

Springpoint Indicators of School Quality

Introduction

Springpoint's work is grounded in an unwavering belief that all young people - regardless of environment or background - can find success in high school, college, and beyond. We believe the job of high school is to ensure a high quality education for all students that encompasses a broad vision of student success. And yet many high schools have failed to provide all young people with the education they deserve, instead contributing to the systems of oppression that limit opportunities for students from historically marginalized groups. We must do high school differently.

Doing high school differently means designing schools grounded in a deep understanding of the students served and committing to orienting all model elements around those students. Springpoint has identified seven indicators of school quality that create a high quality, student-centered learning environment. These seven indicators are grounded in the tenets of positive youth development theory, which recognizes that young people's ability to achieve academic success is interrelated with their success in achieving key developmental outcomes of social and emotional learning and identity formation. They highlight what positive youth development looks like in practice when schools have the structures, teaching strategies, learning experiences, and supports in place that intentionally reinforce a deep understanding of and commitment to students.

Springpoint believes the following tenets of positive youth development, when practiced by the school community consistently, enable the personal development necessary for students to achieve and excel academically.

- Students need caring, trusting, and supportive relationships with adults and with their peers.
- Students need and respond to high expectations.
- Students need authentic opportunities to contribute.
- Students need rigorous learning experiences that intentionally engage their interests, prepare them for success beyond high school, and include feedback that enables them to succeed and reflect.

In order to design schools that disrupt systems of inequality and directly respond to students' needs, these youth development tenets must be undergirded by equity practices. In schools that are designed with positive youth development at the core, all students are encouraged to assess their circumstances, understand existing disparities, shape their identities, and strengthen their sense of agency. These practices support adolescent development and create an environment where deep, meaningful learning can flourish. However, without clearly developed systems in place for the school community to deeply engage with the systemic inequities that students encounter daily, efforts to build authentic relationships and relevant learning experiences for students or to support students in building their own identities cannot take root in the school. This work also requires structures to enable adults to examine their own implicit biases, build intercultural competence, and understand the depth of equity that exists so that they may design systems and experiences for students that ensure a high quality education for all young people measured through a broad vision of student success.

About This Tool

This document provides a framework, including a set of definitions for each of the components of the seven indicators of school quality in practice. The tool, which is a living document, is intended to help guide educators who are designing and operating school models that will achieve a community's shared vision of student success. Positive youth development and educational equity—which should underpin all systems, structures, and practices in a school—are named across all seven indicators because these must exist holistically in order to create learning environments where all students thrive.

Additionally, we provide look fors to support designers and practitioners in recognizing what high quality practices can look like inside of a school. The indicators are both concrete, to help educators build a strong vision of excellence, and broad, to allow for customized implementation suited to the unique realities of students and communities. We do not believe there is a “one-size-fits-all” approach to achieving an effective, coherent school model that serves students well.

Last, the indicators are comprehensive and aspirational by design. While school designers and practitioners will likely want to strive for exemplary expressions of these practices, it is important to recognize that the journey to becoming an excellent school takes years of thoughtful practice and iteration. We hope they support designers in building a vision of excellence and informing school practice along the way.

A Note About Equity Commitment & Practices

Given the imperative of ensuring equity and justice for all members of an educational community, this tool attempts to holistically capture the expression of school-based equity practices. At schools that prioritize equity as a schoolwide value held by all stakeholders, these equity practices are integral to all systems and structures. These schools develop a cycle of assessing learner outcomes to identify and address inequities, focusing on historically marginalized groups. As a result, all learners experience the benefits of the practice, and the school actively seeks to change any practices that negatively impact any learner or group of learners.

Because we believe that every young person can achieve at high-levels, when there are differences in outcomes based on demographics, this gives us important information; it tells us that there are ways that our schools and the systems within are failing certain populations. This information can not only fuel our sense of outrage and conviction, but push us to better understand the root causes of why. In our work with schools, we have found that the following are common places where inequities are perpetuated and amplified. As such, these are often good places to look and learn more.

- **Mission & Values.** A school's mission and values are a litmus test for decision-making and guide the everyday interactions that make up a student's experience in a school. Equity must be an explicit, prioritized schoolwide value that is practiced regularly and embedded into a school's systems and structures in order to meaningfully impact students' experiences and outcomes. This includes creating structures that enable adults to examine their own implicit biases, build intercultural competence, and understand what levels of equity exist in their school and community so that they may design systems and experiences for students that ensure a high-quality education for all young people measured through a broad vision of student success.
- **High Expectations.** A strengths-based approach to adolescent development and academic achievement is a key pillar of equity practices. Research shows that students are more likely to successfully embrace and complete challenging learning opportunities when they believe they are capable of succeeding and understand what effort it will take to achieve mastery. Adults support this growth mindset by fostering

caring relationships, consistently communicating clear, high expectations for all students, and by providing appropriate scaffolds and supports.

- **Culturally Responsive Teaching Practices.** Effective culturally responsive teaching practices ensure students develop independent learning skills, feel seen and acknowledged in their classroom, build positive relationships with their teacher and their peers, achieve academically, and develop a critical consciousness about the world we live in.
- **Data Practices.** Data paints a picture of a school's—and each individual student's—progress. Understanding who is and is not being served by a school's systems and practices requires regular reflection on both qualitative and quantitative data. Evolving to ensure equitable outcomes for students also requires mechanisms for changing a school's approach based on what the data reveals.

Additionally, throughout the tool, the language of "historically marginalized groups" is used to allow for flexibility to apply to a range of contexts and ensure equity-based responses. For example, schools might focus on equity responses such as making sure that Black boys and young men are not disproportionately subjected to disciplinary action; girls and young women are included in upper-level STEM courses; and Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) learners, learners with disabilities, and English language learners are included in advanced classes. Because some marginalized groups may not be disaggregated in formal/standardized data sets, such as LGBTQIA+ identities, and because equity practices must be responsive to the lived experiences of the students in a school, communities should define for themselves what inclusion and equity mean in their school and regularly revisit this definition to ensure representation, access, and success for all students.

Indicator #1: Coherent Mission	Secondary schools that effectively serve all students have a clearly defined mission that is rooted in an unwavering belief in the potential of all students and that is deeply understood by and resonant for all stakeholders.
Key Indicators of Practice	
#1a: Positive Youth Development	The school mission is grounded in the tenets of positive youth development and explicitly articulates an unwavering belief in all students, especially the importance of high expectations for all.
#1b: Equity at the Center	Equity and anti-racism are mission priorities, and these values are operationalized throughout all of the school's systems and structures.
#1c: Shared Mission	The mission is deeply understood and resonant with all stakeholders including administration, teachers, support staff, students, families, and key community members. There are authentic opportunities for a diverse array of stakeholder and student feedback, and the school community is able to see how feedback is being used to shape the path forward.
#1d: Coherence	All decisions and changes are made with the mission as a litmus test.
#1e: Goal-setting	The school leader has articulated a concrete vision for how the mission will be met. The school community understands what the most important priorities are at all times and maintains clear goals and indicators to know if they are making sufficient progress in these areas.

Indicator #2: Positive School and Classroom Culture	Secondary schools that effectively serve all students ensure that students are well-known, respected, and part of a community that radiates affirmation and a sense of what's possible for young people.
Key Indicators of Practice	
#2a: Positive Relationships	The school actively seeks to build nurturing and trusting relationships with all students. Adults are accessible, supportive and trustworthy. Student-adult and student-student relationships are characterized by mutual respect and serve as a key source of support for students in their creation and pursuit of academic and personal goals.
#2b: Routines and Rituals	Institutional structures and rituals are leveraged to enable students and staff to develop a shared sense of identity and belonging as members of the school community. Structures and rituals are grounded in cultivating trust, building connections, and celebrating accomplishments and the community.
#2c: Shared Values and Norms	The community has a clear set of shared values that are understood, internalized, and upheld by students and staff. These values are aligned to the broader goal of fulfilling the tenets of positive youth development.
#2d: Assets-based Identity Formation	The school intentionally takes an assets-based approach in creating an environment that is inclusive and affirming of students' identities and provides authentic opportunities for students to develop strong personal identities. All students feel welcome and known, and staff are able to cultivate relevant and responsive pedagogical approaches.

Indicator #3: Rigorous and Relevant Learning Experiences	Secondary schools that effectively serve all students leverage their understanding that students thrive when their education is rigorous, relevant, and clearly connected to the development of college and career readiness competencies.
Key Indicators of Practice	
#3a: Rigor	Learning experiences are aligned to college-ready standards (e.g., CCSS, NGSS, College Board, or other research based standards) that foster disciplinary reasoning and require students to be critical thinkers.
#3b: Relevance	Learning experiences are designed to focus student inquiry on relevant and engaging topics – those of particular interest to the students, the school, and the local community - and involve real-world problem solving and engagement with the outside world.
#3c: Progression, Transparency, and Feedback	Learning experiences have a strategic and logical sequence that makes clear how the learning experiences build upon one another, how they tie back to a driving question, and how they are intended to support students in mastering skills and knowledge, and clearly defines what is required of students.
#3d: Personalization	Learning experiences are designed to hold all students to the same outcomes. They are also personalized, and students are provided with the appropriate scaffolds needed to ensure mastery of content and skills.

Indicator #4: Academic Systems	Secondary schools that effectively serve all students are guided by a schoolwide, mission-aligned, instructional vision that defines what students must master to be college and career ready. The school uses this definition to strategically develop and sequence adult and student learning experiences and to develop systems that best advance students towards promotion and graduation.
Key Indicators of Practice	
#4a: Instructional Model	The school has articulated a clear, succinct, mission-aligned instructional vision, and all academic systems work to meet that vision.
#4b: Curriculum and Standards	All courses are strategically standards-aligned and/or competency-aligned, resulting in coherence across grades and subject areas that promotes college-and career-readiness for all students.
#4c: Systems to Support Strong Instruction	The school leverages an array of teacher supports and collaborative structures to systematically improve instruction.
#4d: Graduation Pathways	The school has developed a robust set of course offerings that support multiple pathways and all students have access to college preparatory coursework.

Indicator #5: Student Supports	Secondary schools that effectively serve all students ensure that students have a comprehensive set of supports, resources, and opportunities to advance along a pathway to graduation.
Key Indicators of Practice	
#5a: Transparency of Student Performance	Students understand the requirements for progressing through their courses and graduating college and career ready. Systematic processes are leveraged such that students know at all times how they are performing in a course and where they are on their pathway to graduation
#5b: Primary Person	Each student has a primary person with whom he or she meets to discuss progress to graduation and has a meaningful relationship based on trust and personal connection. This adult has a manageable caseload, understands that his/her primary responsibility is to serve as the student's academic case manager to ensure that each student is making adequate academic progress, and is available to check-in as frequently as the student needs.
#5c: Systems to Support a Primary Person Model	Systems and structures enable adults to consistently and effectively monitor student progress, identify when additional support is needed, and marshal resources to provide students with appropriate support as needed.
#5d: Student Agency	Students own every step of their pathway to graduation, informed by an understanding of the school's graduation requirements, their performance level in each content and skill domain, their interests, and their experiences setting goals and reflecting metacognitively on their progress towards those goals.
5e. Collaboration with Families and Student Supporters	There is regular communication between the school and families and/or adult supporters so that members of students' outside support networks consistently know if students are on or off track toward their next academic checkpoint on the way to graduation.

Indicator #6: College and Career Planning	Secondary schools that effectively serve all students ensure that every student has a clear and viable postsecondary path to college and career success that represents informed and authentic choice.
Key Indicators of Practice	
#6a: Empowering Postsecondary Choices	Members of the school community believe all students should graduate with a rigorous postsecondary plan and embrace the community's collective responsibility for supporting students in making an informed and authentic choice.
#6b: College and Career Learning Sequences	College and career learning sequences equip students with the knowledge, skills, and resources to assess a comprehensive range of postsecondary options such that students fully understand the implications of different pathways and can make fully informed choices about their path after high school, as well as evaluate the implications of current choices on postsecondary options.
#6c: Enrichment Experiences	All students are matched with meaningful experiences outside of the classroom that accelerate learning, promote identity development, provide opportunities to explore college and career pathways, and build students' competitive resumes.
#6d: College Counseling	All students receive support with the process of developing a strong college list that prevents undermatching; reflects an academic, financial, and personal fit; and has an appropriate mix of reach, target, and safety schools.

Indicator #7: Strategic Development and Use of Resources	Secondary schools that effectively serve all students optimize people, time, and other resources and engage in constant iteration in order to meet a mission grounded in positive youth development.
Key Indicators of Practice	
#7a: Human Capital	Systematic processes that incorporate student voice are leveraged to ensure that adults are proactively and intentionally recruited, onboarded, developed, recognized, and retained in order to build a seasoned and high-performing team. All members of the team share a firm belief in the tenets of positive youth development, the school's mission, and a commitment to pursuing instructional excellence.
#7b: Roles and Responsibilities	Roles and responsibilities are designed to ensure that there is sufficient focus and attention on each of the school's priority areas aligned to the mission. Clear ownership is assigned for each task or initiative based on an understanding of individual strengths in order to create an effective division of staff resources.
#7c: Strategic Use of Time	The school strategically uses the school schedule and calendar to maximize the use of time in the context of the school's mission, vision, and priorities. Students' time is consistently allocated to high impact opportunities and experiences. Adults are able to collaborate effectively with each other, purposefully conference with students, and deliver on core professional responsibilities.
#7d: Community Partnerships	The school develops community partnerships aligned with key school needs and those partnerships are integrated into all elements of the school, resulting in proactive systems of support and intervention in place for predictable needs.
#7e: Continuous Improvement	The school has established a continuous improvement process that involves a cycle of learning, evaluating, and iterating on the school's practices and model to better serve all students.