Co-creating school design principles

Design principles are four to seven ideas that align with the school's mission and vision and act as a guiding light for the school-level team implementing change. When schools build design principles as a larger community — engaging faculty, staff, families, students and community members — they help to ensure all stakeholders' perspectives are represented in the big ideas that guide their work.

This tool suggests steps a team might take to prepare for a design session on co-creating design principles, offers a protocol for facilitating the session and proposes next steps for taking design principles from draft form to final state.

▶ Before: Plan the design session

1. Identify who. Identify the members of your community who will co-create design principles. Consider: How might we obtain the perspectives of all people who will be impacted by this initiative, including students, families and community members?

2. Identify when and where. Select a date, time and location for the session. Consider gathering input on these decisions before finalizing them in order to ensure the time and location work for as many stakeholders as possible. Also, consider scheduling the session later in the day to allow families to attend after work.

If the meeting will occur in person, consider whether transportation support might be helpful for some attendees and if you're able to provide childcare for families who may need to bring children.

You might also consider hosting the session virtually. This option may lower the time demand on participants and eliminate the need for transportation. If the meeting will occur online, consider what steps you might take to ensure all stakeholders have the internet and hardware access required to participate.

3. Invite stakeholders. Share details of the gathering with stakeholders, and solicit attendance information.

4. Determine your plan for iterative design. By the close of the first session, stakeholders will have developed draft design principles. Make key decisions now about how the iterative process will work, how many iterations you will generate before finalizing and how you might calendar key benchmarks in the coming weeks and months. For example, you might plan to hold three additional, weekly workshops following the initial session, in which the same group of stakeholders iterates on draft design principles. Alternatively, a school-based team might iterate on the draft design principles and solicit feedback from the larger group of stakeholders (via email) prior to finalizing and sharing. Making these key decisions now will allow you to share the big picture and timeline with stakeholders in your first session.

▶ During: Facilitate the session (90 minutes)

Time required: 90 minutes. Note that times are only recommendations. You should adjust the protocol to meet your needs.

Welcome and introduction (15 minutes)

1. Welcome stakeholders (2 minutes). Thank stakeholders for sharing their time and energy. Address any "housekeeping" items (e.g., if online, ensure your screen name is accurate; if in-person, ensure everyone knows where the bathrooms are located).

2. Provide an overview (5 minutes). Share:
- The school's vision and mission
- The overall purpose of the gathering: To co-create vision and mission-aligned design principles for the school
- The rationale for creating design principles
- The timeline for the project and the big picture on how you will approach iteration.

3. Preview the agenda and norms (3 minutes). Share an overview of the agenda and propose norms for your time together. Invite stakeholders to share feedback and adjust accordingly, in real-time.

4. Facilitate introductions (5 minutes). Share who is here (e.g., parents, community members, teachers, school administrators). Facilitate brief introductions (e.g., names and roles).

Warm-up and discussion (45 minutes)

5. Define design principles and share examples (10 minutes). Design principles are four to seven ideas that align with the school's mission and vision and act as a guiding light for the team implementing change. Share examples of SPARK School at Kyrene de las Manitas, High Tech High and Stanford d.school.

6. Explore school spotlights (15 minutes). Share the purpose of this activity and give directions.

You might say:

> "You're about to explore three different school spotlights. As you do, you'll have the opportunity to learn how other schools are redesigning their schools to better meet the needs of all learners.
>
> The purpose of this activity is to help us think expansively. If we were to jump right into ideation and brainstorming, we might be tempted to focus on current contexts and constraints.
>
> Instead, we'll start from a place of considering that there are other ways of doing schooling and give ourselves permission to think outside of the box as we continue our session."

Specify three school spotlights for stakeholders to explore independently. As they engage with each spotlight, they should complete two sentence stems: "I like…" and "I wonder…" They will share these statements with a small group during the next activity.

Provide 15 minutes for participants to explore school spotlights and complete sentence stems, independently.

7. Facilitate small-group sharing (20 minutes). Review the protocol below with the whole group. Then split stakeholders into groups of 4–6 for sharing. Working with small groups will ensure all stakeholders have the opportunity to share in a shorter period of time.

Time	Step	Description
2 minutes	Introduction	Introduce yourselves briefly. Identify a facilitator, whose responsibility is to keep time and take notes. *Note: You might consider leveraging members of the school team as facilitators and pre-alerting them to their roles.*
2 minutes	School 1: "I like..."	Stakeholders should share how they completed the "I like…" sentence stem for the first school. Sharing should occur round-robin, with each stakeholder naming only one response before moving on to the next stakeholder. Stakeholders are welcome to pass at any time. The group should move on to the next statement at the two-minute mark or when everyone passes, whichever occurs first.
2 minutes	School 1: "I wonder..."	Same directions, only stakeholders share how they completed the "I wonder…" sentence stem.
2 minutes	School 2: "I like..."	Repeat the steps above, with a focus on the second school.
2 minutes	School 2: "I wonder..."	
2 minutes	School 3: "I like..."	Repeat the steps above, with a focus on the third school.
2 minutes	School 3: "I wonder..."	

Ideation and consolidation (30 minutes)

8. Identify learner needs (8 minutes). Return to a whole-group structure. Invite stakeholders to respond to the following question on post-it notes: *What is most important for learners as we design our learning environment and experiences?* Provide one example (e.g., "Creating emotional safety so learners are willing to take risks."). Stakeholders should record only one idea per post-it note and post their ideas together, for all participants to see.

Recommendations for facilitating this portion of the protocol:
- Ideally, all post-it notes should be the same color.
- If the group is larger than 15 participants and is meeting in person, consider engaging in steps 8 and 9 in groups of 6–8 first. Then, all participants can come together and engage in step 9 a second time as a whole, using only the small groups' "clustering" post-its.

If the group is meeting virtually, consider using an application like Padlet.

9. Identify commonalities (10 minutes). Invite participants to look for thematic commonalities and to share them with "I notice…" statements. Move thematically related post-it notes into clusters, and label clusters with a new post-it note of a different color.

10. Up-vote clusters (5 minutes). Invite participants to vote for the three clusters they feel are the most important for learners. Groups meeting in person might invite participants to add checkmarks or stickers to post-its. Virtual participants using Padlet might select the "heart" icon to indicate their up-votes.

The top three to five clusters will become the starting points for the school's design principles.

11. Identify draft design principles and next steps (5 minutes). Clearly identify the clusters that will become the starting points for the school's design principles. Layout the next steps and timeline for iteration. Indicate how and when you will share headlines from the day's gathering with any participants who were unable to join.

12. Express gratitude and invite feedback (2 minutes). Share your appreciation for your stakeholders' generosity. Invite their feedback through a survey so that you are able to tailor the next gathering to be responsive to their needs.

After: Execute the plan and follow-up

1. Share headlines from the day's gathering with any participants who were unable to join. If the meeting was virtual and you were able to record the session, consider sharing a recording.

2. Execute your plan for iterative design. Follow through with all key decisions about the iterative process on your established timeline, gathering feedback and sharing updates along the way. This likely includes sending the "final for now" design principles to all participants.

3. Keep your design principles alive. Your design principles are your guiding light and should be present and active in building school culture and making decisions. Think about the mechanism or system that will keep the design principles at the forefront. For example, you might:
- Introduce professional learning sessions with the design principles to recenter educators
- Begin community presentations with the design principles
- Create student or family surveys aligned with the design principles to ask for input on how well you are embracing or living into the design principles.

4. Identify when you will revisit the design principles for revision. Commit to considering a revision of the design principles on a timeline, and share the timeline with stakeholders (e.g., "We plan to revisit these design principles for revision in three years, in July of 2024.") Calendar this next step so that you are prompted at the right time.