Leaps for Equitable, 21st-Century Learning

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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 is truly extraordinary for all and responds 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 not only maximize their own potential but also become equipped to tackle society’s greatest challenges.

On the pages that follow you will find additional information on each Leap, including why it’s critical for equitable, 21st-century learning as well as what it looks like and examples of models embracing the Leap. You can also access a one-pager with all the Leaps here.

| Unequal Expectations & Opportunities | High Expectations with Unlimited Opportunities |
| Narrow Focus | Whole-Child Focus |
| Surface-Level Learning | Rigorous Learning |
| Irrelevance | Relevance |
| Assimilation & Marginalization | Affirmation of Self & Others |
| Maintaining the Status Quo | Social Responsibility & 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.
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 learners' chances of obtaining a four-year degree, and using a less rigorous instructional approach with some learners based on beliefs about their ability to learn are just some of the ways unequal expectations and 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 for themselves, their families, and the community.

The expectations schools hold for young people, and the opportunities schools provide, can influence motivation and learning outcomes, help address long-standing inequalities, and set learners up for success later in life. Experiencing high expectations can boost learners' beliefs about themselves, including their self-concept, self-efficacy, and sense of belonging. It can also help to mediate against identity threats young people may feel due to stereotypes and bias. Additionally, having a broad range of learning opportunities allows learners to explore different pathways and passions. When all young people are held to high expectations and 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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Examples to Explore

- **Adelante Student Services from ARISE High School** (Grades 9–12)

  Adelante Student Services supports all learners to rise up by aligning academic, behavioral, and social-emotional approaches to ensure that learners and their families are provided integrated and responsive interventions attuned to their specific needs. This multi-tiered system of support, integrated through school-wide structures like Academic Mentorship, Advisory, and Restorative Justice Praxis, ensures that all young people can fully engage in learning, are held to high standards, and are supported in achieving that level of success. [View model](#)

- **Integrated Literacy Model from AIM Institute for Learning & Research** (Grades K–12)

  AIM's Integrated Literacy Model is a comprehensive framework designed to improve literacy outcomes for learners of all abilities by helping teachers understand the science of reading and how to translate research into effective practices. Through the consistent application of the framework's components—including assessment, oral language, and word recognition—across the school day, all learners are supported to achieve literacy proficiency. [View model](#)

- **National Education Equity Lab** (Grades 10–12)

  Ed Equity Lab provides access to college credit-bearing courses from top universities to level the playing field for high-achieving learners from historically underserved communities. Through practices like Discussion Sections, near-peer mentorship, and a cohort of peers, this model supports all learners to experience high expectations and have equitable access to opportunities by enabling them to earn college credits, ultimately building their college-going skills and making college more accessible and affordable. [View model](#)

- **The Calculus Project** (Grades 7–12)

  The Calculus Project works to accelerate mathematics learning for learners furthest from opportunity, beginning in middle school, in order to give them access to higher-level mathematics courses in high school and college. The model accelerates learning by pre-teaching math content to learners over the summer and providing continued support throughout the year to ensure that they are successful in their math coursework and on track to enroll in AP math courses in high school. [View model](#)

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Narrow Focus → 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 activities and content learners engage with and the support they receive. As a result, learners’ 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 nurture the whole child. This includes nurturing learners cognitively, physically, and emotionally, honoring the complex factors that support learning and development.

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. 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 learners’ overall well-being helps buffer against this and places learners in a state conducive to deeper, more lasting learning. In addition, a whole-child focus builds the knowledge, skills, and mindsets critical for successfully navigating one’s path after high school, personal relations, and health. This is especially relevant due to the rise of mental health challenges and employers’ growing demand for advanced skills like creative thinking, resilience, flexibility, and agility.

This Leap Means...

- Learners engaging in activities that nurture their physical and mental health and well-being.
- Learners being supported to understand, process, and express their emotions in productive, personally affirming, and developmentally appropriate ways.
- Learners exploring and deepening their understanding of themselves including their bodies, needs, strengths, and interests.
- Learners practicing positive, productive individual mindsets such as curiosity and hope.

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Examples to Explore

▶ Play Built Resilience from Intellectual Athlete (IA) (Grades 3–8)

IA teaches young people how to manage stress and build resilience through a fun play and sport framework centered on awareness of breath. In the IA Play Built Resilience model, young people learn and practice breathing techniques and mental performance skills during play, developing foundational skills that enhance their cognitive, physical, and emotional health and well-being.

▶ St. Benedict's Model from the Father Mark Payne Institute (Grades K–12)

St. Benedict's model gives learners tremendous leadership opportunities and fosters a strong sense of community so that learners become responsible citizens eager to contribute to the community and the world. Acknowledging that educating the heart is just as important as educating the mind, the model provides a robust counseling program to support learners' socio-emotional health. View model

▶ Whole Child Model from Van Ness Elementary, a DCPS School (Grades PK–5)

The Whole Child Model integrates multiple tiers of support throughout the school day to build a safe and supportive school climate as well as the intrapersonal and interpersonal skills young children need to regulate their emotions, manage stress, and handle conflicts productively. Through the model's components—CARE, Boost, and Family Circle—all learners receive Tier I support, families are empowered as valued partners in their child's education, and learners who need more receive tailored support. View model

▶ Whole-Bodied Education from Girls Athletic Leadership Schools (Grades 6–12)

Girls Athletic Leadership Schools' Whole-Bodied Education model addresses female learners' physical, emotional, and psychosocial needs so that they are empowered to be leaders of their own lives. With a focus on social-emotional learning, movement, and diversity within a single-gendered context, all learners experience a safe space in which to fully develop themselves. View model

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Surface-Level Learning → Rigorous Learning

Schools’ traditional focus on acquiring academic knowledge has often been coupled with lower-order tasks focused on memorization and rote application. Often, these activities focus on breadth at the expense of depth, limiting opportunities for application, problem solving, and analysis. While lower-order tasks, like recalling and explaining information, do build a basic foundation, learning too rarely builds on this foundation in the ways that are needed for deeper learning. And today it is rigorous learning and the dynamic use of various thinking skills that will prepare young people for success now and in the future.

Making rigorous learning accessible to every child can improve the quality and impact of education for all young people. Rigorous learning involves using a range of thinking skills to make meaning of complex ideas and assessments that determine learners’ ability to recall and explain information as well as to apply, analyze, evaluate, and create with it across 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, lower-order activities. As a result, learners see more value in them and, in turn, are more motivated and engaged. Rigor also prepares learners for college and changing workforce demands. For example, employers now expect those they hire to have advanced skills like analytical and creative thinking 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 young people and prepare them to solve the increasingly complex challenges our society faces.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Surface-Level Learning</th>
<th>Rigorous Learning</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learners engage in mostly rote, lower-order tasks focused on a broad array of content and are assessed primarily on their ability to recall and explain this information.</td>
<td>Learners use a range of thinking skills to make meaning of complex ideas and are assessed on their ability to recall and explain information as well as to apply, analyze, evaluate, and create with it across contexts.</td>
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This Leap Means...

- Learners completing higher-order thinking tasks that encourage application, analysis, critical evaluation, and the creation of new ideas.
- Learners engaging in challenging grade-level work and experiencing productive struggle regardless of what skills they are still working to master through well-designed scaffolds and extension activities.
- Learners building varied forms of knowledge including factual, conceptual, and procedural knowledge.
- Learners retrieving prior learning and applying it in new ways across diverse contexts and content areas.

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Examples to Explore

- **IB Diploma Programme (DP) from International Baccalaureate (IB) (Ages 16–19)**

  The DP prepares learners for success in higher education and active participation in a global society through a world-class and rigorous curriculum. Learners study content from six study groups including language acquisition, individuals and society, and the arts, as well as reflecting on the nature of knowledge and completing independent research and a project that often involves community service through the DP core, building depth and breadth of knowledge and skills. [View model](#)

- **Math Block from The Number Lab (Grades K–8)**

  The Number Lab Math Block reimagines math education through an ideas-focused approach so that learners can build deep mathematical knowledge and reasoning skills. Learners engage in authentic mathematical practices through several distinct elements—Thought Exercises, Concept Studies, and Studio—where they discover the deep principles of math, make connections across concepts, engage in collaborative reasoning, and develop future-focused skills. [View model](#)

- **New Tech Network (Grades K–12)**

  The New Tech Network K-12 systemic approach creates scalable and sustainable change so that all learners are college and career ready. Through meaningful and equitable instruction, purposeful assessment, and a supportive and inclusive culture, learners engage in contextual, creative, and shared learning—solving complex tasks that require critical thinking, creativity, and collaboration to answer challenging questions. [View model](#)

- **Summit Learning from Gradient Learning (Grades 4–12)**

  The Summit Learning program is a research-based approach to teaching and learning designed to drive learner engagement, more meaningful learning, and strong learner–teacher relationships that prepare learners for life beyond the classroom. Through small group support, group projects, mentoring, and an extensive curriculum that includes rigorous learning objectives covering all core subject areas, learners build and acquire a diverse range of knowledge, skills, and habits. [View model](#)

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Too often today, learning is disconnected from young people's day-to-day lives, interests, and goals, as well as a larger purpose that matters to them. Instead it focuses on inauthentic, dated examples and on gaining knowledge and skills in isolation from the real world, reflecting the belief that learners must fully prepare for the real world before taking it on. Additionally, in these contexts, learning often does not help young people make connections to why something is important to their growth and future. If school is going to prepare all learners to thrive in and transform the world, it's critical that it supports young people's interests and goals, builds on their prior knowledge and skills, and enables them to tackle personally meaningful, real-world activities.

When learning is truly relevant, it takes into account learners’ day-to-day lives, interests, and who they want to become. Relevance supports learning and development by increasing motivation. This is because 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 can also help combat any negative feelings, like boredom, young people may feel toward school, by providing the real-world, personally meaningful learning opportunities they crave. When school is relevant to all learners, and leverages high-value curriculums, then every young person has a greater opportunity to thrive.

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Examples to Explore

▶ Big Picture Learning (BPL) (Grades K–12)

BPL's school design activates deeper engagement in learning by using interest-driven, real-world contexts as its pedagogical foundation. At BPL, every part of a young person's learning experience, from schoolwork to internships, is informed by their personal interests and by real-world contexts, as the model was founded on the premise that young people should learn by working on “real projects that have a consequence.” View model

▶ Build UP (Grades 9–14)

Build UP is an early college workforce development model that enables low-income youth to develop career-ready skills while revitalizing their community and gaining homeownership. Learners spend approximately half their time in an academic setting, gaining knowledge that's directly applicable to their paid apprenticeships in the real estate and construction sectors, and the remaining half learning through other ways, including fieldwork and on job sites. View model

▶ Career & SEL with a Purpose from nXu (Grades 6–12)

By integrating purpose development, identity, social capital, and career exploration with empowering SEL practices, nXu's middle and high school curriculum supports learners—and educators—in defining personal and professional pathways that align with their evolving sense of self. This entails regular opportunities to explore their interests, goals, and career pathways; connect with their communities; and solve real problems in authentic contexts. View model

▶ Project-Based Learning (PBL) from the Robertson Center at Success Academy (Grades K–4)

Success Academy's PBL units inspire learners to become experts in a fascinating subject. Through real-world experiences and immersive lessons and activities like field studies, learners develop literacy skills, become strong and curious thinkers, master self-regulation habits and skills, and learn about the world and their community. View model

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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 on intelligence and worth. Sometimes, learning 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, learners have little opportunity to explore and express who they are. Instead, they experience practices and implicit messages that continue to uplift some while diminishing others. However, in order to prepare all young people to thrive in and transform the world, schools must nurture, celebrate, and incorporate the identities of all learners in ways that promote understanding and respect.

When schools appreciate every learner for who they are while also embracing the uniqueness of others, they promote the success of all learners. Learners seeing their communities, values, beliefs, traditions, stories, and languages reflected in the learning environment can increase belonging and support dialogue across lines of difference. And young people learning about the accomplishments of individuals who share key parts of their identity can support their self-efficacy and buffer against identity threats. 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 learners’ identities as a valuable source of prior knowledge and connect learning to these identities in purposeful ways, it can deepen learning and make it more long-lasting. Doing this work helps all learners recognize that intelligence and worthiness come from every corner and background.

**This Leap Means...**

- Learners deepening their understanding of and pride in their heritage, background, culture, language, community, life story, and more.
- Learners having opportunities to fully express who they are and be themselves without fear.
- Learners seeing, learning about, and celebrating identities both similar to and different from their own in ways that are truly affirming and embrace the uniqueness of others.
- Learners feeling respected and deeply known by others in the community.

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Examples to Explore

- **Indigenous Montessori Immersion from the Indigenous Montessori Institute (IMI) (Ages 3–12)**

  The Indigenous Montessori Immersion model from IMI centers on Indigenous epistemologies to equip schools and teachers with the knowledge and skills to curate community-based Montessori immersion experiences for young learners. Through the Montessori method, language immersion, and an intergenerational approach, young people experience culturally affirming learning and develop an understanding of and appreciation for their community, culture, and individual gifts.

- **Internationals Network (Grades 6–12)**

  Internationals Network's comprehensive approach supports the linguistic, academic, and socio-emotional development of recent immigrant and refugee youth through a blend of language-rich, interdisciplinary, collaborative, and experiential learning. The model's key practices, including advisories and collaborative projects, seek to affirm and build upon learners' rich linguistic abilities, creating a culture where each learner experiences identity safety and develops respect for the identities of others. View model

- **Near-Peer Mentoring from Eye to Eye (Grades 5–8)**

  Through near-peer mentorship, Eye to Eye helps learners and young adults with learning differences build skills to advocate for what they need to thrive in school and life. Leveraging mentorship, art-based methods, and other practices, the program supports learners to identify their strengths and embrace their own unique learning differences, while recognizing and celebrating the diverse identities of their peers. View model

- **The Rites of Passage Program from the Brotherhood Sister Sol (BroSis) (Grades 6–12)**

  The Rites of Passage Program supports adolescents' successful journey into adulthood by helping them define their values and by providing them with an intentional community, wraparound support, liberation education, and leadership development. In this model, youth form self-identified, gender-based groups that, alongside other structures, provide the space for young people to explore who they are, where they come from, what they value, and more. View model

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Our schools have often focused more on maintaining society as it is than on empowering young people to transform their communities and broader society. In these environments, learners are exposed to a narrow range of content and perspectives about why the world is the way it is, and have limited opportunities to engage in conversations about societal issues and pursue change. But, in order to prepare for tomorrow, learners must critically examine and be exposed to a wide range of perspectives on complex local and global issues. Doing so will help all learners develop the knowledge, skills, and mindsets needed to work toward a more just world today and in the future.

Ensuring that learners have opportunities to examine and tackle the complex issues around them can increase motivation, engagement, sense of belonging, feelings of empowerment, and more. This is because these opportunities are relevant to learners’ lives and, as a result, bring value to learning. They also provide learners real opportunities to impact change, and in doing this foster agency and a sense of control. Additionally, these opportunities can positively impact achievement, influence learners’ perceptions of self, increase social tolerance of others, and nurture a range of civic and social engagement skills. As our society becomes more divided on key social and political issues, it is more critical than ever for every young person to learn how to examine, engage in conversations about, and address local and global challenges in ways that are grounded in their own values and the values of their communities.

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Examples to Explore

- **Anti-Bias Education from Roots ConnectED** (Grades K–12)
  
  The Anti-Bias Education model targets biased attitudes through curriculum, classroom practices, and deep community building to transform communities to be more just, equitable, and connected. The model's tools of Community Building, Representation, Critical Literacy, Social Action, and Universal Design for Learning (UDL) help young people to develop the knowledge, skills, and mindsets they need to take anti-oppressive actions that disrupt and dismantle inequities in classroom and school practice. [View model]

- **Environmental Action Civics from Earth Force** (Grades K–12)
  
  Environmental Action Civics positions youth to work in partnership with adults to identify a local environmental issue and engage with community members to take action by advocating for systemic changes to policies and practices. Through Action Civic Projects, learners study the environment as part of larger social systems and environmental problems as part of inequity and injustice, learning how to engage in change-making actions. [View model]

- **RevX** (Grades K–12)
  
  The RevX model develops learners’ confidence to address real-world challenges using core academic, social-emotional, and professional skills and, in turn, supports learners in dismantling mindsets of inferiority or doubt that may stand in their way. Through RevX's project-based modules focused on social justice and community challenges, young people are empowered to claim and wield their power for social good and a more just world.
Too often, young people experience a sense of isolation at school because building relationships is not prioritized. In these environments, learners and adults work together in the same space, but often without knowing one another deeply. This is perpetuated by teaching and learning approaches that prioritize independent work and competition over group work and 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; and form meaningful relationships across lines of difference that nurture empathy, foster belonging, support well-being, 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 can increase learners’ cognitive outcomes and academic performance, buffer against stress and trauma, boost engagement, and contribute 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 social skills, hope, and healthy habits—that are critical for learners’ overall well-being now and in the future. These skills and mindsets enable learners to thrive in a diverse, globally connected society and an ever-shifting employment landscape, where building and maintaining personal relationships is essential.

This Leap Means...
- Learners engaging in activities that foster collaboration and reliance on one another.
- Learners feeling a sense of safety and belonging that enables deep engagement in learning and risk taking.
- Learners building new relationships with peers and adults that expand their social networks and capital.
- Learners deeply listening to, learning about, and supporting one another.
- Learners working with others in the school community to grow and heal after difficult situations.
Examples to Explore

▶ **BARR from the BARR Center** (Grades K–12)

Building Assets, Reducing Risks (BARR) is a strengths-based approach that leverages strong relationships and data-driven decisions to boost achievement for all learners. Cohort-based learning and I/U (integrated SEL) time—key components of the model—focus on cultivating community in the classroom through strong learner-to-learner, staff-to-staff, and learner-to-staff relationships, while expanding the focus of learners’ in-class experience beyond academics. [View model](#)

▶ **Compass from Valor Collegiate Academy** (Grades K–12)

The Compass model fosters holistic and adaptive development—including key physical, cognitive, emotional, and spiritual disciplines—through a focus on community and relationships as well as individual identity work. As learners engage in the Compass Phase System and Circle, the community comes together to support themselves and each other, supporting identity development and growth across the Compass Habits and Disciplines. [View model](#)

▶ **Embark Education** (Grades 6–8)

The Embark Education model supports learners to courageously inquire about, engage with, and discover a sense of self in an environment that is learner-centered, integrated, and embedded in real-world contexts. Through competency-based learning, integrated shop projects, learner-centered conferences, and community reflection time, young people experience a relationship-rich environment where adults support them daily in managing their time and learning. [View model](#)

▶ **The Gentlemen's League** (Grades 3–12)

The Gentlemen's League is an all-male mentorship program that creates opportunities for boys of color to have positive, joyful, affirming experiences that lead to lives of achievement. Through positive and supportive relationships with their mentors, workshops, service learning, field trips, and more, learners find a sense of belonging with peers and adults who share similar lived experiences within the same local community contexts, positively impacting their development. [View model](#)
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 and policies 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 only some learners experiencing the level of support, or challenge, they need—holding some learners back from more advanced content and activities and leaving others behind. However—for all young people to succeed—the focus, pace, and sequence of learning, as well as the resources and supports provided, must be tailored to each learner’s development and needs. This ensures that all learners have what they need to be successful and that those who need more receive more.

Customizing learning experiences in response to the ways in which young people vary can increase motivation, engagement, agency, and learning. In fact, for 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 customizing learning in response to these differences, and by ensuring that learners who need something more or something different receive it, our education system will become more effective for all.
Examples to Explore

- **Competency-Based Education from Building 21** (Grades PK–12)
  
  Building 21’s Competency-Based Education model replaces traditional time-based, age-based, and course-based structures with those that focus on readiness, growth, and demonstrations of learning through authentic performance-based assessments. In this model, young people engage with problem- and project-based learning in Studios that allow them to pursue their interests and passions while progressing at their own pace toward competencies and receiving personalized instruction, support, and feedback. [View model]

- **High-Dosage Tutoring from Saga Education** (Grades 6–12)
  
  Saga’s High-Dosage Tutoring model strives for increased persistence in math by leveraging adult–learner relationships and in-a-school-day, personalized tutoring sessions. During these daily sessions, highly trained tutors, called Fellows, meet with their tutees in small groups to provide personalized academic support and timely feedback, meeting the specific needs of every learner. [View model]

- **Living in Beta from One Stone** (Grades 9–12)
  
  Living in Beta is One Stone’s innovative wayfinding program designed to empower high-school learners to explore their passions and discover their purpose, while helping them develop the tools and mindsets they need to live and learn with intention. The model entails a four-phase, iterative experience—Exploration, Discovery, Purpose, and Self-Actualization—that culminates in a performative project and enables young people to learn and stretch in ways that feel right for them. [View model]

- **P-TECH** (Grades 9–14)
  
  The P-TECH model prepares young people for 21st-century jobs by engaging them in industry-guided workforce development while they are simultaneously enrolled in high-school and college courses. Learners progress through the course sequence at their own pace, with those meeting proficiency benchmarks advancing through the program more quickly and those needing more time receiving additional instruction to master the necessary prerequisite concepts. [View model]

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For many learners, school has been not only the context where they learn essential knowledge and skills but also the context where they learn to be compliant. In these contexts, 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. This has unfairly impacted some learners more than others, often based on factors connected to 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. Young people must drive their learning.

When young people participate in decisions about how, when, where, and what they learn in meaningful and developmentally appropriate ways, it increases their motivation, ownership, and thoughtfulness about their 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 that young people are active participants in the learning process also prepares them for postsecondary success as it builds an array of learning habits and executive functioning skills. In fact, current trends, such as the rise of automation and the rate of technological advancement, indicate that learners need these skills in order to become self-driven, curious, lifelong learners who are able to make decisions that fit their needs and goals.

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Examples to Explore

- **EL Education** (Grades K–12)

  EL Education’s comprehensive school model builds learner capacity for three Dimensions of high achievement—character, mastery of skills and content, and high-quality learner work—through the application of Core Practices centered in real-world learning and teamwork. Every aspect of the model, from Learning Expeditions to student-directed learning to Crew, supports young people in directing their learning; it provides opportunities for them to track their progress, set goals, use assessments to understand their successes and failures, and more. [View model]

- **Montessori from the National Center for Montessori in the Public Sector** (Ages 0–18)

  The Montessori model is rooted in human development and centers independence and agency within a social community to foster a sense of purpose and collective responsibility. The model gives a high degree of freedom to children to choose what to work on, where, for how long, and with whom, allowing learners to engage in learning that interests them, which supports increased engagement, sustained attention, and intrinsic motivation. [View model]

- **Self-Directed Learning from the Forest School** (Grades PK–12)

  The Forest School’s Self-Directed Learning model empowers learners to take ownership of their learning, supporting them to set meaningful goals, uphold community agreements, exercise their voice and choice in the learning process, and engage in real-world work. The model’s key components—Socratic Launches, Running Partners, Core Skills, Contracts & Town Halls, and Quests—are largely learner-led, providing learners meaningful voice and choice in the decisions about how and what they learn. [View model]

- **The Learning Challenge from GripTape** (Ages 14–19)

  The Learning Challenge invites young people aged 14 through 19 to tap into their interests and supports them in pursuit of a self-identified learning topic that is meaningful to them and their growth. During the Learning Challenge, young people have total decision-making authority, and engage in a dynamic cycle of setting a vision and goals, pursuing learning, and reflecting on progress—key processes involved in enacting their agency. [View model]

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.
Siloed Schooling →

Anytime, Anywhere Learning

In the past, learning has been largely confined to schools—a single, physical space with a fixed schedule, and teachers who take on all, or most of, the responsibility for educating young people. Learning outside of school has taken place in settings that often cost money, rely heavily on technology, or require a flexible family calendar, making them far more available to those with substantial economic and social capital. Additionally, the learning, creative thinking, 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 even though it’s now more possible than ever to learn anywhere, anytime. This calls for schools to redefine themselves so that all young people can learn beyond the walls of the physical school building, valuing the people, contexts, and experiences that play important educational roles in their lives.

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, learn in real-world contexts through hands-on activities, receive additional support, or attend to personal responsibilities. Anytime, anywhere learning also reflects changes taking place in the workplace, including increased independent and remote work. These changes stem from a shifting employment landscape and technological advances for which schools must prepare young people. In many ways, anytime, anywhere learning—and the freedom and responsibility it provides—helps prepare young people for life beyond graduation as it can build their self-directed executive functioning skills, self-concept, self-efficacy, resilience, social and collaborative skills, and more.

This Leap Means...

- Learners and their families engaging in learning when and where it works best for them.
- Learners experiencing adults that are interested in, and value, what they are learning outside of school.
- Learners acquiring and applying skills and knowledge through activities that occur outside the school building.
- Learners interacting with people, other than teachers or school staff, who support their learning in real-world settings.

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Examples to Explore

▶ **Career & Technical Education from the Brooklyn STEAM Center** (Grades 11–12)

The Brooklyn STEAM Center is a career and technical education model that immerses high-school scholars in industry workplaces where they learn through distinct pathways and real-world, project-based learning experiences. In these industry pathways, learners build career and technical knowledge and skills and have access to industry experts, enabling learning throughout Brooklyn and NYC. [View model](#)

▶ **Da Vinci RISE High from Da Vinci Schools** (Grades 9–12)

The Da Vinci RISE High model uses a responsive and holistic approach—including flexible scheduling, blended learning, credit recovery, and wraparound social services—to meet the unique needs of learners navigating foster care, housing instability, and other circumstances that have disrupted their schooling. This hybrid learning model, enabled through a digital platform, provides learners the flexibility to learn anywhere and ensures that they meet their academic goals while accommodating out-of-school responsibilities. [View model](#)

▶ **Global Online Academy** (Grades 9–12)

Global Online Academy brings together teachers and learners from around the world to learn together in high-quality, relationship-based online classes. The model's intentional design for a global context, incorporating both asynchronous and synchronous learning experiences, creates meaningful opportunities for young people to learn from the perspectives of others who do not share their physical location. [View model](#)

▶ **Modern Classrooms Project** (Grades PK–Higher Ed)

The Modern Classrooms Project empowers educators to meet every learner's needs through its blended, self-paced, mastery-based instructional model. Leveraging teacher-created instructional videos, the model makes class content and materials available for learners to access, complete, and submit from anywhere at any time, suiting their individual needs. [View model](#)

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