

TWO ANCHORS

that **make** or **break** school change efforts

**How Inflexion Partners
to Build Student-Centered Schools**



inflexion

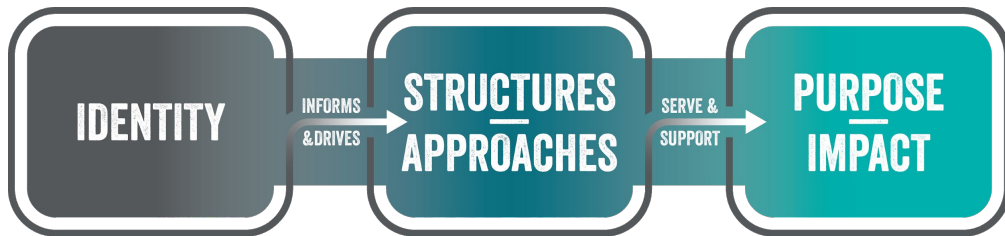
It's no longer just what you know!

Readiness and success should be defined by students' engagement, adaptability, and what they can do with their knowledge.



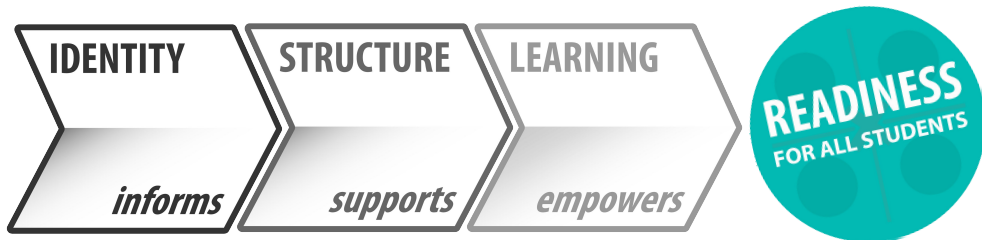
Inflexion is a nonprofit consulting group that helps educators better prepare students for life. We give districts and schools a new way to look at themselves — with all their complexity and culture — to find ways to create a learning community with the best systems and supports to ensure all students graduate ready for college, career, and life. Inflexion, formerly known as the Educational Policy Improvement Center (EPIC), was founded in 2002 by Dr. David Conley, a nationally recognized leader in the field of College and Career Readiness. In November 2017, the Educational Policy Improvement Center (EPIC) changed its name to Inflexion as we shifted from a focus on state and federal policy to one of direct partnerships with educators. Over the years, we have developed a strong reputation as “pragmatic idealists,” working with educators, students, communities, and an impressive list of partners who are dissatisfied with the status quo and motivated to find what really works.

ORGANIZATIONS BUILT FOR **IMPACT**



The organizational theory we put to use – one which has been extensively demonstrated in the field of business – has application across all types of organizations. It is clear that organizations that work, ones that are truly built for impact, have these characteristics in common:

1. a clarity of purpose and desired impact – they know what they want to get done;
2. a shared organizational identity – shared values, beliefs, mental models, etc.; and
3. internal structures and approaches to learning that reflect their identity, align with and ultimately serve and support their purpose and impact.



Identity informs the organizational **Structures** that **support** the approaches to **Learning** that **empower** student **Readiness**.

Applying the same theory to schools and districts: Identity informs the structures that support the learning that empowers student readiness. Schools and districts that have impact on students have three critical things in common. 1) They know who they are (identity), 2) they have a shared vision for readiness (purpose), and 3) their structures and approaches to learning reflect who they are and align and support their vision for readiness. Take a moment to bring to mind a school or district that is knocking it out of the park for all kids. Was their identity clear? Did they have a clear sense of purpose or vision for readiness?

Over the past several years, we have have interacted closely with hundreds of schools. In a handful of them, we have seen clarity of identity and a shared vision for readiness. And all of these are doing right by kids – *all kids*. But this is not the case in the majority, where we see neither a clear and compelling identity nor a shared vision for readiness. Many schools and districts are working hard and trying their best, yet are still struggling to define the outcomes they want for all students.

The purpose of this presentation is to describe the “two anchors” – a vision for readiness and a shared identity – that Inflexion uses, and to explain the effect these can have in terms of structures and approaches to learning.




The first of the two anchors we will discuss is a ***shared vision for readiness***. There are three key components of a shared vision for readiness.

“Balanced” reflects the need for a holistic set of outcomes addressing multiple dimensions, including academic (cognitive and metacognitive skills), behavioral, and social/emotional skills. Embracing a holistic vision for readiness and building school structures and approaches to learning against this vision is huge from an equity perspective, as it allows for other types of “strengths” (metacognitive and social/emotional) to be expressed and valued. Thus, the idea of taking a strength-based approach is possible as kids are recognized for what they can do. In our current system and in most schools, we tell kids it is all about reading, writing, and math. We don’t value other skills (the ability to think, creativity, innovation, communication, collaboration, leadership, student agency) in the same way. We send the message to those who struggle with language or math they are “less than,” they don’t belong. Further, we send kids who excel in language and/or math that they are ready for the world, without acknowledging some serious behavioral or social/emotional gaps that will limit their future success down stream. Setting a shared vision for readiness that is balanced is critical.

“Valued” references the fact that the holistic set of skills are valued enough to show up in lesson plans, grade books, exit surveys, MTSS plans, student conferences, parent and family newsletters, etc.

“Empowered” speaks to the fact that kids need to know both *what* they are expected to learn and *why* they are to learn it. The *why* should be connected to the *what* in the context of students’ future aspirations. Further, the system needs to embrace the idea that the most

important knowledge a 21st century student needs to learn is self knowledge, knowing thyself.
What am I good at, what do I care about, etc?



Our school community (students, staff, and families) shares a defined, common language of a vision for readiness.

Such a vision includes and prioritizes **social/emotional, critical thinking**, and **academic** skills.

Vision for Readiness - Balanced

(1 – not even, 2 – sort of, 3 – somewhat, and 4 – absolutely)

Based on this short overview of Vision for Readiness, please take a moment to think about a school that you are involved with – either directly (as a principal, vice principal, etc.) or indirectly (as the superintendent, assistant superintendent, director, etc.) Read the statement on this slide and think in terms of the entire school community, including students, staff and families.

On a scale from 1–4 – how would you rate your school's response to this statement?

Even in hard-working and well-intended schools, we typically encounter more 1's and 2's than 3's and 4's.



Our students can **articulate** the skills they will have when they leave school; **identify** how these skills will support their career, college, and future plans; and are **actively using** these skills to better themselves and their community.

Vision for Readiness - Empowered

(1 – not even, 2 – sort of, 3 – somewhat, and 4 – absolutely)

This statement gets at *empowerment* as part of a high-impact school's Vision for Readiness. Again, on a 1-4, how do you rate the school you are thinking about?



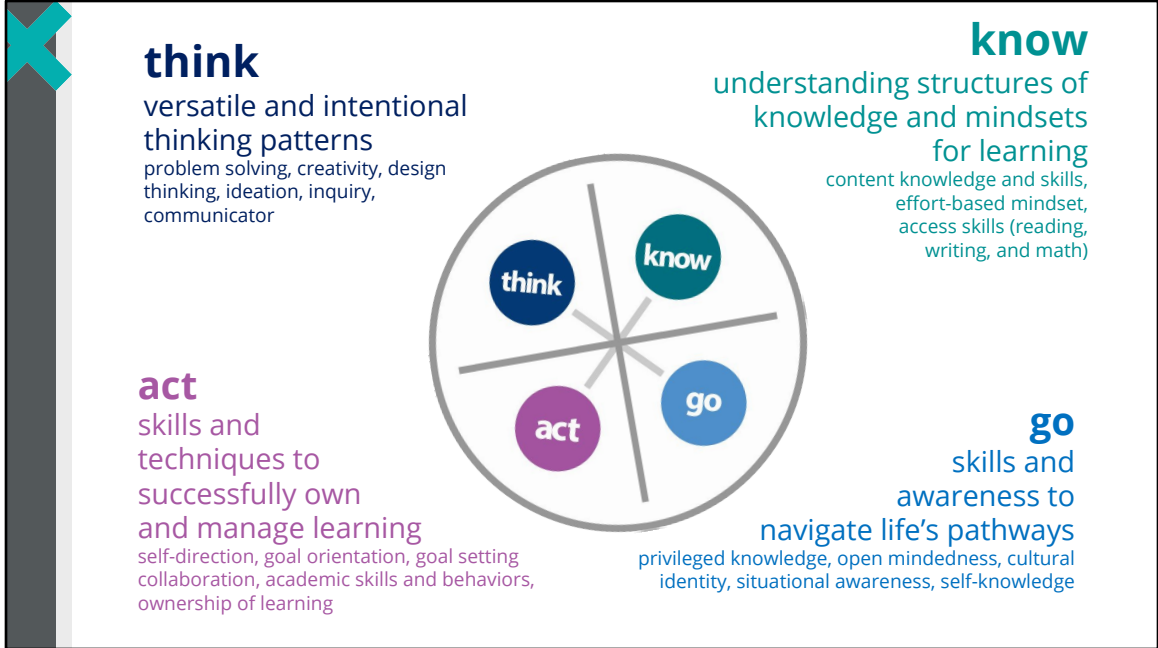
The idea of a shared vision for readiness and the need for it comes from both organizational theory (fixation on an organization having a clear vision or purpose) and the school change literature – specifically the identification of the impact of a “lack of consensus of outcomes.”

Inflexion has historically focused on college and career readiness. We work with the College Board, International Baccalaureate, we did the research for the PSAA in California that led to the development of the College and Career Readiness Indicator – specifically, the inclusion of CTE Pathways as component of the CCI. In short, we know this stuff. But rather than getting into the supporting research and evidence, I’d ask you try a personal thought exercise, one which you can and should do with staff at your own school. We done an activity like this with over 10,000 different groups in a variety of settings, illustrating the NEED for a balanced approach – a shared vision for readiness that values equally a holistic set of outcomes.

Please take two minutes (use a clock!) to create a set of descriptors of a student (your students, your own kids, etc.) walking across the stage READY for postsecondary success. In two minutes, think about and actually write these down.

In one more minute, I want you to identify which descriptors have been the secret to your own personal success (in college, professionally, in your personal life, etc.). Think about it...

If you are near a partner, share your skill and how you developed it?



Keep that one skill you identified – the one you think has been your own key to success – in mind as I quickly walk through a holistic framework for readiness we call the Four Keys.

The Four Keys framework was developed by our founder, Dr. David Conley over a 15-20 year period. It was initially based on four-year college success. In subsequent years, Dr. Conley applied a similar approach to looking at community college, trade schools, industries, etc. I am going to take a few minutes to walk you through the framework, along with a little impassioned commentary as we go.

Think – the classic way of thinking about this is critical thinking and inquiry. It also includes ideation, creativity, innovation, design thinking, etc. This is something we all talk about – yet rarely name.

Know is the classic content knowledge and skills, as well as the access skills (reading, writing, and math). These are the skills that the “system” has deemed so important that if you are a student with disabilities or an English Language Learner, you are often required to be double or triple dosed, often impacting your ability to engage in curricular options that cater to developing the think, act and go skills which we’ll discuss more later. It’s our opinion that our over-inflated value of access skills is part of structural racism that masks the brilliance found in communities where English is not the first or predominant language. We’d also argue that this narrow focus is the driver behind students with disabilities consistently having some of the lowest engagement rates (suspension and attendance statistics) and graduation rates across the country. We fixate on students challenges and weaknesses to the exclusion of playing to their strengths (think, act, and go) and we wonder why we keep pushing kids out.

Act is best expressed as ownership of learning. What we talking about is the ability to be self directed and goal oriented. It also includes the ability to collaborate and communicate as well as some classic academic behavioral skills – note taking, etc.

Go in Conley's original work was all about privileged knowledge – the fact our country's post-secondary education system is the single most complex system in the world. No other country's comes close. While this is still part of go, go has expanded to include elements of student agency – self awareness, self knowledge, situational awareness.

We would argue, and can provide the research, that all of these skills are critical for success and need to be developed – every period every day at the secondary level and all day, every day at the elementary level. But you don't need the research. Go back to your own "key to your success." Where does the attribute that you identified as most causal in your own life success fit in this framework? As you do this, recognize that an attribute you identified might fit in more than one of the four keys. Where does yours fit?

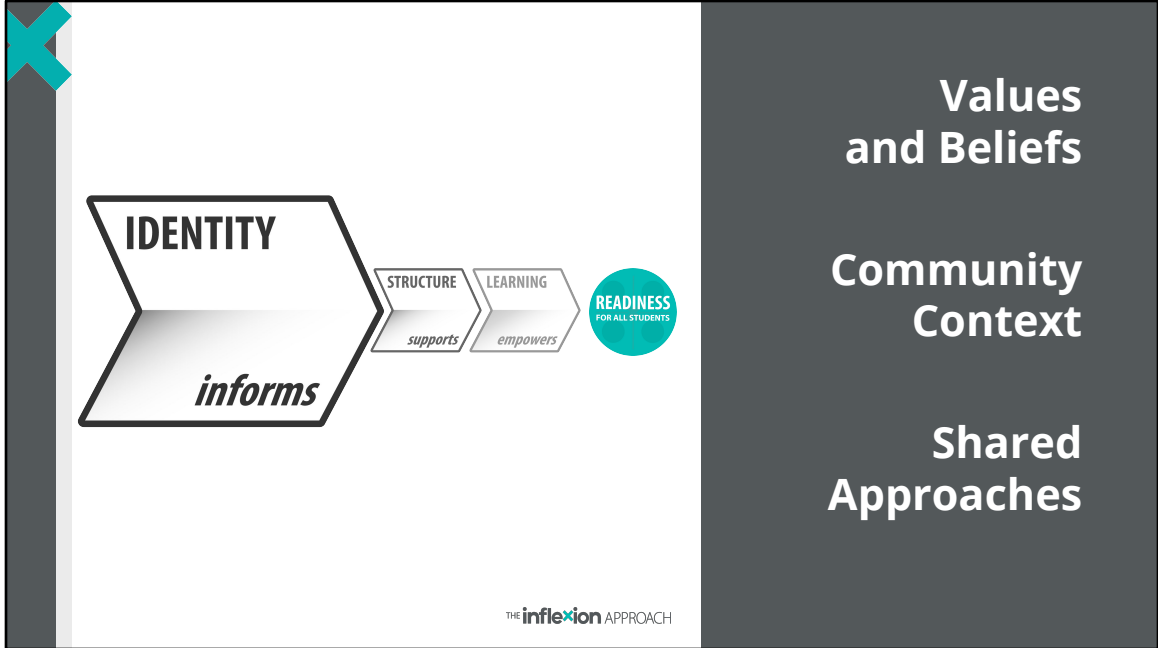
Let's get a sense in the room. I need 7 or 8 people – loud and proud so the room can hear you to stand up – say your name, where you are from - then tell us the one skill and where you think it fits?

We have done this activity with the staff at the Carnegie Foundation, with Nike Execs, with middle school parents whose kids were headed to a brand new high school, with schools and districts we have worked with to develop statements of identity through a range of community engagement activities, with teachers at the AVID national conference and the GEAR UP, and many others. With over 10,000 people in hundreds of venues. EVERY TIME it is the same.

The keys to success in life – are Think, Act and Go. Yet, when we ask folks where their school is at in terms of a shared vision for readiness – specifically, if it is balanced, if it is holistic, we get more 1s and 2s than 3s and 4s. Especially at the secondary level, we see very few schools that purposefully and intentionally work to develop the whole student. Where we see schools with a holistic purpose or vision for readiness, a consensus and commitment to a holistic set of outcomes – we see success for *all* students.

If you take anything away from this presentation, please take away the need to anchor your work, your approaches to learning, your structures to support a shared, holistic vision for readiness. It is critical for success.

Each of us, especially those of us working at the secondary level, can tell stories of students we know personally who represented "false positives." By this, I mean kids who knock it out of the park on the content measures (know) and fall on their face in college and in life because of a lack of act/go skills. This first of our two anchors is critical!



Let's now look at the second of our two essential anchor points: Identity.

By “identity” we mean the organization’s identity, the school or district’s identity. The critical role identity plays in effective schools and districts is predicted in organizational theory literature, based on research in both for-profit and not-for-profit organizations. In short, you will not find a business, a church, a community-based organization, a school, or a district that is truly thriving that cannot readily address the issue of “who are we.”

Specifically, organizations that work – organizations built for impact – have a known shared set of values and beliefs, as well as shared understandings and approaches. Peter Senge refers to these as “mental models.”

“Community context” references the need to develop an identity that is inclusive of *all* stakeholders. In schools, this means it needs to be community driven.



Our school community (students, staff, and families) shares values and beliefs that are articulated in our statement of identity. If asked, anyone in our community would provide a similar response to the question,
“Who are we?”

Identity - Values and Beliefs

(1 - not even, 2 - sort of, 3 - somewhat, and 4 - absolutely)

Let's look at another statement, this one tied to Identity. Think about the school you chose to rate earlier, as we discussed Vision for Readiness. As before, be sure that you are considering students, staff, and families as you rate your school.

What fits? A 1 or 2? Or a 3 or 4?



Our school's identity has been **shaped by the community** (students, families, and staff).

Our school's identity embraces and incorporates **student and family voice**.

Our school's identity reflects and respects the **historical and cultural context** of students, families, and the community as a whole.

Identity - Community Context


(1 - not even, 2 - sort of, 3 - somewhat, and 4 - absolutely)

Here are a few more statements. Please think about your students, staff, families and your community overall would rate your school on these statements about identity.



An organization's identity – its shared, values, beliefs, and mental models – live below the surface. They are the root system that are the lifeblood of the structures and approaches (the trunk, branches, and leaves) of the organization. Often, we hear that a school has a culture problem, or a climate issue, or low morale. 9 out of 10 times, the root cause of those issues is a lack of shared identity, and/or a disconnect between our stated identity below the surface and what we are doing above the surface.

Too often, statements of identity or other “similar but different” types of statements (vision and mission) are created with only one stakeholder group in mind – neglecting to recognize that the school's identity needs to speak to students, to families, the community, as well as staff.



Spencer Butte Middle School is designed to deliver a personalized and engaging experience for all students. Our welcoming atmosphere is a purposefully created ambience meant to relay to the community that we take our responsibility of educating students seriously. Our whole child approach fosters the well-being of all students. We value students, families, and the community. Students are seen as individuals who have distinct needs, likes, dislikes, aspirations, and talents.

Engage, Inspire, Empower

Let's take a look at an example. Here's one from Spencer Butte Middle School. Who is this written for? Which stakeholder group is going to be drawn to this statement?

Think about your own school's or district's vision or mission statements. Does it sound similar to this one?

Try this statement on. Ocean View High School down in Orange County – it does not have a view of the ocean – by the way.

Read it out loud.

Who is this written for? What values and beliefs jump out at you? Can you see their “vision for readiness” and how the holistic characteristics “bucket” under their three statements of identity.



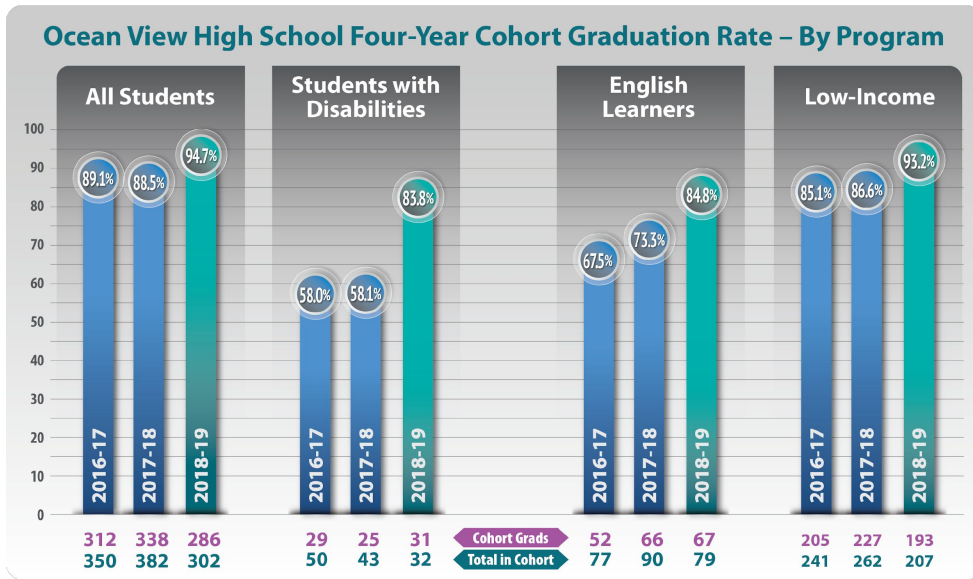
Now try this statement on. It's from Ocean View High School in Orange County, CA. (This is a school that does not have a view of the ocean, by the way.)

Read this statement out loud. Who do you think this would speak to? What values and beliefs jump out at you? Can you see their “vision for readiness” and how holistic characteristics fit under their three statements of identity?

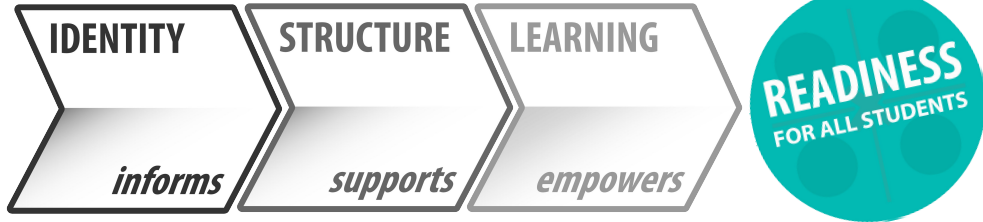
Can you imagine how the Ocean View statement is more memorable and actionable than the one we looked at last? Which of these is your own statement of identity more like?

Raised hand? How many of you have statements of identity that are more like the first??? How about Ocean Views. Let me show you what it has meant – in terms of student outcomes at Ocean View to have the two anchors (shared identity and vision for readiness).

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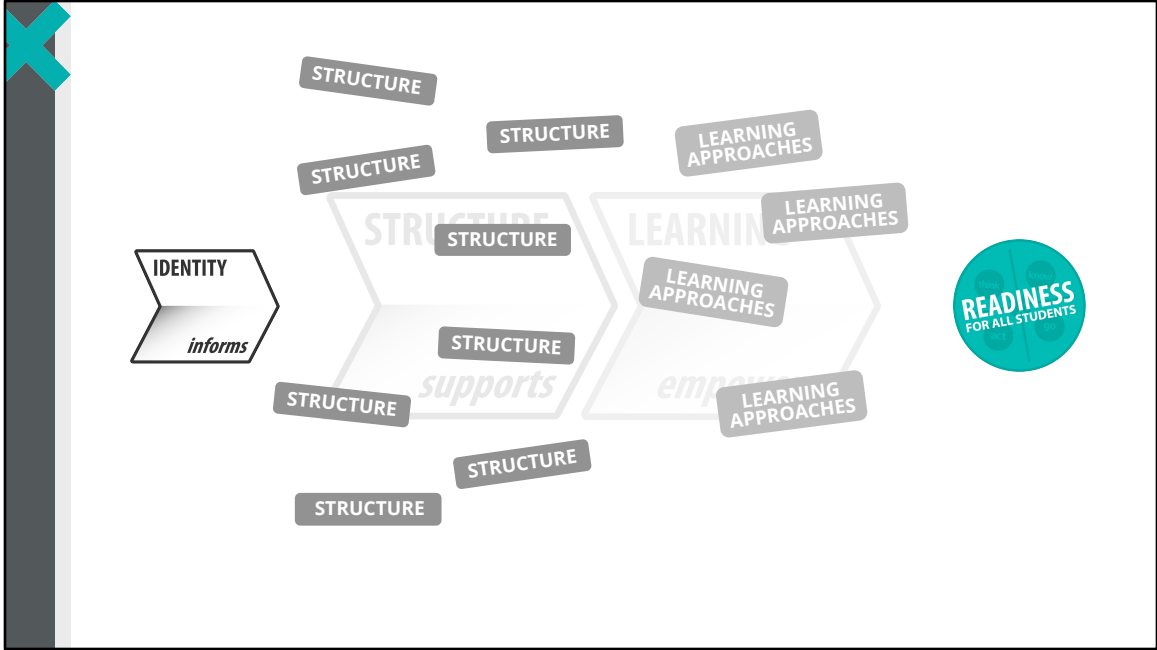


At Ocean View, since going through the work of defining and adopting a shared vision of readiness and identity, graduation rates for *all* students are on the rise. At the midpoint of the 2019/20 academic year, they are on track to be holding thee improved rates for all students, including students with disabilities, English Learners, and students who are economically disadvantaged (69% Free and Reduced overall).

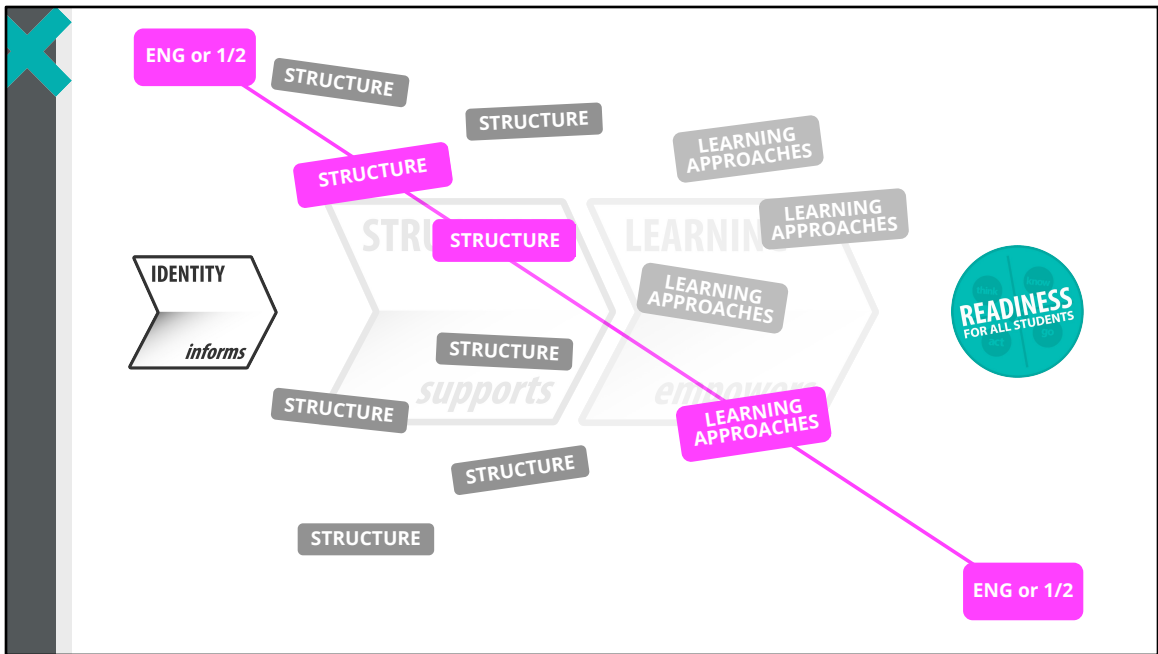


Identity **informs** the organizational *Structures* that **support** the approaches to *Learning* that **empower** student *Readiness*.

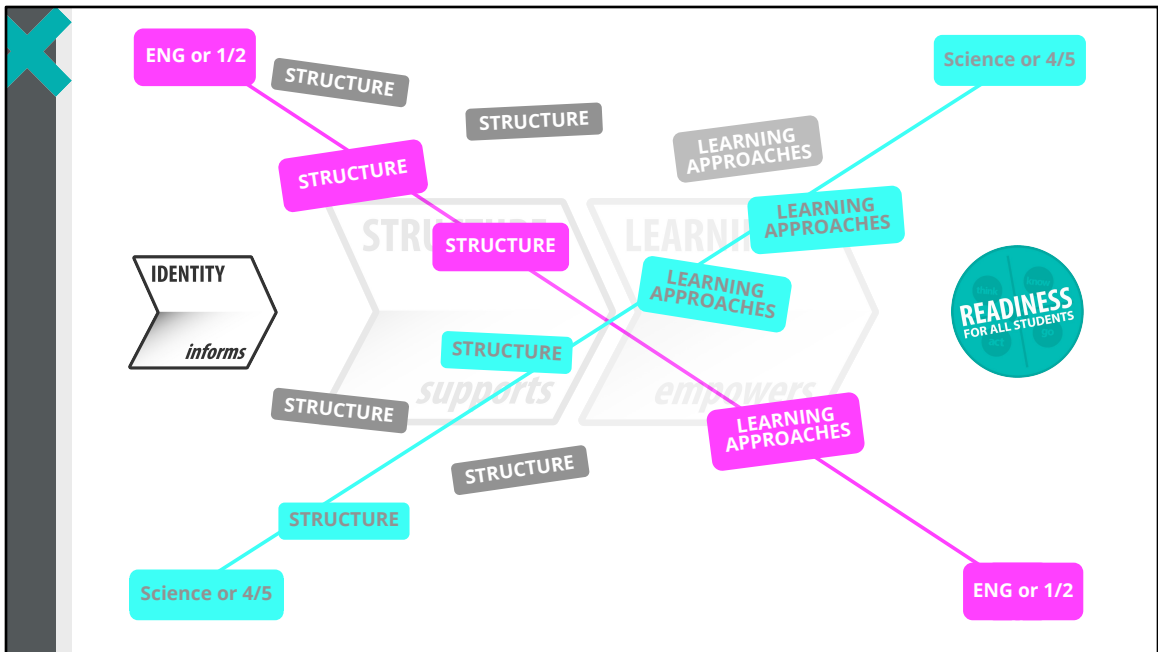
You may already be familiar with Michael Fullan’s work on coherence and the need for strategic alignment. The question is cohere to what? What should we be aligning with? Our model suggests that you can draw a line between the two anchors – identity and vision for readiness – and draw a type of “guide line” between them. Once you have that, it becomes clear that you should be working to “cohere” to that guide line.



Here's a conceptual illustration of what we mean. It's a reflection of what we see in most schools. Multiple structures (policies, practices, processes, etc.) and approaches to learning all co-exist, yet without cohering or reinforcing one another.



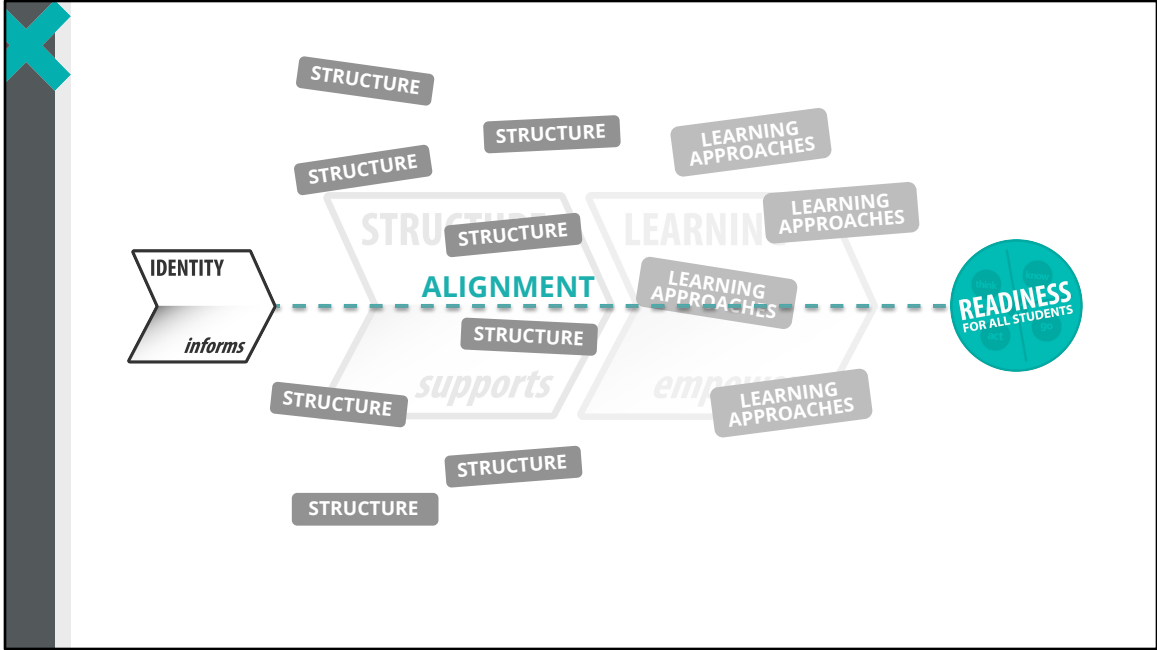
In schools with a lack of identity and vision for readiness (and in the few hundred schools we have looked at, this is the rule, not the exception) this is what you see. You see the English department or the primary teachers have an identity that is unique to them and aligns with a vision for readiness they share with each other, but not with the collective school as a whole. In this scenario, the structures these groups advocate for are prioritized, because those structures support whatever the approaches to learning are that line up between their unique identity and their vision for readiness.



Then there's the science department or the upper elementary teachers.... In this same school (again, more the rule than the exception) the science department or the grade 4/5 teachers advocate for a set of structures that support specific approaches to learning that line up between their unique identity and their vision for readiness. What you end up getting is gridlock. The school is not able to move/change.

Think about it. The ultimate structure in a high school is the master schedule. Anyone who has gone through the process of reconsidering the master schedule knows that the science department is going to advocate for some type of block schedule to support the ability to do high quality, inquiry-based labs. The world language and math departments are going to advocate for a schedule that allows them to engage with their students every day, because it is "critical" for students to engage with the content regularly, without the day on/day off of a 4x4 block, or not having math or world language for a 12-week period in a trimester schedule.

Such incoherent structures are typical, and they are what school change researchers over the past twenty years have called out. The lack of a consensus of outcomes paralyzes schools from moving on with substantive change.



After a school or a district works to develop a shared identity and vision for readiness, they are then able over time to bring their entire system into alignment. They are able to nudge their approaches to learning and the structures that support them into coherence. In some cases they may even identify certain structures in place that can and should go away.

Think about your own experience and this model or way of thinking. In schools you've seen that work, can you clearly perceive their identity and shared vision or consensus of outcomes? How about those that didn't work for all kids – can you see the gaps?



I am going to briefly describe the way we think about approaches to learning. While they are not the only ways to think about approaches to learning, we would argue that the three components called out here – universal design for learning, the student experience, and expansive opportunities – are the most critical and inclusive buckets, and the ones to which schools should be paying the most attention.



Our school's instructional approach is designed to:

- meet individual student **interests, aspirations,** and **needs**;
- address **academic, behavioral, social/emotional,** and **physical** development
- build a **sense of self** and **belonging** for all students
- and aligns with a **shared vision for readiness.**

Approaches to Learning – Universal Instructional Design

Universal approaches to instructional design – common language, frameworks, a philosophies which students see throughout their entire school day – are essential, especially when we think about teaching to a holistic set of outcomes.

Most educators these days would agree that social/emotional learning is a critical part of what schools are responsible for. But do your high schools have a shared understanding or definition of social/emotional skills or competencies? Are your high school teachers actually including social/emotional development as part of their syllabi?

This is a huge issue at all levels, but especially at the secondary. Schools need to share a holistic vision for readiness and it needs to be addressed universally – every period, every day.

Beyond social/emotional learning, the same mindset applies to other aspects of holistic outcomes. For instance, the inclusion of student interest and aspirations (student voice) should be part of all teachers' universal approach to instructional design. And all teachers should feel the need to build students' sense of self and belonging (student empowerment and inclusive practices) into their instructional design. Project-based learning, design thinking, and culturally specific approaches to instructional design all offer wonderful platforms for "approaches to learning" that touch on such elements.



Our school's approach to learning is:

- driven by **student voice**.
- prioritizes the development of **self-knowledge** and **student agency**.
- ensures all students experience an **engaging, empowering, and inclusive** learning environment.

Approaches to Learning – Student Experience

In terms of the student experience, student voice and choice are critical, and represent a phenomenal approach to incorporating culturally inclusive and sustaining practices. Incorporating practices that include the intentional development of self-awareness, self-knowledge and ultimately student agency are essential for 21st century learning. Many would even argue that the *most* critical thing for kids to know in the 21st century is to “know thyself.” Focusing on a student experience that is student-centered and inclusive of reflective practices is critical when the goal is to prepare kids for a 21st century world.

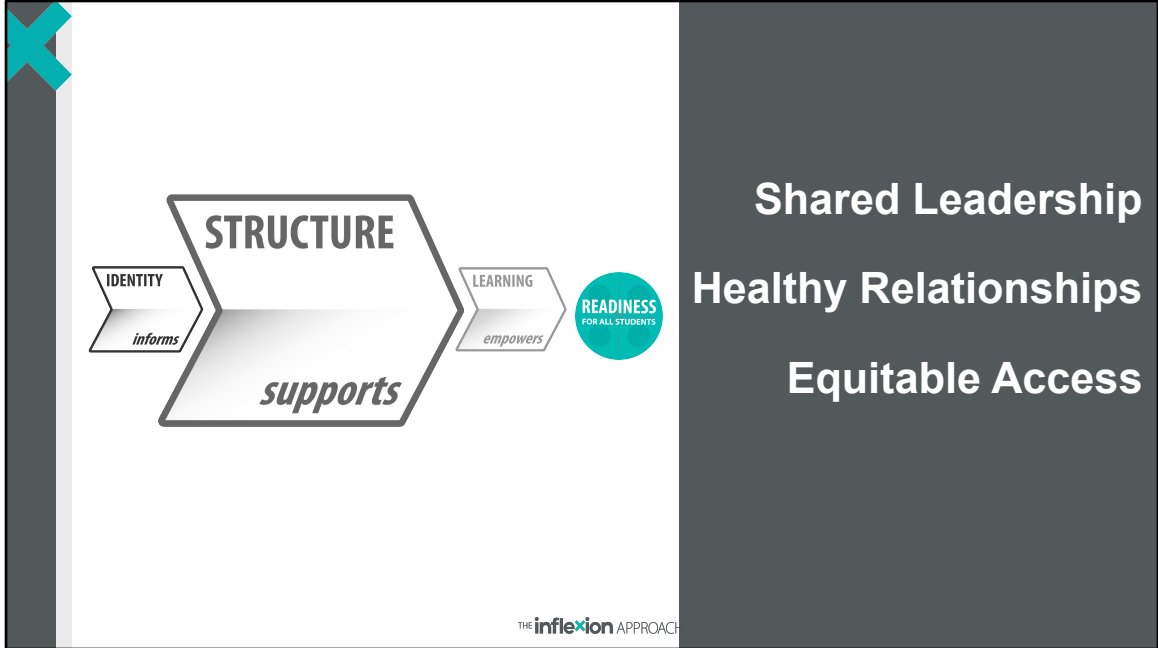


Student opportunities, supports, and curriculum are:

- **needs-based** and linked to **established** standards;
- integrated and supported across **academic, social/emotional, behavioral** and **physical** domains;
- and delivered using multiple approaches including **large-group, small-group,** and **individual** opportunities.

Approaches to Learning – Expansive Opportunities

Finally, the concept of expansive learning. This is really a call for a multi-tiered system of support that places student needs at the center, yet recognizes that those needs cross the academic, social/emotional, behavioral, and even physical domains. It also recognizes that schools need different approaches that are applied in different types of settings (large group, small group, and individual). In schools that work, expansive opportunities align well with the vision for readiness as well as with the universal instructional approaches being employed.



Shared Leadership
 Healthy Relationships
 Equitable Access

In schools that work for all kids, the structures reflect the identity of the school and support the approaches to learning designed to serve all kids.

As an example, if you are a PBL type of school, you need a master schedule that supports that approach. It's very difficult to do something like PBL in isolation and/or in 45-50 minute periods. Not impossible, just not fully supported. Grading practices are another example of a structure. In a school with an identity that emphasizes a belief in a growth mindset, you would assume that the grading practices would incorporate some type of flexibility.

As we've shown here, our work identifies three sorts of structures. These are each components that are essential for an effective school that works for every kid.

Shared leadership speaks to the need for a) inclusive decision making, including all stakeholders; b) intentional, continuous improvement practices; and c) focused development of the talent pipeline, from recruitment, through hiring, onboarding, evaluation, and professional learning. Think for a moment about your school's hiring practices, just one aspect of the talent pipeline. If you hope to hire someone who stays in your district for 30 years (and who doesn't hope to hire for the long-term?) a hiring decision is potentially a 2 million dollar decision. How well do your school's interview questions actually reflect and embody the values and beliefs you hold as a school or district? How reflective are your questions in terms of a shared, holistic vision for readiness? What do your onboarding processes look like? How about your evaluation practices? Are your evaluations simply about quality instruction, or are they about quality instruction against a set of shared outcomes? These are critical questions that often can't be answered, because stakeholders don't share an identity or a vision for

readiness. In schools that work, hiring, onboarding and evaluation each align with who they are as a school (identity) and what they are trying to get done for kids (vision for readiness).

Healthy relationships really comes down to how students are known by their name, face, and story. This may be less of an issue at the elementary level, but is a persistent challenge and (we would argue) often a fatal flaw in secondary school design. It is tough to empower students, or to create choice, or to support kids getting what they need (expansive opportunities) when it is really easy for kids “to be not known.”

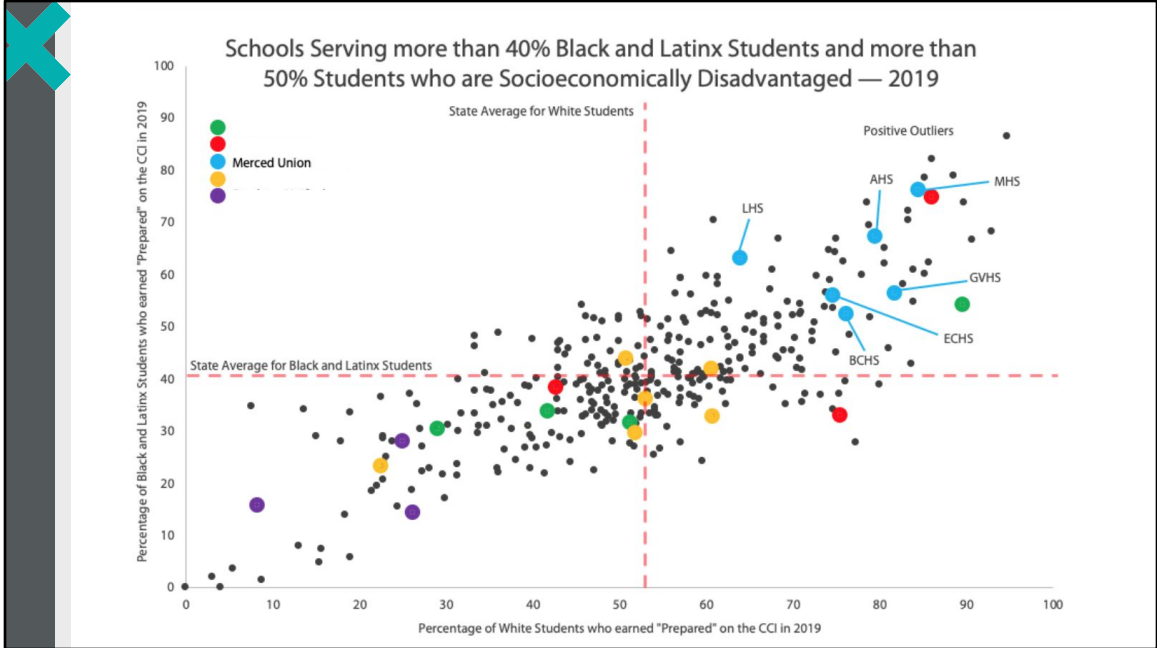
Equitable access is focused on the policies, practices, strategies to ensure kids get what they need, when they need it.



When you have a school that anchors all that it does (structures and approaches to learning) to who they are and what they are trying to get done for kids, *great things happen*. We, as a research organization, are agnostic when it comes to approaches to learning and/or structures. When people ask us, what do you think about AVID, or PBL, or AP vs IB, we ask the question: *How well does it align with who you are (what you value and believe) and what you are trying to get done in terms of a shared vision for readiness?*

I'd like to offer an example. Kanu is a native Hawaiian immersion school. Their approach to learning and the structures they employ are like no one else we have seen. Kids spend half of their week in traditional classrooms and half of their week working "in the field" (as the kids would say), working on student-driven, community-based projects requiring collective effort. They start every day in the middle of the quad (rain or shine) engaging in native Hawaiian rituals to align mind, body, and spirit.

This school serves a student population that is 85% native Hawaiian. In terms of results, they see 10 times the number of native Hawaiian students transitioning to post-secondary education than the overall transition rates of native students, rates that are significantly below their non-native peers.



Here’s another example in the state of California. About five years ago, the Merced Union High School District approached the opportunity to reinvest/rethink education (LCAP/LCFF) with a clear sense of what they wanted for all students (vision for readiness) and what they believed. Essentially, they focused on 21st century skills – a holistic set of skills – as a vision for readiness and were driven by the beliefs that all kids can learn, and that student interest and aspirations should be the primary drivers.

Critical decisions were made. They moved from a six-period day to a seven-period day to support student access to an expanded set of CTE courses and programs. They strategically aligned their coursework with their local higher education partners. They set aside resources to pay for coursework and AP exams for ALL students.

What kind of results have we seen? This is 2019 data from the CCI. Each dot represents a California high school, and the blue dots call out the six high schools in the Merced Union District. Along the horizontal access, we have the percentage of white students who earned a “prepared” on the CCI. Along the vertical access, we have the percentage of Black and Latinx student who earned a “prepared.” The dotted line along each access represents the state averages.

As you can see with the blue dot, every Merced high school is in the positive outlier quadrant where black, latinx, and white students are all above average. As you can see, each of the six is significantly above the state average for black and latinx students. This is very different from the positions where Merced schools started five years ago, and represents terrific improvement at each of their schools. The red and green dots represent high schools from

districts across the state that are regularly recognized for the results they have gotten historically, for all kids. The yellow and purple dots represent comparable schools to the Merced Union schools.

Bottom line – Merced Union is getting results. We would argue that they are doing so because they have made strategic decisions over the past five years that are aligned with a clear sense of identity and vision for readiness.



DREAM IT We innovate and adapt to pursue our goals
LIVE IT We show up and grow stronger every day
SHARE IT We inspire and take care of those around us

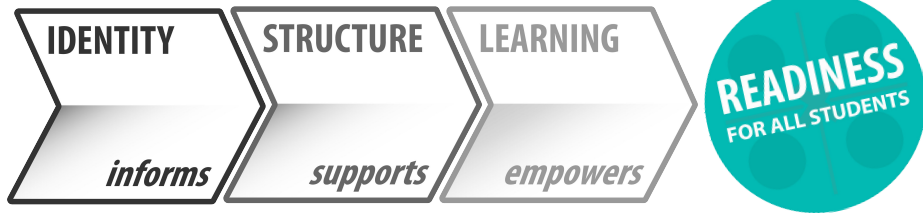


WE CREATE
Ideas are discovered by exploring new perspectives

WE BUILD
Solutions are strengthened by collaboration

WE SHARE
Relationships are sustained by open communication

High schools in the Merced Union District no longer have long, educator focused statements of vision or mission. They have straightforward, meaningful and apparent statements of identity that express who they are and what they are trying to accomplish.



See a summary of the research backing up our approach

To learn more please visit: inflexion.org

Thank you for your time and attention.