THE FUTURE OF EDUCATION REPORT

2023/24

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Future Design School supports deep competency development and skill mastery through exceptional learning experiences.

We support leaders looking to develop unique, personalized pathways for their schools, educators and students.
Schools across North America leverage our organization for transformational strategy, professional development as well as our robust tools, frameworks and resources.

Our proven methodologies combine significant learning generated from our extensive field work around the globe and leverage our deep expertise in strategy development, user centered design and change management.

Hundreds of schools and districts have leveraged our seasoned business strategists and renowned education experts to drive deeply impactful and measurable results.

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A Note From Our Founder & CEO
Sarah Prevette

As data tools become more readily accessible and emerging technologies like artificial intelligence are adopted at an increasing rate, there are exciting opportunities in education to transform both strategic planning and assessment practices.

Too often, strategic planning is treated as a checkmark exercise in schools — we create beautifully designed external facing plans, celebrate aspirational vision, and then hope that individuals will rally to implement. What we know to be true is that strategic visioning is but one aspect of planning; without deep operational plans and clear actionable roadmaps, success is unlikely. There is a rising trend of schools looking to better capture their aspirations as measurable goals — and to create systems that capture integral data for tracking ongoing progress. Creating analytical dashboards that proactively identify barriers to achievement, as well as highlight inefficiencies or inequities, are indispensable to ensuring effective leadership and strategic implementation.

Feeding into these systems are all sorts of data points that are easily capturable, including ongoing assessment of learning from educators. We are seeing more and more schools reinvest into updating assessment practices, and encouraging educators to think about Journey Based Assessment — where they engage students in goal setting, measure ongoing skill development, and reward iteration of thought. As Higher Education admissions offices seek demonstrable work-ready competencies from incoming students, K-12 schools are evolving to incorporate skill development into their jurisdictional curriculum.

All of these changes require thoughtful change management and stakeholder engagement, including ensuring that parents understand how the world is changing, what their children need to succeed, and how schools are meeting the moment. Similarly, our educators need to appreciate the necessity for change in their practice and feel supported — both in adopting new pedagogical approaches, and in capturing essential data. Cultivating creative culture and empowering teams to achieve measurable results are critical to high performance.

Emerging technologies are an amazing opportunity for us all to level up practice and achieve ideal states; the schools that are slower to adapt may find themselves at a disadvantage in the marketplace. Forward looking leaders are using this moment to galvanize their teams with the art of the possible and reignite passions for deeper learning — and in that spirit, I hope you find this edition of the Future of Education Report informative and inspiring as you seek to meet this moment. The Future Design School team is here to support you in developing and implementing strategic vision. I'd love to hear from you and talk about how we might collaborate. Email me directly anytime at sarah@futuredesignschool.com.

Enjoy the Report!

Sarah Prevette
Founder & CEO

Future Design School **Senior Leadership Team**

SARAH PREVETTE
Founder & CEO
@sarahprevette

SARAH PREVETTE has developed transformational strategy for some of the country's biggest business leaders and renowned brands. Globally recognized for her work in human centered design and entrepreneurship, she is proud to work alongside an incredible team of educators to drive innovation inside schools. Prevette's organization, Future Design School, provides world-class strategy development, professional training programs and resources that empower effective leadership and personalized learning. Prevette has an illustrious history of innovation as a serial entrepreneur, high profile investor and strategic advisor to numerous organizations. She has been named by *Inc. Magazine* as one of the top entrepreneurs in North America and one of the "Top 20 Power Elite" by *Canadian Business*.

SANDRA NAGY
Director of Learning
@edtechtest

SANDRA NAGY has dedicated her career to driving innovation and building effective organizational strategy. With 20+ years of experience, Nagy has designed, developed and delivered hundreds of learning opportunities to thousands of employees and educators. Nagy leads the Education Practice at Future Design School, building strong academic partnerships with school leaders that help to drive their strategic priorities through consulting support, professional development and efficacious curriculum resources. Nagy's educational background includes a Master's in Education from Harvard University focused on Technology in Education and a Bachelor of Commerce focused on Organizational Behavior and Entrepreneurship from McGill University.

LESLIE MCBETH
Director of Special Projects
@lesmcbeth

LESLIE MCBETH is an educator on a mission to answer the question: *"How might we empower students to solve the world's big problems?"* With 15 years of experience at the intersection of design and education, McBeth has worked in public policy and design in Switzerland and New York City, and as a classroom teacher and professional learning designer in Toronto. Currently the Director of Special Projects at Future Design School, McBeth designs programs to empower educators to break down their classroom walls and engage students in future ready learning experiences. She has worked with more than10,000 educators around the world from Australia to Sweden to California, leading workshops and speaking at events such as CIS Ontario's Cohort 21, SXSWEdu, the Apple Teacher Conference and TEDx. Since 2016, she has been the Design Thinking Coach for the Google Certified Innovator program worldwide.

Why School Strategic Plans Fail *and Three Ways to Avoid It*

In education and beyond, a strategic plan is designed to serve as the backbone that supports and unites everyone involved in the enterprise. Despite the extensive time and resources devoted to creating them, these visions often fail to come to fruition. Through our deep experience leading and supporting the strategic planning process for schools, districts, and industry partners, the Future Design School team has identified three key reasons why strategic plans fail — and developed frameworks to address them .

STRATEGIC PITFALLS TO AVOID:

Failure to get stakeholder buy-in early in the process

Lack of a supporting operational plan

Inadequate measurement and monitoring of key goals

Two out of every three well formulated strategic plans end up failing because of poor execution.

— HARVARD BUSINESS REVIEW

STAKEHOLDER BUY-IN

Deep and meaningful stakeholder consultation is an essential step in developing and executing an aspirational vision. This should not be a performative exercise, but rather a culture building, human centered approach to change in schools. This step cultivates shared understanding and buy-in with all stakeholders, and allows school leaders to enact plans deeper, faster, and in a more connected manner. For that reason, a robust engagement process is an essential element *throughout* the strategic planning and implementation process (not just at the beginning). Students, parents, teachers and staff, school administrators, board members, and community leaders need to have their voices heard — and their perspectives should be acknowledged and reflected, in the completed plan as well as ongoing implementation. Done well, the strategic planning and execution process is **an equitable, open, iterative, responsive, and inspiring opportunity to examine a school's current state, and set a course for the years ahead.**

OPERATIONAL PLANS

The rubber truly hits the road, however, once that course is set. It's true that a strategic plan can be a useful, beautifully designed communications tool for any school — as a marketing piece for the families of prospective students, a call to action for advancement, and a document of the path forward for potential faculty and staff. But this cannot be its only purpose; the public facing document is not where the vision should go to die. In other words, **the "how" is critical, and the release of the plan itself represents a** *beginning* **more than an end to the process.** While strategic plans include high level aspirations related to a school's growth and sustainability, the growing trend is for these documents to be **supported by a deep, action-oriented operational plan used by internal leadership** to ensure that these aspirations are met.

Future Design School's *Cascading OKR Cycle* **is a proprietary and proven approach for building operational goals and metrics for schools and districts. Learn more about this framework on** page 8.

> **Accountability is one of many elements that may help create a healthy and supportive work environment. Professionals may work to embrace their own accountability, hold each other accountable or foster an overall organizational culture based on accountability. All of this can help lead to a happier and more productive workplace.**
>
> — Indeed.com

MEASUREMENT & MONITORING

Forward thinking leaders are implementing internal operational plans that leverage all the data at their fingertips to drive decision making and track progress. The vital role that data plays in developing and measuring strategic goals ranges from admission, ongoing engagement, and student retention rates, to metrics that can flag important equity and inclusion interventions in a school community. Developing accountability around these and other important goals, while ensuring intentionality about what data is being collected, and how it's being used, is an important — and inspiring — rallying point for school communities.

EFFECTIVE STRATEGIC PLANS:

✔ **DEFINE** what success looks like

✔ **MEASURE** what matters

✔ **ENSURE** personal accountability for implementation

✔ **ENGAGE** stakeholders in all stages of the process

School leaders need an opportunity to develop an innovative vision for where their school needs to go, and how it will get there. A strategic plan is the platform to convey this vision and see it through, but in order to be effective, it must **define what success looks like**, and be backed by an measurable operational plan.

Schools need to **measure what matters**, and ensure **personal accountability** for implementation. Crucially, it must bake ongoing engagement into all stages of the process, so that stakeholders can be meaningfully brought together to impart their perspectives on how their school can meet the current moment, and

respond in kind. We are seeing schools creating digital dashboards that enable their governing Boards to have greater visibility into real time performance, while school and team leaders action the data they collect around strategic goals to make decisions and understand how teams are performing.

A plan needs execution like a team needs a coach. Engaging, data driven operational plans are that actionable element, and it's here that innovative school leaders take the reins to lead with vision, empathy, and a resolve to do right by the most important people in any school community: the students.

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Future Design School supports school leaders worldwide to develop and execute strategic visions. Connect with us at team@futuredesignschool.com to learn more about how we can support you and your school community.

Establishing and Meeting Your School's **Objectives and Key Results**

As any school leader who has engaged in the strategic planning process knows, bringing a vision to life requires structure, commitment, and ongoing stewardship.

Two important considerations must be balanced in equal measure:

1. How might **teachers and staff** be authentically integrated and engaged in the strategic vision, on an ongoing basis?

2. How might **governance** needs be addressed?

For Board members and other governance stakeholders, an operational plan is a highly effective engagement tool; **Boards get frustrated with big visions that outline the "what" but aren't backed by "how"** . And when it comes to engaging teachers and staff, one method we have introduced to many school leaders is known as the **Objectives and Key Results Cycle** — which Future Design School has developed into a proprietary, education-focused approach we call *Cascading OKRs*. Our OKR Cycle is taking hold in schools because it's a clear, actionable, and repeatable framework that ensures teacher and staff teams are aligning their work with the top level priorities, and is designed to foster ongoing collaboration and communication.

WHAT ARE OKRs?

» **Objectives** are obtainable aspirations for what the school wants to accomplish in a set time period

» **Key Results** are the measurable outcomes related to each objective

The purpose of the OKR Cycle is to operationalize a strategic vision by defining measurable goals and key results for school teams, to ensure that all team members are aligning their work with top level priorities, and to embed a process for ongoing communication around goal achievement.

Most importantly, though, the OKR Cycle is a tool to measure what matters — because, in schools and industry alike, **what gets measured is what gets done.** It maximizes efficiency, increases productivity, and helps ensure tangible, positive impact. It's worth noting, too, that its cyclical and repeatable structure is a perfect match for how schools operate: it **sits nicely atop an academic year**, and is used by school leaders to frame start-of-year planning and conduct end-of-year reflections.

The first step, of course, is to develop an effective strategic plan, through a process that includes deep data review and extensive community consultation. With this plan in place, the Cascading OKR Cycle can commence. **Here's a breakdown of the process in action:**
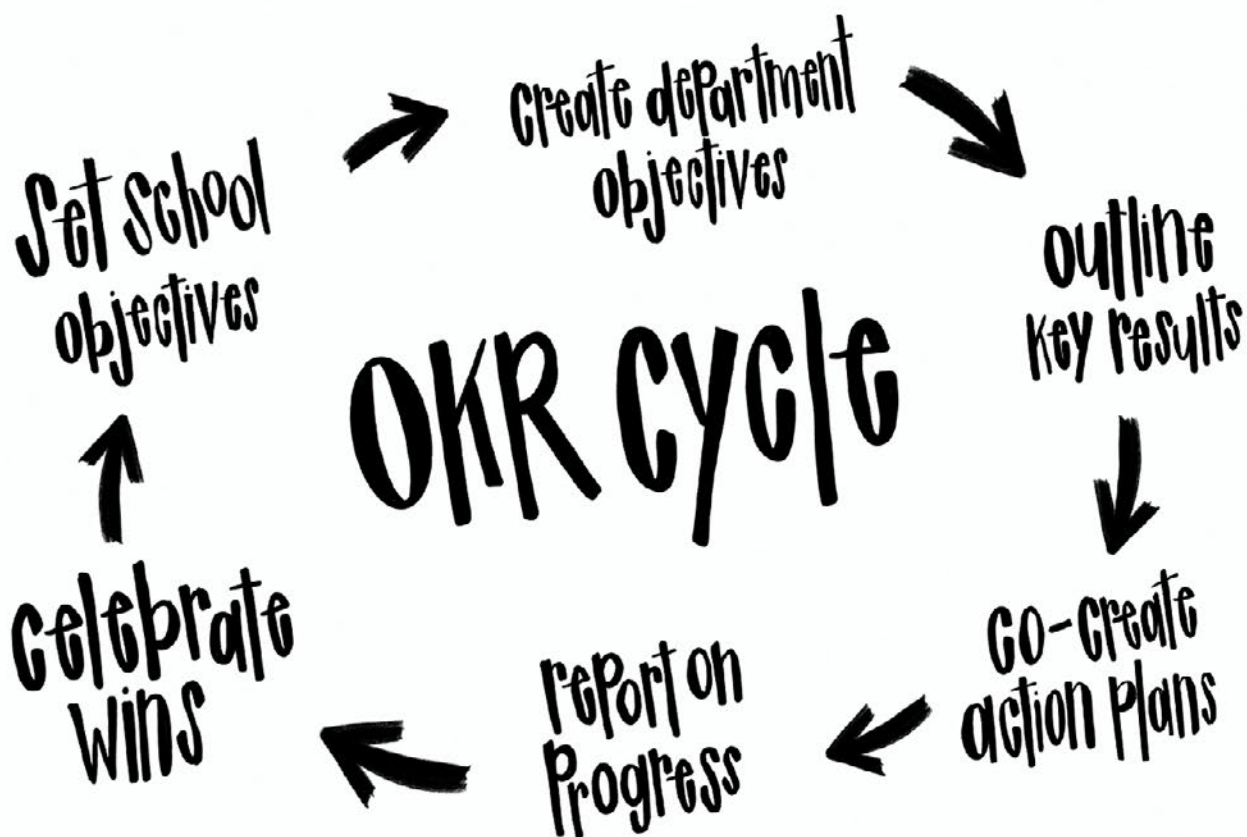
Set School Objectives

The OKR Cycle begins by setting the school's objectives. These will connect directly to the strategic plan, and usually span three (or sometimes more) years. And just like strategic planning itself, this begins with **deep and meaningful consultation** with all stakeholders — including surveys, interviews, focus groups and a thorough internal review designed to surface unmet needs, followed by deep work with a cross-functional team to paint a future vision.

"The process of setting overall objectives is as important as it is challenging, because it's so important to get things right. For example, establishing the right high level metrics at this stage sets up the process for success down the line. The scaffolding and support that Future Design School provided was essential in ensuring that we set meaningful, actionable objectives for our school."

- STRUAN ROBERTSON | Head of School, The York School

Create Department Objectives

Once the overarching school objectives are set, each department is able to create their objectives for the school year ahead. This process boils down to asking teacher and staff teams two important questions:

1. **What needs to be achieved in this next year** as we backwards design from our three-year goals?

2. **What role does your team play** in realizing the school's objectives?

If, for example, a school set an objective to retain 95% of students transitioning from middle to senior school, then the marketing team might create an objective to host three "transition events" for middle school families, while middle school teachers could commit to a series of cross-grade collaborations with the senior school. For an example of this entire process in action, .

Outline Key Results

Once each department has its objectives, they can outline the key results. The essential difference here is that **objectives are visionary goals** that define what success looks like, while **key results are the measurable actions** that lead towards the achievement of those visions.

It's important to note that these goals and metrics are co-created with the department leader — and sometimes with the entire department participating in design. At this stage, key stakeholders will review all the proposed objectives, key results, and corresponding initiatives, and highlight any potential barriers, challenges, or limitations. It's also important to review goals and actions with an eye on resourcing; leaders and teams need to think about what initiatives can run concurrently, and what initiatives need to be sequenced to account for dependencies.

Inviting criticism and candid feedback from the team will help leaders surface and handle any potential objections, as well as give everyone a voice in how the strategic plan is actioned. This helps achieve buy-in, and increases the likelihood of successful implementation.
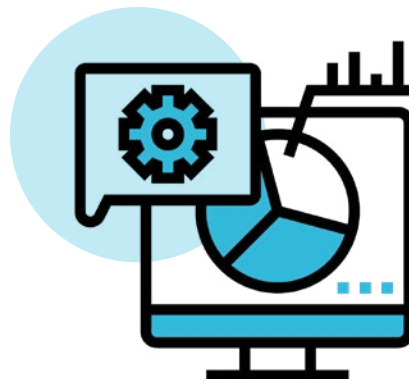
"The process employed by Future Design School ensures that leaders are able to translate high level objectives in the right context for their teams. Working with departmental leaders to establish (and then iterate and refine) key results ensures that they were engaged throughout the process of operationalizing a strategic plan."

— SARAH PREVETTE
Founder & CEO, Future Design School

ENGAGE STAKEHOLDERS

» What challenges do you foresee?

» What dependencies exist?

» What resources will be required?

» Is it achievable in the time period?

» What other key initiatives are concurrent?

» Welcome criticism & candid feedback!

Co-Create Action Plans

Next comes what might be considered the most crucial step: actioning key results. An action plan needs to outline the essential initiatives to be completed, establish workback dates and responsible parties, and consider any potential challenges to meeting a goal. Action plans are **personalized** for each team member, **aligned** to department and school-wide goals, and importantly, are **designed to ensure accountability.**

In other words, **this process cannot be top-down**; instead, it means co-creating plans with department leaders and team members, and engaging with stakeholders to understand potential challenges, daylight useful resources and concurrent initiatives, and ensure that goals are achievable. For school leaders, this requires being **open and welcoming to candid feedback** — after all, this is an important sign of engagement and commitment. Inviting critique from the team will help leaders surface and handle any potential objections, and give everyone a voice in how the school's strategic plan is actioned — which helps in getting buy-in and increasing the likelihood of successful implementation.

The entire process is a narrowing exercise: it starts with high level, strategic objectives for the school, and narrows all the way to individual staff action plans.

PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT & PERSONAL ACCOUNTABILITY

» Clear expectations

» Shared understanding of deliverables

» Measurable performance indicators

» Direct line from individual to organizational strategic plan

Personal action plans are where performance management comes into play. This should encompass soft skills like collaboration, communication, and creativity, along with contributions to the team and to the school's culture and climate. Some school leaders link performance based bonuses to the school achieving its set objectives for the year, as well as the individual delivering upon their outlined key results. See for an example.

"Teachers and staff throughout our school are excited about our new strategic plan, and one of the main reasons is that Future Design School was able to help us show the direct connections between the overall vision and individual expectations. The personal action plans we put in place help to ensure that everyone understands their role in implementing the strategic plan, and has a chance to highlight the support they need."

- PATRICIA KONG | Head of School, Pilgrim School

Report on Progress

Co-created action plans, aligned to strategic goals, present **a clear line of sight for leaders to see progress**, understand roadblocks, and provide support as needed.

School leaders who implement the OKR Cycle intentionally create moments throughout the year where the operational leadership team updates their progress on the identified key results. In addition, they schedule regular meetings for departments to come together to review their progress, and ensure that leadership is meeting with teachers and staff individually to ensure that everyone is staying on track and meeting expectations.

Adopting this framework, and training the full school team on how to use it, helps build **a shared language and understanding around ongoing progress reporting**. It also fosters a high performance culture, and enables qualities that many schools (and companies and organizations, for that matter) struggle to achieve: **transparency, visibility, accountability, and momentum**, particularly around reporting to Boards .

While the granularity of what's being reported will vary, governance groups and internal school leaders need to be regularly and meaningfully engaged in the reporting process through digital dashboards that pull data on the school's OKRs and provide at-a-glance monitoring.

Celebrate Wins

Equally important to tracking ongoing progress is celebrating wins. Taking time to recognize what's working is a critical component of building momentum.

Celebrating wins signals that achievement matters, and sets norms and expectations in a nuanced way. This goes double in a school environment, where time is so often "the enemy," making it difficult for many team members to take the time to think strategically. Research shows that **greater accountability actually fosters greater commitment** — but that's not all. "Reinforcing positive accountability increases happiness and employee engagement," Culture Partners reports in its summary of a recent employer survey. "Companies with positive accountability at the heart of their leadership styles empower employees to take ownership for work that matters, as opposed to fixating on problems that surface from finger pointing and lack of initiative. When employees take responsibility for delivering company wide results, engagement, productivity and happiness rise exponentially."

The entire *Cascading OKRs* process, and this aspect in particular, is a fantastic foundation for **building a high performance culture** within a school team (see page 28). We're seeing deep and meaningful engagement from teachers and staff alike when schools implement this approach to operationalizing their strategic plans.

FUTURE DESIGN SCHOOL'S CASCADING OKR CYCLE EMPOWERS LEADERS TO:

- ✔ Ensure clarity around priorities
- ✔ Maximize efficiency
- ✔ Increase productivity
- ✔ Drive positive impact
- ✔ Build high performance culture

People want to understand what's expected of them, and to have a clear sense of what they are being held accountable for. The OKR Cycle provides school leaders, teachers, staff, and governors / trustees with a shared vision on the most important rocks a school needs to move — and gives everyone a framework to prioritize and sequence. Best of all, **it answers the big question: "How will we empower our teams to achieve key results?"**

Future Design School works as a strategic partner with school leaders to implement OKR Cycles in their schools. Email team@futuredesignschool.com to unpack our process and learn more about how it can benefit your school.

OKRs in Action:
The Forest School

→ To help illustrate the *Cascading OKRs* process, here is an example breakdown we developed with one of our school partners *(with names and specifics changed to keep them anonymous)*.

The Forest School is an independent K-12 day school of 350 students. They are well established in the community, and launched a new high school a few years ago. They have their Kindergarten to 8th Grade students in one building, and their new high school classes in another building.

School Objectives

Here are the objectives set by Forest School — what they want to achieve three years from now:

- Raise $4M in capital campaign

- Have a waitlist across all grades

- Retain 90% of students transitioning from middle to senior school

- Ensure all students graduate with a personalized skill based portfolio

Based on their facility upgrade needs, they know they need to raise $4M in capital in the next three years. They also need to fill the gaps in their current enrollment, in order to get to the point where they have a waitlist for all grade levels.

Through the data review process, we also established that they have high attrition rates from middle to high school. With this in mind, the leadership team and Future Design School's strategic leads identified a need to focus on retention of current students, and decided to aim for a 90% retention rate. Given the need to compete against others in their market, Forest School also needs to continue to demonstrate their commitment to new pedagogies and how they are uniquely preparing students for their futures. With this in mind, they have committed to ensuring all students build a skill-based portfolio.

Department Objectives

For this example, we will focus on what Forest School's marketing team established as their Year One Objectives:

- Increase admissions pipeline for primary school

- Engage all middle school families through ongoing events

- Create marketing materials for middle school families around unique high school opportunities

The marketing department decided to focus on increasing admissions for the primary school — one critical aspect of getting to having a waitlist across all grade levels. They are also focusing on engaging middle school families, in order to integrate them into the high school community and showcase the amazing programs available at the upper school. Note that these goals are directly related to the school's overall objectives, and are particularly in service of increasing the retention rate to get toward the 90% target.

Key Results

The Forest School's marketing department set four key results for this school year, and outlined the same number of key initiatives that all need to be completed in order to realize these results.

KEY RESULTS:

- ✔ Fill all open spots in primary school
- ✔ Retain 85% of graduating middle school students
- ✔ Have $750,000 in donations committed
- ✔ New Skill Based Portfolio featured in *Hechinger Report*

KEY INITIATIVES:

- » Launch advertising campaign on primary school
- » Create marketing materials around unique high school approach
- » Host fundraising auction
- » Hire content writer for Thought Leadership

Aligning the results and initiatives side by side illustrates how they cascade from one another. For example, the initiative the marketing team needs to undertake around creating new marketing materials supports all key results, while the advertising campaign is focused specifically on their primary school admissions goal. To help ensure $750,000 in donations, they are going to organize a fundraising auction, and to highlight their new skill based portfolio, they need to hire a writer to generate some targeted thought leadership.

Action Plans

Key initiatives are really tasks — and tasks need to be assigned to individual people! In the *Cascading OKR* model, these tasklists are framed as personal action plans.

KEY INITIATIVES:

- » Create marketing materials around unique high school approach
- » Launch advertising campaign on primary school
- » Host fundraising auction

PERSONAL ACTION PLAN:

- ☐ Write marketing copy for high school brochure
- ☐ Work with outside agency to design marketing campaign around primary school
- ☐ Find venue, secure donations, and get invitations out for auction
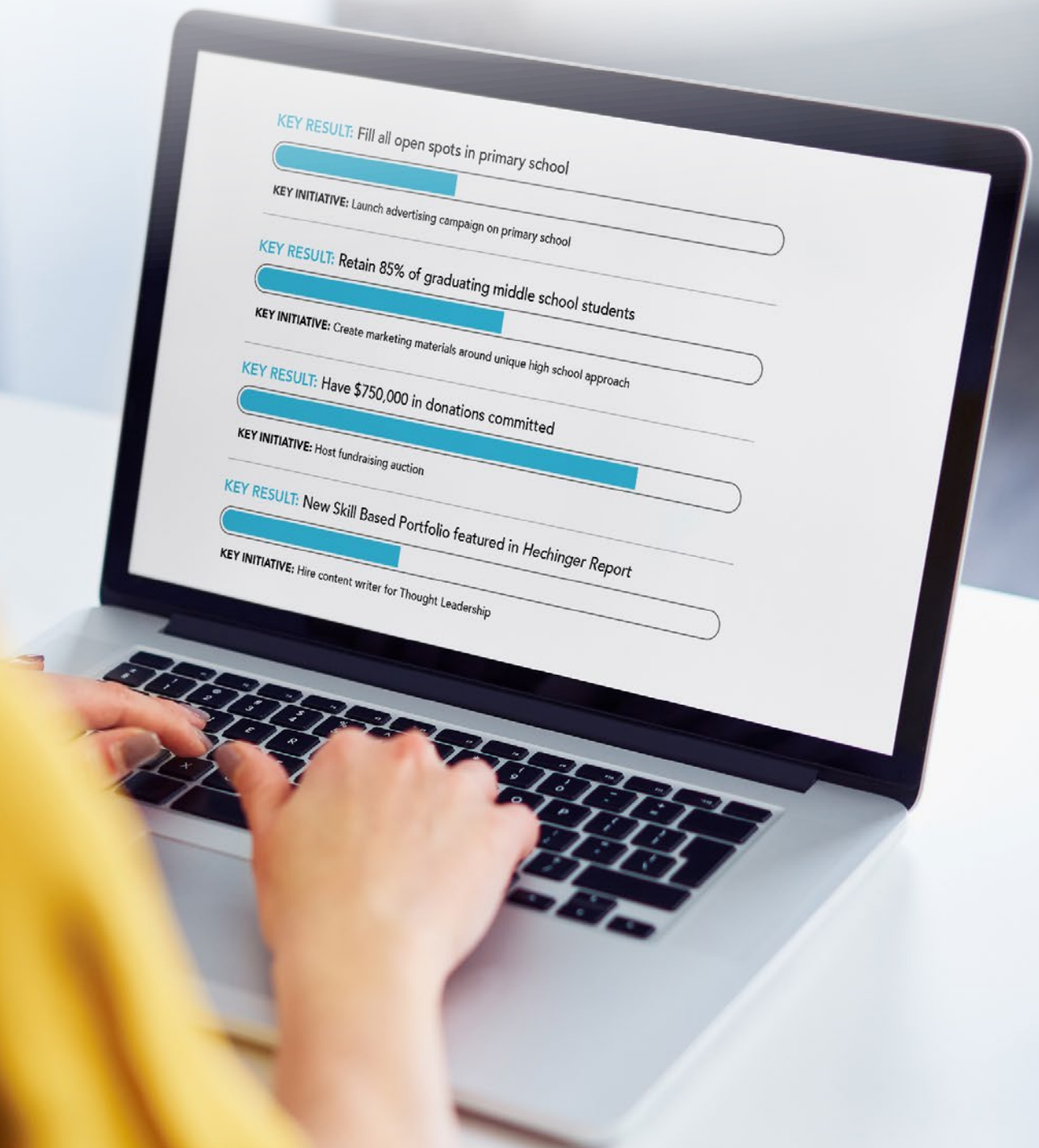
Using the Forest School marketing team's key initiatives as a reference, an individual action plan for a member of the team includes nuanced details like writing copy, enlisting an outside agency to design a marketing campaign, and sourcing a location and donations for the planned auction, along with creating relevant collateral.

KEY RESULTS:

Measurable actions that lead towards achievement of objectives

OBJECTIVES:

Big, visionary goals that define what success looks like

KEY RESULT: Fill all open spots in primary school

KEY INITIATIVE: Launch advertising campaign on primary school

KEY RESULT: Retain 85% of graduating middle school students

KEY INITIATIVE: Create marketing materials around unique high school approach

KEY RESULT: Have $750,000 in donations committed

KEY INITIATIVE: Host fundraising auction

KEY RESULT: New Skill Based Portfolio featured in Hechinger Report

KEY INITIATIVE: Hire content writer for Thought Leadership

Progress Reporting

The Future Design School team specializes in building accessible online dashboards to help track and report on progress. This pulls all elements of the operational plan into one central repository for the entire organization, so that every department can easily see what other departments are doing — and every individual can easily drill down to their specific accountabilities.

Forest School's dashboard links the beautiful aspirations from their strategic plan, to core overarching three-year objectives for the school, to year one key results, key initiatives, and individual actions — with measurable deliverables, defined timeframes and personal accountability. The Forest School leadership team integrated this dashboard as a regular part of staff and team meetings; it has become the lifeblood of the school's planning process on an ongoing basis. Elements of the data collected here can also be leveraged in a Board dashboard that shows high level metrics and provides an at-a-glance understanding of the progress achieved to date.

"As a Board member, it's important to have ongoing pulse checks on how the school is progressing in realizing its strategic priorities. The entire Cascading OKRs process from Future Design School, and especially the dashboards we provide, is a perfect instrument to ensure that Boards have the resources they need to support the leadership team."

— **SARAH PREVETTE** | Founder & CEO, Future Design School
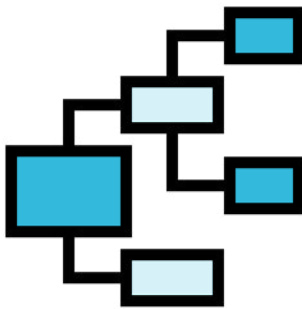
The *Cascading OKRs* process ensures that teachers and staff clearly understand their role in executing Forest School's strategic vision, and school leaders are able to clearly articulate progress to Board members, parents, and community stakeholders. Most importantly, **the process ensures that the exciting vision that emerged during the strategic planning process is manifested in the daily work being done to support students and their families** — the true goal of developing a strategy in the first place.

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Leverage Future Design School's proprietary Cascading OKR Cycle for your school. Email team@futuredesignschool.com to learn more.

Fostering **Data Driven** Decision Making & Culture

DATA PITFALLS TO AVOID:

⚠️ **BAD DATA**
(inaccurate / incorrect reporting)

🛡️ **PRIVACY VIOLATIONS**
(storing sensitive information inappropriately)

📋 **INFERRING INCORRECTLY**
(poor analysis / poor interpretation)

🔗 **FLAWED ACTIONING**
(taking steps without thinking about potential consequences)

Domo estimates **that humanity generates 2.5 quintillion bytes of data each day.**

Insight driven decision making enables great leadership and dramatically increases the likelihood of success in strategic planning. Specifically, being data driven improves success by wide margins — according to a survey of more than 1,000 senior executives conducted by PwC, highly data-driven organizations are three times more likely to report significant improvements in decision making compared to those who rely less on data.

For this reason, a data-infused approach is rapidly taking hold; McKinsey forecasts that, by 2025, "smart workflows and seamless interactions among humans and machines will likely be as standard as the corporate balance sheet, and most employees will use data to optimize nearly every aspect of their work."

BY 2025…

Nearly all employees naturally and regularly leverage data to support their work. Rather than defaulting to solving problems by developing lengthy — sometimes multiyear — road maps, they're empowered to ask how innovative data techniques could resolve challenges in hours, days or weeks.

Organizations are capable of better decision making as well as automating basic day-to-day activities and regularly occurring decisions. Employees are free to focus on more "human" domains, such as innovation, collaboration, and communication. The data-driven culture fosters continuous performance improvement to create truly differentiated customer and employee experiences and enable the growth of sophisticated new applications that aren't widely available today.

— "The data-driven enterprise of 2025," McKinsey

For school and system leaders, data can help achieve mission-critical priorities envisioned in strategy development. Forward thinking leaders are currently mapping the data that would be valuable to have on demand, and thinking about how to set up systems that pull that data forward in a timely manner to allow schools to operate proactively rather than reactively.

This is important work from a strategic and operational perspective, because data is oftentimes siloed and difficult to access. Furthermore, there's also potential for bad data to drive poor decisions. For this reason, leaders need to empower their teams to trust the data, and ensure that they have easy access to automated analysis and reporting that pulls forward the most important and actionable metrics.

The good news is that it's never been easier to be data driven. Schools create an immense amount of data organically — it's about organizing it and analyzing it in a way that enables deep insights and empowers leaders to draw conclusions.

This includes collecting assessment data of core skills like literacy and numeracy, as well as the ongoing development and measurement of critical thinking, problem solving, and other future ready competencies. Another example (and there are many): student data on overall engagement in academics and extracurriculars can be leveraged to provide predictive analytics around retention and matriculation opportunities. The input of this essential information into the operationalization process is vital in order to truly measure whether a school's key results are attained.

Data at most school leaders' fingertips, that can be used to measure the success of strategic objectives, includes:

→ Attendance trends

→ Assignment completion rates

→ LMS engagement analytics (students and parents / guardians)

→ Email newsletter open & clickthrough rates

→ Academic & social emotional support requests

→ Admissions funnel analysis (from initial inquiry / lead to acceptance of offer)

→ Matriculation & pathway streams

→ Alumni engagement

School leaders are leveraging the immense data available to them to:

→ Become more proactive

→ Realize cost savings

→ Improve operational efficiency

What's more, advancements in technology have led to the proliferation of **new tools that make leveraging existing data less expensive and easier to implement.** Different schools and districts are at various stages of improving infrastructure — leveraging cloud based solutions from Google, Microsoft, Amazon or others, along with suites of tools to connect existing systems and create robust reporting abilities for leadership.

As artificial intelligence becomes more widely adopted, there are huge opportunities for schools and school districts to leverage all of the rich data they have available that has been traditionally difficult to access or analyze. As school leaders discuss the future of things like ChatGPT in education, they should also be thinking about how they set themselves up for future competitiveness by focusing on their critical data needs, and considering how AI tools can help power them.

DATA APPLICATIONS IN USE TODAY BY FORWARD THINKING SCHOOL LEADERS INCLUDE:

- Understanding issues facing various stakeholders

- Uncovering inequity & potential injustice

- Engaging students more deeply in learning

- Monitoring ongoing wellness of students & staff

- Developing people & leaders

- Measuring effectiveness of programs & initiatives

- Improving communications with parents & guardians

- Making budgetary decisions

- Following progress across important strategic areas of focus

- Ensuring accountability for results

When the impact of every strategic decision can be measured and monitored, leaders are better able to narrate and showcase why they are making critical decisions and their resulting impact. In order to make this happen, **leaders need to think about how, where, and by whom their school's data is captured, stored, accessed, governed, automated, analyzed, and reported**.

In order to manage this need, many schools and districts are investing in analytical talent — whether it be a chief information officer at a large district, or a data analyst working directly with a school's leadership team to pull forward success metrics relative to their strategic goals.

Many jurisdictions have recently updated laws, or are in the process of revamping them, to ensure student privacy protection is embedded in design. It is critical to stay up to date on changes to ensure student compliance.

Why build data culture?

A good level of data literacy empowers the organization to ask the right questions, acquire pertinent data, derive insights, validate assumptions, and make decisions, so as to serve the stakeholders objectively, ethically, and efficiently.

— **PRASHANTH SOUTHEKAL** | Forbes Technology Council

BEING DATA DRIVEN IS AS MUCH ABOUT HUMAN ENGAGEMENT AS IT IS ABOUT TECHNOLOGY INNOVATION.

Alongside building systems for managing data, leaders also need to build a data culture across their school teams; being data driven is as much about human engagement as it is about technology innovation. Data culture is tied to high performance culture (see page 28), and like all culture building, it starts at the very top of the organization. Leaders need to set an expectation of data-driven decision making and ensure all activities

are anchored in real information and sound analysis. They can also steward data culture by highlighting top organizational goals set in strategic planning, and continuously communicating the importance of those high level metrics. This means modeling desired data driven behavior — for example, by creating protocols for meetings, where everyone is grounding new projects, ideas, and processes in real data.

Online dashboards to track data-driven evidence of ongoing progress are excellent tools to support school leaders in their articulation of the impact of their decision making. We often see two separate dashboards in use: one for internal faculty and staff to socialize and report on their objectives and key results (see page 19), and another that provides a high level overview of progress to Board members and other key stakeholders.

WHERE TO START?

Fix basic data access issues quickly.

» Poll your team to understand what information would enable better decision making, specific to their roles and oversight.

» Work to democratize data access for leadership teams. Without access to information, data culture cannot take hold.

Find quick wins that benefit your team.

» Don't just focus on how better use of data can enable greater student achievement: let teams see how better data management can improve their own performance, roles, and day-to-day.

» Demonstrate how data fluency saves employees time and increases their satisfaction.

Embed data in team culture.

» Require teams to articulate how they drew their conclusions and quantify their trust in the data leveraged.

» Set expectations around how data has to be incorporated into regular leadership meetings. Establish key metrics with stakeholders and ensure shared understanding.

» Monitor and recognize data's importance through ongoing communication.

Provide ongoing support.

» Provide teams with training on how to pull data, with exemplars to guide their work.

» Troubleshoot as issues arise.

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The Future Design School team combines deep education and business experience to support school leaders in embedding data driven decision making in their strategic and operational planning. Reach out at team@futuredesignschool.com to learn more.

Building & Supporting
High Performance Teams
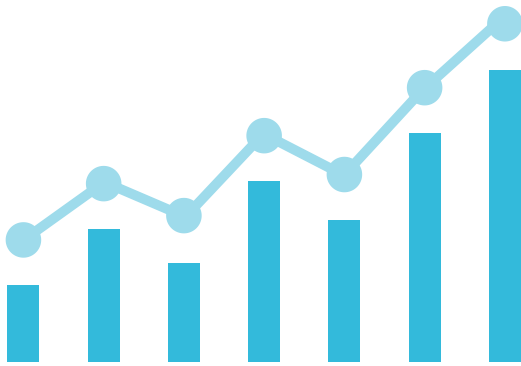
When it comes to making a vision a reality, the most important resource in any organization — and especially in schools — is its team. Despite this, culture is too often treated as something nebulous, organic, and beyond control.

This is something that school leaders must address; in addition to being an element that can be fostered by leadership, a culture of deep engagement and high performance is vital to a strategic plan's success.

HIGH PERFORMANCE TEAMS ARE BUILT THROUGH LEADERSHIP PROVIDING AN EXCITING VISION, MEANINGFUL WORK, TANGIBLE IMPACT, ONGOING GROWTH, AND POSITIVE CULTURE.

This starts with school leaders who determine consciously the values that they want people to embody, and model that ethos. With this in place, they are able to foster a mission based approach to engaging their team, by articulating the higher (strategic) purpose underlying decisions, and then empowering team members to embrace the culture and vision that's presented.

Recruitment is a cornerstone of creating this culture: school leaders building high performance teams tend to screen candidates for enthusiasm and optimism through techniques like behavioral based interviewing, and balancing considerations around culture, fit, unique experience and qualifications equally with pedagogical skills, education credentials, and years spent in classrooms. Great teams embody the same skills and competencies we value in students, including a deep commitment to positive and proactive communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and creative problem solving.

Here are a few behavioral based interview prompts for prospective teachers and school staff:

→ Describe an innovative project or initiative you implemented in a school setting. How did you ensure that needs were met and challenges were addressed?

→ Tell me about a time when you had to recapture a class or student group that was disengaged or difficult to manage. What strategies did you use?

→ Take me through a challenging interaction you had with a parent or guardian. What was the situation, how did you respond, and what was the outcome?

Exciting Vision
meaningful Work
tangible impact
ongoing growth
Positive Culture

LEADERS OF HIGH PERFORMANCE SCHOOL TEAMS NEED TO CONSIDER:

☐ Mindsets ☐ Actions ☐ Focus

☐ Emotions ☐ Language ☐ Outcomes

It's also worth noting that **high performers want to work with other high performers**, and top talent is drawn to a highly effective leader. This means investing in top talent (by paying them well), and then committing to their development by giving them the resources and guidance they need — while automating mundane tasks by being agile with technology (in other words, don't make high performance people do low performance things).

Great leaders must ultimately be incredibly skilled coaches — and that means knowing their players. But in addition, great **coaches always have a playbook** that defines not just what they are going to do, but HOW they're going to achieve their aspirations — this is the operational plan to achieve a strategic vision.

Embedding a high performance culture is an ongoing process requiring both proactive and reactive interventions. This includes **spotlighting behaviors and mindsets that deliver the most value**, as well as nipping naysayers and culture killers in the bud.

Embodying culture is a trainable skill, requiring ongoing communication and policing, and an approach to performance management that goes beyond rote task completion to encompass a holistic embodiment of team values. Results (and the data to demonstrate them — see page 22) are important, but culture building is as much about *people*; leaders of high performance teams need to coach people on an ongoing basis to achieve the desired results.

Ultimately, when it comes to building a high performance team and fostering the right culture and mindsets in a school, **the buck stops with leadership.**

Making space to intentionally focus on developing and understanding their own mindset is an important trait for leaders seeking to impart these values throughout their schools, as is ensuring that they have the support systems in place to manage the complex and ever-shifting nature of their jobs.

With clear frameworks in place, though, school teams can embody the same commitment to high performance and engagement that propels companies and organizations outside the realm of education to sustained growth and long term success.

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Leverage Future Design School's unique expertise and resources to help you build and maintain a high performance team. Email team@futuredesignschool.com to book a meeting.

Leadership Stakeholder Management & Navigating Change

Role of a Leader

- ✔ Keeper of Vision
- ✔ Master of Mission
- ✔ Steward of Culture
- ✔ Driver of Effectiveness

For school leaders developing strategic plans and navigating systemic change in education, bringing a carefully constructed vision to life requires equal doses of tenacity and empathy, and managing in all directions — Board members, parents, the public, and (perhaps most importantly) teachers and staff. Great leaders balance ambition with humility, confidence with contemplation, direction with consultation, gravitas with humor, empathy with resolve, and steadfast dedication with the flexibility needed to pivot when necessary.

Most importantly, bringing a vision to life requires a plan; a vision without an accompanying plan is like **having a canoe but no paddle** — you might stay afloat, but you're not likely to get very far. All stakeholders and team members engaged in executing a strategic plan need deep operational frameworks so everyone understands the roadmap for implementation.

An effective operational plan lays out measurable goals, outlines action steps, and assigns accountability — where every person understands exactly what needs to be done and their personal role in ensuring that targets are met. To that end, understanding the role that instructional leaders and Boards of governors play in meeting operational objectives is a vital component of a school leader's role in executing the strategic vision.

INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP EMPOWERMENT

If a school's strategic plan has no bearing on teaching and learning, it's worth asking why such a plan is even being considered. This goes double for a strategy's accompanying operational plan, which is why **empowering instructional leaders to take ownership of and accountability for a school's vision is critically important**. A department head or curriculum lead should be able to articulate how the key tenets of a school's strategy manifest themselves in its classrooms, and provide strategies and support to teachers and staff that ensure that these goals are met.

To that end, instructional leaders have an important role to play in supporting the development of annual departmental goals and action plans , but more importantly, they need the time, space, and resources to support teachers and staff, disentangle misconceptions, and identify potential roadblocks. The importance of **maintaining a symbiotic relationship with school leaders** in achieving these ends cannot be overstated: instructional leaders need to trust, and feel trusted by, the administration team in order to effectively enact an operational plan.

BOARD ENGAGEMENT

A similar state of mutual trust needs to exist between a school leader and their Board. The key to maintaining this relationship is **communication** — operational teams need a clear and easy-to-use system to communicate the most important metrics to governors, in order to quickly let these stakeholders narrow in on the areas that need attention at the next Board meeting.

One tool being deployed by more and more innovative school leaders is an **online dashboard** that displays operational goals, tracks progress, and highlights the latest developments in an accessible and easy-to-understand format . These dashboards are usually digital and are often interactive, but need not be complicated or resource-draining to develop and update. Used effectively, **a simple online spreadsheet can be a highly effective dashboard tool**.

Successful implementation of a strategic vision comes through accountability — and that accountability, in turn, comes through ongoing tracking and engagement of operational goals, and keeping everyone involved focused on the mission. For school leaders, turning a strategic plan into a living document within their school means building shared vision with all leadership groups engaged in that plan — through aspirational objectives, clear communication, and a transparent, responsive process for ongoing measurement.
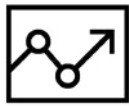
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Future Design School is a trusted partner to school leaders worldwide. Email team@futuredesignschool.com to learn more about how we can help you action your strategic vision.

STRATEGIC PLANNING

YOUR FULL SERVICE STRATEGIC PARTNER

School leaders work with Future Design School to create strategic plans that are concrete, attainable, and aspirational.

Engage key stakeholders in cultivating a shared vision, building action plans and developing key performance metrics for implementation.
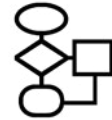
DESIGN
effective strategy

ESTABLISH
shared vision
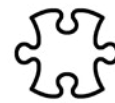
BUILD
action plans

ENGAGE
in deep PD

COACH
and support teams

ASSESS
current initiatives

UNCOVER
new opportunities

CREATE
new resources

Future Design School's strategists leverage a proven process and provide school and system leaders with applied human centered design methodologies to create innovation-driven climates that encourage reflective and inspirational practice, while ensuring clarity around key objectives, roles and resourcing.

Connect with us today and bring your future ready strategy to life:
team@futuredesignschool.com

CASE STUDY

Long-Range Vision, Daily Action: Dubai American Academy

→ Dubai American Academy (DAA) is the flagship school in the GEMS Education network. It combines an enriched U.S. curriculum with the International Baccalaureate program, and serves students in Kindergarten through 12th Grade. DAA partnered with Future Design School to develop its 2021-2026 strategic plan, *Inspired, Individualized, Interconnected*, along with the operational frameworks to bring it to life.

"

The operational planning was incredibly helpful. When we get together as a team to make decisions, we continuously go back to the plan and ensure it passes the test for taking action which is — does it align with the goals and metrics for success that we have set?
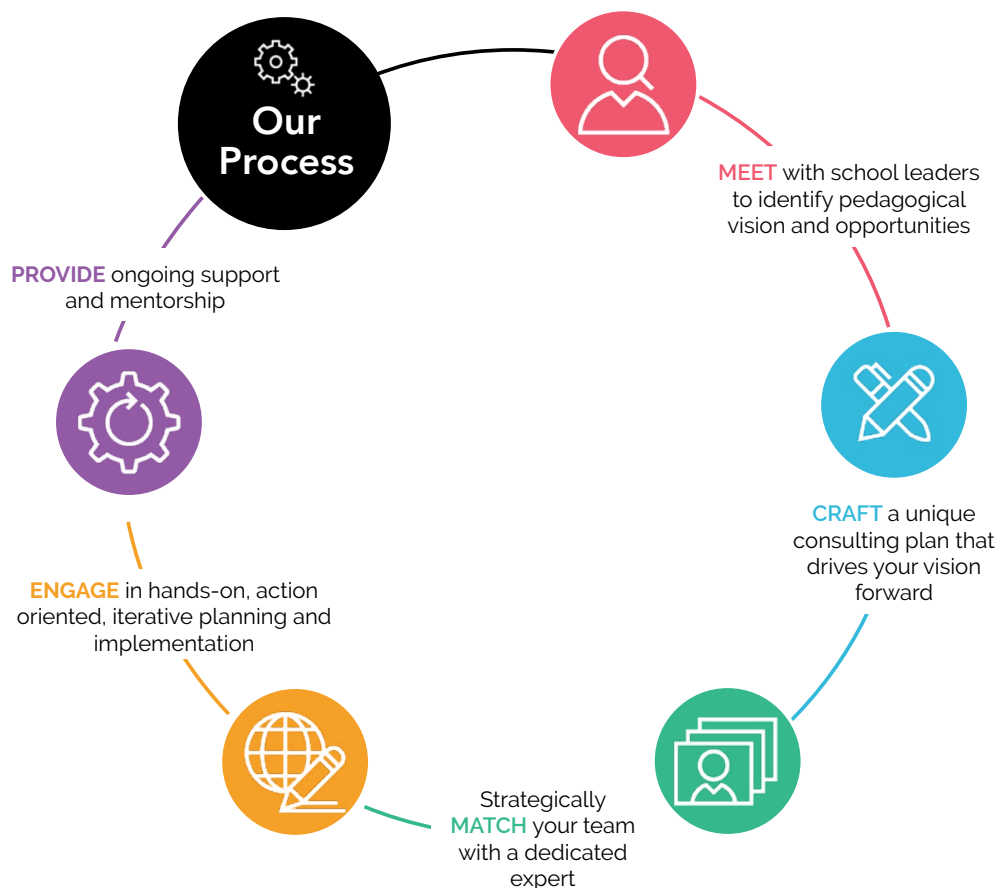
— TAMMY JOCHINKE | Head of Teaching, Learning and Innovation, Dubai American Academy

Like most independent schools, the leadership team at DAA recognizes the profound importance of having a well thought out, visionary strategic plan in place. **"It's critical to have a vision for a school, because it is the vision that gives us the road map to success,"** says DAA Superintendent and CEO Dr. Ethan Hildreth. "When we know where we want to be, we're able to do the backwards planning to get to that point from where we are today. And that journey should be a dynamic journey that's subject to responsive amendment and change, but it's within the context of a unifying vision."

It's that notion of responsive change, though, that sets DAA apart. It's a concept that is particularly important to the entire DAA community, who collectively view the *Inspired, Individualized, Interconnected* plan as the foundation of their work on a daily basis. According to Tammy Jochinke, DAA's Head of Teaching, Learning and Innovation, **the deep work that was done with Future Design School to engage stakeholders and bring their voices**

forward into the plan has paid significant dividends when operationalizing its commitments. "Whenever we're writing the year-long professional development plan, whenever we're thinking about how we're engaging our teachers, our parents, or our students, we can always go back to our strategic plan and say, 'What did we commit to do? How is this aligned? Is it not aligned? Is it something that perhaps we need to push aside because we need to go back to our priorities?' It really gives us focus. It gives us clarity, and because we did involve all stakeholders, we know that we're on the right path."

That path started simply enough. "I had a one-on-one meeting with Sandra [Nagy, Future Design School Managing Director] and that was really nice," Tammy says. "**You don't often get a chance to talk one-on-one with someone about the work you're doing and the plans you want for the future and really dream big.** Having that one-on-one time was really helpful, and it made me think more strategically as well."

Our Process

MEET with school leaders to identify pedagogical vision and opportunities

CRAFT a unique consulting plan that drives your vision forward

Strategically **MATCH** your team with a dedicated expert

ENGAGE in hands-on, action oriented, iterative planning and implementation

PROVIDE ongoing support and mentorship

From those initial conversations, the path widened to allow a diverse group of community members — including students, teachers, staff, and parents — to walk alongside the DAA leadership team in the development of its strategic plan. "**The process was really well thought out**," Tammy recalls. "We didn't rush it. We took our time with it. We stopped, we looked at the data, and then we adjusted based on what was happening. Because we involved everyone, and it wasn't rushed, we came out with a very strong vision. It validated some of the things that we knew that we needed to do moving forward, but we also got a very strong voice that perhaps may not have been heard before."

Crucially, **DAA views the release of its strategic plan as the *beginning* of a journey — not the end.** Once it was published, they got to work immediately to put its commitments and goals into action, and develop frameworks to ensure accountability — including through ongoing parent engagement. "We have members of our parent organization who actually join us in some of our operational teams where we want that direct parent feedback on a regular basis," Ethan says. "We also have our Local Advisory Board, which includes parents and is regularly updated on our progress towards strategic targets."

But the school's annual planning process is where the rubber truly hits the road. **DAA connects its yearly goals directly to its strategic vision, and ensures that the commitments at its core are being addressed on an ongoing basis.** "We have an operational plan that is at the division level," Ethan explains. "We also feed that down to our heads of department as well, and so whenever we start any of our meetings, we're starting with our vision — why we are doing what we're doing, and how what we're about to do connects with the vision."

"

We depend on all our component parts of the school community to help move us forward and encourage us forward to success. Future Design School has been an integral part of that, in providing a lot of that expertise and helping us go from first step on to the staircase.

— DR. ETHAN HILDRETH

Superintendent and CEO,
Dubai American Academy

Tammy agrees. "The operational planning was incredibly helpful," she says. "**When we get together as a team to make decisions, we continuously go back to the plan** and ensure it passes the test for taking action which is: does it align with the goals and metrics for success that we have set?"

It's here, too, that the hard work done during the strategic planning process is paying off. "There's something to having co-created this document together, amongst multiple people," Tammy says. "Our words can then literally be lifted up and into a plan. For example, as part of our professional development series, we created several teams, and one of the teams is directly coming from a strategic commitment that we made to create a robust and collaborative student leadership program. So we created a K-12 student leadership team, and we have one of our elementary principals and our assistant principal in the high school leading that."

Developing and operationalizing a strategic vision as fulsomely as DAA can seem daunting, but the key, says Ethan, is to recognize the importance of the work, roll up your sleeves, and get started. "I'll use a quote I love from Martin Luther King, and that is you don't have to see the whole staircase to take the first step," he says. "We just had to start it. We had to get the consultants and experts who knew what they were doing. We had to talk to schools that have been there before. We had to keep open conduits of communication and we had to bring all our stakeholders together to get that good work going. And those elements are going to be true for anyone."

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Learn more about how Future Design School can help you unite your school community and operationalize your strategic vision. Contact us at team@futuredesignschool.com to get started.

MEETING THE MOMENT:

Why Journey Based Assessment is the Spark Schools Need

Schools and education systems are at a crossroads, as they face the need to catch students up post pandemic and double down on student development from all angles in order to ensure that they don't lose a generation of students and teachers. School leaders at the forefront of this effort are finding that assessment transformation is the spark necessary to drive meaningful and lasting change.

What is **Journey Based Assessment?**

Journey Based Assessment, a term coined by Future Design School, is an ongoing, student centered approach to measuring learning and growth. It is based on the notion that students need as many opportunities as required to practice a skill until they can demonstrate proficiency, and that this journey itself is the most valuable part of the learning and assessment process. See for a full breakdown of Journey Based Assessment.

Building key skills and improving student performance over time is being amplified in schools by taking a **journey based approach to assessment**, which means measuring learning on an ongoing basis, and using the data collected to determine not only what the student knows, understands, and can do, but what they should learn *next*. Simply put: if the goal of school is to ensure that each student is equipped with the skills they need to navigate the world, then **ongoing assessment is crucial in order to understand learners' capabilities and — more importantly — needs.**

Pinpointing the needs of each individual student will ensure that we continue to raise the bar on what they can achieve, growing individuals' capabilities and confidence in using their skills proficiently. This means providing multiple, personalized opportunities for students to show growth, with actionable feedback to help them improve. This proactive approach has always been effective, but it is particularly important in this pivotal moment in education, in which more and more students are falling behind and schools are scrambling to provide needed support.

The impetus for assessment innovation is based on the recognition of **three urgent needs:**

1. We need to rethink accountability, and measure what matters for students.

2. We need to give students agency around what and how they learn, and reward them for the critical thinking, decision making, and problem solving skills they build in the process.

3. We must value the journey of learning — because the skills we develop in the process of learning is what will ultimately lead to long term success for students.

Addressing Student Needs

THE CHALLENGE

Many students are disengaged, and not seeing the relevance of old school curriculum and assessment approaches. **Reigniting these students is a complex process**; during the pandemic, they learned in their own way, at their own pace, and often only about the things they cared about. Many of them didn't learn at all — and according to the traditional, age bound achievement thresholds of their particular jurisdiction, they lost a lot of learning.

Students have other interests outside of school and vehicles for showing learning in their personal lives that are not "allowed" to be used in school; in the worst cases, those tools are considered cheating. **Students want, and often need alternate ways and choices to show what they know**, and they want to focus on topics that interest them. What's more, they need scaffolded opportunities to understand how, when, and why to use emerging technologies like

AI and machine learning, and to connect these tools with key future ready skills — like critical thinking and problem solving — that cut across all subjects and pathways.

There's also an urgent need for **a deeper dedication to equity and developing a culturally responsive approach to learning.** Not all students feel known, cared for, or seen or have role models that they can relate to in schools — and seeing each human, and their specific needs, is key to their academic and ultimate life success. They need an education that reflects who they are, and the world that they encounter outside of school; one where they are able to bring their communities and authentic selves into the classroom. They need to see the relevance between what they're learning and their path into the future, and feel as though they are being given an opportunity to build the skills they need to succeed.

ASSESSMENT AND EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES

As Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning become more prevalent and publicly accessible, school leaders are being tasked with responding to their use by students and teachers. Headlines about the potential merits and perceived threats of ChatGPT in learning dominated news cycles in early 2023, and led to bans in some of the largest districts in the U.S. – including New York and Los Angeles. Meanwhile, some education innovators are asking how these tools might be used to enhance learning. "If the things that we used to put so much effort into in teaching can be automated, then maybe we should rethink what the actual goals and experiences are that we should work toward in the classroom," said Lalitha Vasudevan, Columbia University Teachers College's vice dean for digital innovation, in an article in *the Washington Post*. "These are hard decisions schools need to make, but they should not be made out of fear… They should be made within the scope of improving student learning."

THE OPPORTUNITIES

Re-engagement starts with authenticity. Students want to grapple with real world problems and to think about how they can have a real impact on the outcomes — to feel hope instead of despair about the challenges their generation faces. Giving students the opportunity and the tools to design authentic solutions as a core component of their learning experiences is the key.

Dynamic, meaningful learning is often messy and recursive, but there is an impetus to embrace it — it's a process of trial and error, one where students are assessed and rewarded for reflecting on what worked, the challenges they faced, and how they showed growth with each new attempt, ultimately building the skills they so critically need to thrive in and beyond school.

Students need support in gaining conscious awareness of their development. In these authentic learning experiences, students also need to be engaged in the process of setting goals, reflecting on achievement, and pursuing their own next steps. **Self advocacy and conscious pursuit are vital components of this process**, as is authentically building an understanding of, and confidence in leveraging key skills like critical thinking and problem solving.

Journey Based Assessment and emerging technologies work hand-in-hand. For example, a teacher could ask students to generate a response to a problem using ChatGPT, then have them fact-check the result and critique its usefulness. The revised AI-generated response could then be combined (and contrasted) with primary research based on the needs of the people affected by the original problem, with both sources contributing to the design of potential solutions. Along the way, students could be assessed on how they applied critical thinking skills to the ChatGPT data, built empathy through original research, and developed problem solving skills in designing a solution.
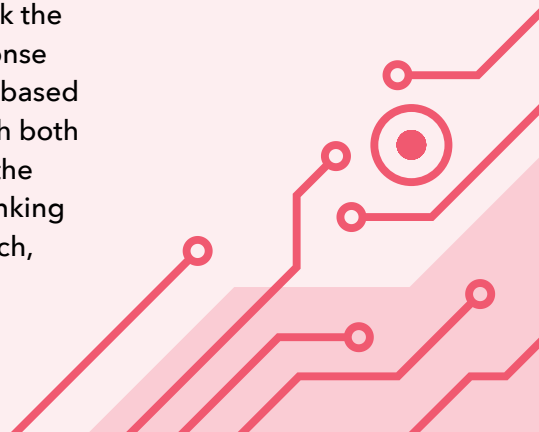
CONSCIOUS PURSUIT

The goal of Journey Based Assessment, at its core, is to **foster conscious pursuit — the ideal state of learning.**

This state requires learners to become fully aware of the process by which they explore concepts, and create and apply meaning. They will recognize that **learning is an ongoing process** with no end point; it's a practice that promotes inquiry, exploration, and interpretation.

Learners who embrace the conscious pursuit of learning will **leverage reflection as a critical skill.** They will examine what they have learned, and how they have interpreted their learning, then **seek out opportunities for new experiences** to challenge what they know and continue to delve deeper into understanding as they pose meaningful and relevant questions.

Additionally, in this conscious pursuit state, learners **will share their knowledge and methodologies, and explain how they arrived at their conclusions** — pointing to pivotal or key moments throughout the journey. They champion learning with others and exude excitement about the findings along the way, celebrating not only their successes, but also the challenges and initial failures. When individuals consciously pursue knowledge and learning, they will **see themselves as lifelong learners** who appreciate, value, and honor the process above all.

Conscious pursuit of learning is vital to developing deep understanding and ongoing growth, within and beyond the classroom. See page 56 for an example of this concept used in a learning continuum.

What About Knowledge?

Schools adopting Journey Based Assessment recognize that acquiring knowledge, and understanding core concepts, are still vital cornerstones of student learning. The fundamental difference is that, in an ongoing assessment model, this knowledge and understanding is reinforced by also asking students to demonstrate what they've learned through deeper thinking and inquiry, to practice transferability through the application of knowledge in different contexts, and to build communication skills as they articulate their process and results.

THE ONTARIO ACHIEVEMENT CHART

Assessment of student learning in Ontario, Canada is based upon an overarching framework known as the Achievement Chart. Separate versions of the chart exist for different subjects and grade levels, but share a common four-level achievement scale (below, approaching, achieving, and surpassing the provincial standard), assessed across four categories:

KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING
Subject-specific content acquired in each grade (knowledge), and the comprehension of its meaning and significance (understanding)

THINKING
The use of critical and creative thinking skills and/or processes

COMMUNICATION
The conveying of meaning through various forms

APPLICATION
The use of knowledge and skills to make connections within and between various contexts

Authenticity and awareness are the key ingredients to a critical element of skill development: transferability. **Students must be able to demonstrate (and be assessed on) how the skills they're learning transfer from one context to another.**

For example, the Performance Standards Achievement Chart in *Growing Success* (Ontario, Canada's assessment and evaluation framework) includes "Application — the use of knowledge and skills to make connections within and between various contexts" as one of its four required learning and assessment categories. The Achievement Chart is the foundation upon which all assessments created by the province's teachers are based, and includes prompts to ensure that students demonstrate an ability to transfer knowledge and skills to new contexts, and make connections to their personal experiences and the world outside school.

Supporting Teachers

THE CHALLENGE

Educators around the world report deepening challenges with student knowledge retention, engagement, mental health, and executive functioning skills. Teachers are grappling with students not turning in work, or exhibiting minimal effort and engagement in learning. School and system leaders, meanwhile, are pushed into a reactive state to manage these and other issues, while **the core concern — student needs — remains unaddressed.**

Meanwhile, **teachers are leaving schools in droves** because they are burnt out and not sure how to break through and reach their students. They are stymied by a lack of autonomy, feeling unsupported in their mission to address learning loss, and are focused on managing behavior as opposed to leveling up learning and helping students reach new heights.

Diagnostics & Ongoing Assessment Models

Though Journey Based Assessment is focused on fostering and documenting student growth, utilizing this approach does not prevent schools and teachers from capturing and using diagnostic data to assess student achievement of key learning concepts and outcomes. In fact, the two go hand in hand: diagnostics provide a window into what's happening in a given moment, and Journey Based Assessment provides the framework for how this information can be applied to benefit students on an ongoing basis.

THE OPPORTUNITIES

Given the lag in learning over the pandemic, **teachers need information and a holistic understanding of where students actually are individually, to help them determine what a student's next steps for growth** are in all aspects — including core concepts, future ready skills, and their socioemotional development. This means collecting rich assessment data, through conversations with students, observations of their learning in action, as well as the products and artifacts they generate .

The aggregated data that an ongoing assessment approach provides can paint a far more robust picture of macro trends like learning loss, since it is able to show both attainment and retention of knowledge and skills. For example, members of a team of high school teachers in Connecticut who are currently working with Future Design School to embed Journey Based Assessment in their classes reported in January 2023 that the approach had the effect of leveling the playing field between learners who would typically be described as "high achieving" and "low achieving," and providing a deeper understanding of student learning.

Teachers must embrace the value of recursive learning, and **see assessment as an ongoing opportunity to provide actionable feedback for students.** The Journey Based Assessment framework adopts this approach, as do similar models including standards based assessment, and mastery based, outcome based, or performance based education, instruction, or learning . No matter what it's called, an assessment framework that values the process over the product, personalizes when, where, and how students show their learning, and provides the time and space for individual attention to each student's need is key.

Engaging Parents & Guardians

THE CHALLENGE

Parents have preconceived notions of where their children should "be" relative to what they remember about their own experiences in school. They often express frustration and put pressure on educators to do more, without a professional understanding of real needs. This armchair advice is based on a fixed mindset that causes many parents to push back against more progressive learning and assessment concepts. **They want their children to be successful, but find it challenging to understand the benefits of new approaches to assessment**, and do not know how to make sense of it. They need to understand both why assessment is changing, and how this will have a positive impact on their children over the long term.

For parents and guardians whose school experiences were based on regurgitating facts on a test to achieve a grade, it is a steep learning curve to understand how cultivating the skills their children need for future success requires a very different approach.

Foundation Public School has been working with the Future Design School team to build and implement an ongoing assessment model for its 12 campuses in Karachi and Hyderabad, Pakistan. In addition to curriculum and professional development for teachers, an ongoing parent education and feedback system was created — both of which have been critical to the success of the school's transformation. "We met with teachers and said, 'we will give you time and space, we will invest in resources — it's not going to happen overnight," says Executive Director Rehman Minhas. "On the parent end of things, they are able to see the results for themselves."

THE OPPORTUNITIES

Through engagement opportunities and accessible and relevant resources, parents can be brought along to understand that the best kind of learning happens through trial and error. There is an enormous benefit to attaining skills through an ongoing process of learning, assessment, reflection, and iteration that is missed when the focus is exclusively on providing the "right answer."

Portfolios are a fantastic opportunity to demonstrate ongoing student development. Done well, portfolios are meaningful tools to unpack student learning, through artifacts, reflections, and feedback linked to a continuum of ongoing student development that transcends subject-based grades and numbers .

The key message for parents and guardians:

Basic skills still matter, and need to be taught, and they should also be coupled with the personalized development of future ready skills.

It is not only possible to teach foundational math and literacy skills through a personalized, holistic approach — it is necessary to do so, because students learn in many different ways. As the UNESCO Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Education for Peace and Sustainable Development reports in its International Science and Evidence Based Education Assessment, "a whole-brain learner-centric approach towards learning strengthens the interconnectedness of cognition and the social-emotional domains, which is essential for human flourishing." This concept manifests itself in many ways, from the strategic frameworks that govern how a school functions (see page 4) to the teaching practices employed each day in the classroom.

Our understanding of student development must fundamentally shift, and changing assessment practices is the key to gaining this knowledge. Schools shifting to Journey Based Assessment are witnessing an exciting transformation: students aren't working to maintain a high grade by getting "the right answers," but are building ambition and evolving toward proficiency by exploring topics aligned to both the curriculum and their personal passions, and receiving meaningful feedback along the way that helps them improve, grow, and light a fire in their minds as learners.

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Future Design School works with schools around the world to develop and embed Journey Based Assessment practices, customized for their student and teacher communities. Contact us at team@futuredesignschool.com to learn more about our unique approach.

Assessing the **Journey:**

## The Truest Reflection of What a Student Knows, Understands, and Can Do

As anyone who has ever planned a unit or graded a piece of student work knows, **curriculum resources in our schools and classrooms are often a tangled mess** of documents, expectations, and look-fors. Despite the fact that these frameworks are often built with the best of intentions, the practical use of them often proves to be cumbersome for teachers and students.

Schools implementing Journey Based Assessment (and similar models) are finding a number of benefits, including:

» meaningful manifestation of **personalized learning**;

» a clearer understanding of **what a student knows, understands, and can do**;

» an increased application of **equity and fairness**; and

» streamlined communication and **learning visibility**.

For this reason, education leaders are now turning to an approach based on **measuring the journey students take toward demonstrating outcomes, standards, or student mastery**, in which student learning and progress is assessed on an ongoing basis according to a set of predetermined learning objectives, as opposed to an average percentage that focuses more on completion than deep learning.

In other words, though individual lessons and activities vary from day to day, the *standards, outcomes, or expectations* used to frame and assess student learning are consistent, and the **goal is to measure student's journey and growth** as they strive to demonstrate the standard. This means that **the amount of time and number of attempts required can vary as needed** — the goal, after all, is not to complete a list of tasks, but to ensure that a standard is being met.
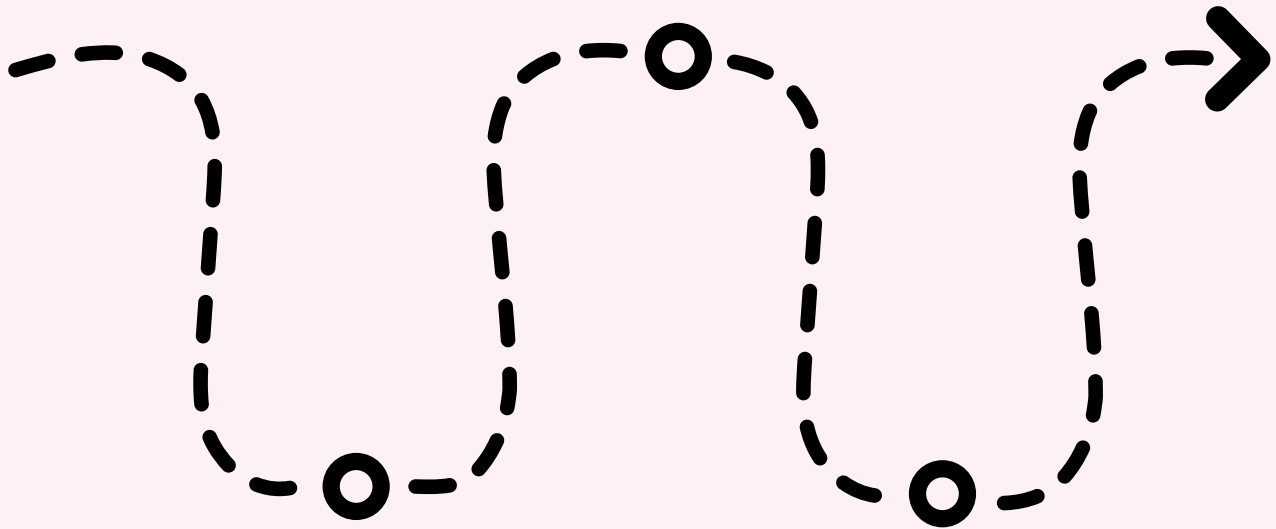
KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF JOURNEY BASED ASSESSMENT:

+ Students have multiple, differentiated opportunities to demonstrate the same outcome / expectation / standard

+ Assessment is ongoing, with teachers providing feedback along the way

+ The goal is to demonstrate and authentically apply the learning, not "finish the work"

+ The student's grade is based on their most recent and most consistent performance, not a cumulative average of all their attempts to demonstrate learning

+ Students aspire toward conscious pursuit — the intrinsic motivation to grow as learners and build important skills

Journey Based Assessment & Personalized Learning

When all students are expected to complete the same laundry list of tasks, in the same way, the focus — for them, and for their teachers — is necessarily placed on task completion. But by focusing assessment on an ongoing journey informed by overarching outcomes, **teachers can use the results of assessments to inform their instruction** and identify areas where students may be struggling. This helps teachers provide personalized learning opportunities, including additional scaffolding and attempts, as well as extensions, to better meet the needs of each individual student.

TRADITIONAL ASSESSMENT	JOURNEY BASED ASSESSMENT
• Each assessment is developed and graded in isolation	✔ Multiple assessments are based on the same standard(s), and graded on a continuum
• Focus on task completion	✔ Focus on ongoing learning
• All attempts / assessments contribute to a student's final grade	✔ Assessment is ongoing, meaningful, and actionable by students

"Instead of just giving a final exam at the end of each unit, I try to use formative assessment to enable me to give my students guidance and assistance when they need it…. I use all of this data to inform adjustments to learning activities as well as selection of resources to help students meet the standards addressed in the unit. When the assessments show a student has mastered a skill, I can provide them with instruction to go deeper or learn new skills."

— ROBYN HOWTON | English Department Chair, Mount Pleasant High School, Wilmington, DE

> *"With standards based grading and reporting [SBGR], student grades are directly linked to what students should know and be able to do (standards). SBGR gives students the practice they need, and more than one opportunity, to show success of standards. This ensures students and parents know what the next step is in mastery toward being career and college ready."*
>
> — **FEDERAL WAY PUBLIC SCHOOLS** | Federal Way, WA

A Clear, Holistic View of Students

TRADITIONAL ASSESSMENT	JOURNEY BASED ASSESSMENT
• Leans heavily on products (e.g. tests, essays)	✔ Supports assessment data collected through conversations, observations, and products
• Demonstrates student learning at a specific moment in time	✔ Documents student growth

Journey Based Assessment focuses on what students truly know, understand, and can do, as well as how they can apply and transfer the learning to new and different situations — rather than how well they perform on a particular test or final product.

Teachers can collect assessment data from students through formal and informal conversations, observations of students as they perform authentic tasks, and metacognitive opportunities such as ongoing self reflection. This ensures that **learning is assessed in a variety of ways, at different moments in time.** Also, since a journey based approach is ongoing and iterative, it can help to shift students' focus from test preparation to actual understanding.

Equity, Fairness, & Accountability

Journey Based Assessment provides a clear, objective measure of student learning, which can help increase fairness and accountability for both teachers and students. Its ongoing nature, in which **assessment data for the same standard or outcome is collected at different times and in varying contexts**, provides a more substantive and holistic — and therefore more accurate — view of student achievement than a single test or essay grade. In addition, the structure itself promotes fairness, in that expectations are transparent, and students clearly understand when, where, why, and how they're being assessed.

TRADITIONAL ASSESSMENT	JOURNEY BASED ASSESSMENT
• Pushes students to be right the first time, instead of learning and growing from mistakes	✔ Encourages students to make multiple attempts
• Grades derived from individual task completion	✔ Provides a more holistic view of student growth and development

But there's also a deeper purpose and motivation behind this shift: **Traditional methods of assessment often reward students who are adept at playing the "game of school"** — in which the goal is to get the highest possible grade. However, what is often sacrificed in this pursuit is learning and growth, which happens just as often by trying and failing as it does when one succeeds.

Developing higher order standards, and focusing on the journey toward attaining them, allows teachers to see this growth, and creates the conditions that allow all students to reflect on and articulate what they need to work on to improve. These important equity considerations — along with ensuring choice and voice in the assessments, providing reasonable accommodations of deadlines, and ensuring expectations are understood by all students — are all addressed by Journey Based Assessment, and serve the important goal of **providing an opportunity for all learners to achieve conscious pursuit.** Emphasizing the importance of learning

through multiple attempts — and ensuring that students' grades are not impacted by making mistakes without the opportunity to correct them — is another important step toward ensuring equity, in that it can **help to reduce unconscious bias** and ensure that all students are being evaluated in ways that best serve their development. Bias can creep into curriculum in many ways — including through required texts, standardized tests, and time-bound demonstrations of learning. Zooming out to focus on how students use ongoing, personalized feedback to improve their work and build skills helps to level this playing field.

Communication & Understanding

Journey Based Assessment helps to improve communication between teachers, students, and parents and guardians by providing **clear, specific information and evidence of student learning and progress across a continuum of development.** This can help students (and their parents and guardians) better understand how they are progressing, and help to ensure that everyone understands and is working towards the same objectives.

Here's an example of one outcome in a Journey Based Assessment continuum, displayed in a Middle School student's portfolio.

OUTCOME#1 — COMMUNICATION:
Writing and speaking with confidence, for different audiences and purposes

LATEST RESULTS:

- **SCIENCE:** Sarah's group presentation on water pollution to the town council was thorough and clearly communicated.

LINKS:

» Presentation slides
» Self reflection

CURRENT LEVEL

| EXPLORING	IMPLEMENTING	ACHIEVING	CONSCIOUS PURSUIT
Student is developing the ability to communicate content effectively to different audiences. Student is beginning to gain confidence when communicating.	With support, student can communicate content, in written and spoken form, to different audiences, and is beginning to synthesize their own ideas. Student demonstrates confidence in some forms of communication.	Student independently communicates content to different audiences, and effectively synthesizes their own ideas. Student displays confidence in using a variety of written and oral communication methods to share information.	Student is highly effective in combining content and their own ideas to clarify concepts and explore their personal passions and interests. Student confidently uses a wide range of written and oral communication methods to inform, share opinions, and advocate on behalf of others.

The growth based model inherent in an ongoing, journey based approach also lends itself naturally to the use of portfolios that track student growth toward conscious pursuit over longer periods of time . Reaching this stage, in which students actively pursue opportunities to deepen their learning and development, is a journey in and of itself; no two students will take the same path. Documenting a student's progress toward conscious pursuit, and making that documentation accessible to all involved, is an important connection that elevates student agency while also promoting holistic support. It supports transferability and authentic skill building, while scaffolding students in their ongoing efforts to understand themselves deeply as learners.

Outcomes in Action:
Portrait of a Graduate

School leaders are increasingly using Portraits of a Graduate to unite teachers on the future ready outcomes they should be assessing, alongside their curriculum standards.

A Portrait of a Graduate defines the critical, transferable skills and competencies students need in order to be prepared for the rapidly changing needs of the world beyond K-12 education, regardless of the path they choose.
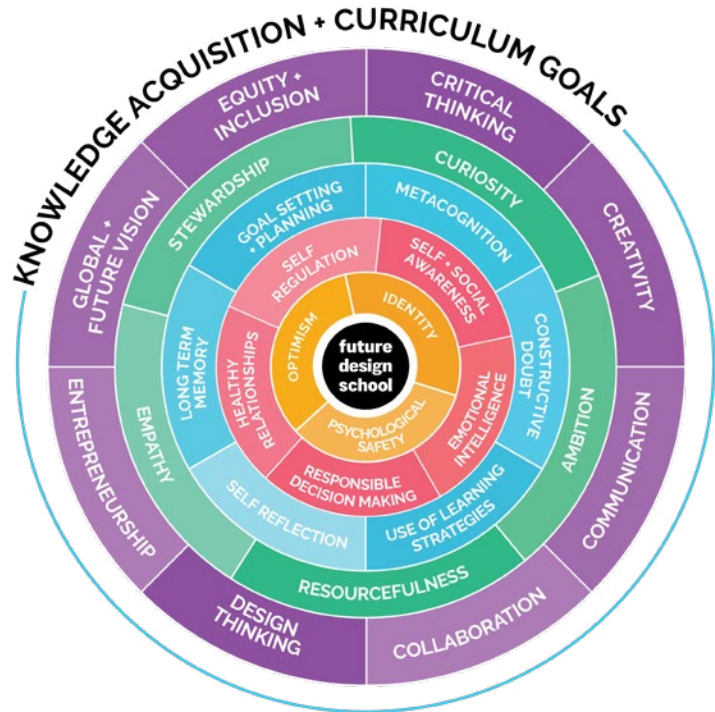
Informed by our transformative work with schools and districts, and backed by industry insights and research informed pedagogical best practices, Future Design School's own Portrait of a Future Ready Graduate represents a holistic approach to teaching and learning. Our Portrait is backed by a continuum that pairs with Journey Based Assessment to support teachers as they design learning experiences that build critical skills and engage students in their passions.

TRADITIONAL ASSESSMENT	JOURNEY BASED ASSESSMENT
• Requires extensive documentation to connect artifacts with curriculum — which may not be understood, or even present	✔ Links student artifacts with their ongoing efforts to demonstrate defined outcomes ✔ Supports interactive communication tools like student portfolios

Future Design School has embedded Journey Based Assessment approaches in schools and districts across North America and around the world. Leverage our expertise for your school — contact us at team@futuredesignschool.com to learn how we can help.

Triangulation:

Assessing Learning Through Conversations, Observations, and Student Products

Collecting and grading student products (worksheets, tests, quizzes, essays, labs, and more) is a hallmark of assessment in nearly every classroom in the world. There are good, and meaningful, reasons for this; daily life beyond school is rife with deadlines and deliverables, from the report one's boss is expecting by the end of the day to the filing of a tax return. But **learning — and living — is about much more than the completion of products**, which means that a journey based, future ready assessment approach must take other factors into account.

One such approach, **triangulated assessment**, is taking hold in many schools and systems. Simply put, this framework guides teachers to **assess student learning through three lenses — conversations with students, observations of student practice and application in the classroom, and student products**. The two main goals of this approach: differentiation, to account for the different ways students are best able to demonstrate learning; and transferability, to apply skills in multiple contexts.

TRIANGULATION OF EVIDENCE

CONVERSATION

PRODUCT ← OBSERVATION
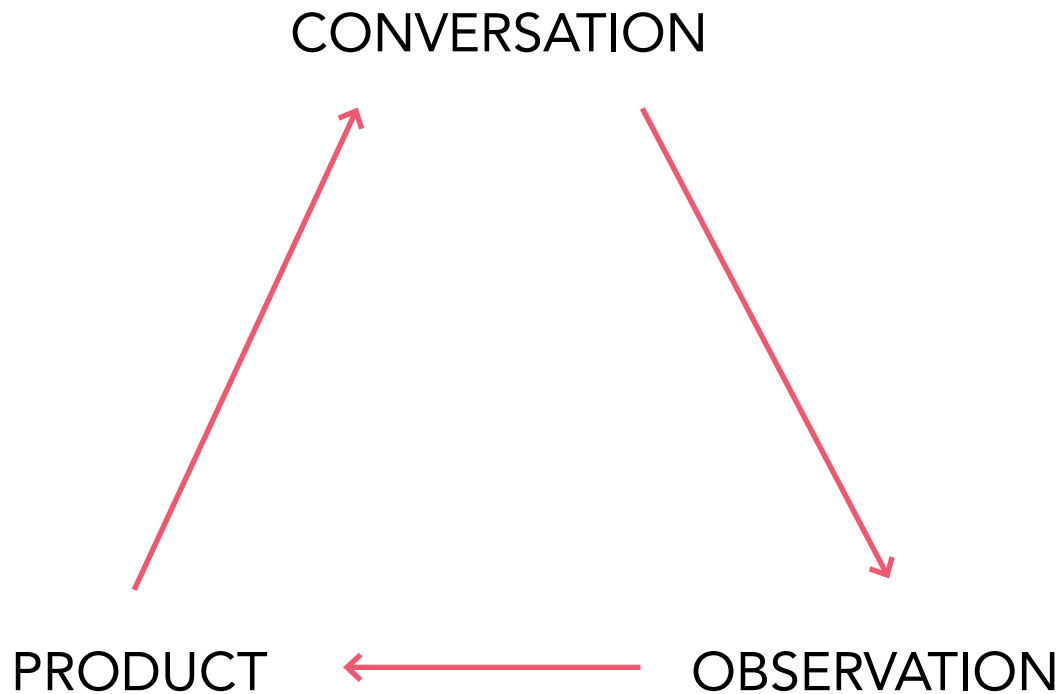
Conversation "The Talk"

- Progress Update
- Artifact Interview
- Group Reflection

Observation "The Actions"

- Rich Performance Task
- Simulation
- Collaborative Project

Product "The Things"

- Digital Model
- Prototype
- Learning Log

Teachers use a variety of assessment strategies to elicit information about student learning. These strategies should be triangulated to include observation, student-teacher conversations, and student products.

TEACHERS CAN GATHER INFORMATION ABOUT LEARNING BY:

- designing tasks that provide students with a variety of ways to demonstrate their learning;
- observing students as they perform tasks;
- posing questions to help students make their thinking explicit;
- engineering classroom and small-group conversations that encourage students to articulate what they are thinking and further develop their thinking.

Teachers then use the information gathered to adjust instruction and provide feedback.

— *Growing Success: Assessment, Evaluation, and Reporting in Ontario Schools* *(Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010)*


In a classroom where triangulation is leveraged deeply, these three types of evidence are **woven into teaching and authentic learning as well as assessment.**

For example, students might submit a proposal for a project as an initial product, then conduct experiments while being observed, and complete the assessment by sharing their findings through a structured, small group conversation with their teacher. "Classroom assessments are an integral part of the instructional process and can serve as meaningful sources of information about student learning," notes the Ministry of Education in British Columbia, Canada — recognized worldwide as a leader in assessment and curriculum innovation. "Feedback from ongoing assessment in the classroom can be immediate and personal for a learner and guide the learner to understand their misconceptions and use the information to set new learning goals."

The Assessment Cycle

Schools adept at triangulation often combine it with a related concept: the Assessment Cycle. This approach seeks to achieve an interwoven balance between three assessment purposes:
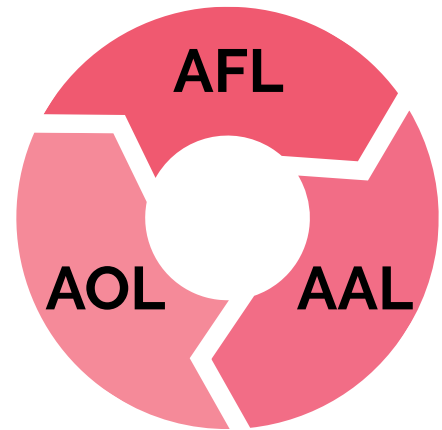
AFL   **Assessments FOR Learning**, or formative assessments, are opportunities to understand a student's current level of understanding, and provide actionable coaching and feedback.

AAL   **Assessments AS Learning** are metacognitive exercises in which students reflect upon their own learning, and apply that reflection accordingly.

AOL   **Assessments OF Learning** are evaluations of student progress and growth, with feedback that can be applied to forthcoming learning opportunities.

Each of the three assessment types in the triangulation model can be applied to each purpose in the cycle. For example, a conversation based assessment can be used FOR learning to help a student identify next steps; AS learning as a means of metacognitive reflection; and OF learning as a means of reporting results or sharing refined responses.

In order to use triangulation in support of this approach, school leaders often begin by inviting teachers to be intentional about documenting and deeply leveraging some of the anecdotal observations and ad-hoc conversations they're already having with students, as well as to replace or augment some of their more traditional, product-based assessments with those based on conversations and observations. With that in mind, here are some examples and ideas for how to embed this practice.

Conversation Based Assessment:
"The Talk"

In a conversation based assessment, students might reflect upon the process they undertook to unpack an activity, and share the challenges and opportunities they encountered along the way. Teachers can use this information to assess standards **related to thinking and application**, as well as check **vocabulary and communication skills** and the **transferability of knowledge.** These conversations can be formally arranged or informal and ad-hoc — and can be as short as a brief check-in or as long as a formal interview, depending on what the student and teacher needs.

EXAMPLES OF CONVERSATION BASED ASSESSMENTS >>

Reflection Interview: Exploring Our Community | Geography

Students were required to go out into the city and take 360-degree photos that represented examples of various types of land use in the community — including examples that connect with their cultures and individual lived experiences.

» The teacher viewed the images while the student reflected on why this image was chosen, making connections to the learning goals.

» Students were assessed according to how they demonstrated progress in their journey toward conscious pursuit in understanding how and why communities change, and were provided with additional opportunities to demonstrate their understanding as needed.

» Students also reflected on how the skills they built through this assessment can be transferred to other activities, and reflected on what supports they will need to continue their development.

Linear Modeling: Is College Worth It? | Math

Students began their inquiry into the long term financial benefits of higher education, asking the question "Does college pay off?"

» They started by metacognitively reflecting on what they already knew, and still needed to find out, using a KWHLAQ (Know, What, How, Learn, Actions, Questions) chart.

» The teacher conducted conversation based assessments throughout the unit, followed by a culminating conversation in which students explained their linear model.

» For each conversation, the teacher used an online form and the voice-to-text function to quickly capture key points of feedback during the conversations, which were automatically sent to students for their future reference, and captured in a spreadsheet for the teacher's ongoing pedagogical documentation to inform practice and final grades.

Oral Presentation: Memories Project | History

Students met with elderly community members at a nearby retirement home to learn about their experiences growing up during WWII.

» After conducting interviews and reviewing primary artifacts from their lives, each student wrote and performed an oral history story of the life of one of the elderly participants, connected to curricular outcomes such as historical thinking skills.

» The teacher followed up with probing questions to draw out connections between this individual's experience and their personal cultures and histories, and to identify developmental indicators of conscious pursuit. These included asking students to provide each other with feedback, and to self-reflect on how they would approach similar projects in the future as opportunities to deepen their skills.

Observation Based Assessment:
"The Actions"

Observation based assessments are ideal opportunities to understand and provide feedback on **how students interact with and apply course content and transferable skills.** Teachers can observe what questions students are asking, take note of what tools and methods they use, and unpack the usefulness of resources (and iterate as needed), all while assessing important skills like problem solving and critical thinking, and quickly identifying misconceptions.

Most teachers use observation based assessment regularly, but often think of it as a formative tool not suited to generating "real grades." However, this need not be the case; observations can and should be a part of evaluation, and present **a more "plagiarism proof" opportunity than many products** to assess learning as it happens.

EXAMPLES OF OBSERVATION BASED ASSESSMENTS >>

Timed Simulation: Escape Room Challenge | Math — Functions

Students were divided into teams, and given the task of "breaking out" of a room by solving a puzzle in three stages.

» First, students worked together to decode a message that was encoded using logarithmic functions.

» They used the answers and their understanding of exponential growth to determine how long they would have to escape a room if it was filling up with water.

» Finally, they used graphing software to create a function that reflected the rate at which the water was rising.

» The teacher observed their ability to consciously pursue and solve the problems, and each student also applied metacognition to reflect upon the skills they used to solve each stage and how they could leverage them in other situations.

(Note: For younger students, any type of math problem could also be used. For example, students could solve a series of addition and subtraction problems, and use the answers to find a code that unlocks the next set of problems, in the style of an escape room.)

Flexible Pacing, Use of Space and Student Choice: Lab Circuit | Science

A multi-lab circuit was designed to take place over several classes. Students completed five labs, each following their own path based on readiness and interest, rather than following a teacher-directed approach.

» Teachers assessed their prior knowledge using an online quiz. The results of the quiz provided students and teachers with feedback, and directed students to either a specific lab, or a teacher-led activity to reinforce specific concepts.

» Some students moved on to extension activities that deepened their understanding and made connections to real world issues; while other students spent additional time completing each lab.

» The teacher observed students as they completed each lab, and combined this data with lab reports to assess their knowledge and understanding.

Ongoing Observation:

Multi-Criteria Rubric in Project-Based Learning | Social Studies

Students identified an authentic, community oriented challenge that was personally and culturally relevant and allowed them to apply approaches from sociology, anthropology, psychology, history and political science.

» Learning was observed through collaboration with peers, the development of the solution to the challenge, and written and oral reflections on research and skill building.

» Notes were collected by the teacher in a templated document over the course of the project.

Product Based Assessment:
"The Things"

Though triangulated assessment emphasizes an increased focus on observations and conversations, it still requires the creation of student artifacts and products. Importantly, however, these **products are not the only thing (and not even necessarily the final thing) that students submit for a grade**; instead, the generation of student products is an ongoing and organic process, which also includes self reflection and peer and teacher feedback.

EXAMPLES OF PRODUCT BASED ASSESSMENTS >>

Prototype Testing: Documenting Ongoing Experiments | Science

Students worked in teams to design and build a trebuchet-style catapult.

» Students made a prototype using simple materials to experiment with the optimum arm ratio, beam mass and counterweight mass, as well as beam shape. They used their machine to calculate mechanical advantage and work.

» They documented their work in a slide deck, which included videos of their trebuchet in action and ongoing self reflection on how they had demonstrated conscious pursuit through the process.

» The project wrapped up with a friendly competition between groups to see who could launch a marshmallow the furthest.

Scale Models: Products Paired With Peer & Teacher Feedback | Geography

Students participated in a project-based learning experience that involved the creation of several products, such as a site plan for a real-life landscape design competition, as well as a scale model of their site.

» Students conducted peer assessment of one another's work throughout the process.

» The final scale model was graded on their ability to apply the principles of design, and the student explained this application in a teacher interview (audio and video recordings were substituted when 1:1 interview time wasn't available).

» Peer and teacher feedback was collected using an online form that fed into a document shared with the student.

Learning Log:
Applying STEM Skills to Solve a Real Problem | Computer Science

Students were tasked with using technology to solve a real world problem.

» As students developed solutions, they recorded their learning in a templated Learning Log, reflecting on challenges, and showing the iterative process of developing code, testing apps and building prototypes.

» Products created ranged from a geo-location app to find lost dogs, to an offline communication app, to a drone-to-drone network that would establish communications in a disaster area.

Bringing It All Together

Triangulation becomes especially powerful when students have the opportunity to be assessed through conversations, observations, and products in a single learning experience. Here are two examples:

Environmental Science Civic Action Project
Science / Social Studies

In a cross-curricular unit, students worked in small groups to identify and research environmental challenges in their community, and design civic action initiatives to address them.

Each group met weekly with the teacher for a progress update conversation, in which they discussed and self assessed how they demonstrated conscious pursuit, as well as how they identified challenges and planned to overcome them.

Scientific data and research products were submitted throughout the process, and were leveraged to support the rationale for civic action.

The project culminated with the development and delivery of pitch presentations to a panel of local environmental leaders and decision makers, with the teacher providing observational assessments and feedback on the preparation and delivery of these presentations.

Planning and Crafting a Written Response
Language Arts

In a two-part English / Language Arts lesson, students moved through the process of generating a written response to a prompt that asked them to connect a reading to their culture and personal lived experiences.

Students were observed as they made use of previously introduced writing tools and strategies, and solicited and actioned feedback on their initial prompts and first drafts.

Graphic organizers, drafts, edits, and polished work were submitted as products.

During the process of creating the polished version, students engaged in a brief conversation with the teacher about how they used resources, actioned feedback, and iterated on their ideas to arrive at their final product.

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The Future Design School team includes expert teachers with deep experience in creating rich conversation and observation based assessments in their classrooms. Leverage our expertise today! Email team@futuredesignschool.com to get started.

Make It Visible:

Using Portfolios to Document the Journey

The shift toward Journey Based Assessment (and similar, holistic efforts to lead change through assessment in schools) has breathed new life into a well known documentation tool: a student portfolio that provides **deep, ongoing evidence** of growth and development.

Though portfolios are by no means new, their structure — and the impetus for implementing them — has definitely changed. As schools evolve to implement Portraits of a Graduate , and provide their students with opportunities to authentically build and demonstrate the future ready skills they'll need to succeed in postsecondary education and beyond, the need for rich documentation is more important than ever. This means that **the latest iteration of the student portfolio is far more than just a collection of artifacts and student reflections**; it must instead be a deep dive into what a student knows, understands, and is able to do.

"If our education system moved away from this obsession with the single measure of standardized testing and moved toward a more holistic and humanizing approach to evaluating student learning, think of all the ways this could transform our schools and positively impact children."

— REBECCA ALBER

Instructor, UCLA's Graduate School of Education Instructor (via Education Week)

Characteristics of a **Journey Based Assessment Portfolio**

The goal of a portfolio is to collect evidence of student learning and growth over time. While traditional portfolios focus on examples of student work, portfolios designed in support of ongoing assessment models have a much broader scope and purpose.

A fulsome, Journey Based Assessment portfolio should:

- Carry forward year-over-year

- Incorporate evidence of growth from all classes / disciplines

- Contain ongoing self reflection, as well as teacher and peer feedback

- Align to a school's Portrait of a Graduate, and track key skills and attributes over time

- Highlight the student's strengths and growth opportunities

- Allow students and parents to interact with its contents, as well as share some elements with postsecondary admissions officers and/or prospective employers

- Reflect the student's passions and interests, and be personalized to align with the goals and pathways the student is pursuing

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Portfolios should include artifacts of student work that demonstrate conscious pursuit of key skills — and much more, writes UCLA's Graduate School of Education Instructor Rebecca Alber in a March 2022 blog post for *Education Week*. "There may be audio recordings of the student narrating thoughts on new content learned or explaining a new concept or idea and reflecting on the benefits of this new learning. The portfolio could include slide presentations; quiz and test results; problem-solving charts, graphs and reports; multimedia projects; and also self-assessments, along with peer reviews and teacher reviews of the student's work."

Alber's last point — that portfolios should include self assessments and peer reviews, in addition to teacher feedback — is particularly relevant in a conversation about portfolios as a true reflection of a student's growth, and responses to journey based assessment opportunities. Simply put, **it's about making learning — all learning — truly visible.**

When portfolios become a cornerstone of communication between teachers, students, and parents and guardians, students can be deeply invested in developing a metacognitive understanding of their strengths and needs as learners.
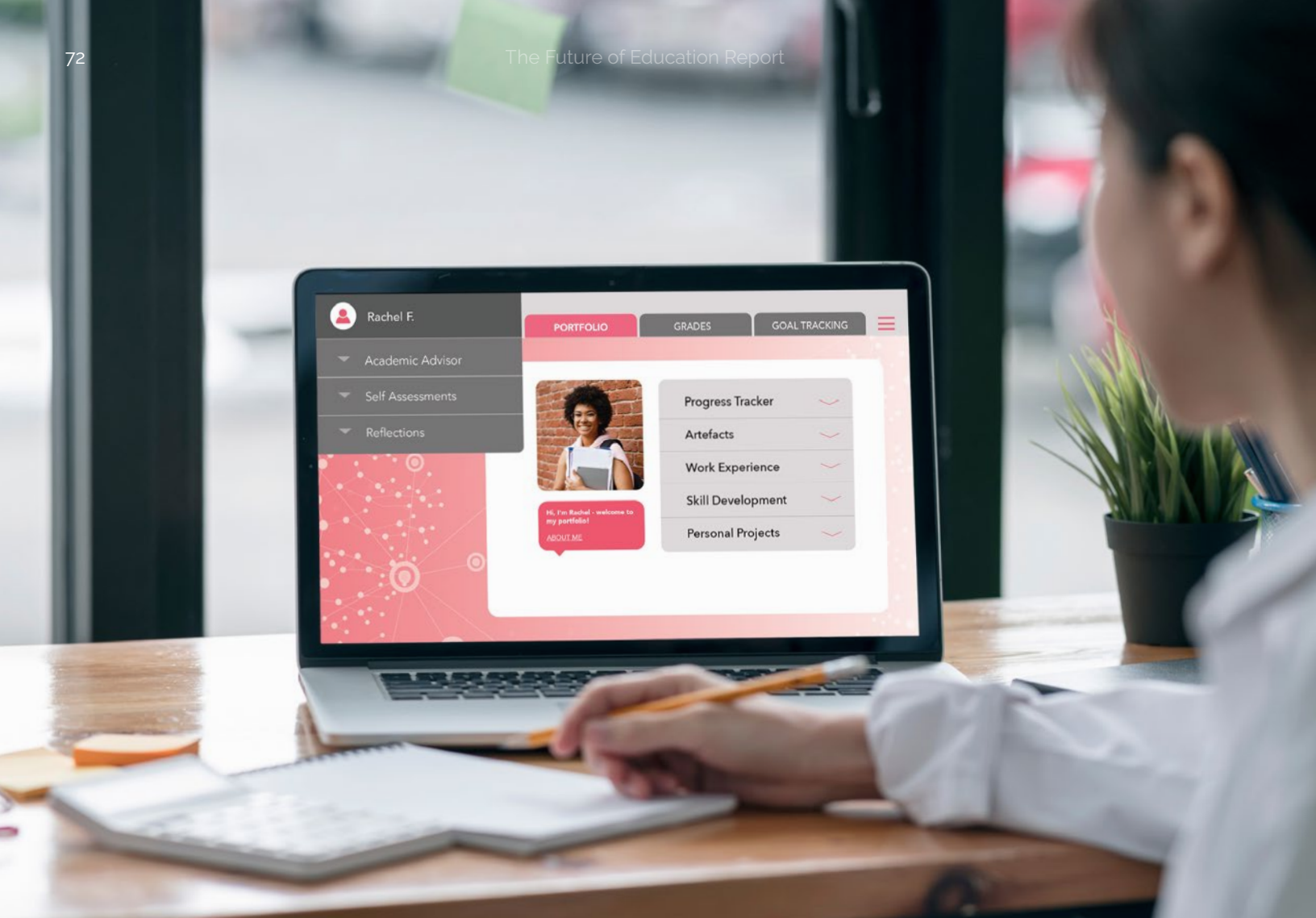
How Portfolios *Transform* Learning

▸ **Students** connect what they're learning with their passions and goals, and engage directly with their growth in developing vital skills as they move between grades

▸ **Teachers** open a window into what their students already know, understand, and do, and are provided with a user friendly "home base" to consolidate feedback, collect artifacts, and communicate next steps

▸ **Parents and guardians** unlock access to a holistic view of student growth over time, that includes quantitative and qualitative feedback, linked to evidence

▸ **External stakeholders** like postsecondary admissions officers and employers can clearly connect a student's candidacy with the skills and attributes they have built

▸ **School leaders** unite all of these needs in one place, while providing an impetus for deep and ongoing evidence collection

Here are **three key considerations** for school leaders seeking to develop or build upon their schools' portfolio offerings:

1.

How might you quickly launch and test a prototype?

Development of tools like portfolios can quickly get mired in the murk of "analysis paralysis" — resulting in a finished product that falls short of the original vision. Instead, **innovative school leaders are taking a pilot-and-test approach**: they bring together a group of willing participants (for example, a particularly forward thinking cohort of teachers), and have them develop, launch, test, and provide feedback on a simple prototype that leverages the school's current tools and resources (including tech tools). Key learnings from this initial experiment can then be applied to a more fulsome rollout.

2.

How might you engage with external stakeholders?

If the purpose of a portfolio is to make learning visible, then it follows that this learning should be available to the widest possible audience (student privacy considerations notwithstanding). This means **asking local university and college admissions officers and key regional job providers** what kinds of documentation resources — and, indeed, demonstrable skills — they find most valuable, and designing a school's portfolio offering accordingly.
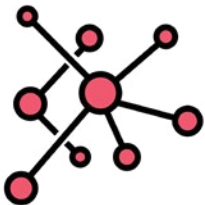
Future Design School helps school leaders connect with their stakeholder communities. For example, our engagement work with a U.S. school district began with a process of helping to define the needs of local job providers with a view to transforming local high school program delivery, and continued into the development of student learning visualization resources that connect back to the needs of those same stakeholders.

3. How might you ensure that portfolio content is readily accessible?

There are many proprietary portfolio tools in the Ed Tech marketplace, each with their own benefits and drawbacks. In lieu of a **universal solution that addresses every school's need**, leaders instead often have to rely on their existing tech stack to lay the foundation for developing these resources. This approach, especially given the extent of new LMS and SIS tools deployed in schools in recent years, has merit, though it often requires schools to "think outside the box" when developing portfolios that work for all stakeholders.

For example, as long as both are equally accessible and can be linked to one another, a student's portfolio and a school's raw assessment data might not be housed in the same system. **When it comes to documenting student learning and growth, the "what" and "why" matters more than the "where"**; in fact, the location will surely change several times during the dozen (or more) years that a student is in school.

The crucial considerations, then, are how effectively a portfolio **documents the journey** a student is taking to build skills and demonstrate outcomes, and how **accessible, user friendly, and useful** these resources are to teachers, parents and guardians, school leaders, and — most importantly — the students themselves.

Future Design School has developed portfolio tools for independent schools, higher education institutions, and public school districts worldwide. Get in touch with us at team@futuredesignschool.com to learn more about how we can help your school.

BECOME A **FUTURE DESIGN SCHOOL**

Future Design School is taking strategic partnerships to the next level. Schools and districts that share a vision of bold transformation in education are coming together and leveraging our unique approach as a vision for change in their communities.

WHAT IS A FUTURE DESIGN SCHOOL?

- A beacon of personalized learning
- Focused on building future ready attributes
- Community connected and responsive
- Devoted to ongoing professional learning
- Committed to justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion

SCHOOLS AND DISTRICTS JOIN OUR NETWORK TO:

- Develop and execute strategic goals
- Engage with key stakeholder groups
- Embed our Portrait of a Future Ready Graduate and learning continuum
- Optimize data collection and technology tools to gain deep insights

- Access engaging, customized curriculum resources
- Deploy innovative assessment frameworks and measurement tools
- Connect with other thought leaders in a worldwide community of education changemakers

Become a Future Design School today! Get in touch at: team@futuredesignschool.com

Shifting Assessment to Prepare for What Lies Ahead: Thames Valley District School Board

Ongoing changes to curriculum and assessment are taking hold across the Canadian province of Ontario. One significant shift is the gradual removal of academic levels (or "streams") in all 9th and 10th Grade courses provincewide. Thames Valley District School Board (TVDSB) in southwestern Ontario is taking a proactive approach to these changes — including the formation of a cross-panel team of STEM teachers which, in partnership with Future Design School, is using Journey Based Assessment and user centered design to equip teachers with the tools they need to support students with a wide range of strengths and needs during an important and transitional time.
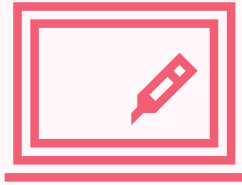
An exciting aspect of Ontario's new science curriculum is its increased focus on the engineering design process. When TVDSB teacher and Science Destreaming Lead Sara Stephenson caught wind of the impending changes, she had a few immediate realizations: **she wanted to get a head start on preparing for the new curriculum; she knew from past experience that Future Design School were experts in that field; and she wanted to bring together a group of STEM teachers from across the district** — one that crossed between the elementary and secondary panels.

To take action, Sara reached out to Mandy Cleland, Learning Coordinator for K-8 Science & Technology, Environmental Education, and Experiential Learning, about working together to prepare for the anticipated changes. "Mandy and I were talking frequently, and we had come to the decision that we need to start building some capacity," Sara recalls. "I had been to a session with Future Design School before, so I knew we could learn a lot from the team. That's why we reached out — and then we brought together a really diverse group of teachers to be part of our professional learning community."

Mandy was immediately inspired by the prospect of uniting middle and high school teachers to talk about the transition to 9th Grade. "That is our reality in elementary schools, and particularly in 7-8," she says. "We thought it was a cool opportunity to bring those 7-8 voices together with the teachers who were going to be teaching 9th Grade to learn together about how we could really support these students as they transition into the destreamed curriculum." They were supported in this effort by TVDSB leadership; as Sara points out, the Board is dedicated to improving the experience of 7th to 10th Grade students as they transition from elementary to high school. **"We wanted to really build that cross panel conversation,"** Mandy says. "There's been so much feedback — 'I didn't realize that was happening in 7th Grade,' or 'I didn't realize that was happening in 9th Grade' — and that was our hope: to start those conversations and provide a safe space for them to occur."
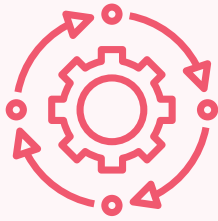
Together, Sara, Mandy, and the community they created worked with Future Design School facilitators to embed human centered design and Journey Based Assessment into their classrooms. **"By using that process, that framework from Future Design School, I'm much happier with the learning outcomes of my students,"** says Sara. **"It was just a much more positive experience for the students, and the work that they did was significantly better."**

One critical conversation that has struck a particular chord with the team is around assessment, and the vital role it can play in supporting students who have a wide range of learning styles, strengths, and needs. **"We are realizing the importance of the ideas of Journey Based Assessment — especially in a destreamed classroom, when you have such a wide variety of student ability, interest, and willingness,"** Sara says.

"Your job as a teacher is to collect evidence of learning. It doesn't matter where they start; it matters where they finish. Students should not be penalized for their early versions, or the fact that they have grown and in their understanding of curriculum — and that it doesn't really matter how a student demonstrates their understanding of the curriculum, it just matters that they have demonstrated the curriculum.

"If you read the curriculum document, it says 'By the end of this course, the student shall demonstrate.' It doesn't

say the student shall demonstrate [their learning] in a report, or in an exam, or in a presentation. It says that they 'have demonstrated,' and so that really opens up the opportunity to use any type of evidence. If it's a conversation, or product, or scribbling on a whiteboard, or just the whole process of working through a big problem and using curriculum to solve the problems and being able to explain it in reference to whatever the student is working on — it should all count."

Mandy agrees, and sees an expanded scope of evidence gathering as beneficial to teachers as well as students. **"My biggest takeaway from the work that we've done with Future Design School is the professional judgment piece,"** she says. "It was a real 'a-ha' moment for me that, when we only look at student products, we really are devaluing and undermining our professional judgment. We're almost saying we don't trust ourselves to use conversations and observations to know where our kids are — we need a product. That was huge."

"The work that we've been doing, and the conversations we've been having around assessment, have reminded teachers that you can use this method of assessment to really validate what students are doing in your classroom, and you don't have to mark 55 lab reports from every single student. You get a grade because you can use what the student does in your room with you every day."

—

SARA STEPHENSON

Teacher and Science Destreaming Lead,
Thames Valley District School Board

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The sessions felt very **responsive, organic, and authentic.** We were able to tell you [Future Design School] what we needed, and you were able to develop and define a goal and a program, and you were able to be responsive, and meet us where we were at. Every time we met with you, it was very responsive, which is what I also appreciate, because that's what we want our teachers to do, so **I felt like what you modeled for us, in the way you taught us, allowed us to see ourselves doing that with our students.**

— MANDY CLELAND

Learning Coordinator for K-8 Science & Technology, Environmental Education, and Experiential Learning, Thames Valley District School Board

That sense of empowerment extends to the entire group of TVDSB STEM teachers who have participated in the program. "The feedback that I've had from the teachers that have been part of this learning journey has just been overwhelmingly positive," Sara reports.

"**They say that it's really meaningful, and that they're walking away with strategies that they can take and use with their students — and they feel comfortable and confident with it.** And I think that's really important, because oftentimes our professional development is a lot of 'why' and not a lot of 'how,' but the sessions with Future Design School have been focused on the 'how.' It was a really positive experience, and they want to come back and keep going and keep learning, and I think that says a lot when your teachers are looking for more."

For Mandy, what's most exciting is how a widespread application of these new assessment approaches can make a demonstrable difference in student learning. **"The work we were doing with Future Design School around Journey Based Assessment is going to be so important moving forward,"** she says. "Understanding that conversations and observations and products are valuable in all subject areas, and your teacher is going to collect evidence of learning — and you, as a student, are going to demonstrate evidence of learning in a variety of ways. All of a sudden you start to change the game."

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Future Design School specializes in transformative, sustained professional development. Email team@futuredesignschool.com to learn more about how we can help you empower your teachers and support your students.

CASE STUDY

Deep Conversations and Lasting Change:

Rockwern Academy

Cincinnati, Ohio's Rockwern Academy is an inclusive school community grounded in Jewish values, offering an Early Childhood and K-6 program focused on creative risk-taking, hands-on learning, and a personalized approach to student support. Future Design School's partnership with Rockwern in 2022 included a sustained professional development program that invited teachers to plan authentic learning experiences backed by a Journey Based Assessment framework.

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Our teachers are using the knowledge and reflections that they gained throughout the course of the year. This was definitely not a one and done sort of professional development — it has had a continuing impact on the conversations that our teachers are having with each other, and with us as leadership.

— TOM BARHOST | Director of Strategic Initiatives, Rockwern Academy

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As a school, Rockwern has long dedicated itself to one of the core tenets of Journey Based Assessment: individual mastery. Director of Strategic Initiatives Tom Barhost credits a passionate and dedicated team of teachers and staff for this (with a nod to the benefits of the school's smaller size). "One of the things that Rockwern has always worked hard to do is to have a very individual approach to learning," Tom says. "We have always believed that **we should be meeting our students where they are, and figuring out the best ways to help them move forward** in their learning."

It was from this solid foundation that the Future Design School team built a customized professional development program for the school. The result: the Rockwern team was able to easily embrace ideas like designing personalized, real-life learning opportunities and bringing concepts like assessment triangulation (see page 58) into their classrooms. "We want to help students and their parents understand what the students are learning," Tom says.

"**We want them to see that they are on a learning journey, and that they are making progress** — whatever progress looks like for those students — through their studies, and building an understanding of the skills and knowledge that they're acquiring along the way."

For this reason, the frameworks and common language that the Rockwern team adopted through their work with Future Design School has helped drive the school forward in its mission. Tom reports that providing feedback and data between grades is a longstanding practice at the school, and the adoption of Journey Based Assessment has taken this to a deeper level. "We'll have conversations about individual students — what they learned, what their strengths are, maybe some areas of growth for them," he explains. "Finding ways to make that time more meaningful and efficient by working around a common language is always very productive. **We are talking about assessment — talking about the planning process — more consistently during our common planning times with teachers.**"

Many new practices and initiatives have been put in place at Rockwern as a result of the school's work with Future Design School. A few recent experiments include:

+ Project based learning opportunities focused on finding solutions to real community challenges

+ Ongoing self assessment, in which students begin to identify their own strengths and opportunities for improvement as learners

+ Primary students writing letters to peers and parents about themselves as learners, and how they think about their thinking

+ Daily goal setting incorporated into a class's "morning meeting"

That our partnership led directly to new energy and ideas was no accident; it's a cornerstone of Future Design School's approach to professional development, coupled with the Rockwern team's propensity to embrace new approaches and face challenges head on. "Future Design School was very thoughtful about making sure that they were meeting the unique needs that our school had," Tom recalls. "You don't just have PD that you're pulling off the shelf and presenting. You want to get to know the schools and the communities that you're serving, and make sure that your offerings are meeting what that school, in particular, needs.

"It was a highly collaborative process — and your communication was great; I think we certainly appreciated that as well. It was just a great experience for everybody."

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Future Design School's professional development team are expert educators dedicated to helping school leaders provide meaningful experiences for their teams, and create lasting change for their students. Email team@futuredesignschool.com to learn more about how we can work together.

CREATIVE CULTURE & NAVIGATING CHANGE

In schools and beyond, creativity is a vital ingredient in cultivating meaningful and lasting change. Whether a school is responding to an unforeseen inflection point, proactively operationalizing strategic goals, or transforming its approach to teaching, learning, and assessment, fostering a culture that prizes creativity will improve employee satisfaction, increase team productivity, and, most importantly, level up learning experiences for students.

Creative cultures in schools are intentionally created, and consistently cultivated by their leaders. Here are five important steps in the process of nurturing creativity with teacher and staff teams:

1. FALL IN LOVE WITH THE PROBLEM

Identifying problems as a team, and working from a growth mindset to unpack them, is the foundation of creative culture. This step includes leveraging a wide range of data, and applying an empathetic lens to understand the needs of those impacted by the challenge — including students, teachers, parents/guardians, and beyond.

2. EMBRACE FAILURE AS A STEP IN THE JOURNEY

To change attitudes about failure, embrace it as a step towards creativity and innovation. The notion of giving students multiple opportunities to learn and grow from mistakes should also apply to teacher and staff teams.

> *These first two steps impel school leaders to consciously and meaningfully address negativity and fear, which can be rooted in many things — fear of failure or rejection, fear of mistakes or being wrong, fear of being judged for taking a risk, or a fear of stepping on others' toes. Understanding what is driving fear, and addressing it, will directly impact how a leader can build creative culture at their school.*

3. SET AN EXPECTATION FOR PERSONAL CREATIVITY AND EXPERIMENTATION

Reward new ideas, innovations, and opportunities to look at challenges in unique ways. For teachers, experimentation in the classroom should become the norm.

4. CELEBRATE THE RISK TAKERS

Honor those who are taking creative risks in the name of transformation, because this is where they'll grow the most. Then, share successes and failures as a team, to demonstrate the importance of becoming a collaborative and innovative community.

5. ADOPT AN INNOVATOR'S MINDSET

Creative culture starts at the top. When school leaders embrace and demonstrate a commitment to innovation, and model it in how they approach challenges and engage with teams, this same mindset is unlocked for those in their orbit.

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We can help.

Our team is here to support your
organization as you manage change
and transition.

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