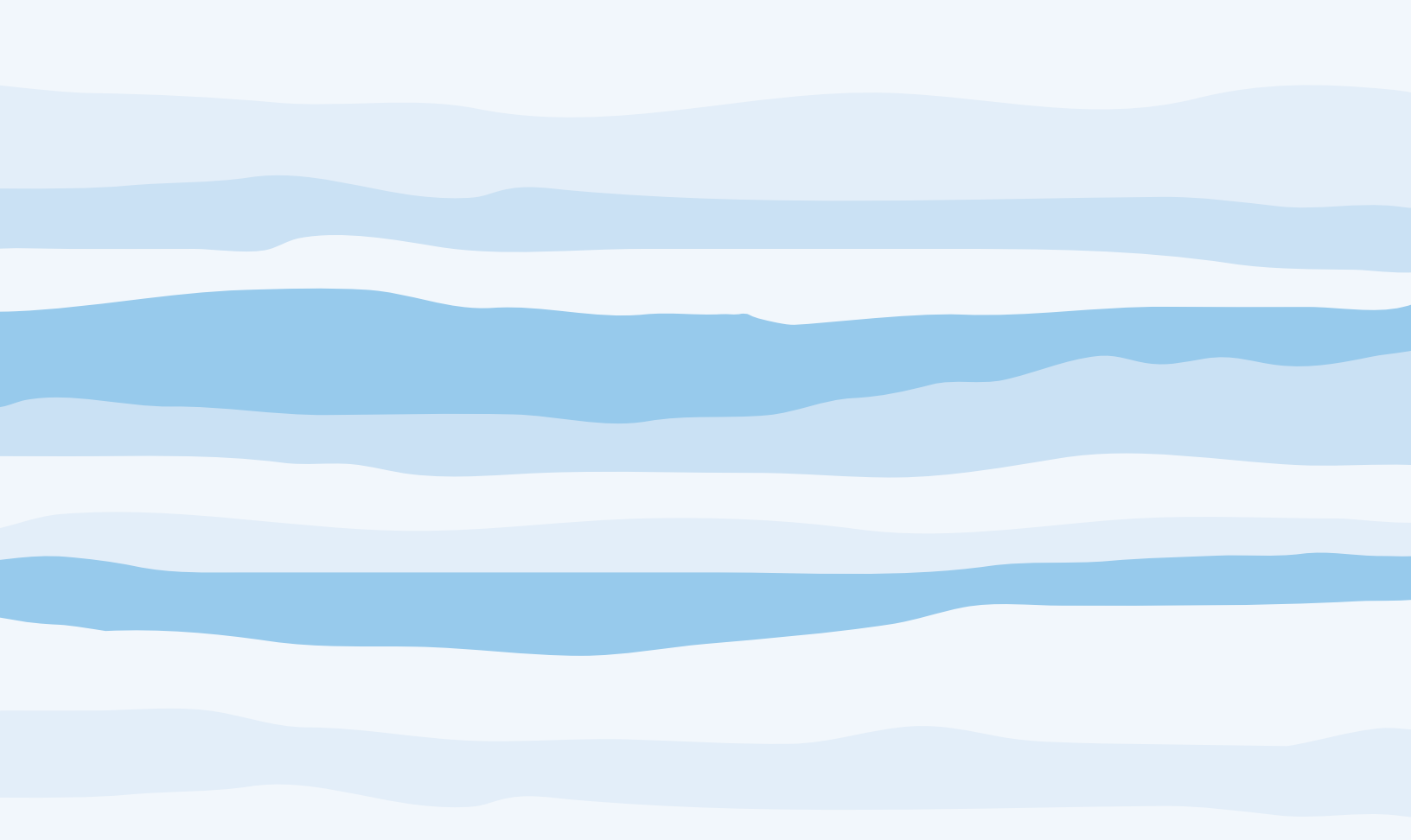
Organizational Culture

- Building and Maintaining Culture
- Hiring and Role Reallocation
- Professional Development
- On-Boarding
- Staff Wellness



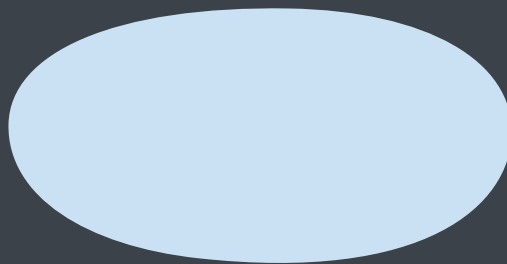
Wellness

- Mental Health Supports (School-Facing)
- Medical Needs and Considerations
- IEP and 504 Plan Supports
- Family Support for Learning and Social-Emotional Needs



Operations & Facilities

- Safety Procedures
- Sanitation of Facilities
- Protecting Operations Staff
- Entering/Exiting Buildings
- Space for Social Distancing
- Transportation and Student Mobility (vehicular and foot)



Communications

- Involvement and Engagement of Stakeholders
- Feedback Loops and Continuous Improvement
- Community Communications
- Building Influence and Trust

As you begin to build out solutions to your big rocks, we recommend using prototypes as a way to ensure your solutions are aligned to the values of equity, safety, and agility.

A prototype is a representation of an idea that you can test in a small, low-risk way to get immediate feedback and show proof of concept.

Traditionally, prototyping lives within a design cycle (learn more [here](#)). However, in order to build a prototype in an equitable way we recommend grounding the design of your prototypes in key design levers previously introduced from the [equityXdesign Framework](#) and following the steps to connect, include, and create.



Connect

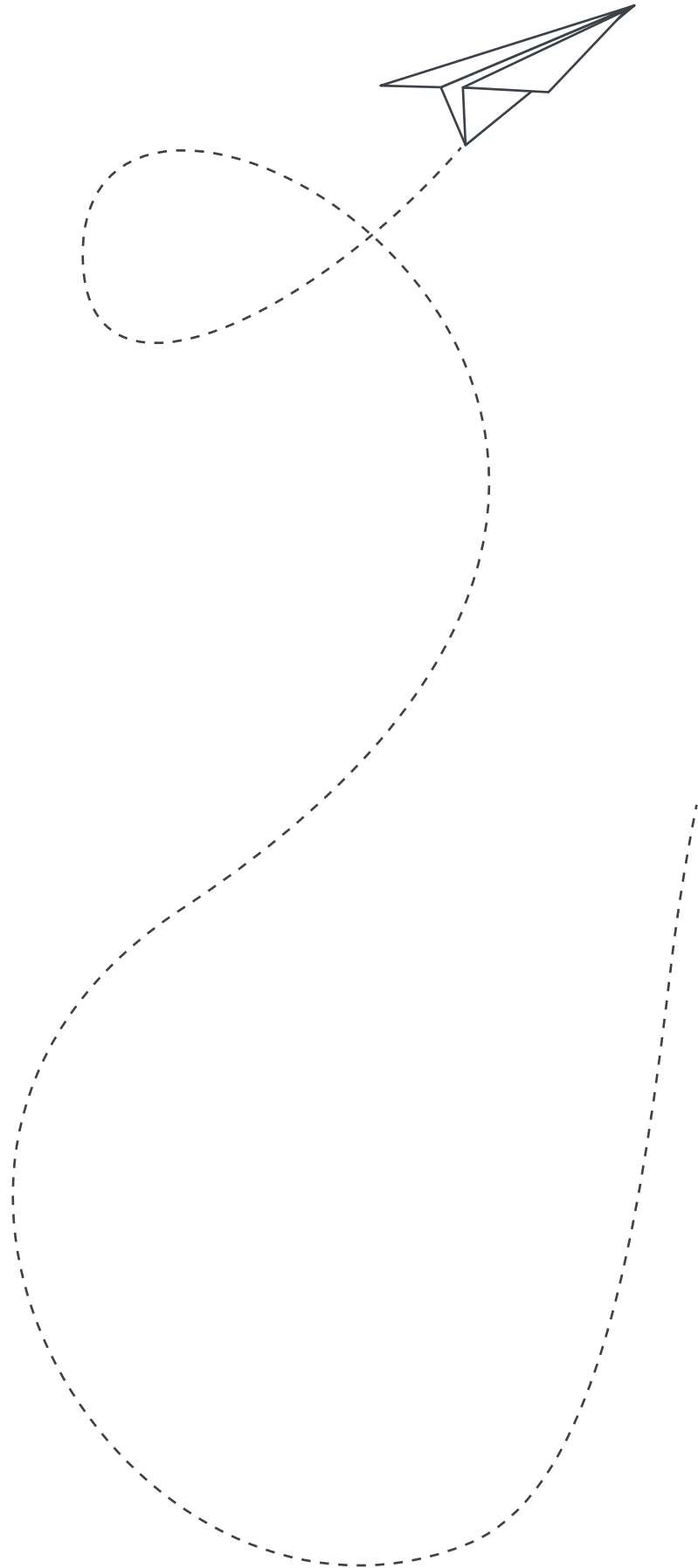
Leaders hold a great responsibility to make decisions for entire communities. We believe that a leader who seeks to redesign systems for equity, safety, and agility must be able to empathize with the varying perspective of those they serve. We **MUST** connect with our challenges by deeply understanding the origin, circumstances, and intentions in which they were created which may mean uncovering an uncomfortable and traumatic past.

Include

Families, students, teachers, and business leaders want and need to actively participate in their communities. For many communities, the school system is the epicenter. In order for districts to be universally effective they must create structures for inclusivity that authentically value diversity of thought at the decision-making table and take deliberate action to elevate marginalized voices.

Create

School districts must enable a culture that allows everyone to use their voices to create necessary and impactful change that will help them grow as individuals. Inviting individuals to co-create with you shows you care. At the same time, we need to look within and examine how our own identities, biases, power, and privilege might govern the relationships we have with the communities we serve. Following through on tough conversations and feedback establishes trust. People will not care about how much you know until they know how much you care.



**"Not everything that is
faced can be changed, but
nothing can be changed
until it is faced."**

James Baldwin

Connect

As your big rocks are becoming more clear, it is now time to bring more leaders into your process. Whether you decide to create individual teams for each big rock or you want to tackle all big rocks as one team, now is a good time to evaluate how you engage your stakeholders by either inviting them to the decision-making team or seeking their feedback. You likely needed one group to make the broad decisions across all of your scenarios in your first sprint but now that you are getting closer to acting on your plan it is important to expand your reach.

Want to learn more about specific tactics aligned to your 'why'? Read more in our engagement guide [here](#).

Determine the information you need to collect



Understanding what information you require to guide decision-making will guide how you approach your community throughout a major change. Common 'why's' for engaging with stakeholders include, but are not limited to:

Wanting feedback

Understanding the current state of a situation

Securing buy-in

Sourcing new ideas

Decide from whom you need the information



After articulating your 'why', identify stakeholders to engage.

Consider groups who are often sought after and have a louder voice vs. those who often do not have a seat at the table.

Consider who will truly be impacted most by the outcomes of the changes you seek to make, and how systemic inequities could exacerbate certain stakeholders' experiences post-change.

Consider how race, geography, positional authority, and other factors influence who consistently seizes and uses power in your community to make change.

Consider your personal biases – who do you tend to involve in decision-making, particularly when the timeline is short?

A big part of connecting to the challenge is certainly empathizing with the community; it is also understanding the circumstances that have created the challenge on the macro and micro level.

We encourage you to do your due diligence to understand racism and classism in education. This will help you ensure you do not recreate inequitable systems.

Getting Started

[The Whiteness Project](#)

[Understanding Whiteness](#)

[Race: The Power of an Illusion](#)

[28 Common Racist Attitudes & Behaviors](#)

[1619 Podcast \[NY Times\]](#)

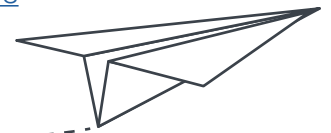
Digging Deeper

[RaceWorks Toolkit](#)

[Race and College Admissions](#)

[Conspire for Change Resources](#)

[Courageous Conversations](#)



Distinguish decision-makers from contributors and consultants.



After identifying who to include and your 'why', distinguish between how you will engage with various stakeholders.

Are some absolutely crucial to involve because they are directly impacted by upcoming changes?

Are others better to include on a more ad hoc, consultative basis due to certain subject-matter expertise?

Are there any groups we should not include to allow for the liberty of expression of a marginalized group?

Are there any groups who historically have held power and had a voice, whose opinions do not weigh as heavily in this decision?

Engaging to identify your problem statement.

Now that you have clarified which group(s) to engage, circle back to your 'why'. Generate a specific, aligned problem statement that you will address using specific engagement tactics, such as:

We seek to collect feedback from Black parents, teacher-leaders, staff, and Black community leaders in order to increase safer learning environments for all students, especially our Black males.

We seek secure buy-in from parents of SpEd students, principals, policy experts, and SpEd staff about structures we have developed to support SpEd students in our return plan.

Include

Building Decision-Making Teams

How you approach return planning will be unique to the needs of your district. In many states, districts have been asked to develop their plan for a return in a matter of weeks. The urgency of the times may add pressure to act quickly, but we implore you to take the time to examine your team structure before you dig into the hard work. In our approach to strategic planning, we have compiled a guide for how you might consider [incorporating layers of feedback](#).

We must do something to improve the governance of antiquated structures of schools. In the current system, we uphold a governance structure that is dominated by the dominant while silencing the marginalized. We must intentionally build teams that fuel stable leadership, thrive on collaboration, and rest on a bedrock of trust. We should strive to create inclusive environments that not only invite the voices of the community to the table but enable them to lead.

Here are the pitfalls we have seen in creating a project team with some suggestions for how to mitigate them:



PITFALL

Creating the team before understanding the problem

AVOID BY**CLARIFYING THE WORK**

In The New School Rules, we lean on rule #3, Define the work before you define the people, to clarify roles in a project. This is similar to selecting a team. When we know the work in which we must engage we can consider who has a stake in the work. We must make a distinction to work with and not just for a community. Partnership will allow the needs to be authentically addressed.

PITFALL

Unclear decision-making

AVOID BY**DETERMINING HOW YOU WILL DISTRIBUTE DECISIONS**

If you are leading the return planning team, spend some time considering what decisions you must be involved in versus the ones that you can defer to others. Share this with your team and then reflect on what decisions you hope to make as a team. Clarifying this on the front end of planning will provide the team with the clarity needed to move the work forward.

PITFALL

Use equity in name only

AVOID BY**MODELING VULNERABILITY**

Equity and justice work require introspection and reflection. It is not enough to simply involve equity as a value without doing the work to question systems and structures. Many of these structures have existed to serve a specific purpose of efficiency or practicality. It's very likely some of these systems do not meet the needs of all of your students. Model the vulnerability your team needs to question these structures by raising the hard questions yourself.

PITFALL

The return planning team does not represent your community

AVOID BY**CONSIDERING MULTIPLE STRATEGIES FOR INVOLVING ALL VOICES**

Part of the issues we are grappling with is that people in marginalized groups such as people of color are less likely to be in positions of power. Look at your organization and consider the following questions:

- What is the racial makeup of my student population?
- What is the racial makeup of my teachers and staff?
- What is the racial makeup of district leadership?

If you notice that the demographics get less representative or diverse the higher up the chain of command you go, you know that by just including your leadership team, you are likely missing key stakeholder perspectives, including the people in whose name you do this work. Consider diversifying your team to include families, students, teachers, principals, and community members of different backgrounds.

PITFALL

You look to leaders of color to represent an entire perspective

AVOID BY**ESTABLISHING PROTOCOLS TO EXAMINE PERSPECTIVES**

When planning for return, we might engage in a binary process, where white people get to share their perspectives as individuals, yet people of color are unconsciously tapped to be the spokesperson for their racial group. Avoid this by seeking perspectives from many stakeholders so a diverse voice is present throughout. This might include the use of surveys, interviews, or forums. Make sure to incorporate protocols to ensure you are designing for perspectives different from your own.

Include

Stakeholder Engagement For Problem-Solving

Stakeholder engagement is always important. In times of crisis and uncertainty, engaging your stakeholders throughout your decision-making process becomes essential. Having varying perspectives allows you to socialize your values and gives you space to include voices at the margins before finalizing them. Does your community have the same understanding of the values you hold or the terms you use to communicate? And does your community feel that the impact of COVID-19 closures is truly known by the organization?

The reality is that all of us have experienced trauma at some level, the extent of which varies based on how you were impacted by the pandemic. Some people have gotten ill; others have lost loved ones to the virus; some are grappling with the economic impact. Many people are facing these challenges on top of previous trauma. According to the [US Dept of Health and Human Services' Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration](#) there are a few actions we can take to incorporate a trauma-informed lens:

Support Regulation

Prioritize Relationships

Create Trust and Offer Transparency

Support Voice, Choice, and Empowerment

You have an opportunity to address the latter two through your return planning. Utilize stakeholder engagement to both socialize your plan and receive feedback while also making space for people to express their preferences and choices to ensure they feel like a part of the plan.

We encourage you to utilize our framework while adding one additional layer: narrowing choices during engagement and sharing your next steps.



Narrow choices

As mentioned previously, just like school system leaders, stakeholders are dealing with decision fatigue. In seeking feedback from your stakeholders we advise that you clarify your request. If during typical circumstances you would ask an open-ended question, we encourage you to provide options or a proposal to which they can react.

Share your next steps

Take this time to clarify how you will incorporate the feedback provided into the plan. This will increase transparency by showing folks how you are considering various data points and how you plan to communicate back. For more ideas read: [\[Blog\] Using Your Strategic Plan to Keep Your Stakeholders Informed and Engaged During Times of Change.](#)

Create

Stakeholder engagement will equip you with ideas, preferences and some clarity on what your community needs. From there, you have used that data to define and frame the underlying challenges or problems that need to be solved with your prototypes. It is now time to begin creating [prototypes](#) for your big rocks.

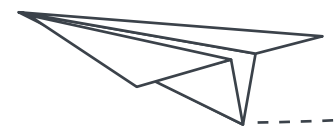
How to create prototypes for one problem statement

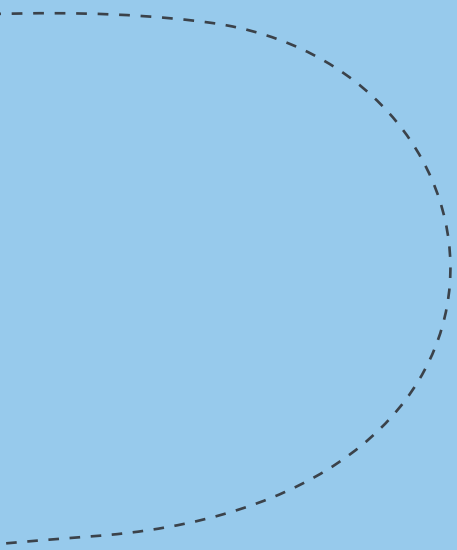
Generate a diverse set of prototypes

When creating prototypes, it's important that you continue to bring a diverse set of voices and perspectives to the table and generate as many solutions as possible to the key problems within your big rocks. We recommend bringing together groups of about 4-6 people per problem statement and allowing time to first independently generate ideas. This ensures that you are inviting ideas from all team members, regardless of the power that they may hold in that space.

Engage in preliminary “testing” of your prototypes through conversation

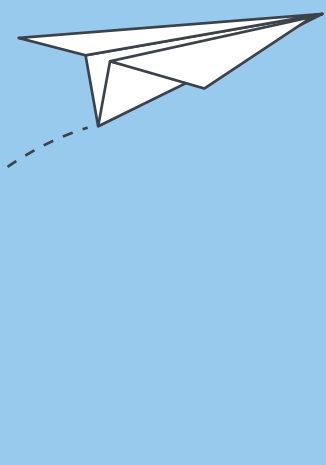
You won't be able to design your prototypes with representation of every stakeholder or user





at the margin. Therefore, it's important for you to solicit initial reactions and feedback for your prototypes prior to officially testing them in the real world. This is especially true for systems-level prototyping because by nature they are meant to serve a larger audience, therefore making them harder to test in a low-impact way. Use this feedback to iterate on your prototype prior to testing.

Create a clear theory of action and measure for success



You're almost ready to test your prototype! A key function of a prototype is to establish proof of concept—will this thing work the way we want it to? Therefore, prior to putting your prototype into action, establish a clear theory you want to test: “IF...THEN...” Coupled with the hypothesis, be sure to explicitly name what success will look like and what data needs to be collected throughout the testing process to support the hypothesis. Finally, we recommend scheduling time to reflect on the implementation of the prototype, analyze the collected learning, and iterate on your design.

Share prototypes and **seek feedback** from stakeholders

Incorporate feedback to consolidate prototypes to create a proposal

Create

Speaking to the Future

Does this prototype promote new, equitable ideas or simply restate existing systems that were never designed to serve all students?

Extending Learning Time

After you've generated your solutions or prototype ideas, create the time to intentionally pause to connect, notice, and reflect on the ideas with an equity lens. Our Education Elements team leverages the expertise of others, two of which are highlighted below and we encourage you to dig deeper through their resources.

Recommended by Key Design Levers from [Equity Design Collaborative](#)

Recommended by [Alliance for Excellent Education](#) (for prioritizing in a COVID-19 response)

Easing the High School-to-College Transition

**Meeting Students'
Basic Needs**

**Determining Students'
Academic, Social, and
Emotional Needs**

Designing at the Margins

Who does this prototype serve?
Whose needs are unaccounted
for? Does this prototype create
inclusion and belonging for
all stakeholders?

**Expanding and Improving
Remote Learning**

**Ensuring Equity
in Fiscal Policies**

Making the Invisible Visible

What assumptions might we
be making as designers? Are
we still upholding underlying
systems of inequity?

Recommended by Key Design Levers from
[Equity Design Collaborative](#)

Recommended by [Alliance for Excellent Education](#)
(for prioritizing in a COVID-19 response)

Create

Gut Check Your Prototypes Against Your Values

Before testing your prototype, we recommend pausing and ensuring that your prototypes are in alignment with your core values. You should develop questions that push your thinking around this alignment. For example, here are questions you might ask using the core values of equity, safety, and agility.

Equity

Does this prototype serve the heard needs of our stakeholders at the margins?

Safety

How does this prototype work to ensure all stakeholders will feel reasonably safe (physically) and to build in structures to support mental health?

Agility

Does my prototype leave room to be responsive and pivot as needed?

Determining Which Prototypes to Test

Traditionally prototypes are tested in small, low-risk environments where a polished product is less important than making sure you are able to prove your hypothesis. In education, this might be with a few students, one class, or possibly a grade level. Given that you are likely trying to test solutions that are meant to serve district-wide needs, it will be important to align on a group size with who you are okay testing the prototype on

and potentially failing. We recommend evaluating the reversibility of your decisions in order to give you confidence to move forward. You might want to use these tips as a discussion point or you might evaluate each decision within your team.

In many instances, going in new directions will be scary and daunting. Those risks are necessary to make real change; sometimes it's a bigger risk to go too small as it may lead you to lose trust from your community because the urgency and impact on kids are too big. Reimagining is not easy, yet it might be helpful to put things into perspective to see if what scares you is as daunting as you think.

Low Reversibility

It will be very difficult to recover from the decision if it does not work and you will have to do significant work to reestablish trust, resources, and/or credibility.

Medium Reversibility

You can recover quickly from the decision if it does not work but you might have to do work to reestablish some trust, resources, or credibility.

High Reversibility

You will be able to recover quickly from the decision if it does not work and you will not lose trust, resources, or credibility.

Sharing Proposals

By the end of this process you should have a few prototypes that you will want to turn into proposals. At this point, we recommend you consider activating the channels you used previously to communicate updates. Ensure that you have opportunities for ongoing feedback and that you set aside a dedicated time to host a retrospective to reflect on what has worked and where you must pivot.



Prototyping can feel daunting, so we want to summarize with some common pitfalls and how to avoid them as you begin engaging your stakeholders and designing:

PITFALL

Selecting one path without considering multiple solutions

AVOID BY

PROTOTYPE development with the goal of leaving with three options.

ANNOUNCE to stakeholders that they will evaluate three options to provide feedback.

PITFALL

Lack of transparency with final decision

AVOID BY

CREATE a website or a place for stakeholders to see progress.

PROVIDE a space for stakeholders to respond to the decision before it goes into action.

PITFALL

Losing your “why” along the way

AVOID BY

KEEP the problem statement at the top of all produced documents and/or conversations.

BE intentional about reflecting on how the solution upholds your values.

PITFALL

Letting the loudest voices lead

AVOID BY

NAME the power and privilege that exists within the space and call on everyone to work towards equity of voice.

COMMUNICATE who was involved in the decision-making process and their roles.

HAVE all members confirm the final decisions using an objection/no-objection protocol.

PITFALL

Only including or elevating the “usuals”

AVOID BY

ESTABLISH dates for stakeholder feedback.

GENERATE a list of stakeholders at the margins across a variety of identifiers (race, socioeconomic, English as a second language, etc.).

ACKNOWLEDGE that you might feel discomfort engaging voices or perspectives that are not traditionally heard.

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We thank the entire Education Elements team for their tireless work this Spring, providing districts with guidance and support for return planning. This approach would not be possible without our team's commitment to safety, agility, and equity while swiftly designing plans to open schools this Fall with our clients. If you are interested in finding out more about our services and ways we partner with leaders, please contact us at info@edelements.com.

Key Contributors

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