



Community Conditions **REFLECTION GUIDE**

Helping Your Change Take Root

What are Community Conditions?

At Transcend, we've supported more than 600 district, charter, and independent school communities in 40+ states to design and launch innovative school models that aim to transform the experience of schooling. Over time, **we've seen that the most successful communities share five critical Conditions:**



CONVICTION in the importance of the work

CLARITY on their vision and what it will take to achieve that vision

CAPACITY to build and implement their ideas

COALITION of broad and diverse stakeholders

CULTURE of innovation, trust, and learning

Just as a powerful oak tree needs rich soil to grow, we have seen that nurturing these five attributes of the people who make up a learning community can dramatically accelerate those people's ability to build and maintain extraordinary learning environments that serve all of their young people well.

Key Considerations

As you reflect on these conditions in your design work, please keep the following in mind:

- These conditions are **not prerequisites** for launching a school design journey. While having some strengths in these conditions will be very helpful for getting started, this is not a list of things you must already have nailed before trying something new. That said, a community's conditions *can* help inform the size and focus of change that they take on.
- These are conditions **within your entire community**, which includes the students, families, educators, leaders, and other community members who contribute to the learning environment's functioning. Because all groups in a community hold responsibility and contribute to effective design journeys, the conditions apply to all of those groups.
- These conditions apply **throughout a design journey**, not only in getting started. They can be used to describe readiness for making *change* as well as ability to *sustain* extraordinary learning that exists. They can apply to the learning environment *overall*, as well as to changing or sustaining more *specific* parts of the student experience.
- Conditions exist on a **developmental progression**, and communities often have strengths and growth edges in each condition, which can progress and face setbacks over time. They are best used as common language to inform planning and design decision-making.

What are the Community Conditions?

Here we've further defined the 5 conditions as well as critical dimensions within each condition.

<p>CONVICTION <i>A deep and sustaining belief in the importance and potential of the work being undertaken that fuels engagement and ensures it is prioritized.</i></p>	<p>Conviction in the potential of all young people: We believe that with support, every young person can excel, and we aspire for the student experience to support all young people here to do so.</p> <p>Conviction in a vision of extraordinary learning for all*: We believe that for all young people here to excel, the student experience must be deeply engaging and effective, through a combination of Leaps toward Extraordinary Learning for All.</p> <p>Conviction to engage in a community-based process: We are invested in ensuring that the process of making any major changes to the student experience is done in ways that both draw on outside perspectives and also deeply involve all groups within the community and especially center students and families.</p> <p>Conviction through prioritization: We are willing to make moving toward a vision of extraordinary learning one of our highest priorities, now and for as long as it takes to make progress.</p>
<p>CLARITY <i>A comprehensive and crisp understanding of the work ahead that provides direction and a path forward.</i></p>	<p>Clarity in the current state: We are clear on what the student experience currently entails, and the ways it is currently serving and not serving young people in our community.</p> <p>Clarity in vision: We are clear on what various members of our community want for the student experience, and how the student experience could be designed to meet our collective aspirations.</p> <p>Clarity in journey path: We are clear on the approach that we're taking to improve the student experience from its current state toward our vision.</p>
<p>CAPACITY <i>The support of personnel and time required to successfully carry out the work.</i></p>	<p>Capacity in skills & capabilities: We have the skills, knowledge, and mindsets we need to help move toward and sustain our vision of extraordinary learning.</p> <p>Capacity in time & bandwidth: We have the time, headspace, and flexibility we need to help move toward and sustain our vision of extraordinary learning.</p> <p>Capacity through continuity: There is enough continuity in people in key roles across our community - as well as healthy turnover when needed - for us to move toward and sustain our vision of extraordinary learning, now and into the future.</p>
<p>COALITION <i>The investment of a committed group of stakeholders who are helping the work become a sustained success.</i></p>	<p>Coalition with students & families: We are better able to move toward a vision of extraordinary learning because students and families are consistently involved and invested alongside us.</p> <p>Coalition with educators & school administrators: We are better able to move toward a vision of extraordinary learning because educators (+ unions representing them) and school administrators are consistently involved and invested alongside us.</p> <p>Coalition with district staff & administrators: We are better able to move toward a vision of extraordinary learning because district-level staff and administrators are consistently involved and invested alongside us.</p> <p>Coalition with others within & beyond our community: We are better able to move toward a vision of extraordinary learning because others within our community (e.g., our Board, religious and political leaders in our community, etc.) and outside of it (e.g., support organizations, sources of funding or policy support, etc.) are consistently involved and invested alongside us.</p>
<p>CULTURE <i>Values, norms, and practices that support effective and sustainable innovation and learning for all.</i></p>	<p>Culture of trust and mutual respect: We trust the various members of our learning community to fulfill commitments, execute roles effectively, treat all other members of our community with authentic care for their wellbeing and respect for their perspectives, and do what is right for all learners above all else.</p> <p>Culture of collective practice: We are all committed to aligning around, following through on, and being supported to achieve shared instructional and cultural priorities.</p> <p>Culture of learning & innovation: We authentically celebrate saying 'what if,' digging into evidence (in multiple forms), trying out bold improvements, and openly sharing successes and failures.</p>

* Shortened in the rest of the statements to "vision of extraordinary learning"

The "we" in each statement can be substituted for any individual or group within the community (e.g., "I", "educators", "district administrators", "families", "math teachers", etc.) when you want to reflect on the Conditions of that individual or group.

Why Reflect on the Conditions?

We believe that collaboratively reflecting on the current state of the Conditions in your learning environment can be powerful for three reasons:

- **Self-understanding:** This framework offers a new lens through which to more deeply understand your unique strengths and growth areas as a learning environment.
- **Alignment:** The framework provides a common language for school design work that you can use across your community. It can also help you better understand where your team might be aligned and where there might be varying perspectives.
- **Intentional Planning:** The data from your team's Conditions assessment can help you develop goals, create a concrete plan of action, and prioritize the next steps in leading and sustaining your school design work.

Conditions in Action

Pike County Public Schools is a rural district 60 miles south of Atlanta, serving over 3,500 students in Pre-kindergarten through Grade 12. Their mission is to develop creative problem solvers ready for college and career through a focus on critical thinking, creativity, communication, and collaboration. In 2021, they partnered with **AASA + Transcend in the Roads to Reinvention cohort**, which supported district leaders in navigating the challenges of the pandemic as they researched and developed more agile and effective school systems for the years ahead.



In this video [1:47], you'll hear from Michael Duncan, Superintendent of Pike County Public Schools, about how he and his team used the Conditions assessment to engage more stakeholders as they developed their district-wide **Portrait of a Graduate**.

DEBRIEF

Debrief the assessment results with everyone who took it, identifying the conditions you want to prioritize in the short term and creating a strategy to do so.

Now that you have the results from your Conditions assessment, you are ready to debrief! This is arguably the most important step as you will collectively make meaning of the results and plan for what you will do next.

Before Meeting with Your Team, Be Sure To:

- Finalize the date/time/location for this meeting and send out invitations.
 - If including students, families, and community members, you may want to provide food and other compensation for participation (e.g. gift cards or a raffle).
- Create an agenda and gather any relevant materials. *Feel free to tailor this sample agenda to your community's specific needs.*
- Preview the Conditions data to get an initial sense of some of the themes that may come up during the conversation.

BUILDING THE CONTAINER FOR PRODUCTIVE DIALOGUE

Discussing the Conditions assessment results may surface some tensions within your community, so we recommend the following to create the right container for honest, productive dialogue:

Identify the Right Facilitator: If you hold a leadership role, honestly reflect on whether folks might default to your point of view, given your positional authority within the organization. If so, you may want to invite another team member or a neutral third party to facilitate the conversation. You may also want to bring in a neutral third party with expertise in conflict resolution if your team scored low on culture, as they can support with navigating difficult emotions and charting a path forward.

Set Community Agreements: Agreements are an aspiration, or collective vision, for how we want to be in relationship with one another. They are explicitly developed and enforced by the group, not by an external authority, and must represent a consensus. While always important, they are especially essential when discussing potentially sensitive topics like the Conditions. Here are a few suggestions for agreements you may want to lean into for this conversation; be sure to come to a consensus on any agreements as a team:

- **Get curious:** listen deeply, seek to understand, ask questions
- **Practice self-awareness:** considering how your identity (e.g., positional authority, race, class, gender, etc.) might impact people and process
- **Expect disagreement and lack of closure:** expect and accept that we will sometimes disagree and we will not resolve or address all our problems or issues by the end of the session
- **Say the thing:** share your ideas even if they are not fully formed, name the elephant in the room
- **Stories stay, lessons leave:** preserve the integrity of peoples' vulnerable sharing
- **Make space, take space:** be mindful of who is speaking more and less

DEBRIEF AGENDA

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GOALS:

1. To co-construct a common understanding of our strengths: where are our Conditions strong?
2. To co-construct a common understanding of our areas of growth: where do we need to strengthen our Conditions?
3. To identify priority Conditions and co-construct a plan of action.

COMMUNITY AGREEMENTS: 5-10 minutes

- Co-create a list of agreements for how you hope to engage in the conversation.
 - If you choose to share a predetermined list of agreements, give people the opportunity to add/edit the list.
- Give people a moment to affirm the agreements either verbally or with a gesture (e.g. thumbs up).

OBSERVE: 10-15 minutes

- Individually, read through the data, highlighting any patterns or outliers you notice.
- As you read, reflect on these questions:
 - What data are standing out to you?
 - Where do we, as a team, see things similarly or differently?
 - What are our strengths?
 - What are our areas of growth?
- Note any additional questions or wonderings that come up for you.

DISCUSS: 20 -25 minutes

Areas of Strengths

- In which two Conditions is our community the strongest?
- What are some highlights that our people have mentioned about these Conditions?
- Do the comments or data reveal any hidden areas of growth with these Conditions (outlier voices are so important!)?

Areas of Growth

- In which two Conditions do we have the most opportunity to grow?
- What are some of the issues our people have mentioned about these Conditions?
- Do the comments or data reveal any hidden strengths around these Conditions?

NEXT STEPS: 20 -30 minutes

- Based on our conversation, which 1-2 Conditions do we think we need to prioritize in the short term? In the long term?
- Is there anyone else we need to hear from to get a fuller picture of our conditions?
- What ideas do we have about actions we might take to tend to these Conditions? Which actions need to happen first?
- Assign roles and responsibilities for each team member to take any determined actions.

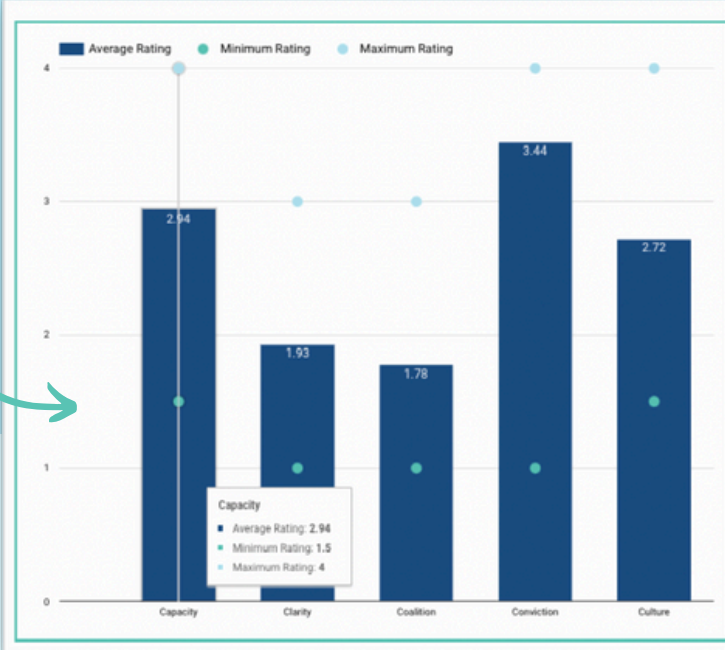
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Tips for Observing the Data & Using the Dashboard

Use this sidebar to toggle between the overview page and each individual condition

Use the overview snapshot to determine which Conditions you want to explore further.

Hovering over each Condition bar on the Overview page will reveal the average, minimum, and maximum rating



When reviewing the overall Conditions ratings, don't ignore outliers. Be sure to look at the minimum and maximum to understand the distribution of the data.

Capacity in skills & capabilities: We have the skills, knowledge, and mindsets we need to help move toward and sustain our vision of extraordinary learning.

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Developing: 7 (53.85%)

Average Rating	Areas of Strength	Opportunities for Growth
4	Capacity through continuity	Resources
4	Teachers and students are working hard, providing time and opportunities for everyone to work together to achieve goals set by the school.	Making sure that their child attends opportunities to seek improvement through tutoring and club offered by our school.
3	The community is strong in the capacity to shape decisions on how to improve the school.	The community has the opportunity to grow in the capacity of understanding what it will take to implement the changes.
2.67	-	-

Hovering over each bar on the individual Conditions page will reveal the percentage of respondents that select that rating

When looking at each individual condition, pay close attention to the distribution of votes for each rating level.

A wide range of responses is an indicator of low alignment. It may be beneficial to explore such Conditions even if the overall rating is on the higher end.

Tips for Observing the Data

When observing the data, be sure to:

- **Note the number of respondents:** If using the assessment with a specific team, the number of respondents will indicate whether you had full participation. If using the assessment with larger stakeholder groups (e.g. students, families, community members), the sample size will indicate if you have sufficient participation to draw appropriate conclusions about how the larger group might rate the Conditions.
- **Pay attention to the average rating for each Condition:** To get a complete picture of the current state of your Conditions, it is important to consider the rating for each Condition individually in addition to comparing Conditions to each other to identify strengths and areas of growth. For example, Conviction may be your highest-rated condition but the average score may be a 2, which places it at the developing stage- meaning there are still lots of opportunities to grow in this Condition in order to reach the advanced level.
- **Look for nuances within each Condition:** Pay close attention to the different ratings for each dimension within each Condition (e.g. clarity to shape the vision vs. carry out the vision vs. spend time and resources) as this can give you more insight into the specific actions you need need to take to nurture that conditions. The comments also provide insight into how different individuals are understanding each Condition, which can help you understand where the team is aligned and where there may be some dissonance.
- **Make low-inference statements:** Low-inference notes capture only what we see and hear, just like a camera. Focusing on low-inference notes helps us remove judgment and bias when observing the data. It also provides a unified starting point for the discussion, as opposed to each person starting from their own assumptions.

Here are some sentence starters you can use when writing your low-inference notes:

- I observe that...
- Some patterns/trends that I notice...
- On average most respondents feel that...
- I am surprised to see that...

Here are some examples and non-examples of low-inference notes:

Examples

"42% of respondents rated our culture of trust as a 2."

"Capacity is the highest rated condition overall"

Non-Examples

"People think negatively about our culture of trust."

"Most educators have the skills they need to lead this initiative."

DEBRIEF

Debrief the assessment results with everyone who took it, identifying the conditions you want to prioritize in the short term and creating a strategy to do so.

Here are some strategies you can borrow and adapt to advance your prioritized conditions:

Condition

Strategies to Cultivate this Condition

Conviction

- De-prioritize other activities so that your design work can be a top priority for the upcoming school year
- Create a [Case for Change](#) to share with your community that summarizes the forces that are driving the need for change within your community, drawing upon shared beliefs about the purpose of school, what the future holds, and the potential of children and families within your local context.
- Explore the [Leaps toward Extraordinary Learning for All](#) to learn more about the ways we must change learner experiences to ensure learning that is engaging for all young people and responsive to the demands and opportunities of the 21st century.
- Get inspired! Go on inspiration visits to schools and non-school venues to get a new perspective.

Clarity

- Create a [Case for Change](#) to share with your community that summarizes the forces that are driving the need for change within your community, drawing upon shared beliefs about the purpose of school, what the future holds, and the potential of children and families within your local context.
- Create a shared description of the initiative, detailing the who, what, where, when, why, and how.
 - You might consider leading a [Design Sprint activity](#) to generate ideas as a team.
- Pilot the initiative with a small group to further refine your description and check critical assumptions.
- Conduct [interviews and focus groups](#) to better understand stakeholders' needs, wants, desires, and aspirations
- Align new design work with the priorities you're already focused on (and make needed shifts in one or both to get authentic alignment) so you can focus on one set of aligned changes vs. two separate areas of work.

Capacity

- Audit your team's current capacity. Then, work to provide training and/or identify other individuals who have the skills needed to support the design work
- Apply for additional grants to support short-term and long-term costs associated with initiating and sustaining school design or redesign work
- Research and connect with other innovative learning environments that are focusing on similar initiatives. [Transcend's Innovative Models Exchange](#) might be a great place to start!
- Schedule frequent, regular step-backs to assess the progress of the design work over the course of the year.

Coalition

- Join the Transcend Design Community and connect with other education innovators in the field
- Host a [Design Sprint](#) with students and families to gather their ideas for new initiatives.
- Identify local and national organizations that are willing to dedicate time and energy to drive your design work forward
- Conduct [interviews and focus groups](#) to better understand stakeholders' needs, wants, desires, and aspirations
- Regularly evaluate whose voices are heard and included in your design work and ensure that those voices reflect the demographics of your community

Culture

- Conduct [interviews and focus groups](#) to identify how you might begin to foster trust and connection amongst your community members.
- Plan an offsite team retreat for your entire staff, focused on making connections and building trust.
- Share your design journey thus far with the broader community- do a presentation or put up a bulletin board that showcases your work
- Define the guardrails for innovation, making it explicit when, where, and how staff are able to test new ideas.
- Create a shared centralized system for tracking and synthesizing new learnings

Now What?



Administering and debriefing the Conditions assessment is just the beginning. Be sure to implement your action plan, gathering evidence of your progress along the way. Then, at a later point in the year, administer a follow-up Conditions assessment to assess any growth and identify new priorities.

We are confident that nurturing the Conditions will dramatically accelerate your community's ability to build extraordinary learning environments for all of the young people in your community. Below, we've included some additional resources to support you toward that goal. Wishing you the best of luck!

Continue this conversation with like-minded education leaders from across the country by joining the Transcend Design Community:

The Transcend Design Community (TDC) is a free, vibrant network of leaders, educators, and designers of innovative schools and learning environments, along with talented individuals and organizations who support them.



Explore other tools to support your design journey:

- Read the **Leaps toward Extraordinary Learning for All:** This framework details 10 ways we must change learner experiences to ensure learning that is engaging and responsive to the demands and opportunities of the 21st century.
 - You can also take a look at the **Leaps deep dives** for more information on the power of each Leap, additional resources, and concrete strategies for how school communities can begin to make each Leap.
- Explore our **Conversations with Kids Guide:** This guide provides tips and guidance for how to learn from students about your community's progress towards more extraordinary learning for all.
- Visit our **Innovative Models Exchange,** a free, searchable library of inspiring learning models and the supports needed to implement them

If you are interested in exploring ways Transcend can support your school's design journey, please email us at:

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