

Be the Leader of a Green Light Culture

CHAPTER HIGHLIGHTS

While your new vision, the Portrait of a Graduate (POG), will help inform many aspects of your system, including transformed classroom practices, the essential next step is to attend to the adults in the system. Do you have in place a culture that will support the transformation you need? How will you co-create the expectations for the adults in the system? Nurture a green light culture in your school or district to give teachers the green light to innovate and experiment. You can work with your educators to co-create a Portrait of an Educator (POE), which includes the competencies they will need to fulfill the promise of the Portrait of a Graduate. You will use the Portrait of an Educator as the guide for transforming professional development and human resources.

If you are going to effectively redefine student success, it stands to reason that you will need to redefine educator success. You will need to co-create that new definition with your educators. This process will test your system's capacity to change.

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It is a truism that culture may be the most important element in an organization's capacity to transform and grow. "Culture eats strategy for lunch" is just one version of that common organizational strategy theme. What this means for you is that if the right culture is not in place, you won't be able to achieve the transformation required by your vision. For example, if you want teachers to shift their pedagogy and the dominant culture is essentially, "We've always done it this way," you won't get very far. If you want your teachers to experiment and innovate, you can't have a culture that penalizes failure.

For our purposes, the easiest way to think about culture is to look at the elements of the POG and ask, "Are educator attitudes and predispositions likely to support the changes we will need to make?" "Which elements of the POG will educators need personally to be successful in teaching and assessing the POG?" "What other teacher attributes are needed to be successful in cultivating POG attributes in their students?" "Do teachers have the growth mindset to build upon their strengths and expand their capabilities?" These competencies and attributes taken as a whole will become the foundation of the culture of your school or district that you will build on.

In this chapter, we offer suggestions for concrete steps you can take to assure that you are at or can get to the place you need to be in the culture of your system. This includes taking a close look at the role of policies, procedures, and practices that influence culture.

CULTURE DURING CRISIS

When we started the interviews for this book in June 2020, we were generally interested in exploring culture issues with superintendents and other leaders. It soon became apparent that everyone we spoke to was now viewing their culture through a significant new lens—COVID-19.

We want to share with you two different organizational cultures that were tested by the pandemic.

Rob Bach was initially a high school assistant volleyball coach. He inherited a team with the motto, "Go for every ball." If you've ever watched a volleyball game, you know what that means. Every player on every play digs as deep as they can to go for every ball. A team that embraces this philosophy is gritty with a spirit of never giving up. Rob adopted this motto and worked to assure that it permeated the culture of his teams, which led to significant success.

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In 2014, Rob became principal of Stillwater High School in Minnesota, which then served Grades 10 through 12. He realized that the culture of the high school needed to change. It had to focus more on the needs of the students than on the desires of the adults. But he knew he needed to wait for the right moment to initiate that change. A year later, that moment presented itself. The high school was expanded to a 9 through 12 school, and Rob realized this was the critical time to address the issue of the school's culture. He rejected the idea of merely "assimilating" the new students and teachers, deciding instead to model extra care in embracing each new student and teacher. Rephrasing his former motto, he focused on, "Go for Every Student." The goal was for each new student to be on-boarded in a way that helped them feel honored and that their voices were heard.

Rob felt the new slogan emphasized that the primary needs of each student—social and emotional learning and equity—were being met. He and his team utilized a social and emotional learning construct called Building Assets, Reducing Risks (www.barrcenter.org). BARR creates a scaffolded system for supporting students and their families. Initially, the system was used to support every ninth-grade student, family, and the new teachers. When the tenth- through twelfth-grade students and teachers saw the individualized support strategies for the ninth graders, they began to ask for the same individualized approach. Following this interest, BARR was extended to an additional grade each year so that at the end of four years, every student in the school was supported by the BARR system. This reinforced the school's "Go for Every Student" philosophy.

Rachel Larson, director of learning and student engagement for the district, observed, "The high school has successfully undertaken a change in culture. It has shifted from a staff-centered culture to a student-centered culture. The staff worked hard to incorporate student voice. Students now serve on the high school's continuous improvement committees."

When the COVID-19 pandemic began to affect school operations, Rob observed, "Our team hit it out of the park. We met as a team and discussed how our evolving culture and philosophy would embrace each student and their family during the crisis." The team made a set of decisions:

- Creation of a grid of every type of support students and families potentially would need, including food, health, internet connectivity, computers, transportation, books, curriculum, and so forth. One person in the central office was made responsible for each of these functions.

- Assignment of each teacher to be responsible for the thirty students in their fifth-period class, including calling each family on their list the day before school resumed and then on an ongoing basis. As the point of contact for those families, the teacher was responsible for determining whether the student or family needed any of the available supports. When support was needed, the teacher would contact the person in the district responsible for that support function and assure that the support was provided.

Rob commented, “Once this structure was in place, our COVID-19 response was a slam dunk. Every family knew we were there for them. We made good on our ‘Go for Every Student’ motto, and that culture created our platform for success. We received recognition statewide for our approach to COVID-19, but it was really our approach to personalization and social and emotional learning that made that possible.”

Let’s consider a second example.

Kim Abel was the relatively new head of her teachers’ union when Jerry Hill became the superintendent of West Bloomfield School District in Michigan in 2012. Jerry had inherited a fractured relationship between the union and the district administration, describing the existing culture as “toxic.” He recalls, “We were having problems with collaboration and problem solving in collective bargaining and were looking to find healthier ways of doing both.”

Kim and Jerry agreed they were in need of help in reframing this relationship. They decided to use an interest-based bargaining (IBB) strategy in which the parties collaborate on designing a win-win solution to disputes (Klingel, 2003). The IBB process took root and led to a steady improvement in relations between the union and administration.

In the spring of 2018, Jerry approached Kim with the idea of the district undertaking a process to design its own POG. They formed a community advisory group to help create a broad-based consensus on the elements of the POG. Kim served on the advisory group along with a sizeable delegation of teachers from the district. That fall, they formed a new entity, the Learning Design Team (LDT), and charged it with overseeing the implementation of the POG. Kim and several teachers served on it. The level of collaboration on the LDT was high, and the district got off to a strong start in building the POG into the curriculum and instruction. Administration and teachers felt the POG gaining momentum.

Fast-forward to March 9, 2020, when the West Bloomfield cabinet met to discuss the possibility that schools might be closing due to COVID-19. They realized that the district should begin a planning process for that possibility and assigned that process to the LDT, which was to meet two days later. At the LDT meeting, the team quickly concluded that school closure in Michigan was imminent and there was a need to prepare teachers for this situation. Team members suggested that Jerry call a “non-snow snow” day two days later and use that day to get everyone on board with a COVID-19 strategy. The Learning Design Team spent the rest of the meeting planning the full day of teacher meetings on the upcoming non-snow day. On Thursday night, March 12, Governor Gretchen Whitmer announced the closure of all Michigan schools, effective March 16.

When teachers arrived at the planned Friday meeting, they all knew that there would be no further in-person classes for the foreseeable future. They spent the day doing detailed planning. The following Monday, the first day of school closure, was a logistics day, where staff made sure that all students had the materials they needed to begin online classes. The following day, classes began with relatively few bumps, and West Bloomfield had one of the easiest transitions of any district in the state to educating children during the COVID-19 closures. The district received accolades for its transition and performance.

It is interesting to listen to participants’ perspectives on what transpired. Kim Abel, the union president, looks back on the district’s performance and notes: “Teachers required support to make the needed transitions. COVID-19 shone a light on building leaders who fostered creativity and experimentation. They would say things like ‘that was great’ and ‘glad you tried that.’ Those comments made a big difference. On the other hand, there were a few leaders who did not nurture creativity and autonomy. These developments underscore the importance of a great principal who nurtures the right culture.”

Superintendent Jerry Hill also had some helpful reflections on the district’s performance during the first months of the pandemic: “The reason we were able to do what we did during COVID-19 was (1) we knew how to collaborate; (2) we had a vision; (3) we were ready for that moment. The culture of our district was, ‘We can do this.’ The POG was a concept, but in our district, it became a way of thinking. No problem is too big if we focus on the best interests of the kids and a collaborative culture.”

These two stories are powerful reminders of the pivotal role leaders play in the culture of their districts. In both cases, the leaders recognized

a cultural shift was needed. In one instance, the culture shift was necessary for a major design change in the school. In the other, the culture shift was undertaken to generally improve relations between administrators and teachers. In both, this cultural shift was in place when COVID-19 arrived, and both districts benefitted from the shifts in culture that had already been undertaken.

ASK YOURSELF

- *What has a recent crisis (such as COVID-19) revealed to you about the strengths of the culture of your district?*
- *If a recent crisis has revealed weakness in the culture, how might you use this as an opportunity to create a conversation around the culture?*

KNOW WHEN TO RESET YOUR ORGANIZATION'S CULTURE

As you contemplate your system's capacity to transform, you can't overestimate the role that culture plays. Brian Greenberg, CEO of the Silicon Schools Fund, surveyed the more than fifty innovative schools in Northern California funded by his organization. He tried to determine which factors led to these schools adapting well in the COVID-19 circumstances. While technology acumen had some bearing on their capacity to handle the challenges of COVID-19, the existence of a culture of collaboration and flexibility was clearly the most important factor in assessing a school's ability to respond constructively to the pandemic (Greenberg, 2020).

This question deserves your attention: "Does your system have the culture necessary to reach your community's new vision for education?"

Chip Kimball, director of the International School of Prague and former superintendent of both Singapore American School and Lake Washington School District in Washington State, puts the challenge this way: "Determine what you want your culture to be and lead to it. Doing this work is all about organizational culture. This is your number-one job. Too often leaders accept the organizational culture as it is. The culture they are building, the DNA of the system, will have more to do with the successful transformation of their system than

the direction in which they are heading. If your system needs it, you must hit 'reset' on your organizational culture."

If a culture reset is needed, be aware of events that could catalyze change. In Minnesota, Principal Rob Bach recognized that the conversion from a 10 through 12 school to a 9 through 12 high school was the right moment to begin a culture reset. In the Michigan district, frank discussion between the union leader and a new school superintendent opened the opportunity for a reset of culture. The right catalyst for transformation in your community will be unique to your context. Consider your POG process as a transition that could jumpstart significant shifts in your culture.

Is the culture required for redefining student success currently present in your system? Or do you need to change the culture to align with your community's vision? If your culture needs a reset, this must be your first priority. The best leaders realize that before they can take their Portrait of a Graduate into the classroom, they need to get their adults on board.

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Anthony Bent, leadership consultant and former superintendent of several Massachusetts school districts, puts it this way: "The quality of a district is not the printed documents, but who owns the printed documents. Whose documents are they? Do the documents reflect the collective will of the team?"

As you anticipate next steps, pay attention to when you will need to stay "tight" to focus on clear priorities and when it's better to loosen control to encourage creativity and autonomy. Good leaders do both. As the late Richard DuFour (2007) pointed out, "One of the most essential elements of loose-tight leadership is getting tight about the right things."

In your commitment to the vision, you want to be firm and clear (tight). You want people to know that the POG is not optional. However, the goals of the POG around specific competencies need to be co-created with your community (loose). Once the POG is adopted, you want every school and every classroom to embrace it (tight). However, the way to get there needs to be determined by each school leader and their team in the context of that school's specific context (loose).

Rachel Tecca, director of college and career academies in Akron, Ohio, appreciates the tight-loose leadership of Superintendent David James: "He lets you make sense of his vision in the context of your work. He is *tight* on his vision and *loose* in letting you make the vision your own."

There is one continuum of culture to which you should pay particular attention: *isolation versus collective efficacy*.

If you were in school in the 1990s or earlier, you know that the primary culture was “teachers rule” in the classroom. The culture was one of splendid isolation for both teachers and students. Each teacher was relied on to solve the problems of their classroom individually. That tradition has been slow to change. The shift to a Portrait of a Graduate requires a culture of collaboration. The culture of the adults needs to model the culture you want students to demonstrate. The challenges the adults take on require collaboration to accomplish.

Jim May, strategic advisor for the New Tech Network, underscores the importance of culture for student learning:

Adult culture functions as a glass ceiling for student culture. I’ve never visited a school where the students are more intellectually engaged than the adults. I’ve never seen a school where the students collaborate at a higher level than the adults. One of the most important levers school and district leaders have available to them as it relates to shaping student learning and culture is their influence on shaping adult culture and the design of the adult learning system. I want school and district leaders to see themselves as environmental architects as it relates to the adult learning system.

Mike Duncan, superintendent in Pike County, Georgia, reinforces this message: “The systems and processes to support teachers have been the culture change. There is now recognition that one teacher cannot do this work alone. Collaboration is about working together. Collective efficacy is about the group taking responsibility for improving.”

Working toward collective efficacy is just one of the cultural issues you need to consider. You and your team will identify other issues that are unique to your context. The key is to prioritize the ones that address your specific challenges.

Three more suggestions will keep your focus on creating the right culture to support student success.

Create a Green Light Culture

One helpful way to think about the culture of the adults in your system is whether you have or can create a green light culture. While you might at first think this refers to the sustainability or environmental

awareness of your system, we mean the term more broadly. Do your teachers and administrators perceive they have the green light to experiment and innovate? Do they—and your board—also understand the necessary corollary, that it's OK to fail? These two questions are central to the green light culture, which is an essential underpinning of a culture that will support innovation and transformation.

Melissa Follin, a teacher in Virginia Beach, Virginia, teaches an engaging unit on the protection of oysters in the nearby Chesapeake Bay. More than 125 students in five different classes participate, along with more students who take part in an after-school club. When asked how she is able to do this innovative work, she responded, “Our principal, Dr. Kelly Hedrick, challenged us to *design to the edges*. She encouraged us to go above and beyond teaching at grade level. She wanted us to push hard to create authentic opportunities for students to experience the curriculum.”

“Design to the edges” was the principal’s way of empowering her teachers to innovate. It’s also the theme of a TEDx talk called “The Myth of Average” (Rose, 2013) that the principal has shared with her staff as a culture builder. Kelly Hedrick elaborates on her key message: “A ‘green light’ for me is empowerment. Teachers who feel empowered and supported in their creative endeavors are more likely to do the same for kiddos. Nurturing the green light, for me, encompasses the entire mission, vision, and leadership I provide my staff. If they are going to take creative risks, they need to know they have more than just my support and permission. They need to feel empowered, and that begins with me. I have to create a safe environment where everyone feels valued and honored. They have to know that while I have incredibly high expectations, I am here to support them.”

Julie (Wilson) Jungalwala, founder of the Institute for the Future of Learning, builds on this concept. As she points out, “There are so many yellow and red lights out there that stand in the way of innovation—federal policy, state policy, and sometimes even district policy. So it falls on the leader to stand up and offer a green light. But one suggestion: Don’t assume just turning on the green light is enough. It may take some cajoling and convincing that you really mean it and won’t change your mind. Folks will need to hear and see that message over and over again. You will need to make it public and prominent or folks won’t believe the green light.”

Anna Nolin, superintendent of Natick Public Schools in Massachusetts, nurtures a green light culture across her school system because it fosters “psychological safety.” As she explains, “We make ‘failure’ not so scary and try to support staff to take risks without judgment. We

call these ideas ‘bright spots,’ and we share them across the district. We try to find money for the bright spots to become full flames or to spread across the district.”

Anna continually reinforces this culture with messages and practices. For example, she says, “I personally nurture it by trying to teach our principals to be evaluated without judgment and not worry over every little detail. We also make innovation teams at each level so people can get together and do post-mortems and share successes. This destigmatizes failure and just makes us all one set of colleagues working towards the best. We don’t stand on hierarchy and we are creative with asking people to partner with us to share [the] financial load for creative ideas.”

The following example from Jeffco Public Schools in Colorado illustrates how a green light culture affects everyone in the system—from students to the superintendent.

Alicia Asmus is a teacher in Arvada, Colorado, whose interdisciplinary science project we will feature in the next chapter. When we asked her how she knew she could take on the ambitious project she did, with students in the role of citizen scientists, she said, “Last year I tried a similar project that had some challenges. My principal was very encouraging, even in the face of some imperfection in the project. So I knew if I approached her on this new project, I would get a green light.”

Alicia’s principal, Brenda Fletcher, explains she was able to give such a clear green light because she knew her superintendent had her back on innovation. Then-Superintendent Jason Glass made it clear to his principals that innovation and experimentation were not only condoned but strongly encouraged.

The union president of Glass’s district was John Ford, who concurred: “Jason opened this huge door, if teachers were willing to take the opportunity and had the courage to do something new. We had the right superintendent; he was willing to take risks. I welcome this approach, but the real green lights are at the building level, and not every principal is giving green lights.”

Glass unpacked what the green light culture means for leaders:

Creating a green light culture is an essential ingredient in transformation. There are three things you can do to support it: First, you need to put parameters on what you are green lighting. When I was in Jefferson County (Colorado),

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we gave the green light specifically to authentic student learning experiences, problem- and project-based learning, and empowering site-based and classroom decision making. Second, once people take you up on the green light, you need to support them. You need to give them the authority they need and then showcase their work. Third, you need to defend what's been green lit from the rest of the status quo. The status quo system will be threatened and try to shut the green light down, and you need to create the safe space where the green lighters can operate.

So, my basic advice about green light culture is this:

- define it,
- support and nurture it, and
- protect it.

ASK YOURSELF

- *What are three examples where you have given your leadership team a green light?*
- *How can you determine whether your principals are developing a green light culture in their buildings?*
- *How can you showcase examples of teachers benefitting from a green light culture?*

Let's take a closer look at the components of green light culture. Mike Marks, former CEO of two very successful tech companies and adjunct professor at the Stanford Business School, is an international expert on innovation. He offers three pieces of advice that are helpful in this context.

Try stuff (and share): At one level, you simply want people to try new things. Mike recommends: "If you want innovation, you just have to be willing to try stuff and just move on." This goes to the heart of giving the green light when members of your team want to experiment with new approaches. It is also important to share these approaches, whether successful or not, so colleagues can benefit from the experiences as well.

Embrace failure (and learn from it): It isn't enough to simply "keep trying stuff." You have to be open to failure and to sharing the lessons of that failure. Maya Angelou has described failure as just a

data point. In the context of education, you need to be certain all data points are shared so that you collaboratively learn from the failures. Mike Marks explains that failure is baked into the culture of Silicon Valley: “It is why I like it so much here. Often the first question one gets asked in a Silicon Valley job interview is, ‘Where have you failed miserably?’ If you can’t answer that question, most often you won’t get the job.” He even encourages leaders to “celebrate failure,” adding, “Maybe ‘celebrate’ is the wrong word, but I mean to let it be known that someone tried an innovation, it didn’t work, but they learned from it and hope they will try again.”

This is the opposite of the dominant culture of education. Most teachers succeeded as students by being the ones who failed the least. So they assiduously avoid failing, finding myriad ways to discourage failure. If we want generations of innovative and creative problem solvers, then we need adults to embrace failure and encourage risk-taking. This requires a major cultural shift. We need to help current teachers embrace risk-taking. We need to hire the next generation of teachers with an emphasis on their willingness to take risks and have an openness to the lessons of failure.

Park Ginder, principal of Homestead High School in Fort Wayne, Indiana, is emphatic on this point: “You have to create a culture in which it’s OK for the adults to fail. Excellent work does not mean perfect. You have to demonstrate to your faculty that it is OK to not know the answer. It is our job as educators to break the rules for the betterment of kids. My superintendent has not told me ‘no’ once in eight years. I can preach failure because he lets me make mistakes.”

Dave Sovine, superintendent in Frederick County, Virginia, relates the POG to breakthroughs in failure: “The biggest impact of the POG in our district is that our teachers are embracing the challenge to experiment. Failure can be our friend. Our most significant breakthroughs are teachers who began experimenting with student engagement as they work on more innovative pedagogy. We have seen tremendous growth by teachers in this realm.” Jerry Putt, a principal in Frederick County, goes even further: “Don’t just accept risk-taking—promote it. Risk-taking is empowerment. How do you engage in risk-taking so it is empowering?”

Be curious: Mike Marks’s third piece of advice is to be curious. He goes so far as to say that in his experience with hiring or promoting leaders, the number-one determinant of an individual’s likely leadership success is their inherent curiosity. If you are satisfied by what is, you will wallow in the current state, problems and all. If you are innately curious, you will not only want to find out how things work but how you can make things work better.

Many educators are inherently curious. Curiosity is so important in the 21st century that we need to shine a light on it. Look for opportunities for adults and students to share their curiosity with each other and showcase the benefits of being inquisitive.

A related piece of advice Mike offers is to look at what everyone else is doing. In an education context, this means looking at what other schools and districts in your region and state are doing in an area in which you want to improve. What are other schools or districts around the country doing with that challenge? This is why we flag this issue in Chapter 7 about joining networks that can serve as a professional learning community for you. It is also why we strongly recommend leaders taking their team leaders on site visits to see first-hand what others are doing. Chapters 3 through 5 are essentially mini-field trips to visit success stories in the realms of creative problem solving, civic engagement, and self-direction. These chapters are designed to show you current cutting-edge practices.

The desire to learn from others should also be directed outside the education community. Mike Marks explains that successful innovative businesses almost always look to see what is going on in industries other than their own. You should try that, too. Consider talking to two to three of the most innovative people in your community; you may have already identified them and included them on your POG advisory team. Perhaps they run a technology start-up company or have reinvented a community service organization. Meet with them to discuss their views on innovation. Bring them in to meet with your leadership team. Have them meet with your teachers. It will be helpful for your administrators and teachers to hear why experimentation and innovation are so important, why your students need those competencies, and how your adults need to model them.

We have described three potential elements of your green light culture:

- Try stuff
- Be open to failure
- Be curious

Now we want you to consider how you would define a green light culture for your school or district. Consider co-creating a rubric or descriptor of the elements of a green light culture you collectively want to embrace. It will help you, your leadership team, and your teachers to shift your current culture to an environment where experimentation and innovation are valued and modeled.

ASK YOURSELF

- *What next steps will you take to assess your system's green light culture?*
- *What next steps will you take to nurture your system's green light culture?*

Consider Creating a Portrait of an Educator

Creating a green light culture will help shift your system's openness to creative ideas that support your shared vision. Creativity among teachers and administrators is essential, but it's not the only attribute they need to help students thrive as 21st century learners. Another tool will help to build a culture more broadly while aligning with your POG. This tool is the Portrait of an Educator.

Begin by asking, "How does our Portrait of a Graduate, designed for students, apply to the adults in our system?" Then go deeper by asking, "For us to help our students attain the attributes of our Portrait of a Graduate, what competencies do we need, individually and collectively, as educators?"

That can be the starting point for working with your teachers to co-create a Portrait of an Educator.

The practice of creating a Portrait of an Educator is just getting started around the country and showing real promise. It is an easier process than co-creating the community-based Portrait of a Graduate because it involves only the internal participation of your own educators. Some of them will have already participated in the community visioning process; however, this is an opportunity for all teachers to be involved.

As the Portrait of an Educator is developed, an interesting question will need to be answered: Will our district adopt a Portrait of an Educator that uses the same competencies as the Portrait of a Graduate, or will the Portrait of an Educator have different competencies? Both strategies can work.

In Northern York County School District in Pennsylvania, the district adopted a Portrait of an Educator based on their Profile of a Graduate. According to their former superintendent, Eric Eshbach: "If this is important to expect of all students, then we must expect it of all

who work with our students. Our POE uses the same language as our POG but adjusts the expectations to be appropriate to the educator level. While I left the district before realizing the full potential of the POE, I envisioned it being used to recraft our evaluation system for all educators.” (See Figure 2.1: Northern York Portrait of a Graduate.)

A different approach was taken in Needles, California, where the teachers of the district thought the elements of their Portrait of an Educator should go beyond the Portrait of a Graduate competencies. They believed there were elements of a 21st century educator that fell outside the scope of their student-centered POG. Superintendent Mary McNeil commented: “During these turbulent times, our POE will help us frame the multitude of new skills and learning that is mandatory during the pandemic and allow us to focus on what we need to do to be supportive of our students as we move through these times” (see Figures 2.2–2.3).

In Natick, Massachusetts, the district began creating a Portrait of an Educator during teacher union negotiations, just after their Portrait of a Graduate was adopted. During those discussions, the union president, Jefferson Wood, suggested that it might be a good idea to adopt a Portrait of an Educator. He thought it would be powerful to have a unifying agreement on what makes a great teacher. “We want to use it to build a better evaluation model that focuses on what matters.”

Natick Superintendent Anna Nolin responded positively: “I agreed with the idea because a vision for teacher practice inspires the heart and soul of educators. Having a Portrait of an Educator would also allow us to set practice goals and provide professional development to support core values and bring clarity and comfort to our teaching force.”

Contemplate the multiple applications of the Portrait of an Educator. It can provide general direction for changing your culture by identifying the educator attributes that should be at the core of culture. It can also help transform components of your entire system.

Leverage Your Portraits

As you have heard, districts have taken different approaches to defining the desired competencies of adults. Some create a Portrait of an Educator; others use their POG to unpack the competencies adults need to support student success. What’s important is to clarify your vision so that it applies to both students and adults, then leverage your portrait (or portraits) to drive culture change. Let’s use POG/POE as shorthand for whatever you decide to create.

Figure 2.1 Northern York Portrait of a Graduate and Portrait of an Educator

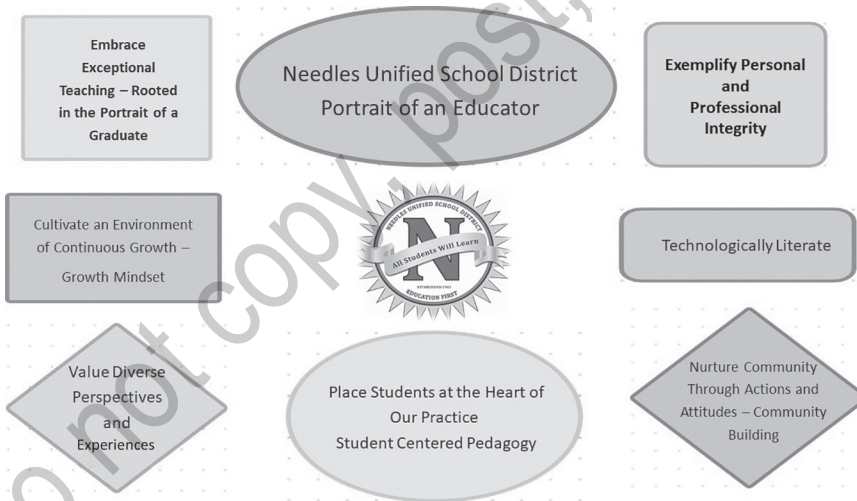


<p>Educators of the NYCS D have learned and understand the importance of Creativity in the learning process. They show this through their:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexibility and openness to learning with, from, about and for students and peers. • Ability to be solution oriented, using inquiry to solve problems. • Willingness to seek, encourage, and provide meaningful learning opportunities for students. • Innovation through risk taking, problem solving, and exploring. 	<p>Educators of NYCS D are Contributing members of the community, the nation, and the world. They:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Model and support a service mindset. • Seek opportunities to be generous with their time, resources and talents. • Intentionally build positive, appropriate relationships with students and colleagues. • Cultivate an environment that promotes empathy toward others. • Demonstrate respect for all viewpoints. • Recognize and appreciate student and staff differences.
<p>Educators of NYCS D have strong skills in Communication as demonstrated by their keen capacity to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speak openly, respectfully, clearly, and in a timely manner. • Engage successfully by listening in a non-judgmental manner. • Relate positively through non-verbal, written and spoken interactions. • Collaborate constructively with all stakeholders. • Utilize multiple platforms and resources to enhance communication 	<p>Educators of NYCS D are Courageous and demonstrate their ability to exhibit a problem-solving approach by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being able to consider perspectives different from their own. • Having a willingness to try new and possibly, uncomfortable things while trusting in the process and the team. • Embracing the opportunity for personal and professional growth through a positive growth mindset. • Modeling "extreme ownership". • Having the professional courage to do what is right for kids.
<p>Educators of the NYCS D have honed the skill of Critical Thinking. This is evident in their ability to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gather information relating to all members of our community, in order to consider and develop successful outcomes. • Synthesize information, identify available resources, and enact viable, student-centered solutions. • Reflect on the effectiveness of decisions and the impact they have on our community, particularly our students. • Adapt and adjust accordingly, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adopting a growth mindset, • Implementing changes when necessary, • Supporting the team. 	<p>Educators of NYCS D are Competent in a wide range of professional skills and are able to demonstrate that competency through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mastery in his/her content area of expertise and the essential functions of the assigned position, along with a willingness to his/her expand knowledge in that area • Mastery of technology related to job expectations. • Ethical behavior, including behavior that is honest, empathetic, and respectful. • Contributing to a positive culture and climate. • Understanding the social and emotional needs of students. • Personal wellness (physical, emotional, social, financial, etc).
<p>Educators of NYCS D use Collaboration effectively and persistently and value:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building positive and respectful relationships with students, parents, colleagues, • Accepting and giving constructive feedback from students, parents, colleagues, • Participating in PLC's, department/grade level meetings, and professional development. • Engaging others in thoughtful discussion, centered on mutual respect to improve teaching and learning. 	<p>Educators of NYCS D are Conscientious, which is evident because they are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-Directed, • Reliable, • Responsible, • Self-Disciplined, • Self-Motivated, • Lifelong Learners, and • Hard Workers.

Figure 2.2 Needles Portrait of a Graduate



Figure 2.3 Needles Portrait of an Educator



One of the best aspects of creating your POG/POE is that it can drive major changes in areas you might not have initially imagined.

In many districts, one of the first areas impacted by the POG/POE is professional development. Teachers need to be supported in making the necessary transitions to help their students develop the desired competencies.

Liz Fagen, superintendent in Humble Independent School District in Texas, talks about the transition this way: “If you look at our Portrait

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of a Graduate, we want our students on a continuum of improvement for the elements of the Portrait. For that to happen, our teachers need to be on a continuum of improvement, too. This transformation work requires a growth mindset for all adults and students in our system. Our professional development has to help our teachers develop their own growth mindset and work on the growth in the areas that require change in our approach to teaching. The specific shift in approach to teaching is often characterized as moving from the front of the classroom to a 'guide on the side' model."

Royd Darrington, assistant superintendent of the Juab School District in Utah, describes the shift this way: "Our job as educators is changing from being the gatekeepers of what education is to being the facilitators of what education should be. Those are two very different roles, and our teachers need support for how to become great facilitators."

Jerry Hill, superintendent in the West Bloomfield, Michigan, district featured at the beginning of this chapter, observes that professional development in his district has gone through a complete transformation: "Our PD has totally changed. The teachers now informally network with each other. Our PD for next year will be focused on competency-based education that is personalized and job-embedded for teachers. Our professional learning communities are taking responsibility for individuals. A lot of this work has become a way of thinking and doing and less about creating free-standing courses of PD."

David Larson, superintendent of the Glenbard High School District in Illinois, also sees professional development as a culture shift. "We have 550 teachers, with probably fifty to 100 innovators. How do we move along our other 400 or so teachers? We've redesigned our PD to integrate our Portrait of a Graduate competencies into student-directed, project-based tasks. We want all 550 teachers to have the capacity to guide those students in accomplishing those tasks. This is an essential component of their professional capabilities."

Everyone in K-12 education knows that PD needs dramatic transformation. Fortunately, POG/POE provides a clear and concrete direction for that needed change. The student and educator competencies need to be a key component of revitalized professional development.

At the same time, these are not the only components of a transformed PD strategy. In Chapter 6, we will explore pedagogical and assessment strategies to enable student attainment of the POG competencies. These strategies will become essential elements of your new PD, as well.

Another area that can be deeply impacted by the POG/POE is human resource policy. Many administrators don't immediately see the tie-in between the POG/POE and HR policy, even though the relationship is profound. Bill Considine, former CEO of Akron's Children's Hospital, points out his hospital used these competencies to evaluate him and his team. "The 4 Cs (critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity) are in our staff evaluation at Children's Hospital, and they also were included at the CEO level for my evaluation."

Many companies and nonprofits use POG-like competencies to evaluate their employees. It's also critical to do so in K-12 education. If we are going to help students develop those attributes, we need educators to be able to model those attributes. Imagine the power of your school board members embracing the POG/POE as principles for how they conduct themselves individually and as a group.

Farmington, Connecticut, is a district that has had its POG for many years. As their experience with it deepened, they applied it to more and more areas of their human resources policy and operation. Their recruitment and hiring of teachers are aligned to their vision of a graduate. They look for "learners" to become members of their learning organization. They want individuals who have a "learner's mindset." Their vision of a graduate defines the kind of teacher they want to hire.

Kim Wynne, assistant superintendent in Farmington, is emphatic: "I love the teacher prospect who can spontaneously articulate how students are collaborative, creative problem solvers. Our vision of a graduate is now front and center on the recruitment table. We want teachers who are teaching students, not content."

Similarly, Danielle Prohaska, superintendent in the small, rural district in Ohio's Mechanicsburg Exempted Village Schools, tells the story of using the POG to hire a new principal during the pandemic. "We asked each candidate to review our POG, explain how their prior experiences prepare them to lead this work, and what each would do to move it forward. The successful applicant made the best impression on those criteria and is now moving the high school forward on the POG during the pandemic."

Farmington not only uses their POG for hiring but also designs their orientation for new teachers, with their "vision of a graduate" as a prominent feature. They hold five to six sessions for new teachers in the first two years with the vision of a graduate at the core of that training. Kim Wynne goes further: "We want to give them a sense of districtwide coherence. They leave the orientation sessions

understanding our district's 'theory of action' in which our vision of a graduate is a central feature."

Finally, in Farmington, teachers set their own benchmarks for the vision of a graduate. They are asked each year: "What are your action research goals for the vision of a graduate for the year?" This work is now a formal component of teacher evaluation.

Farmington is a good example of a district that started with a vision of a graduate and each year embedded it more deeply in their system. It demonstrates how your POG/POE is likely to have applications to your work that you might not have anticipated when you first adopted it.

ASK YOURSELF

- *How will you co-create your POE with your educators?*
- *How will you use your POE?*
- *How will you assess your own progress on the competencies in your POG/POE?*
- *How will you encourage your leadership team to do the same self-assessment?*
- *What can we do individually and collectively to improve performance as adults on one of the elements of our POG/POE in the coming year?*

Final Reflections

In this chapter, we have asked you to focus on the adults in the system before starting to make changes in your classrooms. Your administrators and teachers need support for the shift you are asking them to make. How will you provide that support for transformation? Rob at Stillwater High School began with a culture of adult-oriented priorities, and he put in place structures that redirected the new culture to be student oriented and personalized. Jerry and Kim in West

Bloomfield inherited a history of deep mistrust between the administration and teachers. They put in place structures to encourage a dialogue building upon trust and mutual support for differing perspectives. Now's the time to consider leadership moves you want to make to better align your culture with your vision.

You may have found that the COVID-19 crisis has put issues of culture front and center. Listen to Aaron Spence, superintendent

in Virginia Beach, Virginia, describe how he has guided conversations about culture with his team, with a specific focus on equity:

At the heart of this work, if you want to change, you have to ask, why are we doing business the way we are? COVID-19 threw down the gauntlet. Will people really want to go back to what is super comfortable?

During COVID-19, I asked my team three sets of questions: (1) In this moment, what are we doing that we must keep doing? Have we caught lightning in a bottle? How do we keep it? (2) What are we doing now that we know we need to stop? This has really brought equity to the surface. Kids who don't have relationships with teachers and families are in an untenable position. We must change our practices for them. We have to stop behaving as though it's OK for some kids not to be engaged. (3) What are we not doing that we should be doing? What are the new challenges and opportunities? For example, how do we address post-traumatic

stress disorder (PTSD) for kids, families, and teachers?

These are important leadership questions not only for coping with the pandemic with equitable solutions but during any unexpected crisis or change in circumstances:

- What are we doing that we must keep doing?
- What are we doing that we know we need to cease?
- What are we not doing that we should be?

You may discover that unanticipated events will not necessarily interfere with transformation but rather underscore the need for change.

Finally, take time to reflect on questions related to the big topics covered in this chapter. When it comes to being the leader of a green light culture,

- Where does a green light culture exist in your district? How can you expand its impact?
- How will the shifting culture of the district help to close the readiness gap for all students?

RESOURCES FOR IMPLEMENTATION

To help you develop your Portrait of an Educator, **Battelle for Kids** offers helpful resources. www.battelleforkids.org/portraitofaneducator/landing

For Your Bookshelf

- *The Human Side of Changing Education* by Julie (Wilson) Jungalwala, founder of the Institute for the Future of Learning
- *Leadership for Deeper Learning* by Jayson W. Richardson, Justin Bathon, and Scott McLeod

Action Steps

Just as we cautioned at the end of Chapter I not to skip over the need to set a vision, anchor it in your community, and focus on equity, here we caution you not to underestimate the importance of addressing your system's culture. You can't create aspirations for students and teachers to innovate and experiment if your culture can't support these changes. Many good and great ideas for educational change have fallen victim to dysfunctional culture. Three action steps will ensure that culture is given the appropriate priority as you move forward with your new definition of student success.

- I. **Commit to a green light culture.** Analyze the degree to which you currently have a green light culture. Don't gloss over deficiencies. Does your team really believe it is getting a green light from you? Do your teachers believe they are getting a green light from their principals? Focus the green light on those next steps that truly matter.

2. **Adopt a Portrait of an Educator.** To complement your POG, co-create a Portrait of an Educator with your teachers. Together, you will identify the competencies they need to fully implement the POG and reach a collective decision: Will you adopt the same POG for adults and students, or will you identify a different combination of competencies that fully define the Portrait of an Educator in the 21st century?
3. **Leverage your POG/POE.** Use the POG and POE to define your adult culture. Specifically, consider using the portraits to define your approach to professional development; hiring practices; orientation; and evaluation policies and procedures. This is not an exhaustive list of what can be done with the POG/POE. The further you examine your system, the more applications you will find for using the POG/POE.

Up to this point, we have been discussing vision, community, and educator consensus building. As you continue on this journey, you and your stakeholders need a sharply focused mental picture of the tangible work that students will be doing to achieve the POG competencies. To bring this picture into focus, we have arranged a series of “field trips” to bring to life the full potential of 21st century teaching and learning. Part III of the book will guide you on this inspirational portion of the journey.

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