PART 3:

CAPTURE THE OPPORTUNITY

Steps to Redesign School-Level Systems for Equity

ABOUT THE SERIES

This series was created in response to the radical transformation and change that our educational systems were forced to undergo in a short amount of time because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

We see this as an opportunity to further redesign our systems that have historically uplifted only some students, not all. The inequity within our educational systems has only been exacerbated during this time of crisis. We are at a pivotal point and have the space to intentionally change the narrative around universal student achievement and design new systems aimed at creating opportunities for achievement for all.

PART 1:

We began with "[Forging the Path Forward: How to Design a Responsive Return Plan](#)" that allowed school districts to determine all the possible paths for SY20-21, with an explicit intent to address the needs of all students. In this first part of the series, we guided districts through using the best practices in cycles of crisis management and by following the four steps of responsive return planning. Leaders left this part of the series with actions for possible scenarios this fall and focus areas, or "big rocks," for which to plan for moving forward. Big rocks included areas such as Health & Safety, Culture, Instruction, Operations, Staffing, and Finances.

PART 2:

In part two of the series, "[Boldly Reimagining What Is Possible](#)," we guided leaders through protocols for designing prototypes for these big rocks with an explicit lens on, and alignment to, the core values of equity, safety, and agility. Using the framework of "Connect, Include, and Create," leaders were pushed to reimagine more equitable district level systems, designed with the needs of key stakeholders at the forefront.

PART 3:

In this final installment of the series, we focus on redesign and change at the school-level – equitable redesign within our locus of control and influence. This guide and digital workbook provides school leaders with a tactical process to revamp systems, whether virtual or in person, within their control, embracing the lens of equity. We call on leaders to start with their own beliefs and biases that uphold oppressive systems and then guide them through redesigning for marginalized groups within their schools, as we follow the framework of "Connect, Include, Create" introduced in part two. We want to support school leaders to redesign school-level systems for equity and create communities in which all students are empowered and uplifted to reach their full potential.

CAPTURE THE OPPORTUNITY

Steps to Redesign School-Level Systems for Equity

WHY NOW?

With districts and schools in the process of planning for fall return, now is a time when schools are able to substantially change systems. **Whether you are returning to school in person, virtual, or in a hybrid model, we believe that as you make changes and design new systems, you must explicitly design with equity at the center.** Use this guide to redefine your systems for an equitable learning environment for all your students returning to school this fall.

"Any return to normal is a return to the normality of racism"

- IBRAM X. KENDI

Our country was founded on the oppression of Black people, women, and Indigenous people, among others. This created social norms and beliefs that are ingrained into the fabric of our society and subconsciously affect how we all think. There are many systems of power that routinely produce racially inequitable outcomes for people of color while reinforcing advantages for white people. School systems are complex ecosystems designed within this context of structural racism.

WHAT IS EDUCATIONAL EQUITY?

Educational Equity is the recognition that the barriers that marginalized students face are due to deliberate actions and biases, and therefore requires us to dedicate a greater amount of resources to remove them.

The deeply embedded inequities that exist within our school systems are the result of intentional decisions made by those with power and privilege. People came to those spaces with beliefs, biases, and assumptions that allowed for further marginalization of groups. Over time, they perpetuated deep levels of institutional racism working against marginalized groups. The vastness of these inequities is the primary reason to start now by reexamining systems within our control rather than waiting for change within the larger systems.

We know that to truly dismantle the oppressive systems within our society, change must occur at both micro and macro levels – within a district, throughout a state, and across our nation. People with good intentions, expertise, and actions have attempted to address these problems but have fallen short due to the enormous barriers around power, policies, and practices that have been in place for hundreds of years. Therefore, to achieve systemic changes to the structural racism within our education systems, we must change policies, practices, and the human factors behind power and decision-making.

We challenge you – individual leaders and teams – to start redesigning the school experience for marginalized students within your community as a way to start the eradication of these barriers across all levels. Pre-COVID, leaders would take months to plan and execute a school redesign. However, in this current climate there is a heightened need and urgency to ensure students can enter schools in the fall that have been responsively redesigned to meet their immediate needs. By engaging in the steps below, we hope schools can capture the opportunity to begin redesigning aspects of policies and practices within your buildings in an iterative but urgent manner. If your school is interested in rethinking systems outside of the immediate needs presented by the pandemic, there is also the opportunity to engage in a more complex redesign that will take more time and resources.

"Since we know that disturbance is required for change and there is no doubt that disturbance is happening as we speak, the question is, are we willing to use this opportunity to create the kind of educational system we want?"

- HUGH VASQUEZ, NATIONAL EQUITY PROJECT

DESIGN WITHIN YOUR SCHOOL'S LOCUS OF CONTROL

Some examples of marginalized groups are our Black and brown children, our students with disabilities, our ESL students, among others. While we are not presenting an exhaustive list of marginalized groups, we are acknowledging that **marginalization created by systems** will be determined based on factors of your school community and district. We argue that we can all work to redesign the student learning experience from within our locus of control. That work begins with adopting the mindset that we all have control and influence to dismantle our own internalized racism, the interpersonal racism that occurs between individuals within our school building, and the institution that is our school. We also acknowledge the

1) **size of the district,**
2) **level of autonomy of school leaders, and**
3) **guidance provided by state officials can alter aspects of your redesign.**

EXAMPLES OF MARGINALIZATIONS BASED ON

RACE:
Achievement gap between white students and all other races

LGBTQIA+:
Lack of access to spaces and opportunities that align with their identity

DISABILITY:
Gaps in instructional and curriculum materials for Special Education students

SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS:
Gaps in achievement for economically disadvantaged students

GENDER:
Achievement & opportunity gaps between gender identity groups in schools, such as access to math and science classes

The protocols within this paper are to support our call to action of all leaders within schools. We designed this process to:

- **be completed within your role or team's locus of control**

- **act as a starting point for responsive equity work in schools**

- **shift power in creating prototypes to address inequity**

We engage in dismantling systemic education inequities at Education Elements through a three-part methodology: **Connect, Include, Create**.

We also know and believe that any work around addressing inequity must start with oneself and a willingness to cede power depending on the privileges one holds. The steps below present strategies a school leader, or teams can use to *Start with Yourself and Cede Power*[1], in order to *Connect, Include, Create.*

CONNECT

INCLUDE

CREATE

Step 0:

Start With Yourself & Cede Power

- Identify your own bias, power, and privilege in how you make decisions

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Step 1:

Connect

- Define what system to address, the scope of change you are making, and for whom you are making the change
- Empathize with the identified school level challenge
- Determine if you are designing for impact, urgency, or ease

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Step 2:

Include

- Bring voices to the table
- Empathize with the marginalized group
- Outline the success criteria for truly changing the system for equity

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Step 3:

Create

- Create opportunities for voices at the margin to be included in the design process
- Design 2-3 prototypes with the marginalized group at the center
- Clear communication of the what (decision trade-offs), how (process used), and why (your reason for selecting the system for redesign)

STEP 0:

START WITH YOURSELF AND CEDE POWER

OUTPUTS OR OUTCOMES

- Identify your own bias, power, and privilege in how you make decisions

While systems are a product of design, they can be redesigned to better reflect the needs of all stakeholders. Redesign can only be successful in addressing inequities if the current designers **recognize, consider, and design** against the ways implicit bias, psychological bias, racism, power and privilege impact decision-making. Our identities are multi-faceted, and each part influences how you experience the world and the assumptions and biases you hold. As a society, implicit biases are so deeply ingrained in our social norms that we often cannot even tell that they are there. Your students might experience marginalization and oppression based on a variety of ideas that fuel oppression, including but not limited to discrimination based on race, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, and socio-economic status. Race is one of the most prevalent root causes of inequity in the United States education system.

To begin to unpack racism at the **personal, interpersonal, and institutional levels,** we have compiled a series of readings and reflection questions for readers to explore. Create time and space to reflect on the following questions, both as an individual and collectively:

- **In what ways have my biases helped to maintain racism within my school?**
- **What are examples of interpersonal racism and how does it play a role in my interactions at my school?**
- **How does institutional racism live within our school?**

You can find a list of resources to learn from and to help you reflect on each of these anchoring questions. The goal is to strengthen your capacity to reflect and learn as individuals and a redesign team.

REFLECTION POINT

In going through the resources, did you experience any of the common pitfalls of deep personal equity work?

Feeling defensive or failing to acknowledge oppression
Not recognizing emerging emotions
Not voicing the emotions with your team
Excusing actions with good intentions
Doing the work in isolation

Return to these reflection points in future conversations to reflect and see how you've acknowledged these pitfalls in yourself and/or as a team.

As we encourage schools to reflect on their own practices we would like to offer examples of how we are engaging in these reflections as an organization. Our reflections will be included for each step of the process throughout the paper.

We have been helping schools design and implement Personalized Learning models for years. We prioritize utilizing empathy to understand the student experience which includes strengths, needs and interests. However, we have failed to acknowledge the undeniable impact of bias in design. Moving forward, we will prioritize reflecting on and exposing bias as part of the process to explicitly name the dynamics of power and privilege in creating classroom and school models.
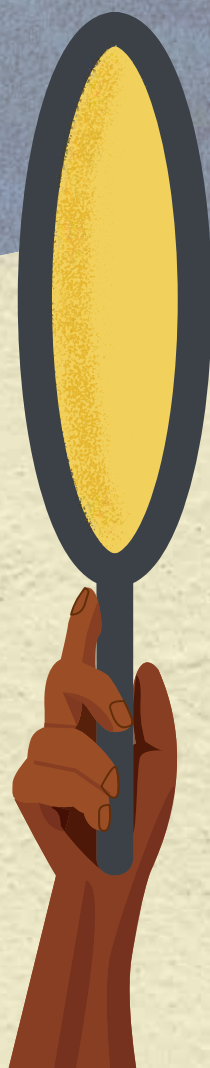
IN WHAT WAYS HAVE MY BIASES HELPED TO MAINTAIN RACISM WITHIN MY SCHOOL?

Great resources for learning how implicit bias impacts decision-making as well as your working and learning environments.

Implicit Bias Tests

What is my complicity?

"Challenging White Dominant Culture: Time to Look in the Mirror"

Internalized Racisms Definition + Internalized Racism Inventory

What is Internalized Racism Flipping the Switch

Color Blind or Color Brave

Brene Brown and Ibram X. Kendi - How to be an anti-racist

WHAT ARE EXAMPLES OF INTERPERSONAL RACISM AND HOW DOES IT PLAY A ROLE IN MY INTERACTIONS AT MY SCHOOL?

Be aware of the power and privilege that you bring.

Great resources available for white allies.

Deconstructing White Privilege

Well-meaning white people

Whistling Vivaldi NPR

White Privilege- Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack

Unpacking White Fragility

"The Surprisingly Racist History of 'Caucasian'"

Addressing Whiteness

Side effects of white women

Who gets to be afraid in America- Ibram Kendi

The Danger of a Single Story

28 Common Racist Attitudes and Behaviors

Great resources available for POC allies.

Non-Black POC start having conversations

Racisms has a cost for everyone

30 ways Asians perpetuate Anti-Black racism everyday

A History of Race and Racism in America, in 24 Chapters

The Racial Triangulation of Asian Americans

Timeline of Events that Led Up to 2020 "Fed Up" uprising

Getting Called Out and How to Apologize

Racial Equity Tools Glossary and Key concepts

Audre Lorde: "The Use of Anger: Women Responding to Racism"

HOW DOES INSTITUTIONAL RACISM LIVE WITHIN OUR SCHOOL?

Identify institutional bias of the school and district. Great resources available are….

What is systemic racism?

Intersectionality Wars

How studying privilege systems can strengthen compassion?

Moving the Race Conversation Forward

Deepening of Our Understanding of Structural Marginalization

The problem with othering: toward inclusiveness and belonging

Targeted Universalism Policy and Practice

ASCD 14 resources for culturally responsive teaching

Culturally Responsive teaching guide

CEDE POWER

Once you have gained self-awareness around your own implicit biases and beliefs, you are better positioned to cede power. When you enter a space, be aware of the power dynamics that exist within the context (Ask yourself, where and how do I hold power right now?) and make conscious efforts to **lift up the voices** that may not hold power in that space. Ceding power can be as simple as being the last one to offer an opinion during a staff meeting or allowing others to make final decisions on work they lead. One simple, but important way to practice ceding power, is creating space for those without power to provide feedback in a transparent way. As a principal, you can cede power by providing space for students, teachers, and parents to give authentic feedback (without fear of reprisal). For example, often our own preferences and beliefs as leaders will manifest into unspoken norms within the school that can morph into policies over time. It is important to uncover these **unspoken norms** around racist interactions within a school. In this example, you might ask staff,

"What do new teachers need to learn about our school or system through their onboarding that is not part of our handbook, PD, and written process?"

This will reveal a range of norms that you can then evaluate with an equity lens.

STEP 1:

CONNECT

OUTPUTS OR OUTCOMES

- Define the system you need to address, the scope of change you want to make, and whom you are making the change for
- Empathize with the identified school level challenge
- Determine if you are designing for impact, urgency, or ease

After identifying your own bias, power and privilege, you are now working to **connect with the specific system** for redesign, the scope in which you will be redesigning, and the targeted group for which you are redesigning. It will be important to continue to be self-aware of your power, privilege and biases so you can check your thinking and make intentional steps to uplift voices without power. To truly Connect with the challenge, a team must:

1. **Determine the information you need to collect**
2. **Decide from whom you need the information**
3. **Engage with stakeholders to identify your problem statement**

DETERMINE THE INFORMATION YOU NEED TO COLLECT

First, brainstorm the different systems that you want to redesign. We defined school-level systems as policies and practices regarding people, time, and money within a K-12 institution. Then, select data points around one area of historical inequity for different marginalized groups within your school based on the system you selected. Be sure to collect data to represent a variety of marginalized groups within your current system.

REFLECTION POINT

1. Have you paused to identify often overlooked sources of additional information that might provide a clearer picture of your needs?
2. Have you identified often overlooked data that might help to represent all marginalized groups within your school?
3. Have you experienced confirmation bias?

You can start defining these systems within your schools by asking yourself the following questions:

1. **What are the gaps among the different sub-groups within your school?**
2. **How wide are the gaps in learning outcomes in your school? Are they narrowing or widening?**
3. **What changes have you made to reduce these differences in learning outcomes?**

EXAMPLES OF POTENTIALLY INEQUITABLE SYSTEMS	Staffing/Master schedule
	Intervention structure
	Instructional models
	Grading
	Parent engagement
	Consequence/reward systems
	Student engagement
	Student safety
TOP RESEARCH BASED MARGINALIZED INEQUITIES IN SCHOOLS	Socio-economics status[3]
	Race[3]
	Age/ Grade[3]
	Ability groups[3]
	Instructional Tracks[4]
	Gender[4]
	School created social categories[4]
	Geography and mobility[5]
	LGBTQIA+
	English Language Learners
	Students with Disabilities

You can find a chart of different data points aligned with the prioritized systems on the next page.

BIG ROCK	SYSTEM	MARGINALIZED GROUPS IMPACTED	DATA POINT
Cultural	Safety	• Students whose family structure (families led by a single parent, older sibling or grandparent) is not supported by the design of our systems and society • Students who return home alone • Students who are dependent on school transportation for school • Undocumented students • Students with disabilities • Students from poor and working-class communities, children raising/supporting younger siblings	• Family survey on choice of transportation • Students with chronic late pick-ups • Family contact preference • Instances of bullying • Number of students identified as "At Risk" by social worker • Number of students identified as McKinney-Vento
Cultural	Parent Engagement	• Parents with disabilities • Single-parent working families • Queer parents/guardians • Parents with language barriers • Parents working multiple jobs	• Attendance/ tardies • Referrals or discipline rates • Parent attendance for events • Communication log • Types of parent engagement activities
Operational	Staffing and Master Scheduling	• Underperforming students as determined by achievement and growth data • Students with lowest attendance rates • Students with disabilities • Students from working-class families and students raising/ supporting younger siblings • Students with jobs/ financial responsibilities for their families	• What is developmentally appropriate optimal learning time • Course offerings and selection • Attendance/ tardies • Prioritized decisions in creating the last master schedule
Instructional	Instructional Models for Personalized Learning	• Underperforming sub-group based on behavior and academic data • Classes with least culturally responsive curriculum • Students with unequal discipline data • English Learners • Student with disabilities	• Reading & math levels based on sub-population • SPED referrals • Referrals or discipline rates • MTSS support models • Stereotypes placed on kids
Cultural/ Instructional	Student Engagement	• Students with disabilities based on student talk time • Student who is behind academically (Level of DOK provided) • Students in classrooms where the content or teacher ostracizes them because of their cultural background, whether intentionally or unintentionally	• Attendance/ tardies • SPED referrals • Referrals or discipline rates • Minutes with targeted instruction ⟶ MTSS Tier 2 minutes • Stereotypes placed on kids • Intervention rosters

From your identified systems that you are interested in connecting with, begin to reflect on:
- *Is the system dictated by policy? (e.g. number of minutes required for a class)*
    - *If so, this may not be within your locus of control to redesign.*
- *Do you have autonomy over how the system is designed?*
    - *If so, seek to understand the assumptions and biases that the designer may have brought when creating the system.*

DECIDE FROM WHOM YOU NEED ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Engaging with stakeholders through empathy activities will help to deepen your understanding of the data you collected and shed light on how previous decisions have helped to create the existing structure. You will also begin to build the trust needed to redesign the system which, in turn, will also allow you to center your redesign on the everyday, lived experiences and pain points on those for whom the systems are intended to serve. Lastly, empathizing with your stakeholders will help you determine the core challenge for which to solve. To engage stakeholders to collect this information and develop a deeper connection to core school challenge, consider using a combination of the following empathy activities:

INTERVIEW:
Interview some of your stakeholders impacted by the challenge. Begin your questions with sentence stems like "Tell me about…" in order to ask open-ended questions that invite people to tell stories. Use an empathy map to capture the learnings collected.

OBSERVATION:
Be a fly on the wall and observe your user. Take notes on the high and low points in their daily experience, or through the lens of your identified challenge.

IMMERSION:
Walk a mile in their shoes. A great immersion experience with students is the Shadow a Student Challenge, where you not only follow a student around for a day, but also participate in all of the same activities as the student. If they are doing math problems, so are you! If they are running in gym class, you are running alongside them.

It will be important to consider how you will build safe spaces for people to share their feedback. Not every stakeholder will be open about sharing right away, so consider giving people **multiple opportunities** as needed. You might also collect data from your school community in the form of surveys, focus groups, and town halls. Additional guidance can be found in our stakeholder engagement guide.

We recommend using the following list of considerations to determine the stakeholders with whom you should empathize:

• **Consider groups who often do not have a seat at the table**
• **Consider who consistently seizes and uses power in your community to make change**
• **Consider those groups that experience marginalization due to systemic inequities**
• **Consider your personal biases: who do you tend to involve in decision making, particularly when the timeline is short?**

After empathizing with a variety of stakeholders across a range of empathy activities, take some time with your team to reflect on what you learned. We recommend using a protocol such as Rose, Bud, Thorn to process the information you have collected to narrow your redesign focus, prevent bias, and allow for equity of voice.

REFLECTION POINT

Before, during and after discussions with various stakeholders, attempt to answer the following questions from their perspective:

1. For whom are these systems designed? Who do they exclude?

2. How does this system support and uplift the groups they were designed for?

3. How does the system negatively impact excluded or marginalized groups?

4. Why isn't this system working for the marginalized group? Why is it working for other students?

Throughout our process of helping schools implement Personalized Learning, we have focused on helping schools redesign instructional models anchored in empathy through interviews and the personas of students. However, we did not typically focus on designing explicitly with students at the margin and anchoring design decisions of schools around a variety of data of students at the margin.

ENGAGE TO IDENTIFY YOUR PROBLEM STATEMENT

Consolidate the qualitative (empathy) and quantitative (school-level data) data points to create a list of 1-3 systems for redesign. Once you and your team have decided, prioritize the systems based on urgency, impact, and ease on a 2X2 matrix to define the scope of change.

URGENCY

During a crisis, we want to prioritize everything because it all feels urgent and we attempt to act on our many competing commitments. In this case, we encourage you to identify an entry point for redesign by focusing on the school-level system that is most urgent for your marginalized group. You can do this by determining the **dependency** (information or decision you need) and "**commit by**" timeline (the time when you decide to commit to a decision with the information you have) for each pressing decision point or system you are considering. Based on what you know about returning to school, you will be able to define the urgency of your decisions in each possible scenario of return:

If you are planning on

• **SCENARIO 1:** returning to school with no physical distancing, it might be the priority to plan to ensure the safety, physical and/or emotion, of your most marginalized students.

• **SCENARIO 2:** returning to school with significant physical distancing, it might be the priority for you to plan for how redesigned operations behind arrival/ dismissal/transitions or how the master schedule should look for your most marginalized students.

• **SCENARIO 3:** returning to school with an extension of distance learning, it might be the priority for you to redesign for how instruction and successful student engagement must look for your marginalized students.

EXAMPLE OF DEPENDENCY AND COMMIT BY:

DECISIONS	DEPENDENCY	COMMIT BY
Deploying 1:1 Devices	Budget adjustments	ASAP
Upgrading Network Capabilities	Legal consultation and budget adjustments	July 15
Distributing Lunch	Personnel	July 5
Transportation Services	School closure decision	August 1
Virtual Teacher PD	New school year	September
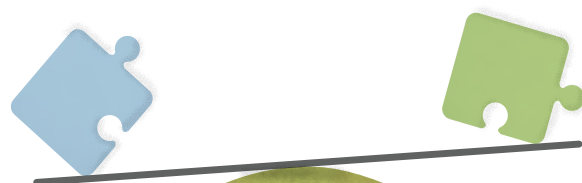
REFLECTION POINT
Use the following questions to help determine the system to prioritize for redesign:

- *What level of impact do we hope to have on our marginalized populations?*
- *Which system is most urgent based on our most likely return scenario?*
- *Which system should we prioritize?*

IMPACT

Our impact range falls from broad to targeted, meaning that no quadrant on our matrix represents low impact. Targeted impact highlights that the factor may be more impactful to a subset of students, in this case the marginalized group you identified.

This is okay.

Equity is not about giving everyone the same thing but giving everyone what they need. Do not be deterred by a priority that falls into "targeted" impact for marginalized students. By selecting a system that impacts your marginalized group, you are communicating equity as a priority for your school. It is also likely that items in the "targeted impact" section will address the needs of other stakeholders at the margins and work for those that fall in the middle.

Decide if the system creates impact:
- For a **targeted group** of marginalized students
  - Example: designing a master schedule by prioritizing special education student needs first before other decisions and inputs
- For a **broader group** of marginalized students
  - Example: designing remote classroom instructional models for students with the highest number of failing grades

EASE

Beyond the two considerations above, it is also important for your team to evaluate the **ease of redesigning** your chosen systems. Define ease relative to the various systems you are considering for redesign. Designing for ease allows for you to uncover feasibility, risk, and resource availability. It also highlights what priorities do not involve the creation of new systems and, as a result, can be addressed more swiftly. A system in which making small tweaks is done with a high degree of ease may not be the system to focus redesign efforts. A system that is highly difficult to change may fall outside of the locus of control of the design team and may be worth advocating for a systems level redesign, whether that is within your network or school district.

WRITING A PROBLEM STATEMENT

Considering the impact, ease, and urgency of your 1-3 systems should guide you towards one you would like to prioritize. The next step is to frame the system within its identified problem. Framing a problem enables your team to create solutions that are aligned with the needs that bubbled up in your data, while also allowing room for innovative solutions. Create your problem statement by defining the **scope of change** you are making based on **prioritization, data, and self-reflection**. A good problem statement sets clear guardrails without pre-determining a solution:

• **How might we create a safe learning environment within the hybrid learning model for our Black male students?**

PAUSE TO SHARE INFORMATION

• *Let your school community know why and how your chosen system was failing to serve and uplift all students.*
• *Share your problem statement and why it was crafted*
• *Explain who was the team, how they were engaged, why they were joined*

STEP 2:

INCLUDE

OUTPUTS OR OUTCOMES

- Bring voices to the table
- Empathize with the marginalized group
- Outline the success criteria for truly changing the system for equity

Now that you've identified and connected with your core redesign challenge within your school, it's important to take some time to consider whom you need to include in the process. You might be bringing **people onto the redesign team** based on engagements from the previous steps, you might be sourcing out key viewpoints that are missing from your team, or you might be looking to hear from underrepresented voices.

CONTINUE TO EMPATHIZE WITH USERS AT THE MARGINS

Too often, products, systems, and services are designed *for* rather than *with* the people they serve. Even when we design with the people for whom the system serves, we often make decisions based on ease, accessibility, and privilege. Therefore, we must design for **users at the margins**. Studies have shown that products designed for users at the margins will naturally serve users in the average or the middle. For example, handicap bathrooms were designed for a user at the margins (a person with a physical disability), but also serve a variety of needs for users in the middle (a person traveling with small children or with a lot of suitcases, as an example). Within the system and marginalized group you previously identified, begin to determine who you need to bring to the table to generate ideas and get targeted feedback on your challenge.

REFLECTION POINT

How do you decide who to bring to the table?
It's important to include the voices of those who are not only impacted by your challenge, but also the voices of those at the margins. When deciding who to bring together for thoughts and ideas consider:

- *Whose voices have been traditionally excluded from the conversation?*
- *Who are my users at the margins?*
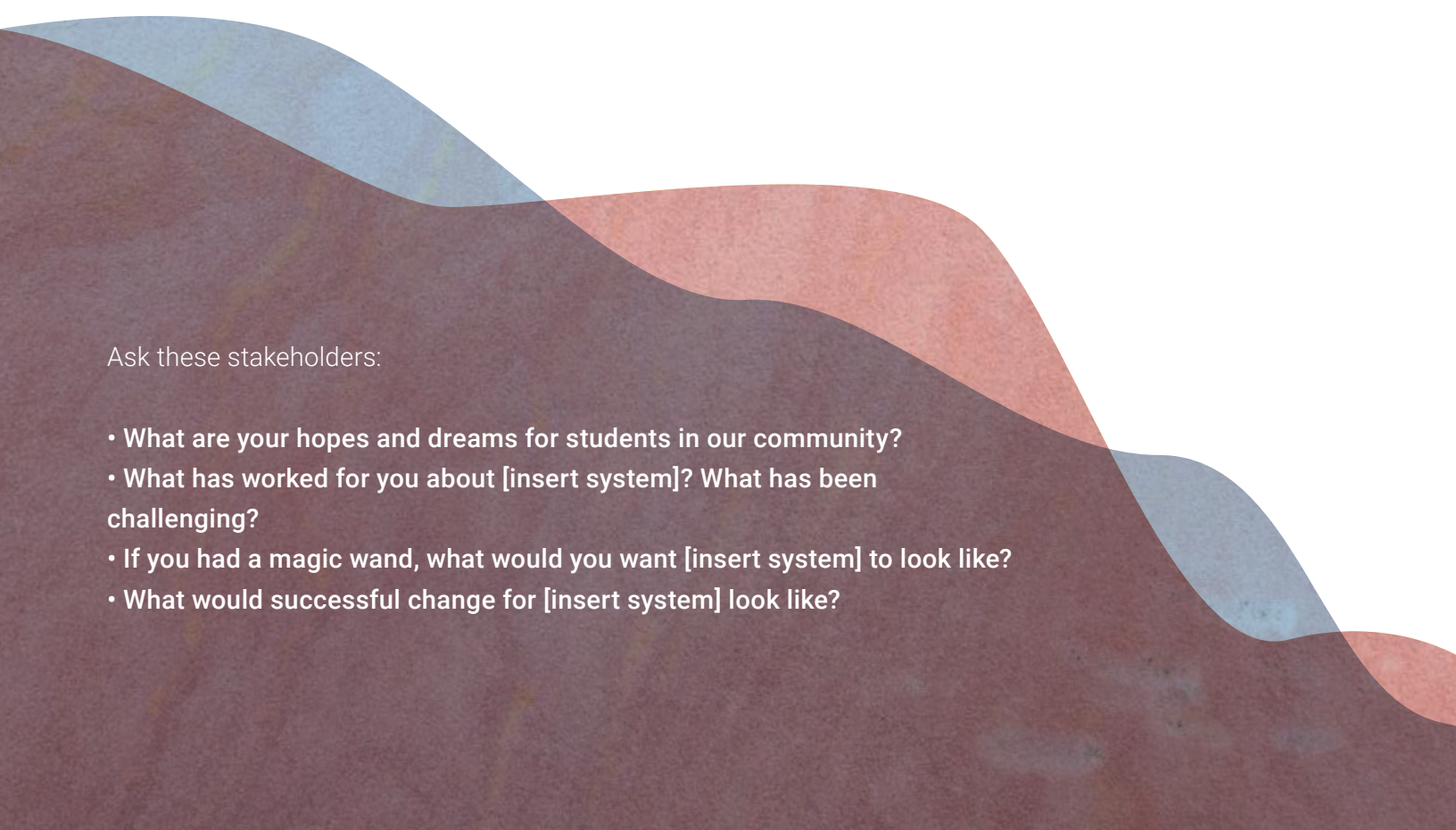- *Who has the system or challenge failed to serve?*

We recommended bringing together 6-8 people at a time, through focus groups or interviews, to better understand their needs and hear what an equitable system could look like. The compositions of focus groups should be of stakeholders you identified in **Connect**, particularly users at the margin or those who are traditionally excluded. Be intentional about how explicit groupings can either create or eliminate safety of voice within marginalized groups. People will not always feel empowered to speak up right away, so be **intentional** about how you create structures and multiple opportunities and ways for their voices to be heard. It is incredibly important to provide anchoring questions and space to brainstorm prior to hosting a focus group or interview. This avoids the pitfall of creating a space that places one or two individuals to speak on behalf of a group or create "new" ideas in a short time span, as well as support different processing styles. Be sure to also consider accessibility when choosing a time and place to meet with stakeholders. It might be the case that you need to meet outside business hours or meet stakeholders where they feel comfortable.

Ask these stakeholders:

• **What are your hopes and dreams for students in our community?**
• **What has worked for you about [insert system]? What has been challenging?**
• **If you had a magic wand, what would you want [insert system] to look like?**
• **What would successful change for [insert system] look like?**

When we build in empathy points within our Personalized Learning methodology, we use different protocols and experiences to help engage teachers and leaders with the student voice. In reflection, a higher leverage strategy to incorporate an equitable lens is to help our partners select marginalized students for the interviews and focus groups. Moving forward, we will include the voices of marginalized parents, community members, or school staff members to better understand how to personalize learning for their students.

With the information collected from the marginalized voices who are now seated at the table, you should have gained a clear understanding of the root causes and what it would look like for the system to work for them. Use this information to answer the following questions:

• **What did you hear as the root causes of inequity within the system?**
• **Why does this matter to your users at the margin?**
• **What does success look like in a redesigned system?**

PAUSE TO SHARE INFORMATION

• *Be open about the process you used to design for the users at the margins*
• *Share the learnings from empathizing with users at the margins*
• *State what success would look like in a redesigned system*
• *Share self-reflections on how the takeaways help you better understand your own biases, power and privilege*

STEP 3:

CREATE
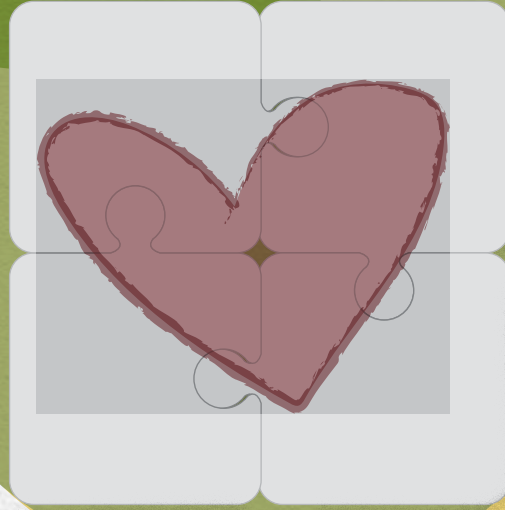
OUTPUTS OR OUTCOMES

- Create opportunities for voices at the margin to be included in the design process
- 2-3 prototypes designed with the marginalized group at the center
- Clear communication of the what (decision trade offs), how (process used), and why (your reason for selecting the system for redesign)

By now you have a rich understanding of the root causes of your identified challenge and have been intentional about including marginalized voices in the conversation. The stakeholders that you have brought to the table around your challenge have given you some ideas and indicated what success would look like for them.

As you delve into **creating solutions and prototypes** for your challenge, first consider how you might continue to design *with* your users rather than *for* them. In some cases, you might even have them as a member of your central design team. However, we recognize there are many constraints that make this challenging. One way around this is to build in intentional **cycles and space for feedback and reflection** from these stakeholders around the solutions that you create.

GENERATE A DIVERSE SET OF IDEAS

Create a school design team, ideally people who have also engaged in the process from the start, to generate a set of ideas to solve for your challenge using the knowledge gained through **Connect** and **Include**. We recommend using a [brainstorming design protocol](#) to ensure that you are inviting ideas from all team members, regardless of the power that they may hold in that space. As your team generates ideas, encourage members to brainstorm based on impact or magnitude of change.

Ideas can be
• **Small tweaks within necessary next steps of guidance**
• **Big shifts limited within locus of control**
• **Aspirational changes outside of direct control but within influence**

AN EXAMPLE CHALLENGE:
How might we create a virtual master schedule to ensure success in engaging students with highest failure rates?

SMALL TWEAKS	• Taking the current master schedule and making small tweaks by translating many of the same processes from in-person to synchronous virtual learning • Provide students with highest failure rates with additional synchronous check-ins with teachers and staff members
BIG SHIFTS	• Taking the current master schedule and making shifts in creating both synchronous and asynchronous learning opportunities within the master schedule • Provide students with the highest failure rates options to engage in pace, path, place and point of contact. Consider offering students a choice about which teachers they connect with in virtual class or office hours and when. For example, an 8th grade student can sign up for or join the office hour with their math teacher from 6th grade
ASPIRATIONAL CHANGES	• Master schedules are created to alter the pace, path, place, and point of contact based on individual student needs to match learning styles with learning venues.

ITERATE THROUGH PROTOTYPES AND TESTING

From those ideas, choose your highest leverage solutions (we recommend choosing 2-3) for which to create prototypes aligned with your prioritization from Connect and test in a small way. When choosing which ideas to prototype and test, consider how they will work to redesign your challenge. We recommend using these guiding design principles (created by the EquityxDesign Collaborative[1]) and aligned questions to help you look at your prototypes with an equity lens:

- **Design at the margins:** Whom does this prototype serve? Whose needs are unaccounted for? Does this prototype create inclusion and belonging for marginalized stakeholders?
- **Make the invisible visible:** What assumptions might we be making as designers? Are we still upholding underlying systems of inequity?
- **Speak to the future:** Does this prototype promote new, equitable ideas or simply restate existing systems that were never designed to serve all students?

PITFALL	AVOID BY
SELECTING ONE PATH WITHOUT CONSIDERING MULTIPLE SOLUTIONS	• Prototype development with the goal of leaving with three options • Announce to stakeholders that they will evaluate three options to provide feedback
ONLY INCLUDING OR ELEVATING THE "USUALS"	• 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
LETTING THE LOUDEST VOICES LEAD	• 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
LOSING YOUR "WHY" ALONG THE WAY	• 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

TESTING 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 of action 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. Though your prototype was designed for users at the margins, we recommend testing with both users at the margins and those in the general population.

OUR EXAMPLE CHALLENGE:

How might we create a virtual master schedule to ensure success in engaging students with highest failure rates?

EXAMPLE THEORY OF ACTION	If we add in more synchronous check-in time with choice in pace, path, and point of contact for students with highest failure rates, then we will see increased engagement and higher academic success for those marginalized students.

Design teams can use the following protocol prior to testing:

• **We believe that (insert your theory of action)** _____
• **To verify that, we will (actions)** _____
• **And measure** _____
• **We are right if** _____

CLOSING THE EMPATHY LOOP: COLLECT AND PROCESS FEEDBACK

Finally, we recommend scheduling time to reflect on the implementation of the prototype, analyze the collected learning, and iterate on your design. In addition to data you collected during the testing of the prototype, be sure to solicit feedback from the users who participated in the testing as well as the stakeholders you identified in Include. Use this touchpoint to also close the empathy loop by returning to the different stakeholder groups from **Connect** and **Include** to ensure the prototype represents their needs. The feedback should be used to iterate on your prototype and conduct additional tests as needed.

A simple protocol you might use to debrief your test is an **After Action Review**:

- **We believed that (insert your theory of action)** ⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯
- **We observed** ⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯
- **From that we learned (what worked? What didn't work? why?)** ⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯

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A NOTE ABOUT SCALABILITY:

If you are using this paper to design for a challenge presented by COVID-19 for the fall, it may be the case that you've already designed a prototype and tested it at scale (Note that typically prototyping and testing initially occurs with small groups). If this is the case, it is imperative that you plan for more frequent cycles of feedback and reflection to make **responsive pivots** along the way, especially within the first few months. If this is not the case, your next step would be to determine how to scale your prototype idea(s).

REFLECTION POINT
As you enter and exit the testing stage, make sure to reflect individually and as a team to ensure you are elevating voices, diversifying perspectives, and meeting true needs.

1. *Have we solicited feedback from the stakeholders from Connect and Include?*
2. *Have we used the After Action Review to gather learnings to better inform progress against our theory of action?*
3. *Have we created a safe space for marginalized stakeholders to give adjusting feedback?*
4. *What potential bias may upholding the inequity of the old system?*

EDUCATION ELEMENT'S REFLECTION APPLIED TO PERSONALIZED LEARNING

An integral part of our methodology is reflecting and iterating through learning walks. Classroom visits and reflection sessions are used to serve as an After Action Review to learn what worked and what didn't work. However, we have not prioritized gathering data during learning walks explicitly around the students at the margin within the school. As our partners launch Personalized Learning within their schools, focusing on how we measure progress around marginalized students is one way for our work to evolve with an equity lens.

SHARING INFORMATION: HARNESS THE FLOW AND LET INFORMATION GO

Once you finalized your design for rollout at the decided scale (continuing with small pilots, larger testing groups, or whole school), it will be important to be transparent and clear about why you are making changes and how the design was created. Based on our New School Rules, transparency requires the sharing of information, but information sharing alone does not mean transparency has been achieved. In communicating the process, prototypes and feedback, it is imperative that:

• **Information is shared before the expiration date (while it's still relevant)**
• **Information is shared to bring allies along and promote engagement**
• **Information is shared through diversified message, models, and tools**

Share **when** and **how** you plan to continue to collect feedback and pivot as needed, especially during the first month of implementation. When organizations fail to be transparent about their **why**, people will naturally fill in the gaps with their own assumptions, leading to cultural pitfalls such as rumors and broken trust. Beyond communicating the **why** and the **how**, it is also important to communicate the **what** from the design experience. Pieces of the what can include what were learnings along the way, what were key decisions that were made as a result of Connect and Include, as well as what changes were made based on stakeholder feedback. Sharing and communicating these aspects of change allows for the greater community to understand the decision trade-offs made by the design team as a result of the entire process.

REFLECTION POINT
Is my communication transparent and accessible?

1. Have I communicated important information three times in three different ways?
2. Are my communications accessible to all members of my school community (e.g. translated into multiple languages, variety of mediums and modes)?
3. Is there an accessible way for members of my school community to communicate feedback to the school?
4. Is communication transparent in sharing the why, how, and why from different perspectives?

CONCLUSION

We hope that this paper has given you the tools to begin to dismantle the systems of inequity within your school. This will be the start of a longer journey, and we encourage you to use these resources in a cyclical manner to chip away at these long-standing systems. Closely examining and redesigning policies and systems within your locus of control is an initial step. There will also be the hard work of shifting the spoken and unspoken beliefs and mindsets of the adults in your building beyond your leadership team and working to create shifts in the macro systems in which your school lives. However, all the deep work in which you engage will have an immeasurable lasting impact on the lives of your students. We are also engaging in this work as a company, and believe that it's our moral imperative to share our learnings with your districts moving forward.

Please connect with us as you are doing this work, so we can learn together to unpack best practices. Together we can achieve educational equity for all our students.

FOOTNOTE

[1]Hill, C., Molitor, M., & Ortiz, C. (2016). Equity x design: A Practice for Transformation. Retrieved February 26, 2020, from https://drive.google.com/drive/search?q=equity%20by%20design

[2] Many parts of this paper connects how leaders will need to utilize proven leadership modalities to lead through an equitable redesign. You can find more information on Education Element's leadership competencies here.

[3]Garcia, E., & Weiss, E. (n.d.). Education inequalities at the school starting gate: Gaps, trends, and strategies to address them. Retrieved July 02, 2020, from https://www.epi.org/publication/education-inequalities-at-the-school-starting-gate/

[4] Domina, T., Penner, A., & Penner, E. (2017). Categorical Inequality: Schools As Sorting Machines. Annual review of sociology, 43, 311–330. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-060116-053354

[5] O'Day, J., & Smith, M. (1970, January 01). Quality and Equality in American Education: Systemic Problems, Systemic Solutions. Retrieved July 02, 2020, from https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-319-25991-8_9

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