

January 2023



Leaps for Equitable, 21st Century Learning

Introduction

[Transcend's](#) Leaps for Equitable, 21st Century Learning describes the key ways we believe the student experience must change so that schools can prepare all young people to thrive in and transform the world. These Leaps can help schools move from one-size-fits-all experiences that often leave young people disconnected, bored, or locked in place, to learning that truly provides an equal opportunity to every student and is responsive to the demands and opportunities of the 21st century. At their core, these Leaps seek to reimagine how we educate young people—centering on personal growth and equal opportunity for every child, so that all young people will not only maximize their own potential but also tackle society's greatest challenges.

On the pages that follow you will find additional information on each individual Leap including why it's critical for equitable, 21st century learning as well as what it looks like and examples of schools taking the Leap. You can also access a [one-pager with all the Leaps here](#).

Unequal Expectation & Opportunities



High Expectations with Unlimited Opportunities for All

Narrow Focus



Whole-Child Focus

Rote Activities



Rigorous Learning

Irrelevance



Relevance

Assimilation & Marginalization



Affirmation of Self & Others

Reinforcement of the Status Quo



Social Consciousness & Action

Isolation



Connection & Community

Inflexible Systems



Customization

Passive Compliance



Active Self-Direction

Siloed Schooling



Anytime, Anywhere Learning

Transcend's Leaps for Equitable, 21st Century Learning are informed by the [science of learning and development](#); equity in education; and [contemporary societal, political, economic, and scientific trends](#).





Moving from Unequal Expectations & Opportunities to

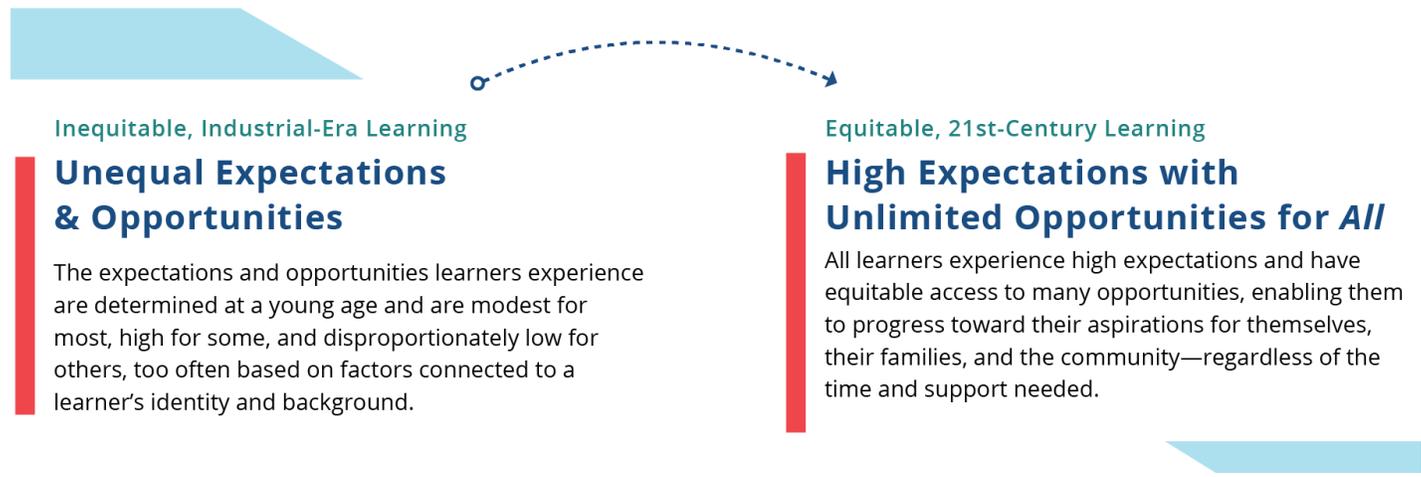
High Expectations with Unlimited Opportunities for All

In many contexts the expectations and opportunities learners experience in school are determined at a young age and are modest for most, high for some, and disproportionately low for others. This is often based on factors connected to a learner’s identity and background like race, income, and gender. Bias when sharing information about advanced courses to learners, less optimism about some students’ chances of obtaining a four-year degree, and using a less rigorous instructional approach with some students based on beliefs about their ability to learn are just some of the ways low expectations and limited opportunities show up at school. However, to truly achieve outcomes that are not determined by birth or class, all learners must experience high expectations and have access to all the opportunities that could enable them to progress toward their aspirations, regardless of the time and support needed.

This Leap Means...

- ▶ Learners experiencing teachers, leaders, and other adults who hold high expectations for all students without bias.
- ▶ Learners persisting when work gets hard and using the support available (e.g., resources, peers, mentors) to help them keep trying.
- ▶ Learners having access to all of the opportunities their school offers.
- ▶ Learners having opportunities to try again when they have not yet been successful.

The expectations schools hold for young people, and the opportunities schools provide, can influence motivation and learning outcomes and help address long-standing inequalities. Experiencing high expectations can boost students’ confidence in their ability to succeed. It can also help to mediate against identity threats young people may feel due to stereotypes and bias. In addition, having a broad range of learning opportunities helps students build a deeper understanding of themselves and their purpose and passion. When all young people are held to high expectations and are given rigorous, unlimited opportunities to learn, they are able to make more progress and succeed. This, in turn, helps ensure that all learners are prepared for college, career, and beyond.



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High Expectations with Unlimited Opportunities for All at DaVinci RISE High School

DaVinci RISE seeks to meet the unique needs of youth navigating foster care, housing instability, probation, and/or other circumstances that have caused disruptions in their academic journeys. In order to ensure that students can attain an excellent education while also attending to the additional responsibilities they have in their lives, RISE provides various flexibilities and supports:

- ▶ **Multiple-Learning Sites with Social Services Nearby** – In-person learning occurs across three “learning sites,” allowing RISE students to master RISE’s curriculum in the places that work best for them. Each site is located within, or near, social services providers. These partnerships give students access to counseling, case management, tutoring, job readiness training, career pathways, internships, extracurricular opportunities, leadership development, and more.
- ▶ **DreamSeeDo Online Learning Platform** – RISE has developed an online platform called DreamSeeDo. Through it, students can digitally access coursework that supports the in-person instruction and project work time they receive on campus. This provides students with additional flexibility in terms of when and where they learn as well as 24/7 access to learning materials in case they need to spend more time with them, or would like to accelerate their learning.
- ▶ **Quarters and Intersession** – RISE operates on a quarter system. Each quarter is approximately 9 weeks, followed by either a 1–2 week break or intersession. During intersessions students can engage in optional programming for academic recovery or acceleration; explore potential career pathways via field experiences, internships, or service learning; or pursue creative expression via extracurricular courses.
- ▶ **Flexible Schedule** – Students are able to customize their schedule to meet their unique life circumstances. It is mandatory that students attend in-person courses at least two days per week. However, students have a variety of different ways to mix and match course schedules to meet this requirement. In the event of extenuating circumstances that prevent students from attending in-person courses, there are added layers of flexibility to complete coursework virtually.
- ▶ **World of Work Career-Readiness Course** – Through this course students receive support in creating their resumes, applying for jobs, and participating in mock interviews. When students complete the course, they have the option of interviewing for paid internships with a variety of RISE partners.

Additional School Examples to Explore

Community Roots – Part of Community Roots’ approach to anti-bias education entails staff members addressing and reflecting upon their own biases as well as the biases they feel toward others, both inside and outside the classroom. This helps the staff identify how biases may be influencing their expectation of and interactions with students so they can make changes.

Bard Early College High School – Through a partnership between Bard College and the New York City Department of Education, Bard Early College High School is able to help students earn both a high school Regents Diploma *and* an Associate’s Degree in four years. There is no cost to students or families and it prepares students to go on to a four-year college degree, or enter directly into a career.

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Moving from a Narrow Focus to →

A Whole-Child Focus

Too often schools are focused narrowly on academic knowledge and skills, with learners engaging in experiences focused primarily on the cognitive dimension of learning. This is reflected in the current definitions of student success, the experiences and content students engage with, and the support they receive. As a result, students' emotional and physical selves are often neglected. While the cognitive and academic dimensions of learning remain critical, for all young people to truly thrive in and transform the world, school must increasingly nurture the *whole* child. This includes the totality of cognitive, emotional, social, and physical factors that impact their learning, development, character, and overall health and well-being.

Having a whole-child focus is essential because learning and development is a complex process influenced not only by how we cognitively process information, but also by how we feel physically and emotionally, our knowledge of ourselves, and our skills and mindsets. For example, destructive emotions stemming from loneliness, anxiety, or insecurity, as well as physical discomfort stemming from hunger or illness, can make it hard to focus on, manage, and make meaning of learning. Nurturing students' social, emotional, and physical selves helps buffer against this and places students in a state conducive to deeper, more lasting learning. In addition, a whole-child focus builds knowledge, skills, and mindsets critical for successfully navigating one's professional pathways, personal relations, and health. This is especially relevant given trends like the rising prevalence of mental health challenges and employers' increasing interest in skills like self-direction and collaboration.



Inequitable, Industrial-Era Learning

Narrow Focus

Learners engage in experiences focused primarily on the cognitive dimension of learning.

Equitable, 21st-Century Learning

Whole-Child Focus

Learners engage in experiences that nurture the totality of cognitive, emotional, social, and physical factors that impact their learning, development, character, and overall health and well-being.

This Leap Means...

- ▶ Learners bringing their full selves—including their life experiences, emotions, ideas, aspirations, and more—to school.
- ▶ Learners building positive, productive individual mindsets and strong relationships with others.
- ▶ Learners being supported to understand, process, and express their emotions in personally affirming and developmentally appropriate ways.
- ▶ Learners exploring and deepening their understanding of themselves including their unique background, strengths, interests, and goals.
- ▶ Learners having experiences that nurture their physical and mental health and well-being.

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Whole-Child Focus at Van Ness Elementary School

Van Ness Elementary School, part of DC Public Schools, serves an intentionally diverse group of young people ranging from ages 3–10 in Washington, D.C. The community strives to support its learners in becoming compassionate, creative, critical thinkers who are constantly learning and working to be positive, contributing members of a cross-cultural community. Van Ness believes that, to achieve these goals, the school must take a whole-child approach, which entails a variety of practices:

- ▶ **Strong Start** – First, to begin each day, students engage in a predictable set of routines that foster both safety and connection, and that give them practice with strategies to disengage stress. These routines include being greeted by a staff member upon arrival and then receiving a personalized greeting from their teacher at their classroom door to help kids feel connected to at least one adult. Students eat breakfast in their classroom and engage in activities aimed to foster social connection with their peers. As the day begins, students participate in mindfulness activities and set a commitment for how they will contribute to the community that day.
- ▶ **Safe Place** – Each classroom has a “safe place” where students can go during the day to regain focus or a sense of calm. In these areas students have a menu of activities they can engage in to help them build deeper awareness of what they are thinking and feeling and self-regulate.
- ▶ **Multi-Tiered Supports** – Strong Start and Safe Place are Tier 1 supports that are available to all students. Students who need more support also have access to customized interventions and mental health supports designed to promote appropriate participation. For example, a sensory-motor room allows students to meet sensory and motor needs, facilitating their appropriate participation throughout the day.

Additional School Examples to Explore

The Girls Athletic Leadership School (GALS) – The GALS network includes one high school and three middle schools in Denver, Colorado and Los Angeles, California. The “GALS Series” is a core component of the GALS model. It engages students in learning activities explicitly designed to promote interpersonal skills, social-emotional awareness, and identity development.

Valor Collegiate Academies – Valor has an expanded definition of student success that includes the development of interpersonal and intrapersonal knowledge, skills, and mindsets like identity, courage, kindness, and integrity.

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Moving from Rote Activities to →

Rigorous Learning

Schools' traditional focus on academic knowledge has often been coupled with rote learning activities. These activities prioritize the memorization of a broad array of content knowledge at the expense of higher-order thinking like application, problem solving, and analysis. While lower-order tasks, like recalling and explaining memorized content, do build a basic foundation, learning too rarely builds on this foundation in the ways that are needed for deeper learning. But today, it is rigorous learning that will prepare young people for success now and in the future.

By making rigorous learning accessible to every child, the quality and impact of education for all young people can improve. Rigorous learning involves the use of critical thinking skills to make deep meaning of diverse, complex ideas and assessments that determine a student's ability to apply, analyze, and use their knowledge in creative ways across a range of contexts. Rigorous, higher-order thinking promotes deeper, longer-lasting learning because it involves analyzing, synthesizing, and applying one's learning. All of this helps to more meaningfully encode or embed it into long-term memory. Rigorous learning activities are also often more interesting than rote activities. As a result, learners see more value in them and are in turn more motivated and engaged.

Rigor also prepares learners for changing workforce demands. Employers now expect those they hire to have a broader range of skills, including critical thinking and problem-solving skills, which are built through rigorous learning. As a result, expanding the use of higher-order thinking skills can improve the chances of career and college success for all children and prepare learners to solve the increasingly complex challenges our society faces.

This Leaps Means...

- ▶ Learners completing high-order thinking tasks that encourage critical thinking, creativity, problem solving, and deep meaning making.
- ▶ Learners engaging in well-scaffolded, supported, and intellectually challenging grade-level work and learning experiences regardless of what skills they are working to master.
- ▶ Learners building conceptual and procedural knowledge.
- ▶ Learners engaging in productive struggle and making meaning for themselves.
- ▶ Learners using their knowledge and skills in creative ways across multiple contexts.



Inequitable, Industrial-Era Learning

Rote Activities

Learners engage in memorizing and recalling a broad array of content and are assessed primarily on their ability to recall and explain this information.

Equitable, 21st-Century Learning

Rigorous Learning

Learners use critical thinking skills to make deep meaning of diverse, complex ideas and are assessed on their ability to apply, analyze, and use their knowledge in creative ways across contexts.



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Rigorous Learning at MC² STEM High School

[MC² STEM High School](#) is located in Cleveland, Ohio. The school's mission is to engage and enrich all students by developing critical thinking and problem-solving skills, and empowering them to achieve their personal, academic, and community goals. MC² does this through a rigorous education in a nontraditional environment:

- ▶ **Resource-Rich Campuses Embedded with Partner Organizations** – Students attend classes at campuses embedded in business and school sites around the city—the Great Lakes Science Center, Tri-C, Cleveland State University, and various business campuses around the city. This provides students with exposure to authentic postsecondary working and learning environments and also provides them with access to amazing individuals and resources that can add rigor to their learning. Students have worked with tutors from NASA and engineers from GE Lighting.
- ▶ **Project-Based Learning Experiences** – At MC², project-based learning is innovative, rigorous, transdisciplinary, collaborative, and hands-on. Learners engage in ten-week projects called capstones. These theme-based projects focus on science, technology, engineering, and math yet also integrate all core subjects required by Ohio's state standards and map to state benchmarks.
- ▶ **Mastery Learning** – In mastery learning, students are supported to achieve “mastery” of each learning objective or topic before moving to more advanced topics. MC² seeks for all students to master material at a high-level (90% or above) before earning credit for a course. For students who need additional support, tutoring, peer monitoring, small-group discussions, and additional assignments for practice are all available.

Additional School Examples to Explore

[Long-View Micro School](#) – Long-View in Austin, Texas strives to “speak up and not down to the intellects of children.” It operates under the assumption that children have significant capacity to understand many of the complexities that are part of the world in which they live and that deep understanding derives from being a producer rather than simply being a consumer.

[Casco Bay High School for Expeditionary Learning](#) – Casco Bay is located in Portland, Maine. The school strives to prepare all students for college, career, and citizenship through rigor, relevance, and a focus on relationship. Students learn through long-term, in-depth studies of a single topic that explore compelling questions, incorporate standards, involve fieldwork, and culminate in an authentic demonstration of mastery.

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Moving from Irrelevance to →

Relevance

Too often today, learning is disconnected from young people’s interests and goals, as well as from the real professional, personal, and societal challenges and endeavors they will encounter in life. This one-size-fits all approach is typically highly standardized, reflects a singular way of thinking and living in society, and separates learners from real-world problems and contexts. Relevance is often more acutely lacking for young people who don’t see themselves in the content, examples, people, and practices elevated in most schools’ curriculum. If school is going to support *all* learners in achieving their goals and shaping the future, it’s critical that it explores young people’s interests and goals, is connected to their communities, and enables them to understand and tackle real problems in authentic contexts.

When learning is truly relevant, it takes into account students’ unique life experiences, who they are as individuals, and who they want to become. Relevance supports learning and development by increasing student motivation; learners see more value in learning about topics connected to their interests and goals and, as a result, will be more engaged and invested. In addition, relevance makes what is learned more memorable because young people can connect new ideas to prior knowledge and experiences. Relevance also helps learners feel a sense of belonging and connection, which promotes mindsets that are conducive to learning. When school is relevant to all learners, and leverages high-value, balanced curriculum, then every young person has a greater opportunity to thrive.

This Leaps Means...

- ▶ Learners tackling activities and content that feel compelling and connect to their unique backgrounds, interests, and goals.
- ▶ Learners referencing their prior knowledge when engaging in activities.
- ▶ Learners engaging in learning experiences that relate to their life outside of the classroom and integrate their home cultures and communities.
- ▶ Learners grappling with problems that have authentic, real-world applications and purpose.



Inequitable, Industrial-Era Learning

Irrelevance

Learners have experiences that are disconnected from their interests, their goals, and the real professional and personal challenges and endeavors they encounter in life.

Equitable, 21st-Century Learning

Relevance

Learners engage in activities and explore topics relevant to their interests and goals, are connected to their community, enable them to understand and tackle real world problems, and build their ability to see and dismantle injustice.



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Relevance at

The Science and Math Institute (SAMi)

The Science and Math Institute (SAMi) is one of three innovative zone schools within Tacoma Public Schools. It serves more than 500 high school students and is located in Point Defiance Park and within the Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium in Tacoma, Washington. SAMi's location in a real-world setting is designed to bring learning to life, with a focus on math as well as the natural and physical sciences. As students encounter and apply their learning in engaging, realistic contexts, they accelerate academic, social-emotional, and identity development. [Read more](#) in the school profile compiled by CZI.

- ▶ **Place-Based Learning** – Classrooms are integrated throughout the park, and students spend their days in a lush park among zoo staff, visitors, and thousands of different species, creating rich real-world learning opportunities. Students also receive a “whole-child access pass,” which enables them to use the larger Tacoma area as a learning environment as well.
- ▶ **Student Voice and Choice** – Students select their classes, as well as a “major,” and are free to enroll in courses offered at any of their sister schools, in areas such as music, theater, or engineering. If students still feel their interests are not met, they are free to propose new courses, create new community traditions, or redesign the physical environment of the school.
- ▶ **Next Move Internship Program** – Students participate in internships with one of the Tacoma area's 200 partner organizations during the school day, accumulating 90 hours of internship experience and school credit. Students are matched with an internship that aligns to their interests and personal goals. In addition to work experience gained on the job, students also take an internship prep course to learn how to write a CV, practice interviewing skills, and set specific goals for their internship experience.
- ▶ **Mentor Peer Groups** – These multigrade cohorts meet with a mentor for four hours each Friday. The purpose is to ensure each student is deeply known by an adult and peers, and groups are created to reflect the diversity of the Tacoma area. MPG activities are student-planned and student-run, which ensures that relationship-building activities reflect the real experiences and needs of the students who comprise each group.
- ▶ **Mini- or Micro-terms** – At the end of each semester, students partake in what is referred to as a “miniterm” or “microterm.” These are month-long opportunities that offer students the chance to engage in an intensive study via a unique course. For example, SAMi students chose to run a podcast course, hosting deep dives on subjects students deemed relevant.

Additional School Examples to Explore

Latitude High School – Located in Oakland, California, Latitude High engages students in authentic, real-world, project-based learning. Each year, students visit over ten different workplaces to explore career interests and to collaborate with professionals. All students also engage in additional extended learning opportunities such as internships and the creation of their own businesses.

Gibson Ek – Gibson Ek is a Big Picture Learning school located in Issaquah, Washington. At Gibson, young people engage in a learner-centered model where they craft their own projects, learning paths, schedules, and more. The school has an explicit focus on design and STEM learning in real-world settings. As a result, students spend two days a week off campus engaged in internships, culminating in a year-long capstone experience during their final year at the school.

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Moving from Assimilation & Marginalization to →

Affirmation of Self & Others

Historically, schools were intentionally designed to assimilate large numbers of young people from various backgrounds into a common culture. The curriculum, instructional practices, and community norms reflected this singular perspective of beauty, brilliance, and worthiness. Sometimes, they reinforced—or even justified—racism, sexism, and other forms of bias. In many schools, this legacy continues today, even if the goal of assimilation has become less explicit. In these contexts, color-blind approaches, English-only policies, bans on ethnic studies programs, and other practices continue to convey messages that uplift some and diminish others—often students of color, LGBTQ+ learners, those living in poverty, multilingual learners, and those with a disability, among others.

However, in order to prepare all young people to thrive in and transform the world, schools must acknowledge, celebrate, and nurture the diverse identities of all students in meaningful ways and help each learner develop a unique, positive sense of self as well as a deep respect for the identities of others. When schools affirm each learner’s unique identity, they promote the success of all learners. Seeing one’s community, values, beliefs, traditions, stories, and language reflected in the learning environment promotes a sense of belonging and self-efficacy. When young people feel confident in their ability to succeed and feel like they belong, they are more likely to see value in coming to school and are better able to learn when there. In addition, when schools truly view students’ identities as a valuable source of prior knowledge and connect learning to these identities, it can deepen learning and make it more long-lasting. Doing this work helps all students recognize that worthiness, beauty, and brilliance come from every corner and cultural background.

This Leap Means...

- ▶ Learners deepening their understanding of and pride in their heritage, community, and life story.
- ▶ Learners having opportunities to express their unique identities and truly be themselves without fear.
- ▶ Learners experiencing the representation, humanization, and celebration of diverse identities within the school community as well as what is being learned and how it is learned.
- ▶ Learners feeling respected and deeply known by others in the community, and like they belong.

Inequitable, Industrial-Era Learning

Assimilation & Marginalization

Learners from marginalized groups—such as people of color, LGBTQ learners, those living in poverty, multilingual learners, those with a disability, and others—are pushed to either conform to the dominant culture or risk alienation.

Equitable, 21st-Century Learning

Affirmation of Self & Others

Each learner develops a unique, positive sense of self and purpose as well as a deep respect for the identities of others; these diverse identities are celebrated, nurtured, and leveraged in meaningful and anti-oppressive ways to support everyone’s learning.

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Affirmation of Self and Others at **Empower Community High School**

[Empower Community High School](#) in Aurora, Colorado, is led by students, guided by educators, and co-created with the community. Opened in 2019, Empower was created by a Community Design Team of students, families, educators, and community members. It is a deliberately small school with a 20:1 student-to-teacher ratio. Empower's vision is that "Our students will claim their rightful place as agents of change, growth, and social progress. The world is ours, and we must educate and foster the scholars, writers, artists, and innovators who will build a just and equitable world." Students are empowered to design and personalize their experience of school in ways that are grounded in reality, community, and a multicultural curriculum.

- ▶ **Ethnic Studies Program** – Designed with professors from CU Boulder, the Ethnic Studies program is a rigorous four-year program that develops college-level literacy and critical thinking skills. All content courses taught are part of the Ethnic Studies program. Students study power and identity with a focus on perspectives of people of color.
- ▶ **Critical and Liberatory Instruction** – Instruction is dynamic; the co-creation process ensures that instruction and learning is always personally, culturally, and civically relevant. Every lesson, every course, every project has meaning to the individual student and to her community. This is guaranteed because nothing is designed or planned or implemented in isolation from the learners.
- ▶ **Diverse by Design** – Staff at Empower reflect the diversity of the student body. Empower actively recruited teachers and leaders of color who are from the community and can serve as authentic role models for students.
- ▶ **Student-centric** – Students serve on committees responsible for curriculum, hiring, professional development, school culture, and more.
- ▶ **FLOW** – FLOW is a 2-hour project-based learning block where students research and solve local or global community problems. All projects have a direct impact on the community. Check out some examples [here](#).
- ▶ **FAMILY** – In Empower's spin on advisory, students spend all four years of high school with the same family group and trusted advisor. They meet two or three times each month to engage in healing, community building, goal setting and reflection, and social-emotional learning and development.

Additional School Examples to Explore

[City Garden Montessori](#) – City Garden Montessori School in St. Louis, Missouri strives to create a nurturing, intimate atmosphere and implements an interactive learning approach that honors each child individually and fosters a sense of respect for oneself and for others. City Garden weaves the Montessori theory of development together with additional academic special services such as a SPED and speech pathology program.

[Native American Community Academy \(NACA\)](#) – NACA is located in Albuquerque, New Mexico. The school's 450 Native students represent 37 different tribes. NACA blends a college-preparatory education with Indigenous philosophies and traditions, resulting in a culturally responsive curriculum that allows students to see their experiences honored and celebrated.

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Moving from Reinforcement of the Status Quo to →

Social Consciousness & Action

In the past, schools have often focused more on reproducing social patterns and norms than on empowering young people to make change in their communities and country. Practices such as tracking, segregation, unrepresentative and unbalanced curriculum, and more have reinforced the status quo in our educational system. In these environments, learners' experiences are situated within structures related to race, class, gender, sexual orientation, ability, and more that are implicitly accepted, directly perpetuated, or studied in ways that do not motivate change. But, in order to prepare for tomorrow, learners must begin critically examining social problems and working toward a more fair and just world today. Doing so can have an immediate impact and will help all learners develop the knowledge, skills, and mindsets needed to improve the world in all of the ways they are motivated to improve it.

Ensuring learners have opportunities to tackle the injustices that surround them can foster feelings of empowerment and motivation. This is because these opportunities are relevant to learners' lives and, as a result, bring value to learning. They also provide learners with an authentic opportunity to impact change, and in doing this, foster agency or a sense of control. For learners who have personally experienced adversity or injustice, this can be especially empowering and may bring even greater meaning to learning. In addition, as our society becomes more and more polarized, it is critical for every young person to learn how to act against injustice in ways that are grounded in their own values and the values of their communities.

This Leap Means...

- ▶ Learners discussing current and historical events from multiple perspectives to gain a more complete understanding.
- ▶ Learners developing the knowledge, skills, and mindsets needed to understand injustice and take action against it.
- ▶ Learners internalizing that their individual and collective actions can effect social change.
- ▶ Learners exploring and working to solve real social problems with the support to do so.



Inequitable, Industrial-Era Learning

Reinforcement of the Status Quo

Learners' experiences are situated within societal structures related to race, class, gender, sexual orientation, ability, and more that are implicitly accepted, directly perpetuated, or studied in ways that do not motivate massive change efforts.

Equitable, 21st-Century Learning

Social Consciousness & Action

Learners critically examine social problems and work toward a more just world; they develop the knowledge, skills, and mindsets needed to continue taking anti-oppressive actions that disrupt and dismantle racism and other inequities.



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Social Consciousness and Action at June Jordan School for Equity

The [June Jordan School for Equity \(JJSE\)](#) is located in San Francisco, California. The school's mission is not just to prepare students for college but also to prepare its graduates to be agents of positive change in the world. In order to achieve this, JJSE focuses on three key areas: community, social justice, and building independent thinkers. JJSE embodies the social consciousness and action Leap in a variety of ways:

- ▶ **Pedagogy** – JJSE describes their pedagogy as, “expressly designed to help our students understand the forces of marginalization they have experienced growing up, and thus to begin the process of freeing themselves from oppression, including especially the internalized oppression (or self-imposed limits) which we see preventing so many students from meeting their potential.” It is informed by critical consciousness theory and is characterized by:
 - Educators as warm demanders who develop students as human beings first
 - Safe classroom communities that protect students in a potentially dangerous world
 - Learning starting where students are, not where teachers want or imagine them to be
 - Students as intellectuals developing into a community of warrior-scholars
 - Educators as coaches who let the students do the work
 - A social justice curriculum that helps student understand the real world
- ▶ **Advisory** – These small, intimate groups are a key support system for students. In the ninth grade, advisors explicitly explore social justice in order to build knowledge, skills, and mindsets the students will use throughout their time at the school.
- ▶ **Electives/Activism Blocks** – JJSE is a small school and uses electives/activism blocks as a way to provide students with a great breadth of experiences and choice. Often these blocks focus on social justice and activism. Past blocks have included Urban Gardening and Food Justice, Art and Activism, and 415 Unidos: Immigration Rights.
- ▶ **Wellness Center** – The wellness center is a safe, supportive environment where students can go to discuss issues related to mental and physical health such as depression, self-esteem, family life, dating, sexual identity, and more. Like the school's pedagogy, wellness services reflect culturally competent approaches and are provided in a confidential, nonjudgmental, and professional space.

Additional School Examples to Explore

[The Primary School](#) – The Primary School in Palo Alto, California has made explicit [anti-racist commitments](#). These include pursuing equitable outcomes for children and families; strengthening diversity, equity, and inclusion practices with staff; speaking out and taking action; and staying active and accountable. For each commitment, the school has specific strategies in place.

[The School of Social Justice](#) – The School of Social Justice in downtown Los Angeles develops and guides students into becoming champions and role models of social change, justice, and equity for all. Students engage in a curriculum that explores issues of human rights and social concerns through a diversity of perspectives.

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Moving from Isolation to →

Connection & Community

Too often, young people experience a sense of isolation at school because building strong relationships is not prioritized. In these environments, learners and adults work together in the same space without knowing one another deeply. This is perpetuated by instructional approaches that prioritize independent work over group work and competition over collaboration. In addition, discipline practices—such as detentions, suspensions, and expulsions—exclude learners from the community as a punishment. In order to prepare all young people to thrive in and transform the world, our schools must be relationship-rich and value authentic connection. All learners must be deeply known and respected by a variety of adults and peers, collaborate closely with one another, and form meaningful relationships across lines of difference that nurture empathy, support inclusion, and build social capital.

Developmentally supportive relationships and a sense of belonging can flourish in environments that prioritize connection and community for *all* learners. This helps learners to explore their diverse identities, buffers against stress and trauma, and contributes to positive emotions and mindsets. It also helps young people see value in the experiences they have at school, provides a critical scaffold that makes learning more manageable, creates opportunities for discussion and higher-order meaning making, and allows learners to give and receive feedback from one another. Learning environments that prioritize connection and a sense of community also build skills and mindsets—such as collaboration, empathy, and communication—that are critical for the emotional and economic well-being of all learners. These skills and mindsets enable learners to thrive in a diverse, globally connected society where the employment landscape increasingly requires the ability to build and maintain personal relationships.

This Leap Means..

- ▶ Learners engaging in tasks that foster collaboration and a reliance on one another.
- ▶ Learners deeply listening to, and learning about, one another.
- ▶ Learners supporting and encouraging one another.
- ▶ Learners working with others in the school community to grow and heal after difficult situations.
- ▶ Learners experiencing families and community members sharing their knowledge with the school.

Inequitable, Industrial-Era Learning

Isolation

Building strong relationships is not prioritized; learners and adults work together in the same space but often without knowing one another deeply, and teaching and learning approaches prioritize independent work and competition.

Equitable, 21st-Century Learning

Connection & Community

The environment is relationship-rich: learners are deeply known and respected by adults and peers, collaborate with one another, and form relationships that nurture empathy, foster belonging, support well-being, and build social capital.

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Connection and Community at St. Benedict's Preparatory School

St. Benedict's Prep is a 7–12 school located in Newark, New Jersey and operated by the Benedictine monks of Newark Abbey. Building community is at the core of St. Benedict's approach to helping its students, many of whom have faced significant challenges related to chronic poverty and racism, fulfill their potential. When young people enroll at St. Benedict's, they join a lifelong community. Guided by the motto, "Whatever hurts my brother hurts me. What hurts my sister hurts me," students and staff strive to grow in mutual respect, to work and pray together, and to take responsibility for one another. St. Benedict's focus on building community is reflected in a number of their core practices:

- ▶ **The Group System** – St. Benedict's students are divided into 18 groups named after a St. Benedict's alumnus or a prominent figure from the school's history. The groups become an important part of students' academic and social lives. They meet for 45 minutes each day, compete in events, and work together to run the school. Each group elects a Group Leader who is responsible for knowing about the whereabouts and well-being of all group members, oversees group activities, and represents the group in leadership meetings.
- ▶ **Convocation** – Each school day begins with a 45-minute "convo," where all students, faculty, and staff gather as a community. Convo includes time for group leaders to stand up and account for any members of their group who are not in attendance that day and, if possible, provide a reason why. This is followed by time for prayer, announcements from students or faculty, and sometimes a message from the school's leader, Fr. Edwin. Convo enables students to build intentional brotherhood and accountability for every student in their group.
- ▶ **Overnight** – All incoming students attend this intense, five-day orientation during the first week of school. The purpose of the Overnight is to teach incoming students about St. Benedict's history, logistics, school songs, and aspects of what it means to be a Gray Bee, and induct them into the community. It is also their first experience with their student group, which remains consistent throughout their time at St. Benedict's.
- ▶ **Trail** – At the end of freshman year, students complete a 55-mile hike on the Appalachian Trail in groups of approximately eight students. The purpose of the trail is to foster leadership and a sense of collaboration among students, who are expected to stay together throughout the entirety of the trail. Students prepare for the hike for almost a full month through practice hikes and classes on topics like cooking, camping, leadership, and first aid. It is largely older students, not faculty, that make the hike possible. The older students work as instructors before the hike and play coordination and support roles during the hike itself.
- ▶ **Alumni Network** – After graduation, students continue to stay in touch. The school coordinates on- and off-campus alumni events, and alumni remain involved in fundraising, and visit the school for events like Convocation.

Additional School Examples to Explore

Ann Richards School for Young Women Leaders – ARS utilizes collaborative and discussion-based learning approaches throughout their all-girls middle and high school. In addition, they seek to foster sisterhood between students through routines and traditions like Community Circle and 6th grade-12th grade student pairings.

Codman Academy – Students are part of a single crew their whole time at Codman. In crews students develop relationships, dedicate time to service projects, and engage in conversations and check-ins about their progress and other school-related issues.

Transcend's Leaps for Equitable, 21st Century Learning are informed by the [science of learning and development](#); equity in education; and [contemporary societal, political, economic, and scientific trends](#).



Moving from Inflexible Systems to →

Customization

When formal education began, schools borrowed guiding principles, like standardization and structure, from the factory systems developing at the time. School became a place where rigid structures batched learners of the same age together and engaged them in the same content, through the same activities, at the same pace. This one-size-fits-all approach results in very few learners experiencing the level of support, or challenge, they need—holding some students back from more advanced content and activities, while leaving others behind. However—for all young people to succeed—the focus, pace, and sequence of learning, as well as the resources and support provided, must be tailored to each learner's identity, prior knowledge, development, way of learning, and life experiences. This ensures that all learners have just what they need to be successful, and that learners who need more receive more.

This Leap Means...

- ▶ Learners following a variety of pathways in regard to the how, when, and where of learning based on their unique developmental level, interests, learning needs, or other factors.
- ▶ Learners receiving the resources, scaffolds, and supports needed to be successful with intellectually challenging work.
- ▶ Learners experiencing personalized learning opportunities and flexible systems that evolve to fit them.

Customizing young people's learning experiences in response to the ways they vary can nurture their identities, fuel motivation, and support learning. In fact, for these experiences to be truly relevant to and intellectually challenging for every learner, at least some degree of personalization is essential. This is because every learner is unique and has different needs based on what they value and want to achieve, where they are developmentally, and more. By increasing customization in all learning environments, more learners can receive personalized academic and social experiences that support their developmental needs; educators can become masterful interventionists and relay just-in-time support to every child; and classrooms can become safe places that promote continuous progress while also fostering a respect for differences. By personalizing learning in response to these differences, and by ensuring learners who need something more or something different receive it, our education system will become more effective for all.

Inequitable, Industrial-Era Learning

Inflexible Systems

Learners experience rigid structures and policies that batch those of the same age together and engage them in the same content through the same activities at the same pace—holding some learners back from more advanced content and activities and leaving others behind.

Equitable, 21st-Century Learning

Customization

The focus, pace, and sequence of learning, as well as the resources and supports provided, are tailored to each learner's identity, prior knowledge, development, way of learning, and life experiences, ensuring that all learners have what they need to be successful, and those who need more receive more.

Transcend's Leaps for Equitable, 21st Century Learning are informed by the [science of learning and development](#); equity in education; and [contemporary societal, political, economic, and scientific trends](#).

Customization at

Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center

Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center (The Met) is a network of six schools located in Providence and Newport, Rhode Island. The Met's mission is to educate and empower youth through relentless commitment to student-centered learning and personal growth so that all students graduate as skilled and responsible, diverse thinkers and civically-active citizens who gain fulfillment in their life and work. The school's approach to achieving this mission is highly personalized, based on students' interests and needs:

- ▶ **Personalized Curriculum** – Advisors work with mentors, parents, and students to build a personalized curriculum around each student's interests. They then engage professionals from the community to help students pursue those interests through real-world projects completed on site with the professionals who become mentors to the students. The projects provide opportunities for the students to explore and master the content and skills outlined in their personalized curricula.
- ▶ **Learning Through Interests and Internships** – Through real-world projects, each student works with a mentor who is an expert in a field the student is interested in. The student and mentor work together to engage in project-based work that addresses authentic problems and works toward real goals. The projects are a major driver of students' academic growth but also benefit mentors and the larger community or sector.
- ▶ **Individual Learning Plans** – Each student has an individualized Learning Plan. Plans are created and updated each marking period with the student's learning team, which includes the student, a family member, the student's advisor, and whenever possible, the student's mentor. Learning plans are built around a student's interests, talents, and needs.
- ▶ **Advisory Structure** – Advisories are students' homebase and play a key organizational and relational role in their lives. Advisories include about 16 students who often stay together, with the same advisor, for all four years at The Met. An advisor's role is to know each student well, manage students' project work and Learning Plan, and provide the right amount of challenge and support needed to promote growth. Students gather for advisory time each day to explore new ideas and concepts as well as to build community.
- ▶ **Flexible Scheduling** – The Met encourages students to explore their interests outside of traditional school hours and awards credit for doing so. In addition, students are grouped flexibly; they engage in one-on-one and small-group work around their interests and needs and these groupings evolve regularly.

Additional School Examples to Explore

CICS West Belden – CICS is a K-8 charter school located in Chicago. Its approach to customization entails Learner Profiles and Personalized Learning Plans, student interest surveys, weekly conferences, standards-based report cards, and multi-age classrooms with flexible movement between classes.

Wilder Elementary School – Wilder is a rural school district in Idaho with a high-poverty student population. The district is implementing a personalized learning model that enables students to master work at their own pace. This was a key turning point in the district's overall transformation.

Transcend's Leaps for Equitable, 21st Century Learning are informed by the [science of learning and development](#); equity in education; and [contemporary societal, political, economic, and scientific trends](#).



Moving from Passive Compliance to →

Active Self-Direction

For many learners, school has not just been the context where they learn essential knowledge and skills but also the one where they learn to be compliant. In these contexts, learners are expected to passively absorb what they are taught by adults and are pushed to comply with rules and routines developed for them through extrinsic rewards and punitive consequences. This has unfairly impacted some students more than others, often based on who they are and where they are from. But if all learners are going to be prepared to thrive in and transform the world, this can no longer be the case. Learners must become active drivers of the learning process.

When students direct their own learning, it drives motivation and deepens learning. This is because they have a sense of control and are able to shape learning to be relevant to their interests, needs, and goals. In addition, active learning helps to more meaningfully encode knowledge, skills, and mindsets into long-term memory, which makes learning more long-lasting. Ensuring young people are active participants in the learning process also prepares them for postsecondary success, whether this means college or immediate entry into a fulfilling career. In fact, if current trends—like the rise of automation and the rate of scientific advancement—persist, our learners will need a different set of skills that enable them to be self-driven, autonomous, lifelong learners who are able to make decisions that fit their unique needs and goals.

This Leap Means...

- ▶ Learners participating in decisions about how, when, where, or even what to learn in developmentally appropriate ways.
- ▶ Learners discovering knowledge and applying skills through hands-on and self-directed work.
- ▶ Learners engaging in open learning time where they can explore curiosities, tinker, ask questions, discuss, set meaningful goals, get into a flow state, and more.
- ▶ Learners building knowledge, skills, and mindsets that underpin self-direction such as self-awareness, self-regulation, goal setting, planning, and reflection.

Inequitable, Industrial-Era Learning

Passive Compliance

Learners are expected to passively absorb the knowledge, skills, mindsets, and behaviors modeled and taught by adults and are pushed to comply with rules and routines developed for them through extrinsic rewards and punitive consequences.

Equitable, 21st-Century Learning

Active Self-Direction

Learners are active drivers of the learning process; they grapple directly with concepts while receiving adult and peer guidance and support and they have a voice in decisions about how and what they learn, so that the process grows their agency and meaningfully builds on their interests and prior knowledge.

Transcend's Leaps for Equitable, 21st Century Learning are informed by the [science of learning and development](#); equity in education; and [contemporary societal, political, economic, and scientific trends](#).

Active Self-Direction at One Stone

One Stone is a tuition-free independent lab school and non-profit for high school students in Boise, Idaho. One Stone believes in the power of students and believes that each student brings a unique background, skillset, and sense of passion to the learning environment. Students have many different lab opportunities on campus, all aimed at cultivating agency via real-world opportunities that enable them to arrive at their personal “whys.”

- ▶ **Labs** – Instead of a four-year high school where learning happens in seven or eight periods per day, One Stone operates three labs: (X), (D), and (Y), based on readiness. While each lab is slightly different, they are all designed and implemented *in collaboration between learners and coaches*. Read more about One Stone’s labs [here](#).
- ▶ **Immersion** – **Immersion** are a primary way students learn. They are three- to four-week experiences where learners are free to pursue personal learning objectives. Students can opt into immersion or codesign one aligned to a personal interest with a coach. Immersion can cover mathematics, humanities, science, or technology in a variety of hands-on, real-world environments, often outside of school.
- ▶ **Living in Beta** – The Living in Beta program empowers One Stone students to explore their passions and discover their purpose while developing the tools to live, learn, and practice with intention. Through engagement in scaffolded wayfinding activities, students design experiences that bring relevance to their learning. As students unpack their passions, identify their personal values, and create a personalized and meaningful why statement, they develop a greater sense of identity, belonging, and purpose.
- ▶ **Student Board Members** – Young people are active participants in the governance and direction of One Stone. Its **board of directors** is two-thirds students, attesting that young people are definitely in the driver’s seat.
- ▶ **The Curation of Me** – Students create and manage a digital portfolio, which displays their work, reflects on their growth, and demonstrates their passions. Upon completion of their One Stone experience, students reflect on what they’ve learned and how they’ve grown, and present The Curation of Me, which is conveyed to the entire school in a 30-minute presentation.
- ▶ **Cannonballs and Deep Dives** – **Cannonballs** and Deep Dives are one- to three-week experiences where learners have the opportunity to explore a range of ideas or topics in which they are interested, largely through tours, readings, visits, and hands-on learning. Cannonballs are a time for students to explore the breadth of a topic, issue, or skill, whereas Deep Dives enable a more narrow and intimate understanding.

Additional School Examples to Explore

Avalon Charter Schools – At Avalon, students create their own projects as a way to complete state requirements and pursue their passions. Through these projects, students learn time management and collaborative skills necessary to succeed in the 21st century.

Red Bridge – The mission of Red Bridge is to develop a sense of agency in every child as the foundation for academic and life success. In order to make this happen, Red Bridge has made aligned design decisions such as grouping students based on “autonomy level” versus grade levels, reframing the roles of teachers as guides, and more.

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Moving from Siloed Schooling to →

Anytime, Anywhere Learning

In the past, learning has been largely confined to schools—physical spaces with a fixed schedule and teachers who take on all, or most of, the responsibility for educating students. Learning outside of school has taken place in settings that often cost money, rely heavily on technology, or require a flexible family calendar, which has made them far more available to those with substantial economic and social capital. Additionally, the learning, creativity, and initiative that take place outside of school, such as at home or with communities, often go unnoticed by our current education systems. These patterns persist in spite of the fact that it is more possible than ever to learn anywhere and at any time. This calls for schools to redefine themselves so that all young people can learn beyond the walls of the physical school building, and teachers, families, community members, and other important figures in a young person’s life can become important sources for rich learning.

Anytime, anywhere learning can help meet the unique needs of learners. It means that learners who need or want to dedicate additional time to a task are able to do so. It also means learners can choose to work at times or in places where they can be most engaged, receive additional support, or easily attend to personal responsibilities. Anytime, anywhere learning also reflects changes taking place in the workplace, including an increase in remote work and gig work. These changes stem from a shifting economy and technological advances for which schools must prepare young people. In many ways, anytime, anywhere learning helps prepare young people for life beyond graduation by allowing them to acquire and apply a range of skills and knowledge in real-world contexts.

This Leap Means...

- ▶ Learners and their families engaging in learning when and where it works best for them.
- ▶ Learners acquiring and applying skills and knowledge in real-world settings outside the school building.
- ▶ Learners interacting with people, other than teachers or school staff, who support their learning in real-world settings.



Inequitable, Industrial-Era Learning

Siloed Schooling

Learning is largely confined to school—a physical space with a fixed schedule and teachers who take on all, or most of, the responsibility for educating students—and learning outside of school is far more available to those with substantial economic and social capital.

Equitable, 21st-Century Learning

Anytime, Anywhere Learning

Learning can happen anywhere and at any time for all learners, with teachers, families, community members, and other important figures in a young person’s life all playing important educational roles.

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Anytime, Anywhere Learning at

Virtual Learning Academy Charter School

Virtual Learning Academy Charter School (VLACS) is an online virtual school from the state of New Hampshire that provides elementary school, middle school, high school, and adult students with the freedom to learn anytime, anywhere. Full-time and part-time programs are available to students around the globe with free tuition available to K-12 students who are New Hampshire residents. Students learn through a 100% self-paced, competency-based learning model that provides opportunities for students to learn where “learning is not restricted by location, time, or a one-size-fits-all curriculum. Students have the option to select one of the many flexible learning journeys or to combine opportunities into a customized learning program.”

- ▶ **Competency-Based** – An online instructor guides students as they master each competency through independent learning, projects, internships, work, online courses, face-to-face courses, hobbies, tutoring, service learning, or any combination of the aforementioned. Learners select the order in which they meet competencies; dashboards help them monitor pace, progress, and completion of the competencies.
- ▶ **Experiential** – In addition to selecting competencies to work toward, students can also select the environments in which they learn. They are encouraged to design and participate in experiential learning through internships, work study, community service, travel, etc.
- ▶ **Online “Backpack”** – Learners fill their backpack (think of it as an online shopping cart) by selecting the competencies they want to focus on and how they are going to learn (courses, college, projects, or experience). VLACS then assigns the learners to an instructor who can guide them through the curriculum, help them select a project, coach them as needed, and, most importantly, provide ongoing feedback and assessment.
- ▶ **Learning Through College** – In partnership with Southern New Hampshire University, the LTCollege program is a competency-based-early college program where learners have the opportunity to earn an Associate’s Degree when they graduate from high school. Like the other classes at VLACS, classes are selected à la carte, are open enrollment, and are self-paced.

Additional School Examples to Explore

Lindsay Unified – In addition to having a powerful online learning management system, Lindsay established a district wide wi-fi connection that covers all students’ homes. This helps to ensure that students do not face access barriers, which can create and deepen inequities.

Teton Science – Teton takes a “place-based” learning approach that “connects learners and communities to increase student engagement, boost learning outcomes, impact communities, and promote understanding of the world around us.” It operates four campuses across the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem.

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