



# STUDENTS EMPOWERED

How do we create a culture of mastery that empowers students?



# STUDENTS EMPOWERED | culture

## HOW DO WE CREATE A CULTURE OF MASTERY THAT EMPOWERS STUDENTS?

At its core, mastery learning is about recreating our education system to truly provide rich, multi faceted, and numerous opportunities for all students to develop the skills, habits, and knowledge they need in order to thrive in college, careers, and life. Mastery-based education takes on the structural, systemic, and cultural inequities that bound and shape educators' and young people's experiences in learning communities.

One of the first and most difficult challenges of developing and implementing a mastery-based learning system and approach is changing our mindsets.

The work of developing a culture of mastery in our schools involves shifts in school culture that are observable and those that are out of our awareness, which is part of the reason why it's so challenging to take on. We need to think about tangible shifts about how to adapt and update our pedagogical practices, how curriculum and assessment must evolve, how we use time and space in the classroom, and what tools are available to students. We also need to examine our deeply held beliefs, values, shared understandings, and the meanings and messages that underlie the material and non-material aspects of our culture, exploring the extent to which they support a mastery-oriented culture.

So how to approach developing a culture of mastery?

Let's look at five aspects of culture and what it looks like from a mastery-based learning perspective.

- Mindset
- Relationships
- Teacher collaboration
- Community connections
- Vision of a graduate



What needs to **shift** within these areas?



And what are the **indicators** of a thriving mastery learning culture?

Whether or not you have been using the frame of mastery learning, let's start by identifying where your current practice aligns to and supports a culture of mastery.

# KEY SHIFTS TO MASTERY



## MINDSET

**Fixed intelligence**

*Learners' beliefs about their intelligence and ability matter greatly. They are predictive of student behavior in school, and they greatly influence engagement and motivation.*

**Growth mindset**

**Disconnected from adults & community**

## RELATIONSHIPS

*The quality of relationships between adults and learners has a profound impact on student achievement. Knowing the learners in our classrooms is the foundation of successful personalized learning.*

**Caring relationships that sustain & support**

**Silos & inequities**

## TEACHER COLLABORATION

*When schools and systems break down silos around professional practice and create common competencies, assessments, and expectations that promote mastery, learners benefit.*

**Collaboration & calibration**

**Learning restricted to school hours and walls**

## COMMUNITY CONNECTION

*Deep connections between school and community support personalization and promote equity. Mastery learning systems support authentic, real-world learning because the priority is the demonstration of competency, not where the learning took place.*

**Learning extends beyond school hours & walls**

**Inequitable, variable student outcomes**

## GRADUATE PROFILE

*The graduate profile articulates a vision for learners that goes beyond K-12 academic excellence. It is defined by competencies that are explicit and measurable with learning objectives that describe specific and observable skills, knowledge, and behaviors.*

**Shared, transparent values & competencies**

# INDICATORS OF MASTERY



## SYSTEM INDICATORS



## STUDENT LEARNING INDICATORS

### MINDSET

Norms, routines, rituals, and practices create community, foster a strong sense of connectedness, and help learners develop important social and emotional skills and dispositions.

Learners have a mastery orientation, regularly reflecting on their learning, celebrating their own growth and the growth of others, and demonstrating positive persistence.

### RELATIONSHIPS

Adults build deep, caring relationships with students to support their academic and socio-emotional development, advocate for their well-being, and jointly monitor their academic progress as they advance through the learning system.

Learners feel that they have ongoing opportunities to build strong relationships with adults, who remain formally engaged in their learning, and with peers, who they see as collaborators for learning and co-creators of knowledge.

### TEACHER COLLABORATION

Teachers engage in collegial practice to support student learning, such as collaboratively analyzing student work, planning responsive instruction, and coaching or mentoring one another.

Learners have adult role models for setting goals, ongoing learning, and collaboration with peers; they tangibly benefit from teachers' collegial efforts to improve learning experience and outcomes.

### COMMUNITY CONNECTION

Schools are meaningfully connected to the broader community, providing expanded learning opportunities for students to learn and apply skills, explore interests, and engage in relationship-building beyond the classroom.

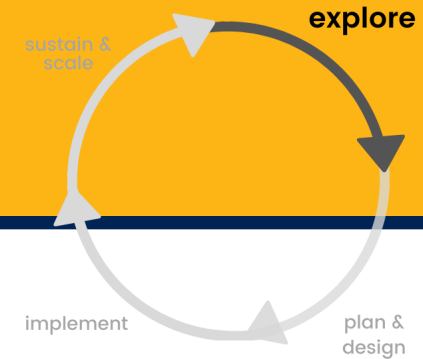
Learners can articulate opportunities for learning experiences that meaningfully connect formal schooling to the local or global community and that are valued by the learning system. Learners feel safe and connected in the learning community, and can describe ways in which their culture and the culture of their communities are valued in the learning environment.

### GRADUATE PROFILE

A set of high-quality academic and efficacy competencies articulate a distilled, equity-driven, unifying school/institutional vision for learner outcomes in a way that is transparent and accessible to all stakeholders.

Learners know what they are learning, why they are learning it, and how it promotes the ultimate goal of their education.

# STUDENTS EMPOWERED | explore



## Explore a culture of mastery.

Advancement upon mastery requires schools to make a deep commitment to meeting every learner where they are, and providing the supports and environment students need to successfully demonstrate mastery. Within the classroom, this means designing student learning experiences purposefully structured to nurture self-regulation and build agency. Let's explore how culture empowers students to be independent, engaged learners.

## OUTCOMES



- Identify a specific aspect of culture to cultivate.
- Establish a goal for classroom, school, or system culture.



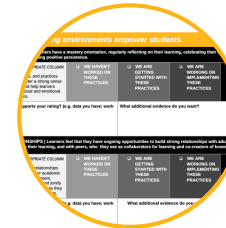
## KEY ACTIVITIES & RESOURCES



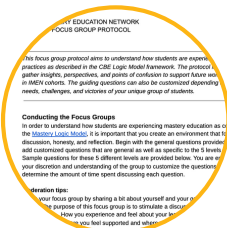
Explore concepts of culture and mastery to build background and prepare for fundamental shifts in thinking about a Culture of Mastery.



Explore the Idaho Mastery Learning Explore Series: Culture to dig deeper into culture to identify areas that need revision or amplification.



Complete the Culture Self-Assessment. Gauge progress toward creating a student-empowering learning environment and identify an entry point for your work.



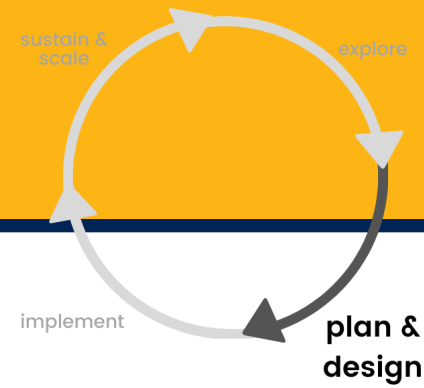
Gather student insights into their sense of belonging and connectedness within the school community using surveys or the IMEN Student Focus Group Protocol. Extend to other stakeholders if possible.



Explore the Idaho Competencies. Draw inspiration and generate questions on how students are empowered by the Idaho State Board of Education Competencies and through intentionally cultivating a culture of mastery.

For Recommended Reading check out Appendix C.

# STUDENTS EMPOWERED | plan & design



## Plan, design, and build capacity for a culture of mastery.

Cultivating a culture of mastery is an ongoing journey. Each school community has a unique culture with its strengths and gaps, so the pathways to mastery are varied. In this stage let's focus on developing a common understanding of the elements of a mastery culture and design a plan of action toward achieving the goal you have established.

## OUTCOMES

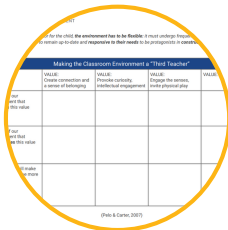


- An actionable plan to meet the goal for classroom, school, or system culture identified in the Explore Stage.
- A common understanding of culture and its connection to mastery learning.



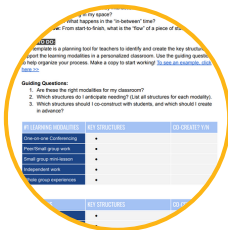
## KEY ACTIVITIES & RESOURCES

### Inspire GROWTH MINDSETS



A successful mastery learning environment utilizes space, groupings, and other structures to meet student needs and support their development as independent, self-aware learners.

- Take stock: Does my classroom environment reflect my values as an educator? You can use this template: [Classroom Design - Values and Features](#) to assess whether your values align with your learning environment.

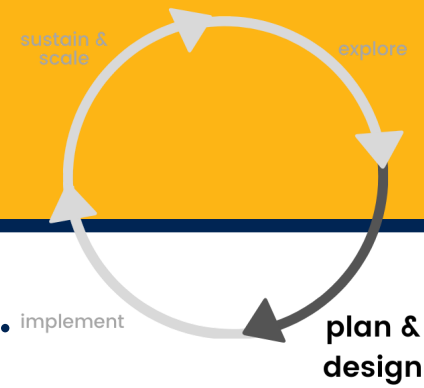


Effective classroom structures help to clarify, prompt, and reinforce desired behaviors and interactions that foster focused learning, ongoing relationship-building, and effective use of time.

- You can also use this [Classroom Design Tool: Key Structures](#) to begin to co-create with students a set of structures (norms, procedures, protocols, routines, schedules, self-monitoring tools) to guide your interactions, nurture relationships, and optimize learning. Explicitly teach students the skills, strategies, and processes that support agency, self-directed learning, and cycles of feedback and revision—key building blocks of a growth mindset.

(More *Plan & Design* activities & tools on the next page >>)

# STUDENTS EMPOWERED | plan & design, cont.



## KEY ACTIVITIES & RESOURCES



### Encourage CARING RELATIONSHIPS

Design structures that deepen relationships among students and between students and teachers, such as mentorship and joint progress monitoring with an adult that persists beyond the end of the school year and into the next. The sessions from [IMEN's Virtual Learning Series](#) offer a guide for advancing anchored, caring relationships.



### Plan for TEACHER COLLABORATION

Opportunities to collaborate with colleagues throughout the design and implementation process will strengthen mastery-based learning and bring an equity lens to the work. Our guiding question: *How can we use protocols to focus and strengthen our collective work in a way that enhances the learning of each student?* Check out the [Collaborative Analysis Tools](#) to try on some new ways of collaborating.



### Deepen COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

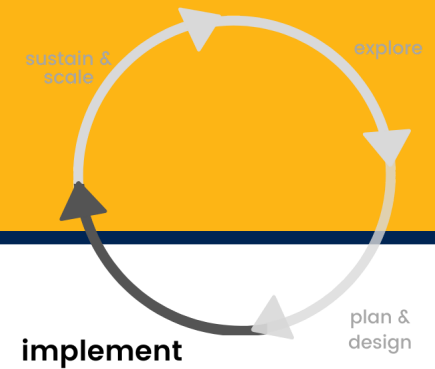
Identify relevant and meaningful guest speakers, community service projects, and internships that will enhance and deepen learning. Create opportunities for students to go into the community to learn from experts, to apply their learning, and to share and communicate what they have learned. Gain inspiration from this video: [Community Partners: Making Student Learning Relevant](#).



### Create a PROFILE OF A GRADUATE

Schools and systems can develop a Profile of a Graduate to create a shared vision for student success. The Idaho State Board Competencies can inspire a system in identifying key competencies for success. The process in this resource, [MITx Course: Envisioning the Graduate of the Future](#) (Also available in this link to the [Course to Go Version](#)) can guide the development of a local graduate profile and includes examples and ideas for engaging all stakeholders.

# STUDENTS EMPOWERED | implement



**Implement your plan, provide feedback and support, engage in action research.**

Now we get into the nitty-gritty work: Implementation! Build in time for teacher learning and collaboration to implement your plan. Having tools to document and measure growth is critical, as is ensuring a process to capture data and evidence so you can tweak and adjust. As you implement, take the opportunity to apply an equity lens to the important work of creating a learning culture where all students are empowered.

## OUTCOMES



Data to

1. inform evaluation of goals identified in plan; and
2. development of new goal and plan.

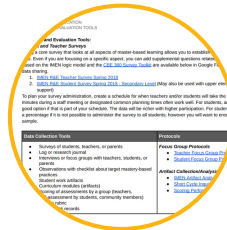


## KEY ACTIVITIES & RESOURCES



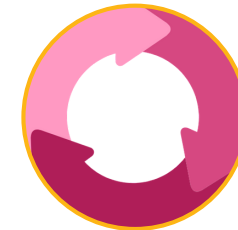
### Implement your plan for cultivating mastery.

Deliver an array of professional learning opportunities, followed up with opportunities to practice and receive feedback and support. Deepen Collaborative Analysis practices.



### Measure impact

Use tools such as the Student Focus Group Protocol and Teacher Focus Group Protocol to collect data about changes in adult and student culture and use data to respond to unanticipated needs. Remember: both of the protocols can be found with the other Data Collection Tools!

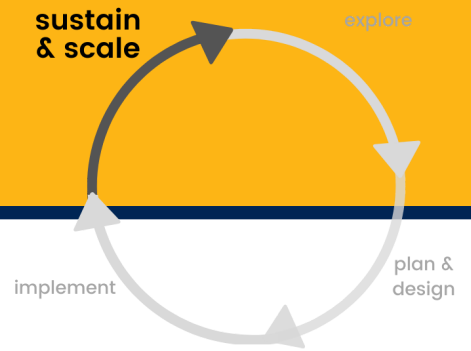


### Reflect

Use insights gathered during implementation to inform the ongoing cultivation and inculcation of a culture of mastery.



# STUDENTS EMPOWERED | sustain & scale



## Establish systems for sustained implementation and collaborative practice.

As new cultural practices take hold in your classroom and school community they become ingrained like habits. This is generally what we want: less work for our brains and more natural connection, collaboration, and community. Just make sure to also build the practices deliberately into the systems and structures to continue deepening your culture of mastery and bringing new team members into the ongoing work.

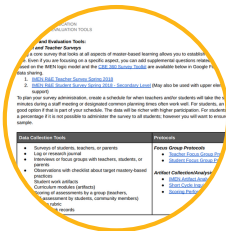
## OUTCOME



Formalized, sustainable, and scalable systems for continuous improvement of classroom, school, or system culture.



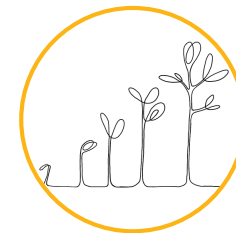
## KEY ACTIVITIES & RESOURCES



**Systematize processes for continuous attention on a culture of mastery.** Ensure formal structures are in place to monitor and respond to adult and student culture. Adapt the focus group tools and other Data Collection Tools to regularly assess culture.



**Induct new members into the culture**  
Formalize rituals, routines, policies, and practices that support the mastery learning culture to ensure new members experience and share in the culture building. Introduce new teachers to the desired culture through the Idaho Mastery Learning Explore Series: Culture.



**Share results**  
Document practices and collect data to identify high-leverage practices. Share results, resources, and stories within your system and with the broader field.

## WHERE DO YOU WANT TO GO?

Click on the section of the Staging Guide you want to explore.

**INTRODUCTION**

STUDENTS  
EMPOWERED



LEARNING  
PERSONALIZED



COMPETENCIES  
DEMONSTRATED



MASTERY  
RECOGNIZED



**APPENDICES**