Embracing Your Vision

As we begin our journey, we invite you to act boldly:

- Embrace a bold vision focused on redefining student success to address equity.
- Embrace future-facing and bold conversations with your community.
- Embrace the adults in your system and co-create a culture that supports your vision.

Along the way, we will introduce you to concepts and tools that will help you make progress with these leadership challenges:

- Readiness gap
- Portrait of a Graduate
- Green light culture
- Portrait of an Educator

Taken as a whole, these tools can help you prepare your students for the challenges they may face in the next twenty to forty years. You will identify the competencies they will need and then develop a broad community consensus that will serve as the "Why" of your school or district transformation. You will engage with your administrators and teachers in creating the culture, professional development, and human resource policies that support them as they make the shifts necessary to realize your collective vision.

What to Look For

As you read Chapters 1 and 2, we encourage you to reflect on your own context as you consider the following:

- How will you redefine student success so it is focused on the real needs of your students and addresses inequities in your system?

"What would I tell the ninth-grade version of myself?"

"First, cultivating and maintaining positive and trusting relationships is the key to almost everything. Learn how to connect with people on a personal level, understand their perspectives and values, and then use the power of those relationships to get things done. Continuously work on building your own support team.

"Second, the ability to synthesize complex and often contradictory information is a skill you will use your entire life. Life is a constantly evolving "theory of change" to which we all add data continuously. If we pay attention and can open ourselves to reflecting on and reconstructing our views on a regular basis, we have a chance at gaining wisdom and seeing this amazing world and universe more clearly.

"Finally, identify those things you really love and are good at and work on them most of all. Don't spend all your time fretting and perseverating on what you don't do well. Sure, we all have areas where we need some basic skill and understanding, but the most successful people in this world find their gift and spend their life playing in that fountain."

~Jason E. Glass, commissioner and chief learner, Kentucky Department of Education

- How can you build a broad-based consensus with your community so the vision becomes a deep-seated commitment of the community?
- How will you build equity goals into your vision from the outset?
- How can you assure that your leadership team and teachers co-own the vision?
- How do you develop the culture your administrators and teachers need to be successful in this work?
- What leadership attributes will you need to be successful in this phase of your work?

This is a lot to think about . . . so let's get started by embracing a new vision for your system.

Be the Leader of a Bold Vision

CHAPTER HIGHLIGHTS

Over the next decade, every education leader will need to take their community through a critical conversation. Is the current system of education truly serving the best interests of our students? Is the system focused on memorization, compliance, and test-taking, and if so, is that focus preparing students for the challenges they will face in 21st century life, citizenship, and work? What are the competencies your students really need to be prepared for the challenges they will face? This conversation will launch you and your community on the path to transforming your system and embracing important 21st century outcomes. The competencies your community articulates as essential to redefining student success will become the North Star for your system.

How will you help your school system find its North Star? Before anticipating your own way forward, let's hear how this journey has unfolded for leaders in three different contexts.

David James was the chief business officer for Akron Public Schools. In 2008, he decided to put his name in to serve as the district's

superintendent. Many of us would think that he would be an unlikely candidate to lead a district transformation. His prior position conjures images of spreadsheets and "green eyeshades." However, as he tells it, his background in the private sector made him inherently customer oriented and used to asking tough questions. His basic orientation led him to constantly ask, "What is in the best interest of children?"

As David led his district, he became increasingly concerned that his students were graduating from high school without being prepared for the world beyond. He began talking to members of the community about this and searching for possible solutions. David heard about a series of high school academies in Nashville that he thought might be a helpful model for his district. In 2011, he organized a small delegation of education and business leaders to see the Nashville academies and their partner, Ford Next Generation Learning.

David was moved by what he saw in Nashville—a model of high school that truly prepared students for the next steps in their lives. When he got home, he went around the community trying to light a spark of enthusiasm for bringing such a model to Akron. But he wasn't able to create enough momentum. The timing wasn't right. David put the idea aside, intending to come back to it when he could.

About four years later, David began to sense an opportunity in Akron to bring up the career academies idea again. This time the business community was better organized, having formed a group called Akron Tomorrow. David sought out Bill Considine, head of Akron Children's Hospital and chair of Akron Tomorrow. Bill was enthusiastic about organizing another trip to Nashville with more business leaders able to see firsthand the work being done at the career academies.

This time the timing was right. Bill and David led a group of twenty education, business, and community leaders to Nashville. The group came back enthused and energetic. There was a solid core of support for bringing the career academy concept to Akron Public Schools and for partnering with Ford Motor Company Fund's Next Generation Learning to support the process. The initial work included a broad-based community engagement process to create a "Portrait of a Graduate" for Akron schools.

After some reflection, David determined the ideal location in his district for the first academy. He called Rachel Tecca, principal of North High School, to ask her if she would be interested. Rachel had been in the district since 1993, first as a special education teacher and administrator. In 2012, she took over as principal of North High School. As David and Rachel talked, she thought about the previous

four years of graduation ceremonies at her high school. Each year, upon the stage, she shook every student's hand knowing they were graduating with a diploma that did not equip them to meet the challenges ahead of them. Rachel realized that there had to be a better way to help them prepare for their future lives. She told David that she was on board.

Shortly after that call, Bill Considine committed to David that Akron Children's Hospital (ACH) would be the first organizational sponsor of the North High School Health Academy. ACH made a commitment of $250,000 and devoted a full-time staff person to serving as a liaison between the high school and the hospital to ensure that the school and its students were fully supported by the hospital and its resources.

Today, there are fifteen career academies in the Akron Public School system. Rachel Tecca left her position as principal to oversee all of the academies districtwide. Each academy is supported by one or more organizational partners in the community. The Portrait of a Graduate (POG) developed by the community is embedded in the work of each of the academies. The district is now working to embed the same POG competencies in the work of their elementary and middle schools, including the "I Promise" school associated with basketball star LeBron James.

David James had a conviction about the high schools in his district better serving students. Initially, the schools were primarily focused on the traditions and practices of adults coming up through the system as well as compliance with state policies. David saw the genuine needs of his students being unmet by following that path. He pursued his conviction about student needs through a thirteen-year journey as superintendent, leading to a comprehensive transformation of Akron Public Schools.

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In 2011, Brian Troop was hired as assistant superintendent of Ephrata Area School District because of his expertise in using educational data to improve student achievement. Ephrata is a small town in the middle of Pennsylvania Dutch country.

Two years later, when he became superintendent, Brian planned to spend his first six months on the job listening to district stakeholders. But barely three months in, the board asked Brian for a "100-day check-in" (an idea the board president had recently heard about at a conference).

When the entire school board met with Brian, they asked, "How are things going overall?" Brian thought for a moment and then responded: "We can proceed in one of two directions: We can continue to achieve incremental gains on standardized test scores each year, or we can set our sights on something greater, something more important for our students. We are positioned to do either. I just want to make sure I am taking the same path the board desires for the district."

Brian told the board, "I know you hired me as a numbers guy, but as I listened to folks during my first 100 days, I came to sense that we can do better than just what the numbers value. We can build a system that values the needs of our students. You hired me to bolster student achievement as we have known it. But I could take on student preparedness as it should be. In either event, I want your support. Which direction do you want me to go in?"

The board told Brian they wanted him to pursue the "student preparedness" route, and if he did, they would completely support him. That conversation was the fork in the road. Brian and the school board took the less traditional, more challenging route.

They began an extensive series of conversations with their community and in 2017, the board formally adopted their district profile of a "Life Ready Graduate." That model now permeates most aspects of the operation of the district. And seven years after their 100-day check-in, Brian and the board remain committed to their Life Ready Graduate strategy.

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Karen Garza had a distinguished career as a school administrator in Texas when she was chosen as the next superintendent of the Fairfax County, Virginia, public schools, the tenth-largest school district in the country. Prior to arriving in Fairfax, Karen had worked as the chief academic officer in Houston Independent School District and in Lubbock, Texas, as superintendent. In both of those locations, she worked on implementing "fair and balanced" assessment systems, seeking to balance traditional state test scores with other attributes important for student success.

When Karen arrived in Fairfax in 2013, she came to a district that had already started conversations about 21st century skills. Kathy Smith, a Fairfax County school board member, had attended a National School Board Association panel on this subject and asked the then-superintendent, Jack Dale, to look more deeply into the work. Jack organized a meeting of his leadership team around the topic and

convened a community meeting with parents. Some of the Fairfax regions began to hold professional development sessions for their teachers around 21st century skills.

Upon starting, Karen had to determine what would be the best next step for the entire district. She was impressed with the district's interest in the 4 Cs (critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity). She thought, however, they needed to go much more deeply into the implementation of teaching these skills. Before that could happen, the new superintendent thought the district should first adopt a Portrait of a Graduate. After only six weeks in the district, she was already recommending a bold move for a district of 180,000 students. Karen had concluded that the complexity of the district required community buy-in for a common vision as the only way she could bring the entire group of 200 schools along.

Karen convened a large community advisory group consisting of seventy-five individuals from a broad and diverse set of backgrounds. This group went through a three-month process, concluding with the proposal to the Board of Education for Fairfax County to approve a countywide Portrait of a Graduate. Karen looks back at this process as one of her professional achievements that she is most proud of since it became the backbone of her work in Fairfax County.

Karen has long been convinced that the school district is the "unit of change" for much broader education transformation efforts. The Portrait of a Graduate process has changed her perspective on how to engage the community to garner broad-reaching community support grounded in the "why"—stakeholders' hopes, dreams, and aspirations for their children's education. From that shared why, districts can align educational outcomes to that vision. Today, she runs an educational nonprofit, Battelle for Kids, dedicated to helping school districts around the country create and implement their own Portrait of a Graduate. Under her leadership, her team has created many tools to help districts on this journey.

ASK YOURSELF

- *What were the leadership attributes of each of these leaders?*
- *What vision did each leader embrace?*
- *What relationships did each leader nurture?*
- *What helped them start the process of school transformation?*

Write down your own reflection of these through-lines—and when you share this book with your leadership team, have them reflect on the through-lines as well. Consider what these leaders had to focus on personally and what they needed to collaborate on with others in their communities.

We urge you to take seriously our invitation to reflect. Put the book down for a moment. Jot down what the significance of the stories is for you. Then, read on to compare your perspective to ours.

From our perspective, each story highlights bold leadership. These leaders were not just willing to go along with the current constructs of the system. They recognized the need to redefine student success for their systems, and they made the commitment to deeply implement the changes required to go in that new direction.

We also want you to consider the differences in each of these stories:

- David James had a long track record as a superintendent in the district, and it took until 2016 to get a second community delegation to Nashville to tour their academy structure.
- Rachel Tecca was a principal who began her education career as a special education teacher. She became a districtwide administrator in charge of fifteen career academies.
- Brian Troop was a first-time superintendent, just getting started in a new position.
- Karen Garza was a superintendent who was switching districts and inheriting a nascent 21st century skills initiative, which she decided to expand. She wanted to take the work more deeply into the community and into system-wide classroom implementation.

We hope you can find yourself in one of these leadership stories. We have designed this book to speak to experienced leaders, new leaders, and emerging leaders. Whether you are starting a Portrait of a Graduate or inheriting a transformation process, we want to help you on your journey.

In the coming decade, each of you will find yourself at the same crossroads these leaders faced: whether to focus on standardized test score improvement or to address a broader set of student needs. The goal of this book is to help you meet these challenges boldly.

We have organized the "bold vision" challenge of this chapter into two distinct pieces of advice for you:

- Construct a bold vision: Focus on the readiness gap.
- Facilitate a broad and bold conversation in your community.

These two steps will help to start a change process that will be true to your own vision and reflective of your community context and values. (See the Resources for Implementation box at the end of this chapter for additional tools and resources to help you on this journey.)

The most important observation we can make about embracing a vision for 21st century education is that the vision needs to be co-created with your community. However, before you engage your community, you must first reflect on your own beliefs and values.

ASK YOURSELF

- *What are your core beliefs about the purposes of education?*
- *What should your system be doing to help students accomplish those purposes?*
- *What is the gap between what you want for every student and what your system is accomplishing?*

Record your answers to these questions, paying special attention to the final one. How would you describe the "gap" between where your education system is today and where you want it to be? This gap between what is in the "best interests of the kids" and what the current system focuses on today must become the core of your work. This should be a central component of your leadership going forward.

TO CONSTRUCT A BOLD VISION, FOCUS ON THE READINESS GAP

Today, much attention focuses on the "achievement gap" as the central problem facing education. We do not want to minimize the persistent disparities that subgroups of students continue to experience. Indeed, in many communities, the COVID-19 crisis has put a spotlight on

longstanding racial and socioeconomic inequities that society—and our schools—must address.

But there's another gap we also must close if we want to create a more equitable education system. The achievement gap reflects academic measurement criteria that are more than fifty years old and are not central to student success today. It's time to shift the conversation to the gap between the competencies students are graduating with today and where they need to be if they are going to be ready for the challenges they will face in life, citizenship, and work. We call this the *readiness gap*.

The leaders highlighted at the beginning of this chapter were all focused on this readiness gap. They may not have used this phrase, but the gap in critical skills has driven all of their transformation work.

There is one more step you need to take by yourself: Determine your own ideas about the "North Star" for this work. It is not enough to define the readiness gap, which describes a system deficiency. You now must begin to define your own initial ideas for the system's destination before you gather your community to move forward with you in the process.

For Steve Holmes, superintendent in Sunnyside School District in Tucson, Arizona, the question leaders must answer for themselves is this: "What are your core beliefs around students and learning, and what do you want to head the organization toward?"

To define that destination, begin by articulating your own "first cut" of the student outcomes you want your students to have at the end of their time with you. You may be tempted to focus on familiar programs and strategies, such as competency-based education, project-based learning, performance tasks, capstones, portfolios, and so forth. Those may be part of your implementation, but strategies and tactics are not your destination. The destination will comprise the attributes you want your students to be able to acquire and demonstrate. Imagine, for example, a graduate who can

- Quickly master a new content area
- Utilize empathy and inquiry to consider the potential application of the content to practical problems
- Effectively communicate the importance of the content subject and its application
- Work creatively with others to pursue practical solutions using their content mastery and other skills
- Collaborate around creative problem solving

Spend some time constructing your own version of this list. Your version will serve as a helpful starting point as you describe to your community the kind of vision you want to co-create with them.

One question almost inevitably will arise: What is the name or label for the work ahead? We asked the forty-some superintendents we interviewed for this book, all of whom had pursued their own community's vision of a 21st century graduate, what name they gave to this work. We heard an incredible variety of responses:

- Portrait of a Graduate
- Profile of a Graduate
- Vision of a Graduate
- Life Ready Graduate
- The 4 Cs, or 5 Cs, or 7 Cs, or 10 Cs
- Deeper Learning
- Equity
- Student-Centered Instruction
- The Strategic Plan
- Inspire 2025

It is clear that leaders who have taken on this vision challenge have not been constrained by a one-size-fits-all term or title. In fact, they have customized their title to fit the specific context of their school or district. For the purposes of this book, we will call this vision the Portrait of a Graduate (POG). Hundreds of districts have adopted this overarching vision.

ADOPTING YOUR PORTRAIT OF A GRADUATE

We strongly recommend you adopt a POG because, in our experience, it is the single most powerful thing you can do to launch your school or district on its journey to redefine student success. Arriving at a POG involves a customized process by which a school or district adopts its own set of student outcomes to serve as the North Star for its transformation. If your community already has a POG, you will need to determine if it is time to do a review and refresh of it. Most communities with a POG update it every four to five years.

> Adopting a Portrait of a Graduate is the single most powerful thing you can do to launch your school or district on its journey to redefine student success.

You can see for yourself two examples of POGs from districts (Akron and Ephrata) we introduced at the beginning of the chapter in Figures 1.1–1.2.

Figure I.1   POG From Akron

PORTRAIT of a **GRADUATE**

STRONG HABITS OF MIND
▶ persistence
▶ grit
▶ flexibility
▶ strategic thinker
▶ self-confident
▶ self-directed
▶ creative

SOCIAL SKILLS
▶ collaborative
▶ builds relationships
▶ communicates effectively
▶ leads others
▶ accepts feedback

REAL WORLD SKILLS
▶ academic experience
▶ work experience
▶ transferable skills and competencies

CONTRIBUTE TO SOCIETY
▶ culturally competent
▶ contributes to the community, both global and local
▶ member of a social network

A PLAN FOR THE FUTURE
▶ identifies challenges
▶ successfully designs and implements a plan
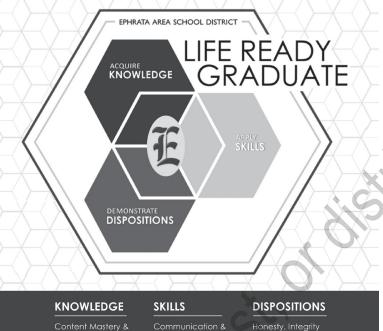
READY FOR COLLEGE. CAREER. LIFE.

You can explore additional POGs on the website, www.portraitofagraduate.org.

We hope you will appreciate the power of adopting a POG. It is not merely the adoption of a slogan, visual aid, or poster. Those schools and districts that seek to fully plum the value of a POG will see that the ramifications can be broad and profound.

We asked the superintendents we interviewed what they considered to be the biggest impact of their creation of a POG. Their responses clustered around four powerful impacts.

The first impact is unity of vision. Leaders noted that having the POG created the power of a common vision. There was now clarity around

Figure I.2   POG From Ephrata

what they wanted for students. They were clear that, while content mastery remains important, standardized tests were no longer the single metric for student success. Readiness is broader than test scores. Several superintendents observed that the POG pushed them to define what we mean by success. Rich Fry, superintendent in Big Spring, Pennsylvania, worked on a POG with his board and community eight years ago and now notes, "We haven't talked about a test score in a board meeting in eight years."

An important second impact of the POG is better alignment within the system. This result is perhaps best captured by Mike McCormick, superintendent of the Val Verde School District in California, who observed:

The POG seemed to verify a lot of complex ideas in education. For about six years, the dots weren't connecting. What is the point of performance assessment? Restorative justice? PLC? PBL? We had

a spiderweb of initiatives. The POG seemed to us to be a unifying force for people to build a mental model so each of the discrete initiatives could rise up and be part of one unified umbrella. It helps people determine where we are going and where they fit in.

Eric Eshbach, currently the assistant executive director of the Pennsylvania Principals Association, used the POG to guide his team when he was superintendent in Northern York County, Pennsylvania. "The POG was a target that showed us the direction to head in. We used it as the criteria by which all changes and initiatives would be judged. Everything needs to go through the POG lens. My administrators had to show me how their work is tied to our POG goals."

This alignment is powerfully reinforced when the POG is embedded into strategic planning and budgeting. Many districts have used the POG as the key objective of their strategic plan and then use the POG as a lens for their budget priorities.

The third impact is that of promoting student agency and self-direction. The attributes of the POG put students at the center of the educational model and emphasize the need for self-regulation and autonomy. The POG also pushes educators toward more personalization and self-assessment. We will explore these issues in detail in Chapter 5.

Finally, superintendents describe the impact of the POG on teaching. The POG shifts the focus of pedagogy toward more teacher facilitation and coaching and less direct instruction. Teachers are encouraged to embrace the challenge to experiment and are being given permission to occasionally fail. These issues will be discussed further in Chapter 6.

While on its face the POG is just a one-page document, the superintendents we interviewed describe significant impacts. These are the kinds of benefits you can reap if you are bold enough to embrace a big vision. However, you need to do it in a broadly collaborative way.

EMBRACE A BROAD AND BOLD CONVERSATION

Your deep personal reflection and your choice of a bold vision like a POG is just your starting point for the transformation process. That vision must be accompanied by a broad-based and rigorous process that assures you and your community are co-creators.

If you see the prospect of a POG solely as an exercise for your leadership team or your educators, it will never gain the deep traction required for real transformation. If you seize this opportunity to engage with your community in an invigorating conversation about the purpose of education, it can be the anchor for the profound and long-term transformation our current education system requires.

Ted Dintersmith, entrepreneur and author of *Most Likely to Succeed* (Wagner & Dintersmith, 2016) and *What School Could Be* (Dintersmith, 2019), has seen firsthand the value of bold community conversations. He shared this insight with us: "Andy Grove of Intel used to say if you don't know where you are going, any road will get you there. If you don't adopt a POG, you won't know where you are headed. We need each community to lean in and shape their own POG. Each time I have watched it happen, it stimulates truly constructive and creative discussions."

You will move next from your personal reflection to a period of outreach with your community. During this period, you will begin a genuine conversation about your initial concepts as you move forward in co-creating the community vision. This period will require you to

- Listen carefully
- Educate powerfully
- Collaborate deeply

Ideally, in the two to three months before you begin a formal visioning process, you should consider doing a "listening tour" of your community. You will want to include key individuals central to your success, including

- Your leadership team
- School board
- Teachers
- Students
- Parents
- Business community, including significant area employers and small businesses
- Youth development groups
- Local governments
- Community leaders reflective of the diversity of your community
- Religious leaders
- Workforce development organizations
- Higher education

Listen carefully to their hopes and dreams for your community's children. You will be surprised by their responses. Parents, in particular, will be grateful to be asked these questions. They likely have never been asked what competencies they would like their children to possess. It can be a positive and constructive conversation, one not likely to bring out the division and discord that many other topics around education tend to generate. You will find a large degree of consensus around competencies your community members think are valuable and important.

Lindsay Unified School District, serving a high-poverty community in California's agricultural Central Valley, began a dramatic transformation in 2007 by inviting families to describe future graduates of the school system. District leaders like Barry Sommer, director of advancement, listened as parents shared their hopes and dreams. "We're giving you our kids. Make their lives better than ours," Barry recalls hearing from families again and again, in both English and Spanish. That profound message shaped a vision of lifelong learning that continues to drive change, as you will hear in upcoming chapters.

Once you have listened carefully, you can begin the process of educating the community, helping them to see the powerful societal contexts that require a shift in the education model. You will want to share videos, books, speakers, and panels to build common language and understanding of these trends. (See Resources for Implementation section at the end of this chapter for suggestions.)

Now you are ready to begin a more formal process, whether you are formulating the community's first POG or updating one. Creating an advisory group is a helpful way to arrive at your community's unique vision of what it wants for students—your own customized POG. There are many ways to assemble this group. Depending on the size of your community, you can bring together a group of thirty to seventy-five members of the education and broader community in a three- to four-month process that will ultimately lead to broad-based support for this vision.

Your advisory group should include the broad base of individuals you met during your listening and education phases. Some of the people you met with may have expressed a willingness to participate in the group. We want to emphasize the importance of five key perspectives:

Students

Participation by students is one of the critical constituencies to have at the table. Middle and high school students have been very effective and active participants in these conversations.

In a district in a western state, known as a politically volatile community, a student was assigned to each table. When one of the POG sessions got contentious, a high school senior stood up and said, "I think the adults have brought their bickering into this room and it has no place here." She got a round of applause.

In the Schalmont School District in Schenectady, New York, an eighth grader, Mariana Riccio, was appointed to serve on the POG advisory committee. Mariana says that experience changed her life as it helped her to understand why she was really in school. Mariana now serves on a POG advisory group, helping the school district implement the POG.

Jason Glass, state education commissioner of Kentucky, underscored the importance of including students in the conversation: "If students and adults are in conversation together, transformation will emerge. When the conversation is rooted in the values of kids and community, it is hard to argue against."

Teachers

Getting teachers involved in the POG process is also critical. While some teachers may resist something new and different, most teachers want to teach in an environment that is less about "compliance culture" and more about giving teachers and students the freedom to explore their learning. In some districts, the teachers' union has been invited to participate in the POG advisory process, which has led to the union becoming a significant advocate for the work. The National Education Association (NEA, n.d.) was a founding member of the 21st century skills movement.

Future Workforce

Business leaders have an important perspective to share in this process. They know which skills and competencies are important in the 21st century workforce. Identify the major employers in your community and, if their CEOs can't join the process, invite their human resource directors to participate. Organizations can explain the kind of employees they are looking for and whether their current candidates—your graduates—meet those expectations or fall short.

Jim Philips, CEO of Azomite Mineral Products in Nephi, Utah, was asked to serve on the POG advisory group for the local school district in his rural community. Sixteen of Jim's twenty-one local employees graduated from Juab High School. Jim observes: "We tell our employees every day: 'We are paying you for your minds. We want you to be

solving problems and finding new ways to do things.' We need our employees to have the basics of math, English, and communication skills, but after that, we need our schools to teach them how to solve problems. From a business perspective, that's what I want. That's why the POG makes a lot of sense to me as a business leader."

When Eric Eshbach was superintendent of Northern York County School District in Pennsylvania, he reached out to a wide range of regional employers to help shape the POG. "We had military recruiters sitting at the same table as university professors, lawyers, and small business owners. They all focused on the same question: What are you looking for in a worker?" An electrician who owned his own company brought the group to consensus when he said, "I can teach my employees what they need to know about electricity, but I can't teach them to be good workers. I need people who will show up." When the POG was finally adopted, it included the disposition of being conscientious.

Also, consider inviting the largest nonprofit organizations to share the kinds of employees they seek. While you will probably invite representatives from your Parent Teacher Association, also consider inviting parents who have "21st century jobs" or who run "21st century companies." They can give your process a helpful perspective on what competencies are or will be needed for successful workers. Consider which other business and governmental groups, including higher education institutions, have an interest in the workforce pipeline so you can include them in the process as well.

Diversity

You need to be certain that the members of your POG advisory group reflect the full diversity of your community. Only then will the consensus that emerges in the process include the commitment that *every* student will experience the impact of this work and that past inequities will be addressed in the new vision. Be relentless in pursuing broad and diverse participation in the group, identifying underserved communities, and assuring their representation. Invite individuals who are not "regulars" in your education conversations and be sure the 21st century competency discussions you have focus on the question: Will *every* student have access to these competencies? Often one group of students has access to engaged student learning, but not all students share in this. Karen Garza notes: "Our greatest challenge in this work is addressing the needs of underserved communities. The kids who need the richest, engaging instruction are often getting the least."

Youth Development Perspectives

Keep in mind that your work is designed to prepare young people not just for the workforce but also for their personal and citizenship challenges. Think about who else in your community is working on the physical, social, and emotional well-being of young people: church groups, YWCA/YMCA, Little League, 4-H Clubs, League of Women Voters, and so forth. These groups will be eager to participate because their work is to help young people attain the same competencies you will be working on. Perhaps you can consider adopting a regionwide POG for all youth-related activities once you have adopted one for your school or district.

These initial thoughts are intended to get your juices flowing. Be expansive and creative about the special and diverse perspectives you can invite to the table.

Cheryl Carrier, executive director of Ford Next Generation Learning, the group that helped Akron build their POG, observes: "The power of the POG is that you are bringing the community, business leaders, and educators together. It leads to a different kind of discussion. By bringing the community together you get more buy-in. And you then create the possibility of new partnerships to pursue the new opportunities." More than 200 businesses now participate in Akron's career academies program. (In Chapter 7, we will explore more strategies for building partnerships and regional networks.)

FOCUS ON EQUITY

As you build community consensus, equity is the one topic you must prioritize in your conversations. Every community faces inequities. Some districts have started to address equity issues; others have not. If you proceed to create your new definition of student success without focusing on equity, you will reinforce the current inequities. It will be even more difficult to address these issues moving forward.

Build equity into your own analysis of your Portrait of a Graduate. Have your advisory group address the equity implications of your POG work as it begins to work on the challenges in your district. Make sure you specifically ask the advisory group, "What are ways we can ensure that every child will have the resources they need to attain their competencies?" "How will we find additional resources for those who need them?"

As you lead this work, be inspired by other superintendents who are keeping the focus on equity.

Steve Holmes, superintendent of the Sunnyside School District in Arizona, oversees a predominately Hispanic, high-poverty district in Tucson. Steve describes their Portrait of a Graduate as their "equity work" for two reasons. First, the deeper learning that flows from a broader definition of student success is a form of engaged learning to which every student is entitled. Additionally, he knows that critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity are necessary skills to address racism and equity.

Mike McCormick, superintendent of the Val Verde School District in California, describes a similar commitment: "The number-one goal from the Board of Education is solving the organizational challenges of diversity, equity, and inclusion in order for all students to gain access and opportunity to the educational programs and services offered by our school district. Our Portrait of a Graduate guides all aspects of our work."

McCormick recognizes that the district's POG and the competencies it describes are important tools to address diversity, equity, and inclusion. "Flexibility includes the ability to balance diverse views and beliefs to reach workable solutions in multicultural environments. Communication includes the ability to communicate effectively in diverse environments. Collaboration includes students demonstrating the ability to work effectively and responsibly with diverse teams."

Jim Montesano, superintendent in Nyack, New York, acknowledges the challenge of addressing equity. "Our data shows that our outcomes are not equitable. Getting people involved in the antiracism work has required open conversations on the topic of race on a monthly basis. We are working to solve institutional racism within the four walls of our buildings. Leaders need to understand what equity and institutional racism mean."

In the urban district of Akron, Ohio, equity is not an add-on to the POG process. "We apply the lens of diversity, equity, and inclusion to everything we do," explains Superintendent David James. That includes the POG. He adds, "We must ensure that we build a school and district culture that removes barriers based on race, ethnicity, religion, or identity so all students have equitable resources (both human and financial) to achieve what we outlined as our vision for success. The work is causing us to take a critical view on how we support our students and recognizing and acknowledging that we must do things differently."

RESOURCES FOR YOUR EQUITY WORK

Ensuring common language about equity will lead to more productive community conversations.

These resources provide clear definitions and guidelines for discussions with your stakeholders:

- "Equity vs. Equality and Other Racial Justice Definitions," published by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, offers a good starting point for ensuring shared language to "name it, frame it, and explain it" when it comes to discussing equity and racial justice. www.aecf.org/blog/racial-justice-definitions

- *Racial Justice in Education*, published by the NEA, provides resources for talking about racial equity, defining this goal as not just the absence of discrimination but also the presence of values and systems that ensure fairness and justice. neaedjustice.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Racial-Justice-in-Education.pdf

- Districts Advancing Racial Equity (DARE) is an online tool published jointly by the Learning Policy Institute and Southern Education Foundation to help education leaders strengthen their capacity to advance racial equity in their school systems. It calls for ongoing cycles of improvement in partnership with school community members. Learn more and download the tool from learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/reln-districts-advancing-racial-equity-tool

Learn from other school systems that are making progress to remove barriers to equity. An excellent case study (Green, 2021) comes from an urban high school with a large population of English learners in Sudbury, Massachusetts. Leaders and staff first identified systemic inequities related to economics, English fluency, literacy, and social-emotional wellness. They adopted student-centered solutions, which have helped to close opportunity gaps even during the COVID crisis. Read the full case study at studentsatthecenterhub.org (search for "One School's Commitment to Equity Using Student-Centered Learning").

Many districts we interviewed have used outside facilitators who specialize in diversity, equity, and inclusion. You may want to consider bringing that expertise into your internal and external conversations.

Final Reflections

During your private reflection and community consensus-building phases, you will have relied deeply on your own mastery of the 4 Cs. Your personal reflection period was based on your own critical thinking capacities. The outreach and advisory board phases require collaboration and communication. Your ability to solve problems creatively will be important as you engage with your team to develop new programs and overcome challenges.

Some of the superintendents we interviewed used the term "transparent" collaboration to describe the idea that consensus building must not only be broad but also easily understood and accessible. If there is a future leadership transition, the vision will survive if it is perceived to be shared by the community and not the brainchild of the outgoing superintendent. Collaboration remains critical after the vision is developed because it leads to partnerships and alliances to do the actual work of implementation.

The superintendents we interviewed also emphasized that success in this work requires constant communication. When you think you have started to overcommunicate, you are likely just beginning to break through. Keep going. Keep the communications simple and clear. Early in the process, you will need to focus on the "why" of adopting a POG. As you progress further, you will focus on the "what" it will look like in practice. Make sure your communications engage the members of your community. Find new opportunities to keep them updated. Use social media to keep a constant flow of communication and feed the "buzz" around the work.

Greg Baker, superintendent in Bellingham, Washington, offers this observation: "You can boil the Superintendent Challenge down to its essence: There is one thing that matters, and that is your ability to talk to the public in a manner that compels action."

If your entire community owns the plan going forward, you will have a deep, long-term commitment to focus on the readiness gap and the outcomes for students that really matter. The community consensus around a bold vision and bold conversation will be a powerful platform on which you can build your school or district transformation.

Let's consider one final reflection:

Are you ready to go beyond standardized testing and challenge your school board and community to define a broader vision of student success for each and every student?

RESOURCES FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Two free resources from **Battelle for Kids** will help you get started on your Portrait of a Graduate:

- For inspiration, explore the **Portrait of a Graduate gallery** at www .portraitofagraduate.org.

- Download a copy of the **Getting Started Guide** (from the POG gallery website) to help you plan your next steps to engage your community in the POG process.

Community movie nights and book discussions are two strategies to foster rich stakeholder conversations about the future of education. Here are just a few examples of resources that leaders have used to catalyze community conversations:

- *Most Likely to Succeed*, produced by Ted Dintersmith, is available for public screenings by schools and districts. teddintersmith. com/mltsfilms

- **TEDx Talks** (www.ted.com) are popular for kicking off community conversations. For example, *The Myth of Average* features Harvey Rose, a high school dropout-turned-Harvard faculty member. Find it on YouTube.

- Combine a screening with a panel discussion or follow up with a reading group. Titles certain to provoke good conversations include *Most Likely to Succeed* by Tony Wagner and Ted Dintersmith or *What School Could Be* by Ted Dintersmith.

- Explore more resources in the **What School Could Be** community launched by Ted Dintersmith (community. whatschoolcouldbe.org).

Action Steps

As we close this first chapter, we want to raise a caution. Sometimes educators gloss over the "theoretical" or "strategic" and head straight for implementation. This is a big mistake.

If you try to undertake the ideas in the remainder of this book without devoting attention to the concepts in this chapter, your implementation will be floating around without a coherent anchor. The key elements in this chapter are central to your success on this journey. Take time to absorb and apply them.

We have asked you to take three action steps:

1. **Redefine student success.** Take on the challenge of identifying the competencies that really matter for your student's success. Make a commitment to developing your Portrait of a Graduate (or whatever you decide to call it) and use this as your North Star.

2. **Anchor the vision in your community.** Commit not only to creating a Portrait of a Graduate, but commit to co-creating it with your community. Some leaders are tempted to shorten the process by having a team of educators determine the competencies. That will not have staying power. POGs developed by a diverse cross-section of the community have a greater likelihood of being woven through the fabric of the district and not being tied to a single education leader. Make this your community's enduring vision of education.

3. **Anchor the work in equity.** If you don't take on the challenge of developing your POG in the context of addressing the equity challenges of your district, you will simply exacerbate the inequities already present in your system. Focus on equity as an essential element of your redefinition of student success.

These action steps will launch your efforts. There is one additional essential step to take before you can begin the implementation of your POG: Work with the adults in your system to be certain they fully embrace the new direction. Developing that culture is a fourth essential step in the process, which we explain in Chapter 2.