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# Reimagining Education: Student Voices Leading the Design Process

April 29th, 2025 1:30-2:30pm

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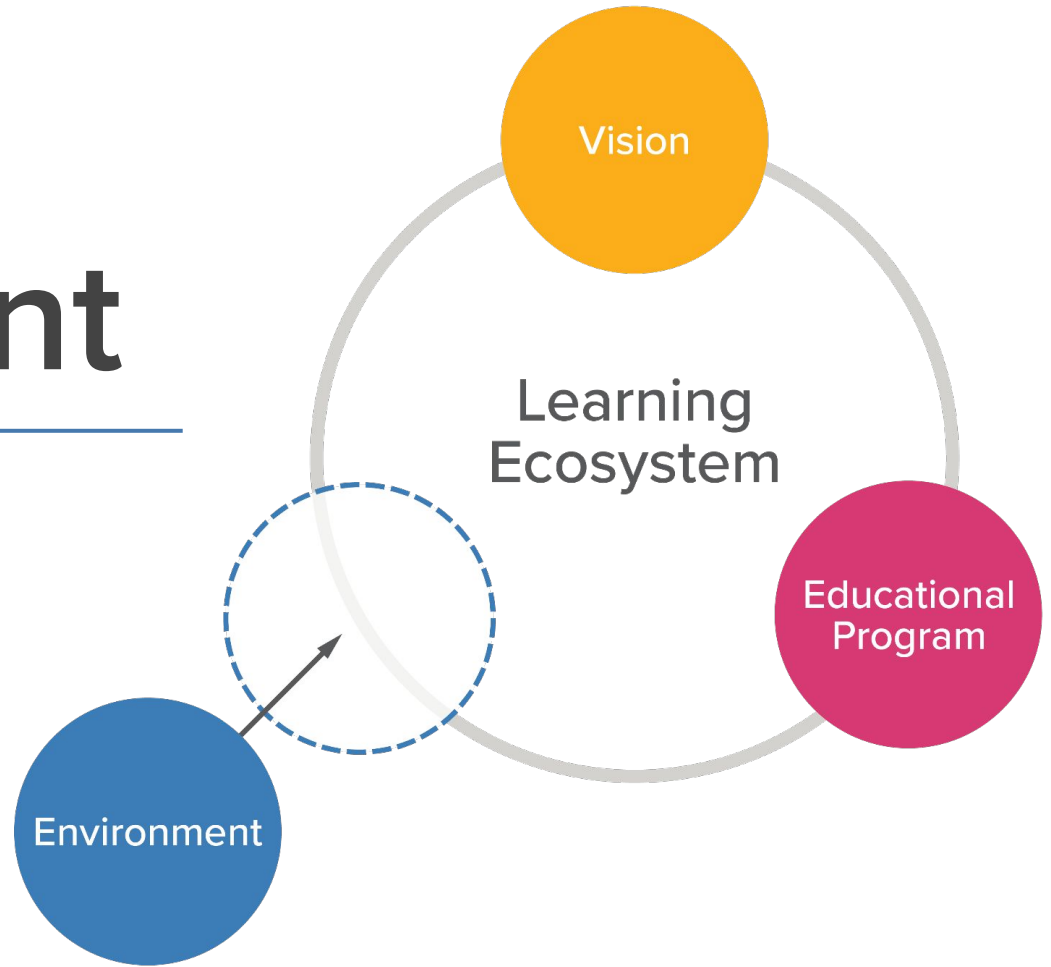
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# Alignment

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# Objectives

**Share Student Leadership Stories:** Share student council members' experiences in driving the design process for reimagining their high school.

**Collaborate on Advocacy Skills:** Illustrate how students translated their peers' needs into actionable ideas and gained confidence in advocating for meaningful change.

**Bridge the Gap Between Vision and Reality:** Highlight the collaborative process of aligning student aspirations with practical, achievable outcomes.

**Design for Change:** Educators and architects will leave with actionable insights into integrating student input into school design and improvement processes.



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# Agenda

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- + **Warm Welcome** 5 minutes  
Introduction to Participatory Design
- + **Why Participatory Design** 15 minutes  
How Participatory Design Can Show Up
- + **Student Leadership** 15 minutes  
Student Stories
- + **Advocacy Skills** 20 minutes  
Design Challenge
- + **Bridge Vision and Reality** 4 minutes  
Q & A
- + **Design for Change** 1 minute  
Optimistic Closure



# Reimagining Education: *Student Voices Leading the Design Process*

## *Participatory Design*

Warm Welcome: Introduction to  
Participatory Design

# Warm Welcome! What makes great school design?

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**10 seconds Word Sprint!** Jot down as many words as possible that describe a great school design (e.g. flexible, welcoming, inspiring, student-led)

**Meet Your Neighbors!** Turn to someone near you and combine your list. Group similar words or add new words.

**Lightning Round Shout-outs!** Shout out one word or phrase from your list.

**Golden Rule Challenge-** One golden rule for great school design based on words shared today.



**Participatory Design** - an approach to design attempting to actively involve all stakeholders (e.g. Students, Teachers, Principals, Families, Community Partners, end users...) in the design process to help ensure the result meets their needs and is usable.

Participatory design is an approach which is focused on processes and procedures of design and is not a design style.

# WHY Participatory Design?

Core reasons why students should be advocates for their learning environment in 2025

- 1. They're the Primary Stakeholders**
- 2. Agency drives engagement**
- 3. They bring unique, future-forward insights**
- 4. Hands-on Learning needs hands-on design**
- 5. It promotes equity and belonging**
- 6. It models democracy and civic engagement**
- 7. Stronger adult-student partnerships emerge**



## **WHY Participatory Design?**

Core reasons why students should be advocates for their learning environment in 2025

# 1. **They're the Primary Stakeholders.**

**Research Insight:** A study by the University of Salford showed classroom design impacts academic performance by 25%. Students know best how space supports or hinders their learning.

Source: University of Salford & Nightingale Associates, 2013



## **WHY Participatory Design?**

Core reasons why students should be advocates for their learning environment in 2025

# **2. Agency drives engagement**

**Data Point:** Students who feel heard are 7x more likely to be academically motivated.

**Source:** PERTS (Project for Education Research that Scales)



## **WHY Participatory Design?**

Core reasons why students should be advocates for their learning environment in 2025

# **3. They bring unique, future-forward insights**

**Educator Insight:** When students help design their space, adults learn how culture, technology, and collaboration are evolving in real time.



## **WHY Participatory Design?**

Core reasons why students should be advocates for their learning environment in 2025

# **4. Hands-on learning needs hands-on design**

**Example:** Experiential learning demands environments that can flex and support movement, making, reflection, and storytelling. When students participate in the design process, the space becomes a tool, not a barrier.



## **WHY Participatory Design?**

Core reasons why students should be advocates for their learning environment in 2025

# **5. It promotes equity and belonging**

**Design Principle:** Inclusive design begins with inclusive dialogue. Student feedback surfaces needs that may otherwise go unrecognized.



## **WHY Participatory Design?**

Core reasons why students should be advocates for their learning environment in 2025

# **6. It models democracy and civic engagement**

Why it matters: Space is never neutral.  
Teaching students to shape their surroundings  
prepares them to shape society.



## **WHY Participatory Design?**

Core reasons why students should be advocates for their learning environment in 2025

# **7. Stronger adult-student partnerships emerge**

**Learning Together:** Adults learn what truly matters to students to students - wellness, flexibility, creativity- and how to embed those priorities into the learning ecosystem.



#1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER

# The Anxious Generation

How the Great Rewiring of  
Childhood Is Causing an Epidemic  
of Mental Illness

Jonathan Haidt

Coauthor of *The Coddling of the American Mind*

# WHY Participatory Design?

Core reasons why students should be advocates for their learning environment in 2025

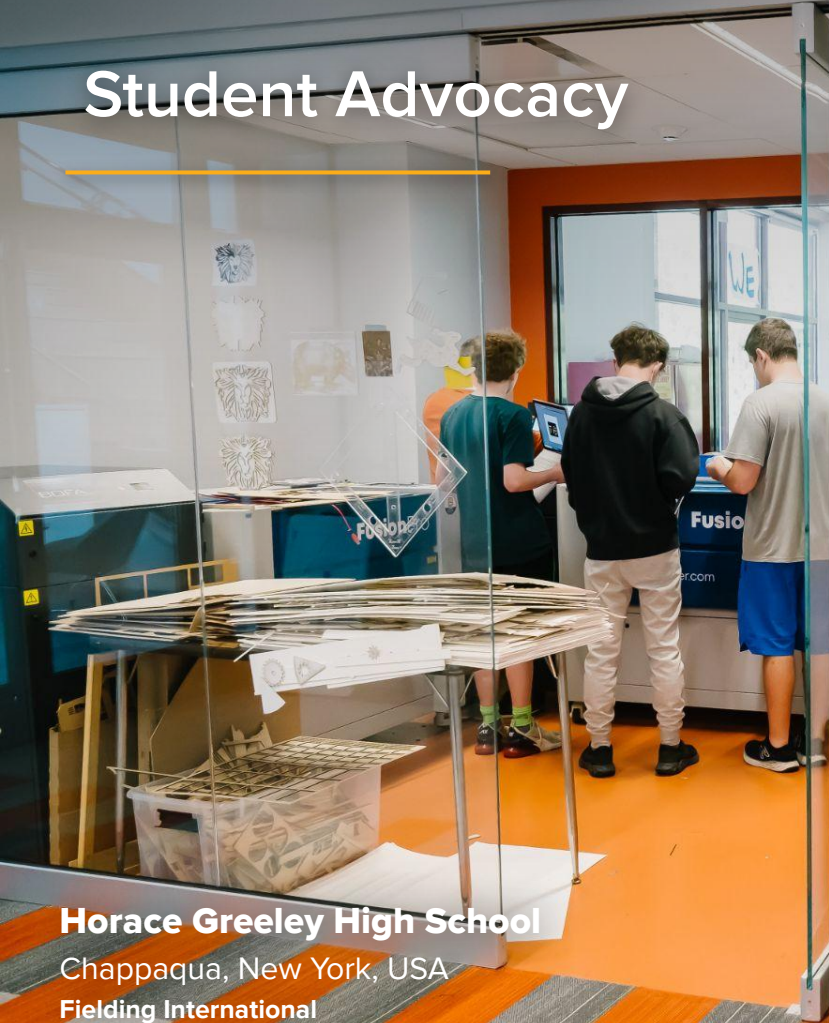
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4. Hands-on Learning needs hands-on design
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6. It models democracy and civic engagement
7. Stronger adult-student partnerships emerge
8. ...

**What is  
your  
WHY?**



# Student Advocacy

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**Horace Greeley High School**  
Chappaqua, New York, USA  
Fielding International



# Relevance

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**International School of Kazan**

Kazan, Russia

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# Connection

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**Hillel Day School**

Farmington Hills, Michigan, USA

Fielding International

# Individual Needs



**Academy of Holy Names**

Tampa Bay, Florida, USA

Fielding International

# Play

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**Mount Vernon Elementary**

Atlanta, Georgia, USA

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# Participatory Design

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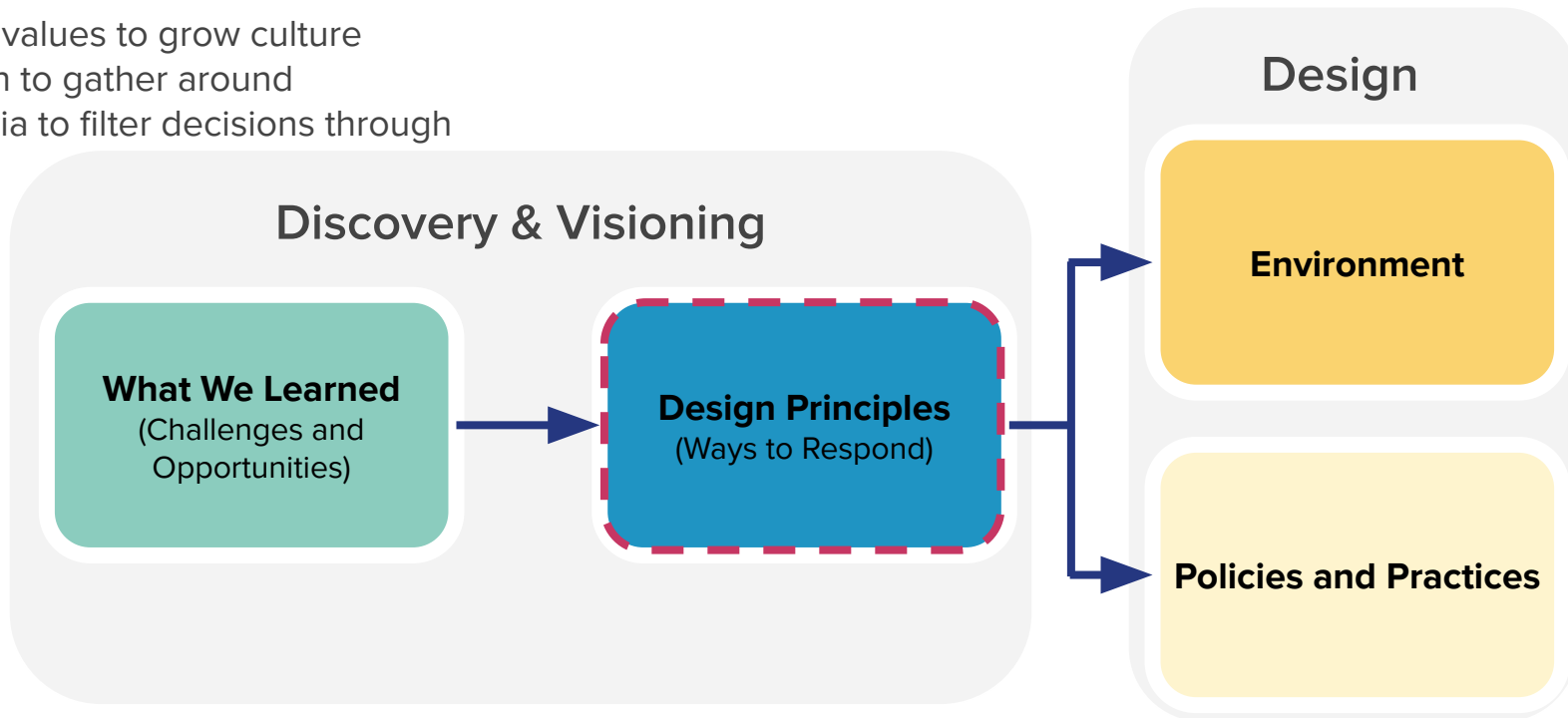
Recent research suggests that designers create more innovative concepts and ideas when working within a **co-design** environment with others than they do when creating ideas on their own.<sup>[1][2]</sup>



# What are **architectural principles**?

## Design Principles / **Overview**

- + Clear values to grow culture
- + Vision to gather around
- + Criteria to filter decisions through



How do we give power and influence to learners to be leaders in school and district decisions toward building future-ready schools?



# Giving power and influence to learners to be leaders in school and district decisions toward building future-ready schools..

- Refines Design Development
- Catalyzes the Schematic Design phases
- Codifies feedback
- Improves engagement processes



# Reimagining Education: *Student Voices Leading the Design Process*

## *Student Stories*

**Student Leadership:** Student council members' experiences in driving the design process for reimagining their high school.

# Story 1: Beyond Our Walls: Insights from Another School



## **Story 2:** If You Build It, Will They Come? Designing Feedback Sessions That Matter



## **Story 3:** Behind the Bond: A Student's Seat at the Table



# Reimagining Education: *Student Voices Leading the Design Process*

## *Workshop*

**Advocacy Skills:** Students translating their peers' needs into actionable ideas and gaining confidence in advocating for meaningful change.

# PERSONAS

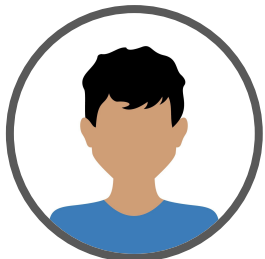
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**Hands-on Learner**



**The Overcommitted Student**



**The Quiet Innovator**



**The First-Generation Student**



**The Nature-Lover**



**The Neurodivergent Student**



**The Aspiring Entrepreneur**



## Hands-on Learner

**Age:** 15

**Background:** A 10th grader who excels in hands-on projects but struggles with traditional lecture-based learning.

**Challenge:** “I love building and experimenting, but most of my classes are just sitting and listening. How can school help me learn by doing?”



## The Overcommitted Student

**Age:** 17

**Background:** A senior juggling AP classes, a part-time job, and leadership roles in clubs.

**Challenge:** “I want to be involved in everything, but I’m always exhausted and stressed. How can school help me manage my time better?”



## The Quiet Innovator

**Age:** 16

**Background:** A creative thinker who comes up with great ideas but feels uncomfortable speaking up in class or meetings.

**Challenge:** “I have ideas to make school better, but I don’t always feel confident sharing them. How can school create spaces where quiet voices are heard?”



## The First Generation Student

**Age:** 14

**Background:** A freshman whose parents didn’t go to college, navigating school largely on his own.

**Challenge:** “I want to do well and make my family proud, but I don’t always know what questions to ask. How can school make it easier for students like me to succeed?”

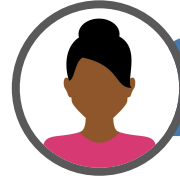


## The Nature Lover

**Age:** 16

**Background:** A junior who finds peace and focus outdoors but is stuck inside most of the day.

**Challenge:** “I concentrate best when I’m outside, but my school day is spent in classrooms with no windows. How can school bring the outdoors into learning?”



## The Neurodivergent Student

**Age:** 16

**Background:** A student with ADHD who struggles with focus in traditional classroom settings but thrives in movement-based learning.

**Challenge:** “I want to learn, but sitting still for long periods makes it hard. How can school support different ways of learning?”



## The Aspiring Entrepreneur

**Background:** A 12th grader running a small business online but feeling disconnected from schoolwork.

**Challenge:** “I’m already learning so much from my business, but school feels unrelated. How can school help me apply my learning to real-world opportunities?”

**Age:** 18

# Hands-on Learner

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# The First-Generation Student

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# The Nature-Lover

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# The Neurodiverse Student

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**Background:** A student with ADHD who struggles with focus in traditional classroom settings but thrives in movement-based learning.

**Challenge:** “I want to learn, but sitting still for long periods makes it hard. How can school support different ways of learning?”



# The Aspiring Entrepreneur

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**Background:** A 12th grader running a small business online but feeling disconnected from schoolwork.

**Challenge:** “I’m already learning so much from my business, but school feels unrelated. How can school help me apply my learning to real-world opportunities?”



# The Future School Experience: A Rapid Prototyping Challenge

**CHALLENGE:** Design a solution that reimagines an aspect of the school experience to better meet the needs of a specific student.

- **(3 min) Empathize:** Review the student persona and discuss their biggest needs.
- **(5 min) Ideate:** Brainstorm as many solutions as possible—no idea is too wild!
- **(7 min) Prototype:** Sketch a quick model, create a storyboard, or write out their concept.
- **(5 min) Share & Reflect:** Each group presents a 30-second pitch of their idea.



# EMPATHIZE - Understand the Student

- Your team will receive a **student persona** with a key challenge.
- Read their background and discuss their needs, frustrations, and goals.
- What obstacles do they face? What opportunities could make their school experience better?



# IDEATE - Brainstorm Bold Solutions

- Generate as many ideas as possible—no idea is too wild!
- Think beyond traditional school models: What if there were no classrooms? No grades? More student choice?
- Consider different learning styles, spaces, and technologies.
- Capture your ideas to be ready to share.



# PROTOTYPE - Bring Your Idea to Life

- Choose one idea to develop.
- Create a **sketch, storyboard, or mini-model** that represents your concept.
- Be visual and creative—think like a designer!



# SHARE + REFLECT

- Each group gets **30 seconds** to present their idea.
- Explain the problem, your solution and how it supports student success.
- The audience can ask quick questions or build on your idea.



# Reimagining Education: *Student Voices Leading the Design Process*

## Q & A

### **Bridging the Gap Between Vision and Reality:**

The collaborative process of aligning student aspirations with practical, achievable outcomes.

# Reimagining Education: *Student Voices Leading the Design Process*

## *Optimistic Next Steps*

**Design for Change:** Actionable insights into integrating student input into school design and improvement processes.

***"The user, the inhabitant, must always be the first architect, and the architect must learn from them."***

- Yona Friedman, Architect and urban planner





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## Thank You!

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