

An Overview of the School Design Process

The first step in the School Redesign Process is accepting that it is both possible to design new school models and acknowledging there is immense value in the process itself. Toward that end, I encourage you to read “Yeah, but... Isn’t Redesigning School Models Impossible?” prior to reading this post.

The process of designing a new school model for a given community is, as noted in the post linked above, actually very straight forward and within reach of any community willing to give it a go. Note that I did not say this will be easy.

This process is human-centric, which means it is at the mercy of human relationships, emotions, biases, and much more, but that is also why this can be exceptionally rewarding far beyond the possibility of designing a new school model. This process will also take time, from one to five years or more, but it can benefit children from the beginning even as the current model continues to operate.

Following are brief descriptions of the steps of the design process. I will be creating posts that go into greater depth on each of the steps described here. In addition, my book, *Know Power, Know Responsibility: How to Unleash the Potential of Every Child in America*, goes into much more detail on this entire process. Here is a summary of the process:

1. Determine the reason(s) you personally are interested in designing a new school model; this is a critical step in bringing integrity to the process.
2. Have conversations with others in your community about the idea of designing a new school model; this will be ongoing throughout the process, but early on it’s about developing a coalition of people who will commit to the process; you are strongly encouraged to include children in your conversations and as part of your coalition.
3. Develop an initial definition of your “community”; for many places this will be geographic, but even then, the “boundaries” might not be clear; in some cases, geographic boundaries won’t work at all; and your definition of the community may change during the process.
4. Begin to research brain development and how people learn; if you have formed a coalition of community members, use this research as a catalyst for further conversations; your coalition can all read some of the same research and sources and discuss it, or people can divide up to read and research different aspects and then share what they learned with the group.
5. Formalize your coalition and make a commitment to follow through on the design process; members of the coalition begin to take on more formalized roles as the process becomes more deliberate; that also means the members have to determine the level of commitment they are willing and able to make and must bring a high level of integrity to the group and the process.
6. Establish a vision for your coalition and your process; determine what you want to accomplish and what your community will look like if you are successful; when you begin the actual design, you will largely be working backward from your desired end state—that is, your vision; establish a vision statement along with principle and belief statements.
7. Begin the journey of self-discovery for your community; you need to truly understand who you are as a community including the resources available and the obstacles to children being able to pursue their true potential; this journey will continue throughout and beyond the design process.
8. Determine the readiness of your community to design and then implement a new school model; this is also part of self-discovery and another place integrity is so critical; your level of readiness doesn’t matter, but you need to know the point from which you are starting (Is there a lot of opposition to doing this that must be overcome or are lots of people chomping at the bit or are you somewhere in between?).

“IT’S A TRAP!!!” (with all due credit to Admiral Ackbar) The following steps will pull you with unbelievable force toward the current school model. You will think of current school requirements as you consider Step 9; you will think of grade levels, classes, school buildings and everything else you think of as “school” as you consider Step 10. While a new design could include some aspects of the current model, be very deliberate about exploring the entire universe of possibilities as you continue the process. “Let go, Luke. Use the Force.” (with further credit to Obi Wan Kenobi) If you want an example of what this might look like, explore the free chapter from my book, [The Summitville Learning Community](#), which is available on my website knowresponsibility.com.

9. Explore the outcomes you want for children who have experienced your new school model; what knowledge and skills should they have developed and mastered? What attributes should they have adopted? What sorts of experiences should they have had? Coalition members should consider the knowledge, skills, and attributes that were important for them and those they wish they had learned; begin by being comprehensive; you can pare this down later.
10. Explore the ways children can learn, grow, and develop; all coalition members should consider their own journeys to their current place in life and what things were most effective in their own learning, growth, and development as well as what was missing; consider how, where, and with whom you learned and what drove the learning; consider all hours of every day of the week, month, and year; consider all places and circumstances; again, be comprehensive and pare these possibilities later.
11. Explore all the things that interfere with the learning, growth, and development of children in your community; again, look at all aspects of children’s lives to figure out all the things that get in the way of them pursuing their potential.
12. Revisit your vision, principle, and belief statements; make sure you’ve been working with integrity throughout the process and reflect on the various statements as you prepare to design the actual school model.
13. Begin piecing together the outcomes you developed in Step 9 with the means of learning, growing, and developing identified in Step 10; work backwards from what “graduates” of your model should look like to figure out the experiences and opportunities they would need to become the “graduates” you envision; figure out which experiences and opportunities need to precede or follow others to achieve the desired outcomes; as you proceed through this step, consider the obstacles and challenges from Step 11 so you can avoid or counter them to the greatest extent possible.
14. Begin planning the actual school model based on your work in Step 13; you will not be trying to create a finished plan that will remain static; rather, because this is a human-centric system with its inherent infinite dynamics, it will be in a constant state of flux; the planning allows your coalition and community to readily adapt regardless of how things change.
15. Begin planning the implementation process of the new school model; this includes developing timelines, necessary resources, and a variety of parameters that must be considered; as with Step 14, this will not result in some perfect, static plan, but rather being prepared to adapt as the implementation process occurs.
16. Begin executing your plans. It seems this would be the hard part and be the most complex, but if you have done the first 15 steps well and with integrity, you will be exceptionally well-prepared, and executing your plan will be exciting and joyful rather than worrisome and stressful. Maybe most importantly, by this point you will have learned to embrace the dynamic nature of the process and even that some aspects of the plan will be all messed up—and that is exactly as it

should be since the new school model is meant to prepare children to thrive in a dynamic and uncertain world.

The Lego Analogy

Most of us are familiar with Legos. As a kid, my Legos were just raw materials. As much as I can remember, they didn't come in kits with instruction manuals. Now, Legos come almost exclusively as kits, and many are incredibly detailed and complex. Think about the Lego designers putting these kits together. The process is much like Steps 6, 9, 10, and 12-15 for designing a school model.

The designers begin with a vision of the final product of the kit, say the Eiffel Tower (Step 6). Then they explore all the available Lego pieces that could be used in the design and the ways they can be put together to achieve the vision (Steps 9 and 10). Developing the actual kit may involve trial and error with different parts in different orders and could require creating some new parts not currently in the inventory in order to achieve the desired end-state or vision (Step 12).

The designers then need to create the instruction manual. This requires working backwards from the final product (vision) to determine what steps must follow or precede other steps (Step 13) and then putting those steps into the correct order (Step 14). Finally, the designers need to lay all this out in the instruction manual so builders can follow all the steps to achieve the final vision—the completed Eiffel Tower (Step 15).

The school redesign process has additional steps because it will be done in a very dynamic, human-centric environment with lots of challenges that must be addressed and, like the Legos of old, the actual end product will be different for every community; there won't be a single plan that can be used everywhere. Also, the school redesign process will itself be in a constant state of flux and there will never be a "final" plan. This reality will be explored much more fully in [related resources](#) available at knowresponsibility.com.