

TWO ANCHORS

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

Why defining school identity and a vision for student readiness come first

Policy pressures, demographic shifts, and other influences have led to a crisis of identity in American public schools.¹ Many school communities lack consensus on the specific knowledge and skills all students should get from their education. Students struggle to succeed and don't graduate well prepared to contribute.

**Schools
CAN work
for EVERY
student**

Many change efforts start with a focus on organizational structures or learning approaches. This is skipping steps. Too often, this approach results in situations where students and families do not see themselves in their school or instructional content. Attempts at system-level improvements are incoherent, sporadic, and unsustainable. Efforts and investments fall short. Students fall through the cracks.

Schools that have a **SHARED VISION FOR STUDENT READINESS** and a clear, shared **SCHOOL IDENTITY** are positioned to succeed.

These **TWO ANCHORS** provide support for what's needed to improve student outcomes.

Hurdles to school change

- Low expectations
- Fatigue and teacher isolation
- Rigid or unrealistic initiatives
- Standardized testing diverts from real improvement.
- Fragmented efforts leave out some students or departments.

¹ Neumerski and Cohen, 2019

ANCHOR ONE

Shared vision for readiness

Define and communicate the holistic set of skills that ALL students need for success after high school.

SHARED VISION FOR READINESS APPLIES TO THE WHOLE COMMUNITY

- Created in inclusive partnership with students, teachers, caregivers, and the larger community
- Includes transformative concepts that promote educational equity
- Shows the path for moving forward
- Gets communicated internally and externally

Addressing structures that advantage some and disadvantage others requires schools to first include and empower all stakeholders.

SHARED VISION FOR READINESS SEES THE LEARNER AS A WHOLE PERSON

- Considers the value of college, career, and life readiness
- Emphasizes interpersonal, intrapersonal, and metacognitive skills
- Values social-emotional skills and well-being
- Supports mental and physical health
- Incorporates postsecondary transitional skills
- Includes proficiency in numeracy and literacy

SHARED VISION FOR READINESS CONNECTS TO INSTRUCTIONAL CORE

- Goes beyond just stating desired student outcomes and provides clarity about the role of teachers and content in achieving success
- Gives direction on building the corresponding structures and conditions to foster professional development and collaboration
- Results in a more coherent organization that eliminates the silos and multiple identities typically found in large public schools

When your vision is connected to the instructional core (students, teachers, content), students understand how school connects to their future plans.

ANCHOR TWO

School identity

Create an explicit statement of what your school stands for and where it intends to go. Visibly express the shared values, beliefs, and ways of making sense of the world that are central, distinctive, and enduring to your school.

ROOTED IN ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTITY RESEARCH

- Foundational for sustaining a strong school culture and climate
- Defines the attributes that students and educators are expected to exemplify
- Helps schools through large-scale change efforts with cohesion and shared purpose
- Leads to behavioral change and shifts in deep-seated assumptions

ALIGNS SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY IDENTITIES

- Expands narrow definitions of values related to teaching, learning, and achievement
- Accounts for the assets, strengths, and gifts of diverse students and the surrounding community
- Opens the door to culturally inclusive learning approaches
- Reflects the student body accurately

"In organizations, real power and energy is generated through relationships. The patterns of relationships and the capacities to form them are more important than tasks, functions, roles and positions."

– Margaret J. Wheatley

REQUIRES COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- Involves families and external stakeholders in the decision-making process, creating connections
- Is meaningful: goes beyond surface attempts
- Assigns identity custodians, tasked with saying, showing, or staging
- Charges them with correcting situations where identity misalignment is occurring
- Is reinforced through repeated communication to dissolve multiple identities operating within public schools and the broader community

THE ANCHORS IN ACTION

ONGOING AND MEANINGFUL STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

- Outreach ensures that dominant perspectives do not overpower the input and voice of historically marginalized groups of people.
- Privilege and power dynamics are identified and managed.
- Input is an authentic process not a symbolic exercise.

APPROACHES TO LEARNING ALIGNED TO A SHARED VISION FOR READINESS

- Universal approaches that align with a holistic vision for readiness are foundational for 21st-century readiness.
- Classrooms that recognize and develop a broad set of skills allow for strength-based approaches.
- Strategic and intensive supports aligned with academic, behavioral, and social-emotional development ensure all students can be served well.

COHERENT ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURES

- Structures, practices, and policies that reflect the identity of the school reinforce and sustain the values and beliefs.
- Coherence between organizational structures and approaches to learning is made possible and is anchored to both shared identity and a vision for readiness.
- Leadership decisions can be made with the community in mind and on behalf of all students.

"We are making decisions that impact and change a student's life forever and if you don't have something that you can adhere to as a school, then what are you basing those decisions on?"

– Dr. Courtney Robinson,
Ocean View High School Principal



A shared vision for readiness and school identity bring about improved decision-making.

- It becomes an explicit part of the hundreds of decisions made by administrators, teachers, students, parents, and other stakeholders every week.
- It answers the questions, Is this who we are? Does this align with what we are trying to achieve for all students?
- It guides school leaders toward internal coherence—a powerful approach for promoting organizational learning and school improvement.
- It's the foundation for systems and supports that ensure all students graduate ready for college, career, and life.



inflexion
decisions that drive student readiness

To download our full report ***Two Anchors that Make or Break School Change Efforts*** and to learn more about an evidence-based approach to improving student success, visit bit.ly/twoanchors