

School-Wide Values, Systems and Routines: Focusing on Student Agency at the High School Level

Description:

A school-wide system of values sets the foundation for a community of shared expectations for behavior of students and adults. These expectations guide all aspects of the school's operation in and out of classrooms, including interactions amongst students, between students and teachers, transitions between classrooms and behavior in public spaces. A school-wide value such as respect, for example, would be used to help students and teachers establish a common understanding of how to transition through hallways when other classes are still in session, work collaboratively in a group during class, and communicate when feeling frustrated. All students and adults are responsible for following and reinforcing these values through their behaviors. These routines do not replace the role of a more formal social-emotional curriculum, but can be used to reinforce and complement it.

Research on high-performing high schools shows that they consistently prioritize high academic expectations and student agency as core elements of the culture. This focus is rooted in a virtuous cycle that exists between character development and academic performance: character is built through academic work that challenges and engages students, and academic success is encouraged when students work together and persist through challenges. An emphasis on student agency places students in the driver's seat of their own educational journey. It sets students up to understand the connections between their actions today and their opportunities tomorrow, and promotes self-advocacy skills needed in school, society, college, and career.

Rationale:

Students and teachers are motivated to uphold school-wide values, systems and routines because they reinforce a school culture that fosters a positive learning environment and strong relationships. These routines, therefore, are less about compliance with rules and more about sustaining a culture that is valued by everyone. This helps students feel safe, cared for and respected, and minimizes teacher and administrator time on re-directing behavior. Fewer behavior referrals to the main office result in more instructional time for more students, as well as stronger relationships between students and teachers.

Ensuring expectations and related routines are practiced school-wide reduces pressure on individual teachers to design their own behavior management systems, which can be especially useful for new teaching staff. Consistency also helps students, because they know what to expect in every classroom. In middle and high schools, where students typically see more than one teacher during the day, these common expectations help set up students to be successful because they are no longer required to navigate widely-varied preferences across multiple teachers.

Establishing common routines in the context of positive values represents a proactive rather than reactive approach to behavior. Students are more likely to be successful when they are given the tools, resources and encouragement needed to regulate their own behavior and build healthy relationships.¹

A focus on student agency is particularly important at the high school level because it can help promote the type of deeper learning that research shows is closely correlated with academic performance, the development of social skills, and college enrollment. In 2012, the National Research Council defined deeper learning as “the process through which an individual becomes capable of taking what was learned in one situation and applying it to new situations (i.e. transfer).”² Focusing on students’ agency in the learning process can help support the development of core interpersonal and intrapersonal dimensions of deeper learning, which are closely connected with students’ personal and academic success in high school and beyond.

KEY COMPONENTS FOR SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION

At its core, building school-wide values, systems and routines—focusing on student agency at the high school level requires:

1. Defined values that are 1) championed by teachers and shared by students and families and 2) translated into specific expectations for student and adult behavior
2. A clear process for students and teachers to learn and practice common routines, including a formal structure through which students actively plan and/or manage their academic progress and trajectory
3. Administrative support of rigorous implementation

1. Huberman, M., Bitter, C., Anthony, J., & O’Day, J. (2014)

2. National Research Council (2012)

District-Level Enabling Conditions

Districts can support schools looking to develop cultures of high academic expectations & student agency by:

- Prioritizing resources and providing flexibility to school leaders to onboard students and staff to shared values and common expectations through time and resources for professional development, student orientations, or similar structures
- Including measures for school climate and academic expectations in school performance frameworks and synthesized data to help schools understand to what extent they are on track to meet their goals
- Providing guidance to high schools, in the form of templates, exemplars or other resources, on how to support students in actively planning—and taking ownership over—their academic trajectory

Clarify purpose: Before making decisions about how to organize resources in support of school-wide values, systems and routines at the high school level, clarify the purpose of this building block in your school's unique context:

- *Given your understanding of students' and teachers' most urgent needs, what aspects of culture are most important to address? Core challenges might include inconsistent teacher expectations across classrooms, bullying and/or weak personal relationships between students.*
- *Which grades, student subgroups, and/or teacher subgroups should be targeted for support? Although new values and routines should be implemented school-wide, additional resources (e.g. coaching for teachers in a high-needs grade) may need to be targeted to students and teachers who need the most help.*
- *What underlying structure will be used to support students in actively planning their academic progress and trajectory?*
- *What are one or two high-level goals that you might use to measure success annually? What quantitative targets might you set with respect to those goals in each of the first few years of implementation?*

Note: All school-wide expectations should be adapted to their school's context, but schools do not have to start from scratch. See the section on Additional Resources below for tools to get started, as well as the school profile at the end of this template for a concrete example of what this looks like.

MAKING IT WORK: RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

1. Defined values that are 1) championed by teachers and shared by students and families and 2) translated into specific expectations for student and adult behavior

A top-down approach to defining school-wide culture and the system through which students guide their own learning is unlikely to result in the buy-in that's necessary for implementation. Teachers, students and parents should provide direct input into defining expectations for students and teachers. Time should also be dedicated to exploring how culture is set in other contexts, and asking stakeholders to react to different options or approaches. Clear parameters around how many people will be engaged, and the timeline for doing so, will be important to ensure this work is carried out efficiently. After foundational expectations and structures are defined, there is usually roughly 20 to 30 hours of independent work time for each person in a leadership committee to create the collateral needed to explain and promote these new values and systems. At the high school level, this committee should prioritize the inclusion of students and teachers. Sample collateral this committee might produce includes:

- Lesson plans that all teachers use to teach values, systems and routines to students
- Collaborative planning time protocols/agendas to support teaching teams in continuously improving implementation
- Protocols to guide student and teacher conferences around goal setting
- Student and parent handbooks outlining expectations, including school-wide systems and routines, rewards, consequences, etc.
- Calendar of celebrations or other events during the school year to motivate students
- Alignment of other structures to support social-emotional learning, such as advisory³ or a formal curriculum, with new school-wide values, systems and routines
- Posters, t-shirts, and/or other venues to communicate values visually around the school

Key Questions:

- *Who will comprise a committee that collects stakeholder input and develops draft school-wide expectations, values or habits of learners, and a structure for students to plan their high school experience, among other artifacts to define expectations? Who will lead this committee's efforts?*

3. For more information on how to plan this well, see ERS' Building Block Profile on advisory

- *Will the members of the committee receive a stipend for the work of developing shared values and the associated supporting materials?*
- *Will the committee need funds to explore culture systems of other schools or tools available to supporting building shared values, expectations, and routines (e.g. trip to see another school's culture in action)?*
- *Who will provide expert support to the school's leadership committee during the development phase of work?*
- *Who are the specific stakeholder groups this committee will need to engage? When and how will those stakeholders be engaged? Who will be responsible for that process?*
- *How much time is required to collect input from stakeholders and when will it happen? The variety of stakeholder groups, method of engagement and how the committee chooses to delegate work will all inform the length of this work.*
- *Over what timeline will school-wide expectations be translated into related systems, and when will supporting collateral be created?*

2. A clear process for students and teachers to learn and practice common routines, including a formal structure through which students actively plan and/or manage their academic progress and trajectory

To implement school-wide systems and routines with fidelity, teachers and other staff members need resources to process new values and learn new systems and routines that should govern school-wide behavior. Often, this professional takes place before the start of the year in order to ensure teachers are aligned before they start interacting with students, and typically occurs as part of a school's summer institute or orientation. After an initial ramp up period, teachers will need time to collaborate during the school year to ensure teachers remain fully normed on how systems should operate, including how to respond to student behavior. Additionally, a clear structure should be developed to help students set academic and personal goals and revisit those goals with their teachers and families over the course of the school year. Teachers will need time to understand their role in facilitating this process and the expectations for how it should be run.

Key Questions:

- *When will staff have time to learn and norm around new school-wide expectations and structures?*
- *When will new staff to the building have time to learn school-wide values, systems and routines?*

- *Who are the people who need to collaborate on common systems and routines after systems are implemented? How much time will teaching teams need to collaborate and continue to norm on school-wide values, systems and routines, and when will this time occur in teachers' schedules?*
- *If professional development is needed from an external vendor, how will it be delivered (train the trainer, school-wide or both), and at what cost?*
- *If a social emotional learning (SEL) curriculum will be adapted to teach expectations, which curriculum will your school purchase and at what cost?*
- *Who will provide expert support to individual teachers and teaching teams as they plan and implement?*

Meanwhile, students will need dedicated time to learn new values, systems and routines, which should include time to practice. If the school year cannot start early for this purpose, a portion of time during the first weeks of school typically focuses on it. Although time for students to learn new values, systems and routines should be concentrated at the beginning of the school year, time is also typically needed throughout the year to sustain and reinforce these systems. At the high school level, time should also be set aside for the development and ongoing maintenance of student-driven goal setting. A summary of student-focused time that is typically accounted for in the schedule includes:

- Time for student and teacher conferences to align on students' personal and academic goals, and the overarching plan needed to achieve them. Families may also attend these conferences, but students should be expected to "drive" them with teacher support. These conferences should take place at the beginning of the year and typically recur quarterly.
- Periodic school-wide celebrations to reinforce a sense of community. To ensure a maximum number of students can participate, some schools choose to repurpose class time for part of the day three to five times a year.
- Daily or weekly class time to reinforce values and a sense of community through time for advisory or a similar structure.

Key Questions:

- *When will all students learn the expectations? Will there be startup time at the beginning of the school year, such as an orientation?*
- *Will ongoing time be embedded to the daily structure (such as advisory) or be incorporated into classroom activities?*

3. Administrative support of rigorous implementation

Once school-wide expectations are established, teachers will need support in cultivating and maintaining this strong culture. This support may come from a combination of administrators and/or support staff (e.g. guidance counselors or social workers). A comprehensive approach to this support includes:

- Developing the knowledge base, amongst both the school's leadership committee and staff more broadly, on what effective implementation should look like
- Linking to appropriate outside resources when necessary
- Targeting additional support for specific grade teams, subgroups of students, or individual teachers or students through observation and coaching
- Supporting teaching teams in identifying common challenges in the implementation of new systems and determining how to overcome
- Using data to monitor progress over time and adjust the implementation when necessary

Key Questions:

- *Which expert will own progress monitoring and efforts to evolve systems as needed?*
- *Will your school use existing staff or hire new staff in order to provide expertise? If existing staff will be used, how will their roles and responsibilities need to be redefined?*
- *On what frequency are teams expected to revisit and monitor progress on these values, systems and routines?*
- *When will all staff have time to receive updates on school-wide systems and routines as they evolve over time to meet new needs?*

4. Data systems to support record keeping

Collecting and analyzing relevant student behavior data will help determine if school-wide expectations are having their intended effect. This type of data might include the incidence of student behavior referrals, reports from teachers on what extent students are on track to meet their goals as of quarterly conferences, as well as views of students who are making progress against on-time graduation and college application goals. Simple record keeping may be available at no cost, but more sophisticated systems will likely need a data tracking system from a third-party vendor. The costs of these systems depend on the functionality and support needed, as well as the number of students. Most range between \$2-4 per student.

Key Questions:

- *What type of data will be tracked, and what will be the method for doing so?*
- *Is an investment needed in data systems to track the progress monitoring metrics relevant to school culture and student agency?*

SUMMARY OF KEY QUESTIONS TO GUIDE THE PLANNING PROCESS BY MAJOR MILESTONE

NEEDS ASSESSMENT

- Given your understanding of students' and teachers' most urgent needs, what aspects of culture are most important to address? Core challenges might include inconsistent teacher expectations across classrooms, bullying and/or weak personal relationships between students.
- Which grades, student subgroups, and/or teacher subgroups should be targeted for support? Although new values and routines should be implemented school-wide, additional resources (e.g. coaching for teachers in a high-needs grade) may need to be targeted to students and teachers who need the most help.

STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT

- What underlying structure will be used to support students in actively planning their academic progress and trajectory?
- What are one or two high-level goals that you might use to measure success annually? What quantitative targets might you set with respect to those goals in each of the first few years of implementation?

MASTER SCHEDULE

- Who are the people who need to collaborate on common systems and routines after systems are implemented? How much time will teaching teams need to collaborate and continue to norm on school-wide values, systems and routines, and when will this time occur in teachers' schedules?
- When will all students learn the expectations? Will there be startup time at the beginning of the school year, such as an orientation?

- Will ongoing time be embedded to the daily structure (such as advisory) or be incorporated into classroom activities?
- On what frequency are teams expected to revisit and monitor progress on these values, systems and routines?
- When will all staff have time to receive updates on school-wide systems and routines as they evolve over time to meet new needs?

JOB AND TEACHER ASSIGNMENT

- Who will comprise a committee that collects stakeholder input and develops draft school-wide expectations, values or habits of learners, and a structure for students to plan their high school experience, among other artifacts to define expectations? Who will lead this committee's efforts?
- Who will provide expert support to the school's leadership committee during the development phase of work?
- Who will provide expert support to individual teachers and teaching teams as they plan and implement?
- Which expert will own progress monitoring and efforts to evolve systems as needed?
- Will your school use existing staff or hire new staff in order to provide expertise? If existing staff will be used, how will their roles and responsibilities need to be redefined?

BUDGET AND STAFFING

- Will the members of the committee receive a stipend for the work of developing shared values and the associated supporting materials?
- Will the committee need funds to explore culture systems of other schools or tools available to supporting building shared values, expectations, and routines (e.g. trip to see another school's culture in action)?
- If professional development is needed from an external vendor, how will it be delivered (train the trainer, school-wide or both), and at what cost?
- If a social emotional learning (SEL) curriculum will be adapted to teach expectations, which curriculum will your school purchase and at what cost?
- Is an investment needed in data systems to track the progress monitoring metrics relevant to school culture and student agency?

ANNUAL PROFESSIONAL LEARNING PLAN

- When will staff have time to learn and norm around new school-wide expectations and structures?
- When will new staff to the building have time to learn school-wide values, systems and routines?

STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING

- Who are the specific stakeholder groups this committee will need to engage? When and how will those stakeholders be engaged? Who will be responsible for that process?
- How much time is required to collect input from stakeholders and when will it happen? The variety of stakeholder groups, method of engagement and how the committee chooses to delegate work will all inform the length of this work.
- Over what timeline will school-wide expectations be translated into related systems, and when will supporting collateral be created?
- What type of data will be tracked, and what will be the method for doing so?

| POTENTIAL CHALLENGES | POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS |
|--|---|
| <p>Students and teachers seem interested in helping develop new school-wide values, systems and routines but the time commitment for leading this work seems too high.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To reduce a concentrated time commitment in the late spring or summer, the planning work could be spread out over a longer period of time in the year prior to implementation. • A small stipend could be used to compensate teachers for the extra time required to lead this work; some form of community service or other credit could be provided to students. • Serving on the leadership committee could be framed as a leadership opportunity; members should be recognized and celebrated publicly. |
| <p>Administrators and teachers do not have enough time or expertise to provide expert support.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider investing in a new position (full or part time) such as a Dean of Culture or Dean of Students, or consider existing positions in your school that may be a good fit (e.g. guidance counselor, coaches, etc). Note that redefining roles may require first checking relevant labor contracts as well as ensuring sufficient time is available in the person’s schedule to cover all core responsibilities. |

| POTENTIAL CHALLENGES | POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS |
|--|---|
| <p>Parents do not seem to buy into efforts to improve the school’s culture through new values, systems and routines.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collecting student and parent input on the front end, during the development stage, is critical for ensuring their concerns and ideas are taken into account. • Consider inviting parent representatives to serve on the leadership committee that leads this work. • Lack of awareness may be mistaken for lack of buy in. A clear communication effort needs to be made with parents, in advance of the school year and at the beginning of the school year, to ensure they have the information they need. This may include written materials, phone calls home, and/or parent nights hosted at the school. Communication efforts should take into account the native languages of students’ families. |
| <p>Some students struggle to meet new expectations, even when they are applied consistently.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some students may not meet expectations for reasons that may be outside the school’s immediate control. If consistent support and consequences are provided with little improvement, a school may need to seek help on behalf of the student from specialized district staff and/or professional social workers. This type of targeted social-emotional support serves as the safety net for students who have needs above and beyond what teachers and administrators may be able to meet independently. |

Design Interactions

Strategic school designs have many interconnected components. Well-designed school-wide systems, values and routines that focus on student agency should be integrated with the following design essentials:

- Collaborative Work and Professional Growth
- Adult Culture

Research

National Research Council. (2003) *Engaging Schools: Fostering High School Students' Motivation to Learn*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. doi:10.17226/10421.

Fryer, Roland G. (2014) "Injecting charter school best practices into traditional public schools: Evidence from field experiments." *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 129.3: 1355-1407.

Huberman, M., Bitter, C., Anthony, J., & O'Day, J. (2014) The shape of deeper learning: Strategies, structures, and cultures in deeper learning network high schools. Report #1 Findings from the Study of Deeper Learning: Opportunities and outcomes. Washington, DC: American Institutes for Research. Retrieved from: <http://bit.ly/2h49DiO>

Leithwood, Kenneth. (2004) "Executive Summary: Review of Research: How Leadership Influences Student Learning." Retrieved from: <http://bit.ly/2tEskLW>

Thernstrom, Abigail, and Stephan Thernstrom. (2004) *No excuses: Closing the racial gap in learning*. Simon and Schuster.

Additional Resources

- EL Education—Building Character & Student Agency: <http://bit.ly/2uyrTFK>
- Student-Led Conference Handbook: <http://on.nyc.gov/2tDSajd>
- The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) supports the Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), which offers a wide range of publicly available resources and tools. Highlights include:
 - o Introductory presentation on PBIS: <http://bit.ly/2v09oLp>
 - o Videos to showcase best practices: <https://www.pbis.org/media/videos>
 - o Guidance for schools implementing PBIS: <https://www.pbis.org/school>
 - o Sample costs for PBIS professional development opportunities: <http://bit.ly/1Rrddy5>
- The Center for Restorative Justice offers resources on how to implement restorative practices, which are commonly used as a component of positive school-wide values, systems and routines: <http://bit.ly/2bQnTEq>
- Sample technology to support behavior data tracking:
 - o Kickboard for Schools: <https://www.kickboardforschools.com/>
 - o Consolidated list of classroom management software options: <http://www.capterra.com/classroom-management-software/>

A Culture of High Academic Expectations and Student Agency at The Springfield Renaissance School

SPRINGFIELD, MA

“You can paste anything you want on a wall. That doesn’t mean that that’s what your school follows. What’s different at my school is that it’s engrained in the curriculum.”

— Jesse, a student at Springfield Renaissance, in reference to the “100 percent college acceptance” slogan that appears everywhere in the school⁴

Context: Renaissance is a public school in the Springfield Public Schools that serves children in grades 6-12 in Springfield, MA. In school year 2010-2011, 62 percent of the students at Renaissance qualified for free and reduced lunch. As part of a larger school network called EL Education (formerly Expeditionary Learning), Springfield Renaissance focuses on building a culture of high academic expectations and student agency to achieve a rich and meaningful academic experience for every student and its ambitious goal of 100 percent college acceptance rate. Renaissance is not a charter school, but does hold Innovation School status in Massachusetts.⁵ Students are admitted via lottery system.

MAKING IT WORK: RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

Focusing resources deliberately around creating a culture of high and academic expectations and student agency had resource implications for people, time, money, and other resources at The Springfield Renaissance School. These implications are noted below, organized by building block components.

1. Defined values that are 1) championed by teachers and shared by students and families and 2) translated into specific expectations for student and adult behavior

- Renaissance followed a bottom-up approach to create its school values by asking its initial group of sixth and ninth grade students to verbalize the leadership qualities they wanted to see in the school. This conversation led to seven character traits—respect, courage, responsibility, friendship, cultural sensitivity, perseverance, and self-discipline—that are now used as school-wide values.
- A clear process for students and teachers to learn and practice common routines, including a formal structure through which students actively plan and/or manage their academic progress and trajectory.

4. Kathleen Cushman, “A System of Working Parts: Springfield Renaissance School, Springfield, Massachusetts.” *Learning by Heart: Six American High Schools Where Social and Emotional Learning*

5. More information about Innovation Schools in Massachusetts can be found here: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/redesign/innovation/> Are Core. Providence, Rhode Island: What Kids Can Do, 2013

- Experienced school designers and coaches from EL worked closely with Renaissance’s faculty to create curricular, academic, and assessment practices necessary to ensure that the school-wide values are maintained. Some of these practices are:
 - **Advisory:** Renaissance refers to students and teachers assigned together for an advisory period as a “crew”. Crew meets daily during the first period for 30 minutes, and is one of the school’s most important venues for providing social-emotional support to students. Please see ERS’ Building Block Profile on Advisory for more information, which includes a distinct school profile on Renaissance’s approach.
 - **Formative assessments:** In addition to assessing subject-area knowledge and skills, teachers at Renaissance routinely evaluate students’ formation of five key habits of work:
 - I come to class ready to learn
 - I actively and respectfully participate in class
 - I revise and assess my work
 - I contribute to the success of group work
 - I complete my daily homework
 - **Student-led conferences:** Students at Renaissance get the opportunity to participate in student-led conferences, where they can review their progress with parents, teachers, and advisors and set new goals and present their work to others. Student led-conferences are held three times yearly, and students prepare for these conferences during crew.
 - **Building choice in student learning:** In order to increase students’ sense of agency and motivation through experiential learning, Renaissance gives its students access to over three dozen short, intensive elective courses twice a year by dedicating one week each before winter and summer vacations. Sample courses include Civil Rights Poetry Slam, Drawing like the Great Masters, and Scrapbooking.

2. Administrative support of rigorous implementation

- Support for building a culture of high academic expectations largely comes through the “crew” structure mentioned above. Renaissance invested in one administrative support position, an Expeditionary Learning coordinator, to facilitate crew time and to build teacher expertise as well as materials for use in the classroom.
- In addition, dedicated conversations regarding the culture of high academic expectations occur regularly in parent conferences, student orientations, teacher onboarding, and collaborative planning time and professional development among teachers.

LEARNING FROM IMPLEMENTATION

- Clear structures need to be in place to support students' social-emotional needs in order for them to fully maximize their readiness to learn.
- Continue evolving the curriculum, accountability structure, and professional development time based on feedback from students, teachers, and parents.

RESULTS

- 100% of students from classes of 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014 and 2015 applied and gained admission to a college or university
- An average of \$2 to \$3 million in grants and scholarships were awarded to each of the schools graduating classes

ARTIFACTS

The Springfield Renaissance School's website: <http://www.springfieldrenaissanceschool.com/>

The school website provides a multitude of information, including the student and family handbook, bell schedule, calendar, and details about the seven character traits at Renaissance.

What Kids Can Do (WKCD) case study on the Springfield Renaissance School: <http://bit.ly/2tKy1O>

WKCD focuses on providing compelling examples of what young people can accomplish when given the opportunities and supports they need and what they can contribute when their voices and ideas are taken seriously.

Crew teacher requirements document: <http://bit.ly/2tKxn1o>

Teachers at Renaissance use the checklist as a reminder of important crew consistencies. It is also used by administrators and others to track and share feedback with crew teachers during a team-building meeting that takes place once a week.