

Using Design Thinking Principles to Identify Human Centered Solutions

Navigating school leadership amidst Covid-19 with conviction, empathy and creativity

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1. Name your Design Principles

Before you begin designing new solutions for your school community, it is important to put a stake in the ground, and identify your *design principles*. Design principles are guidelines for solving a problem, independent of any particular solution. They are often derived from our own core values, and allow us to put a stake in the ground about what, above all else, we want to be true for our students, families and staff. Good design principles force clarity out of ambiguity.

To develop your design principles, start by asking yourself the following questions:

- What do I know about my stakeholders' current experiences?
- What do my stakeholders need out of this experience?
- What non-negotiables do I have about what I want to be true for my stakeholders?
- What specific goals do I have for my stakeholders?

Design principles should be **specific** and **descriptive**. Once identified, your design principles will serve as guiding parameters for any decision you make in a design project.

Example:

The use of time at school will...

- *Reflect our mission and strategic vision*
- *Put relationships and wellness at the center of all experiences*
- *Enable training of our community to maximize potential and support the development of enduring work habits*
- *Give students authentic voice and choice*
- *Promote robust, relevant learning experiences*

2. Identify Existing Barriers and Create Opportunities

2a. Barriers to Success: *What is stopping these stakeholder groups from having the experiences you want them to have?*

Now that you have your guiding design principles, it's time to take a step back and look at the *big picture* surrounding your stakeholders' experiences. What is stopping them from having the experiences you want them to have? It is important to think broadly about barriers, and refrain from narrowing in too far on a 1x1 need and solution.

For example, you may think of a barrier to learning might be students' limited access to the internet. While this is certainly a barrier, when we look beyond, we uncover that the real barrier is actually that many students lacking the connection with classmates and teachers that they used to have. While the only real solution to the first barrier is to increase internet access—which may not be within our control-- by zooming out, we open up new opportunities to create

several solutions. How can we find new ways to connect students with classmates and teachers that don't rely solely on internet?

2b. How might we? Use the HMW framework to identify opportunities for overcoming the barriers you identified.

The *How Might We* framework is a useful way to turn barriers into opportunities for new solutions. HMW statements should serve as the seeds for realizing your design principles. They should be broad enough to allow for a wide range of solutions, but narrow enough to provide helpful boundaries for brainstorming.

3. Brainstorm Potential Solutions

The brainstorming protocol is a collaborative way to identify many solutions. Grab members of your team, and brainstorm as many solutions as possible to each How Might We question. Our suggested method is using sticky notes to capture each idea and “popcorn-ing” them out as they come. Keep in mind, too, the Rules of Brainstorming:

- Defer judgement
- Go for quantity
- Be visual
- Headline your ideas (make them short and pithy)
- Build on the ideas of others
- Encourage wild ideas
- One conversation at a time
- Stay focused on the topic

Once you have completed the brainstorming, it is helpful to identify any themes that emerge from your ideas and sort them according to your themes. After “going big” while brainstorming, this will help you narrow back in on potential ideas to try.

4. Test your Assumptions

When designing solutions for others, it is always important to remain aware of our own biases, and any assumptions that we may be making about stakeholders, the challenge(s), and the solutions we have identified. Sometimes our assumptions might be correct, but taking a step back to reflect on them also gives us the space to identify any blind spots that we may have missed, and want to learn more about before committing to a solution.

Use this framework to reflect on your process thus far and identify the assumptions you are making.

- What assumptions are you making?
- What do you need to learn more about to test whether these assumptions hold true?

Once you have taken the time to test your assumptions and learn more, come back to your brainstorm list and identify a high-leverage solution to try out with your stakeholders.

Design Principles Design

Design principles are guiding parameters and constraints for any decisions you make in a design project. Design principles emerge from patterns found in design research and prototyping. Design principles are guidelines for solving a problem independent of a particular solution. In order to design equitable solutions for your school community, write design principles for each the stakeholder groups you serve, while considering those facing the most barriers to success.

1 The experience for students will...

2 The experience for teachers will...

From Barriers to Opportunities

Use this framework to help reframe barriers to success into opportunities for your different Stakeholder groups.

1 Barriers to Success:

What is stopping these stakeholder groups from having experiences you want them to have?

Students

Teachers

Families

2 How might we?

Use the HMW framework to identify opportunities for overcoming the barriers you identified. We will use these HMW questions to brainstorm solutions.

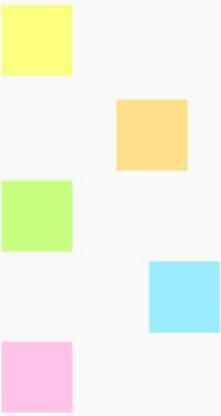
HMW encourage students to...	HMW encourage teachers to...	HMW encourage families to...
HMW inspire students to...	HMW inspires teachers to...	HMW inspire families to...

Brainstorm!

Don't forget the Rules of Brainstorming!

- Defer judgment
- Go for quantity
- Be visual
- Headline
- Build on the ideas of others
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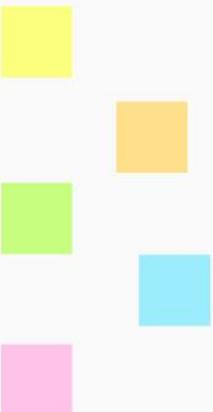
1 Brainstorm: HMW...



Draw inspiration from...



2 Brainstorm: HMW...



3 **Brainstorm:** HMW...



Assumptions to Test

Use the framework below to reflect on your process thus far and identify assumptions you are making about your solution.

1 Assumptions about Your Stakeholders

What assumptions are you making about your stakeholder?

What would you like to learn more about?

2 Assumptions about the Challenge

What assumptions are you making about the problem your stakeholder is facing?

What would you like to learn more about?

3 Assumptions about the Solution

What assumptions are you making about why your solution is going to solve the problem?

What would you like to learn more about?