Activity: Get Inspired! Explore Innovative Schools

Explore districts and schools that are on the "leading edge" of equitable, resilient teaching and learning

Framing

Trying to imagine a future that does not yet exist can be challenging. The adage "you don't know what you don't know" is especially true in school redesign; breaking ourselves from traditional concepts of schooling requires us to be exposed to different ideas and new concepts.

While each district context is unique, there are many schools and districts that have developed strategies and piloted innovations that can be adapted to your own. Reflecting on the work that other districts and schools have taken on can help your community envision what's possible, broaden your perspectives of what the work looks like, and inspire you for the journey ahead.

Ensuring Equity & Resiliency

Equity looks like considering what teaching and learning looks like for those in our country who have the abundance of resources, opportunities, and support needed to fulfill their potential, as well as what it looks like in the most innovative environments where students of color, students with exceptionalities, emerging multilinguists, and students living in situations of poverty thrive. Taking those examples, equity then requires expecting and working toward that same bar for excellence for every student. It also looks like questioning assumptions of what excellence looks like; as you review other districts' and schools' approaches, it's important to ask: is this system working and for whom?

Resiliency looks like being open to the possibility of new ideas even when they seem daunting. It also means adapting your research as you get deeper into the design process. For example, you may start the design-thinking process assuming your district has work to do related to curriculum, leading you to seek out innovative exemplars in that area; however, as you hear from your stakeholders, you may identify a new, more pressing challenge, such as student engagement. This should inspire you to seek out new, additional exemplars!

Steps to Implementation

Suggested time: 1-2 hours

1. Gather your team in a room (in-person or virtual); make sure your team has reflected on your district's historical context and current data and has spoken with students, families, teachers, and classified staff. This will help you focus your research in this activity.

2. Preview the activity and reflection questions below.

   - Encourage team members to look for possibilities in each example rather than focusing on why a particular idea may not work in your context.

3. Have each individual spend about 30 to 60 minutes reviewing the starting set of exemplar schools and districts below; listen to the discussions, read the stories, and review the websites to better understand each school's approach to teaching and learning. Encourage team members to not only look at what examples draw their personal attention but also those that align with what you heard from your empathy interviews. As you review, have individuals document reflections, takeaways, or "ah-has" in terms of your district's work; write one reflection per sticky note.

Exemplar School Profiles to Explore

> [TLA Blended & Personalized Learning At Work: School Examples](): Profiles of schools that have navigated shifts toward blended and personalized learning models.

> [TLA Strategy Lab Expert Talks](): A series of expert panel discussions aimed at districts considering equity and resiliency in teaching and learning.

> [Next Gen Learning Challenges](): A community of educators and school communities working toward innovative, next generation school design.

> [Silicon Schools](): A Bay Area-based community of schools pursuing equitable, innovative, and personalized learning.

> [Canopy Project](): School profiles from across the country organized by Transcend Education and the Christensen Institute.

> [Liberatory Design Hub](): In-depth profiles of schools using liberatory design by Transcend Education.

4. As a group, take approximately 30 minutes for group reflection and discussion:

Discussion Question	Notes
What did we learn from these districts and schools about what a **bold vision** for equitable, resilient teaching and learning looks like?	
What did we learn from these districts and schools about what equitable, resilient teaching and learning look like **in practice**?	
What specific **strategies or practices** from these districts and schools inspired us? Which might be applicable in our context?	
How might other districts **address the challenges** we have identified?	

5. Based on your discussion, take about 10-15 minutes to identify additional research to conduct, including learning more about particular schools and exploring specific strategies more deeply. Use your research to influence your future visioning work as you imagine a better future.

Additional research ideas

6. Next, you will step back and reflect on your work for this section with a special focus on the ways that your process is – or is not – promoting equity in your district.

This activity was inspired by the Secondary Research Method Card of the IDEO Design Kit.

Note: Conducting in-person school visits is an ideal way to learn from others. When safe and possible to do so, reach out to innovative schools in your region to schedule visits – you'd be surprised at how open and welcoming so many of them are!

Cedar Rapids researched other communities that have demonstrated success in building a system and culture for standards-based grading, as well as those who have had success in providing relevant, real-world learning experieneces for students.

Mastery researched approaches to embedding blended learning in every classroom as well as culturally relevant and sustaining pedagogy as a way to personalize learning to student needs, close the digital divide, and prepare students for life after graduation.

Monterey conducted research to better understand the equity implications of personal relationships and students' sense of belonging.

See Appendix: Case Studies for more details

Additional Resources

IDEO Field Guide:

- Expert Interviews;

- Secondary Research;

- Analogous Settings