Learning from the BIPOC Experience in Designing Educational Spaces

Association for Learning Environments (A4LE)
LearningSCAPES National Conference

October 8, 2022

Gensler

Nice to see you!

A little bit about us...

Sara
Silvestri

Phillip
Redpath

Margot
Kleinman

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Nice to see you!

Tell us who you are...
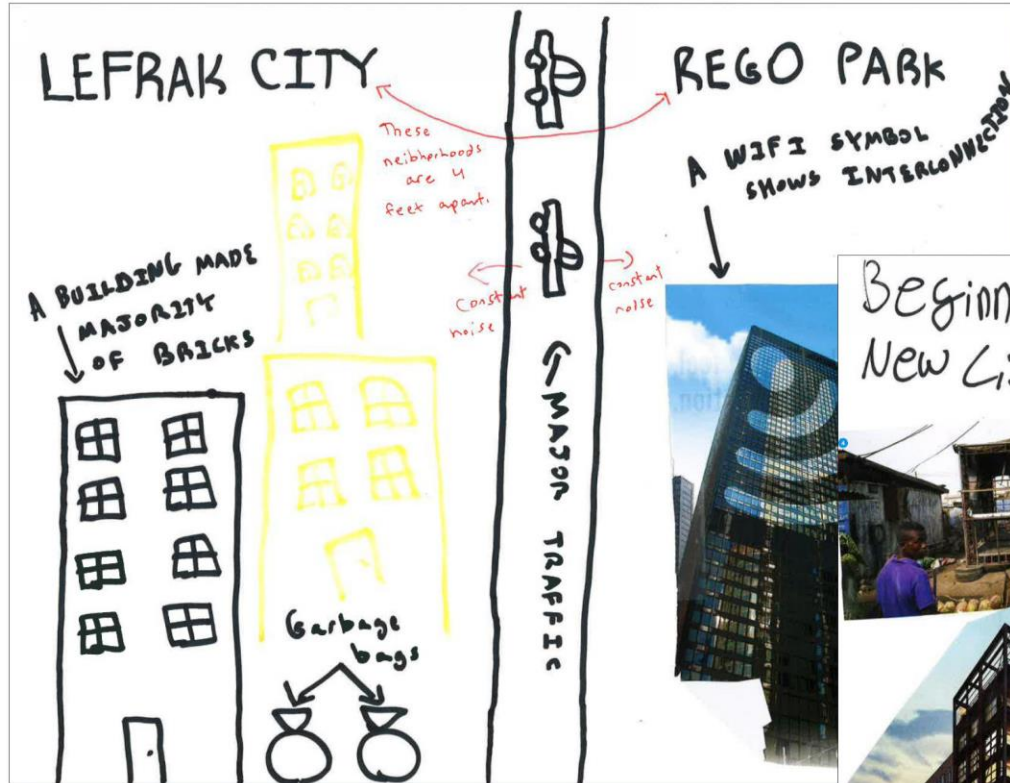
An educator?

A designer?

An architect?

Go to **www.menti.com**
and use the code **8356 5022**

1. Open your smartphone's camera

2. Point camera at the QR code

3. Look for banner notification and tap the link

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Our Motivation

A student participating in the ACE program made a comment about not belonging, which inspired our research.

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The Issue

"A **sociological perspective** could enrich our knowledge on the topic given its traditional disciplinary interest in social and cultural differences, as well as the power relations and inequalities between social groups...

Moreover, qualitative and ethnographic approaches are more sensitive to capture the nuances of belonging and its social and cultural imprints."
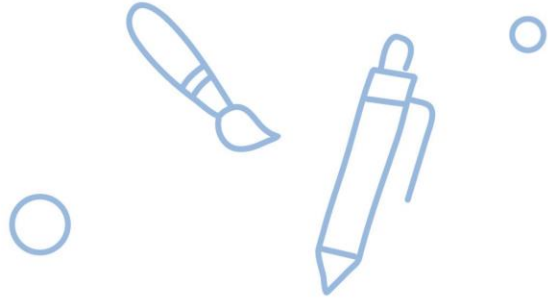
Our Purpose

"The aim is to explore and discuss tensions, contradictions and nuances rather than prescribing 'good' practices to foster school belonging by itself."

– School Belonging in Urban Spaces

Agenda

Introduction

Student Engagement

Takeaways

Framework

Moving Forward

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What do you think?

Rate your agreement with the following statements:

I am welcome here

I belong here

This is a safe place to learn

I like how this school looks

I want to be here

Scan or go to
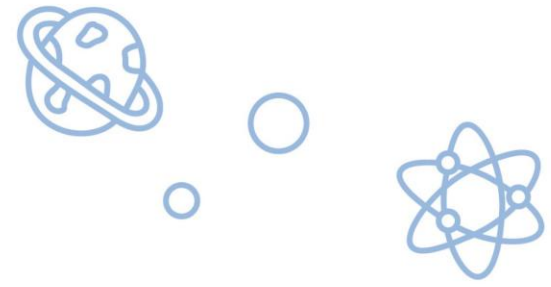**www.menti.com**
and use the code
8356 5022

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Belonging

Rate your agreement with the following statements...

I am welcome here

I belong here

This is a safe place to learn

I like how this school looks

I want to be here

I am welcome here

I belong here

This is a safe place to learn

I like how this school looks

I want to be here

I am welcome here

I belong here

This is a safe place to learn

I like how this school looks

I want to be here

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Survey Composition

Demographics

What is your race/ethnicity? Select all that apply.

❑ American Indian or Alaska Native

❑ Asian

❑ Black or African American

❑ Hispanic or Latinx

❑ Pacific Islander

❑ White

❑ Enter below if your race/ethnicity is not listed above:

❑ Prefer not to say

Safety

I feel safe in these spaces in my school building (Check all that apply)

❑ Library

❑ Hallways

❑ Cafeteria

❑ Gym

❑ Showers/Locker Room

❑ Classrooms

❑ Auditorium/Theater

❑ Outdoor spaces

❑ Restrooms

❑ Music room (band/choir)

Belonging

Imagine yourself going to this school during non-Covid-19 times. Rate your agreement with the following statements.

Disagree   Agree

I am welcome here

Experience

Rate your agreement with the following statements.

Disagree   Agree

I look forward to at least one class a day

I dread going to school

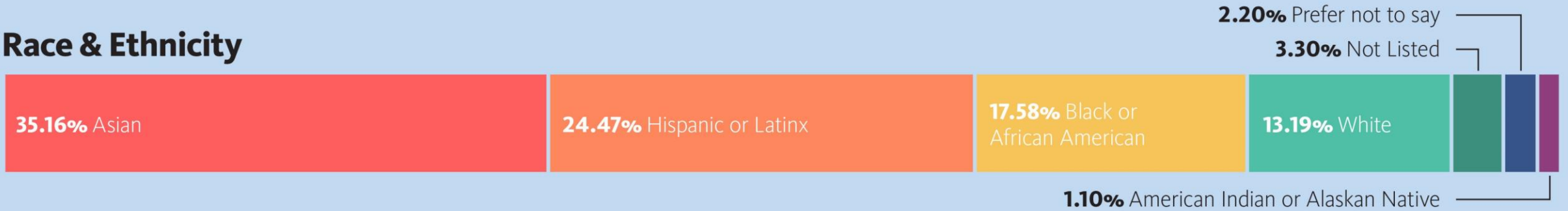I have felt inspired this year in school

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Demographics

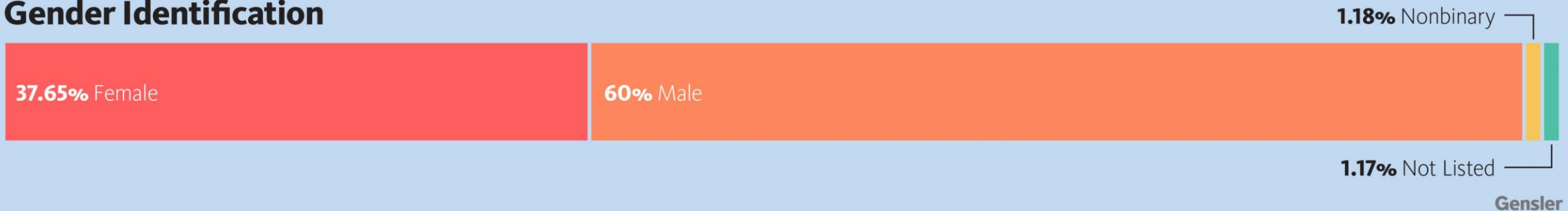**48.67%** of respondents plan to attend a 4-year university after graduating high school

Race & Ethnicity

2.20% Prefer not to say

3.30% Not Listed

35.16% Asian	**24.47%** Hispanic or Latinx	**17.58%** Black or African American	**13.19%** White	

1.10% American Indian or Alaskan Native

Grade Level

10.7% Freshman	**19.1%** Sophomore	**36.9%** Junior	**33.3%** Senior

Gender Identification

1.18% Nonbinary

37.65% Female	**60%** Male

1.17% Not Listed

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Safety

"**I surround myself** with people who make me feel safe. I am friends with my teachers and some administrators." — JUNIOR FROM MANHATTAN, IDENTIFIES WITH MULTIPLE RACES

"My school has a **diverse population**, so I don't feel isolated or withdrawn from the environment" — JUNIOR FROM BROOKLYN, IDENTIFIES AS ASIAN
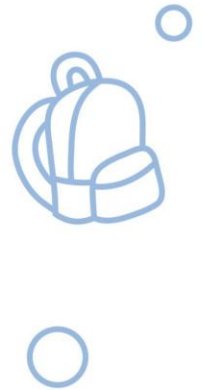
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Safety

What security measures are in place at your school?

Measure	Percentage
Metal detectors	~16%
Bars on windows	~20%
Card reader/swipe system for entry	~43%
Sign in/sign out procedure	~16%

0%   10%   20%   30%   40%   50%
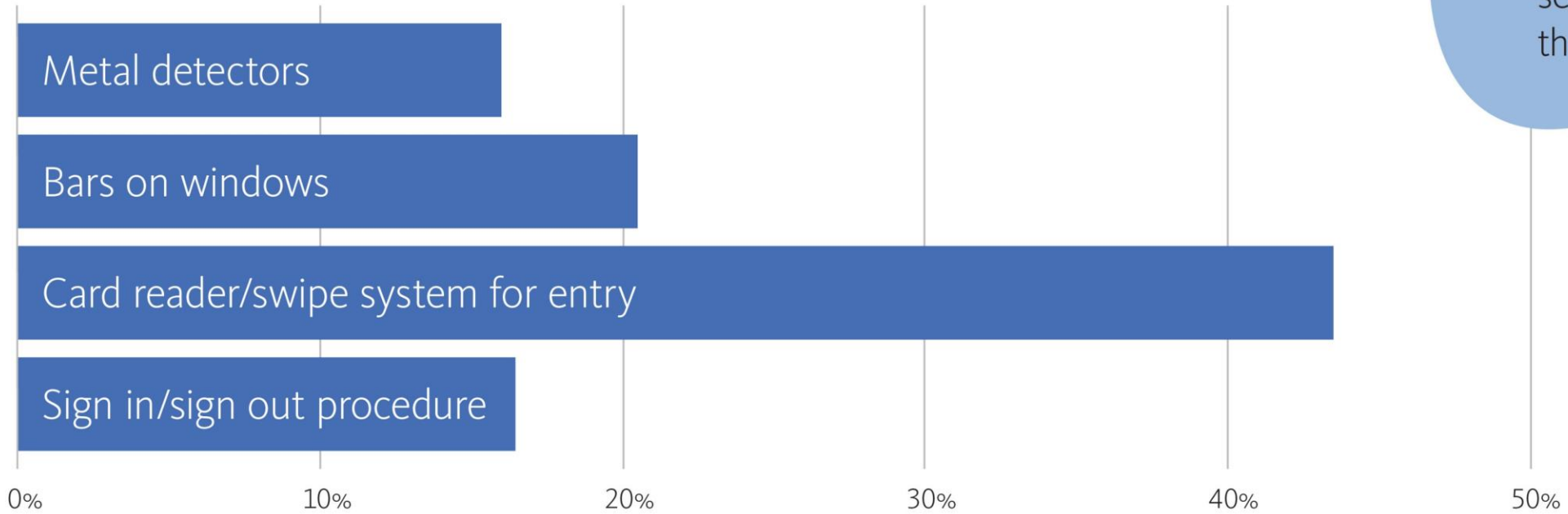
97.7%
of respondents have security guards on their school property

"I'm surrounded by other students and there's no feeling of danger."
– Senior from Brooklyn, Identifies as Asian

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Safety

How safe do you feel...

on your way to school?

in the neighborhood around your school?

on your school property?

inside your classrooms?

Not Safe

Very Safe

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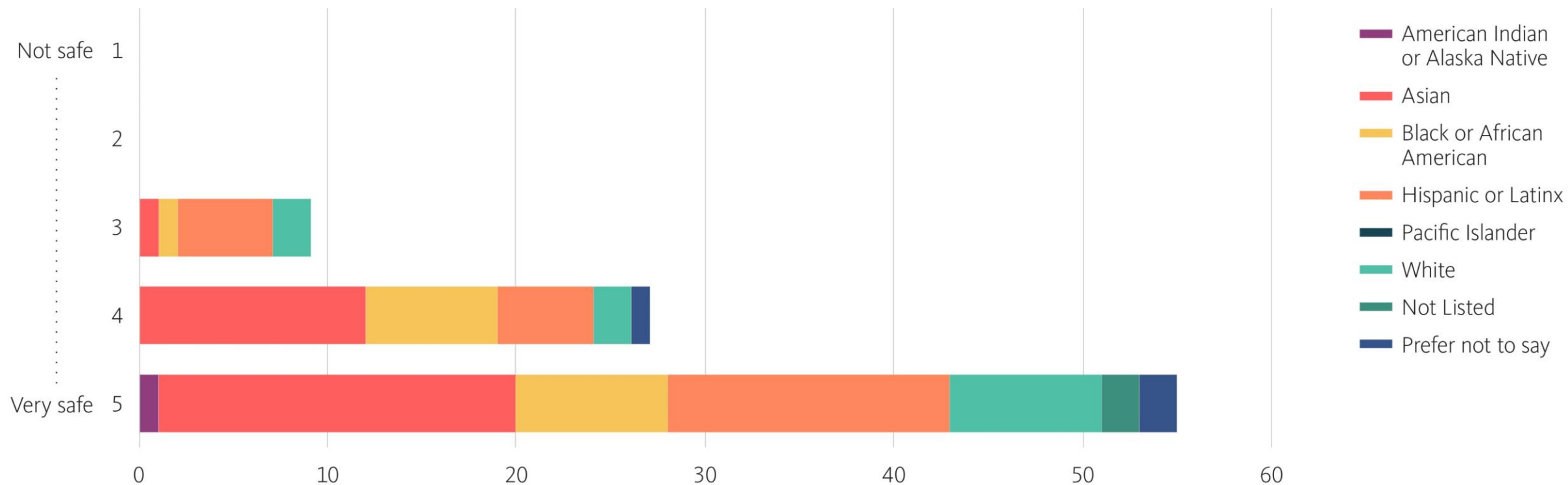
Belonging

"The first school **looked very appealing, and yet, I don't feel very welcome**. The other two schools didn't look that appealing, but I feel that I would be accepted there. The first school seemed to be very well funded, in a safe, private environment. The other two schools were kinda run down, when compared to the first school. I didn't see any students in the first school, which was strange." — JUNIOR FROM THE BRONX, IDENTIFIES AS BLACK
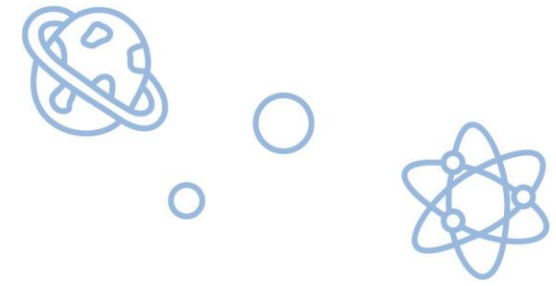
Belonging
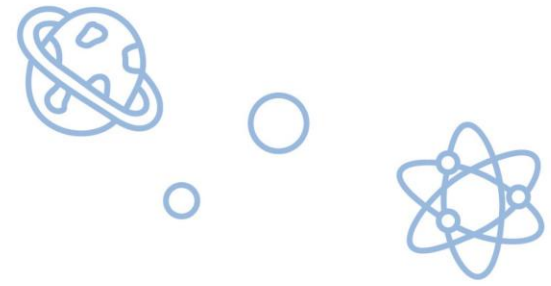
Rate your agreement with the following statements...
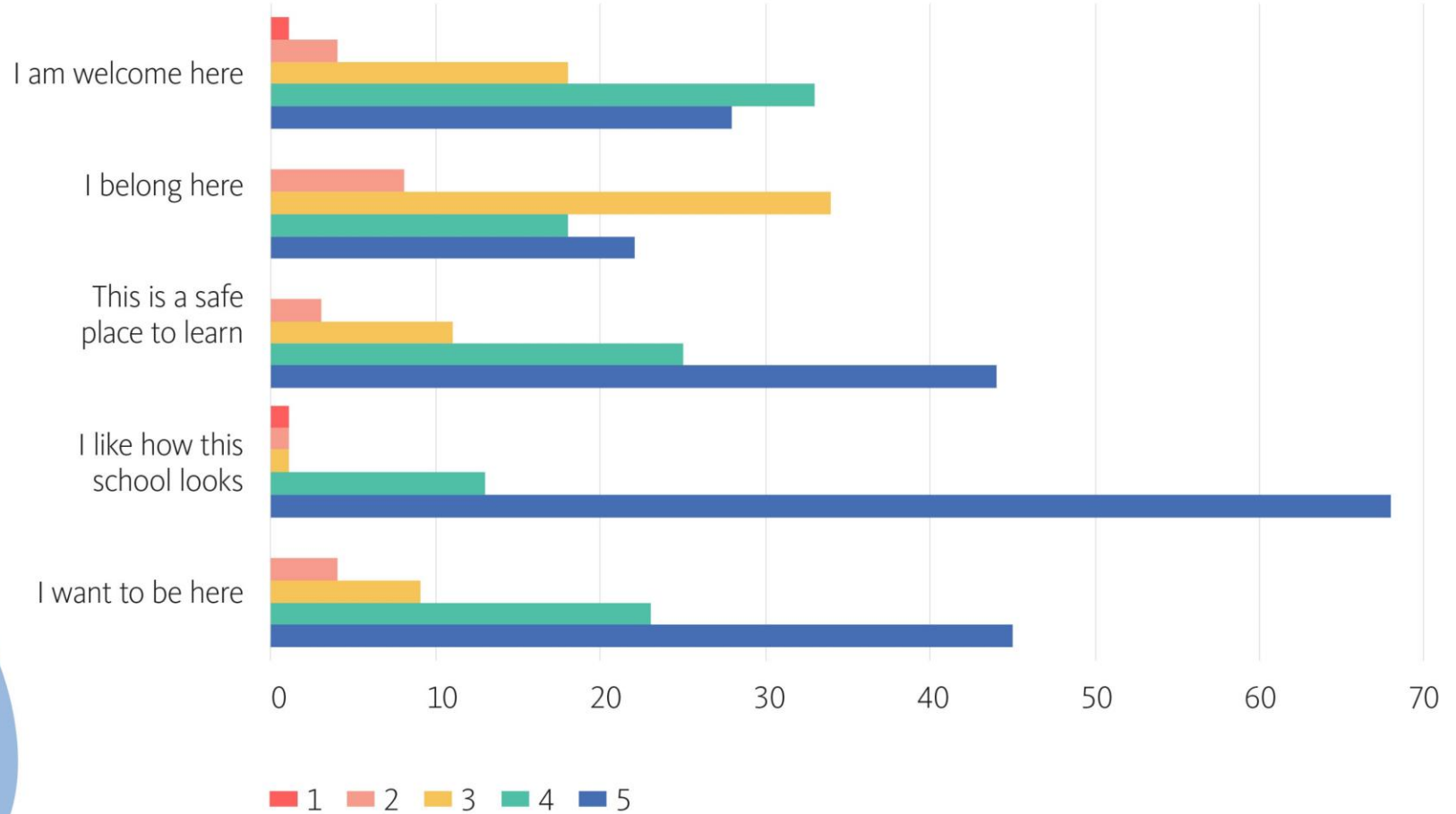
3.39

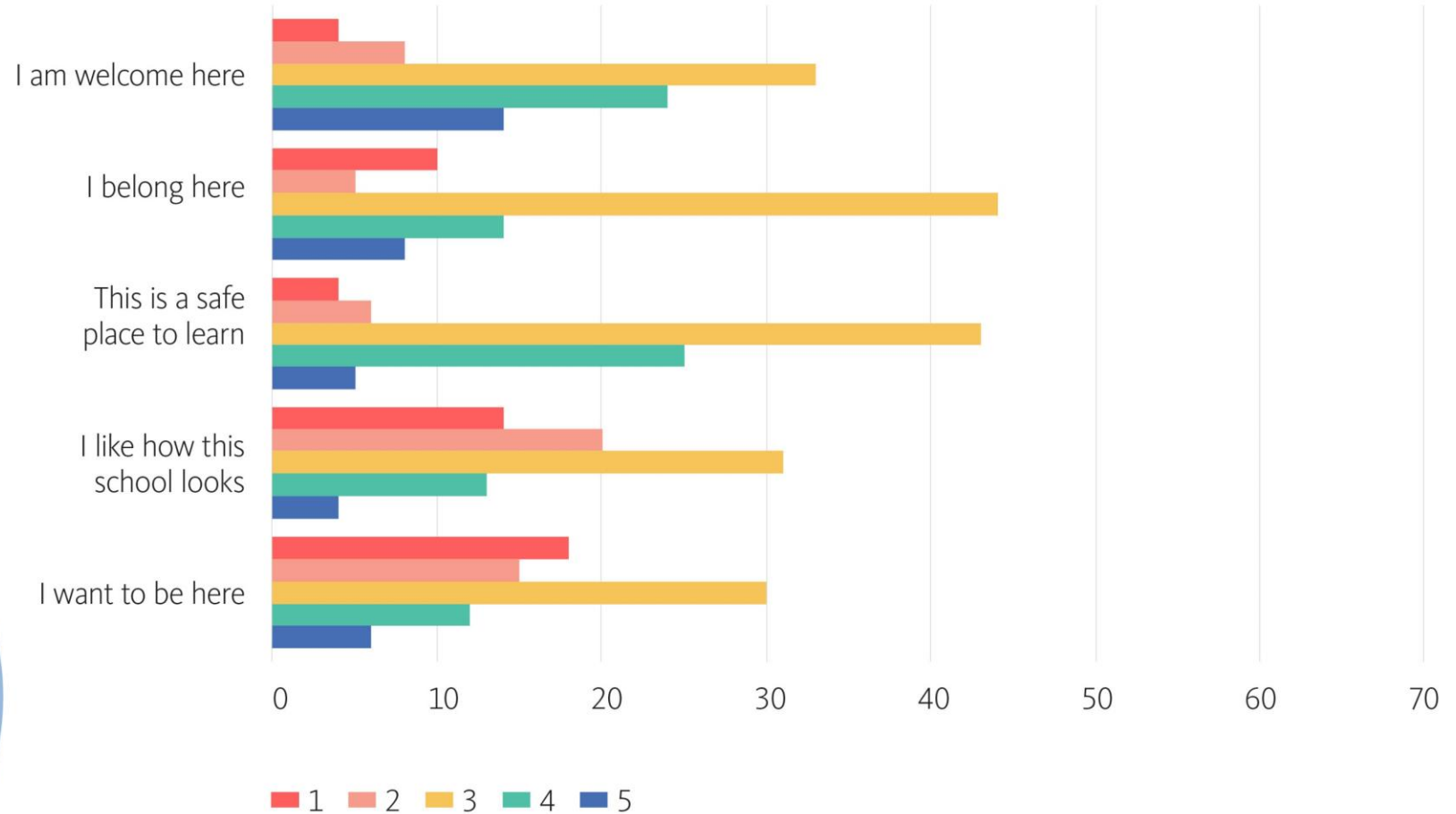average response on a 1 to 5 scale for how often respondents feel **excited to go to school**

Chart: Rate your agreement (response counts by rating 1–5)

Statement	1	2	3	4	5

- I am welcome here
- I belong here
- This is a safe place to learn
- I like how this school looks
- I want to be here

Legend: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5

Axis: 0, 10, 20, 30, 40, 50, 60, 70

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Belonging
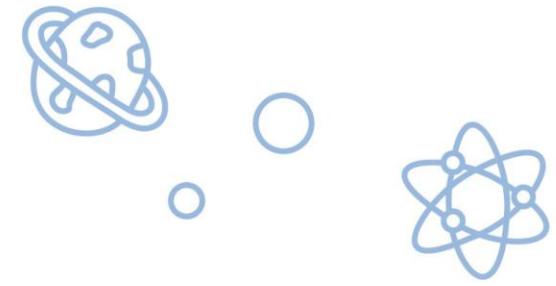
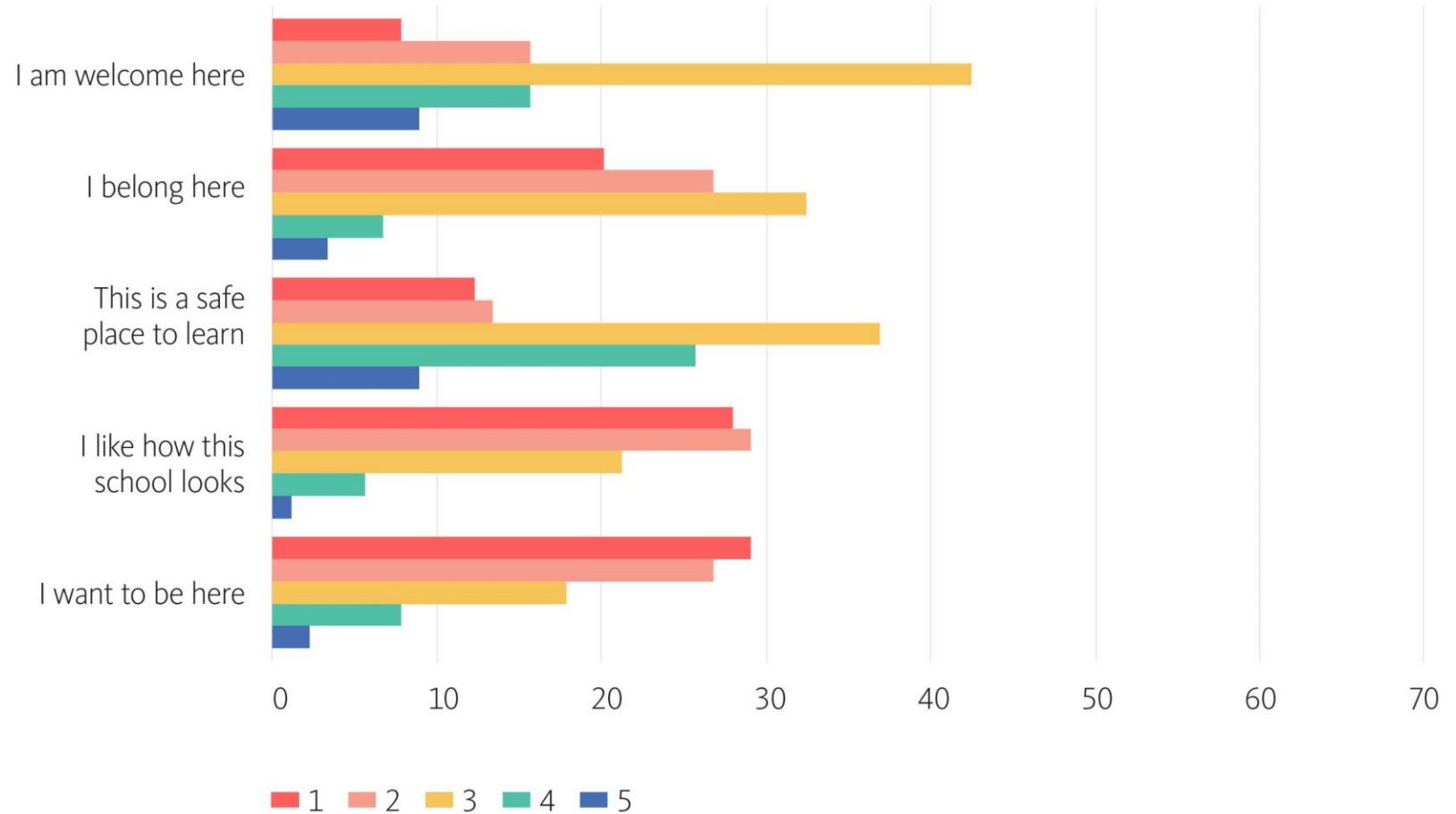## Rate your agreement with the following statements...

96.34%
of respondents feel their **teachers care** about their academic success

Chart categories (top to bottom): I am welcome here, I belong here, This is a safe place to learn, I like how this school looks, I want to be here

Legend: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5

X-axis: 0, 10, 20, 30, 40, 50, 60, 70

Experience

"I think environment speaks volumes when it comes to **creativity and learning**."
— FRESHMAN FROM BROOKLYN, IDENTIFIES AS BLACK

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Experience

"The windows stand out to me ...on the left because it looks nice. I feel that rich students attend the school on the left and students from the middle class attend the school shown on the right." — STUDENT INFORMATION NOT PROVIDED

"The school on the left seems like a college building. The school on the right seems like an elementary/middle school. I **prefer glass curtain walls as the façade**..." — SENIOR FROM BROOKLYN, IDENTIFIES AS ASIAN

"The school to the left has a more welcoming feel to it. The school to the right [feels like it is meant to keep students in]".
— JUNIOR FROM QUEENS, IDENTIFIES AS ASIAN

"The one on the left looks **very professional where those who attend succeed**, whereas the one on the right feels very restricted and [those who attend] don't get far in life." — SENIOR FROM QUEENS, IDENTIFIES AS HISPANIC OR LATINX

"The first one looks like a college because it looks fancy. The picture on the right looks exactly like my middle school so it is comforting."
— STUDENT INFORMATION NOT PROVIDED

"I believe that the first school has more successful students. I believe **it is the windows that give off that idea to me**" — SENIOR FROM BROOKLYN, IDENTIFIES AS BLACK

"First one [is for] **high achieving students**, second one [is for] the average student. [My] first impression was that the first one had a [large] budget to use (meaning there are more opportunities for programs and internships) and the second one had an average one." — SOPHOMORE FROM BROOKLYN, IDENTIFIES AS HISPANIC OR LATINX

"The second school looks like it is a zone school where anyone can go, while the first looks like it was **made for a specific purpose** (specialized, performing arts) where you would need to take a test or audition in order to get in." — SOPHOMORE FROM QUEENS, IDENTIFIES AS HISPANIC OR LATINX

"In the school on the right, I would normally [think] a lot of **bad kids go there**. However, after recently going to public school I know that that isn't the case. With the school on the left, I get the impression that [is] **where all the rich kids go**." — STUDENT INFORMATION NOT PROVIDED

"I would assume the renovated school would have **nicer students**" — SENIOR FROM BROOKLYN, IDENTIFIES AS ASIAN

"Left Image: The school building looks amazing. I imagine that students that apply must have taken an entrance exam and that they show **high intelligence levels**. Right Image: Looks like the average school building. I imagine that it is a zoned school, that nearby students apply, [and that] students there have a variety of intelligence levels." — FRESHMAN FROM QUEENS, IDENTIFIES AS HISPANIC OR LATINX

"The left...building looks well funded, which makes me think **that the students who go there must be 'well funded' themselves**...I'd assume the education within the building is top-notch, which also means the atmosphere might be competitive. The school on the right seems like your average high school... I'd think that the students there are people who I could get along with, more average folk. I would want to go to the school on the [left] because It seems like a quality school. However, feel like I would fit in better with the students on the school on the [right]."
— SOPHOMORE FROM BROOKLYN, IDENTIFIES AS BLACK

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What we learned from our survey informed how we proceeded with our research:

1 **Listen to stakeholders more closely**

We treated the students as the stakeholders and organized engagement programs to hear directly from them.

2 **Designer thinking is part of the problem**

We shared resources and techniques with the students to empower them to reflect on and critique their environments.

3 **Designers need to be teachable**

We allowed the students to have the design voice — to let them teach us.

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Continued Student Engagement

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Student Charrette

Materiality | Patterns:

Having a variety of textures that gives a sense of familiarity and belonging. Use of local sustainable materials to celebrate history of the community.
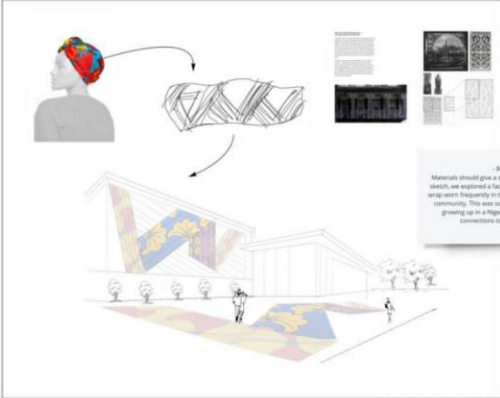
National Museum of African-American History and Culture
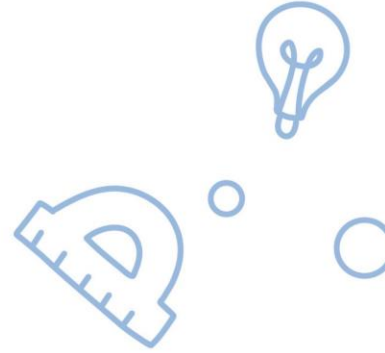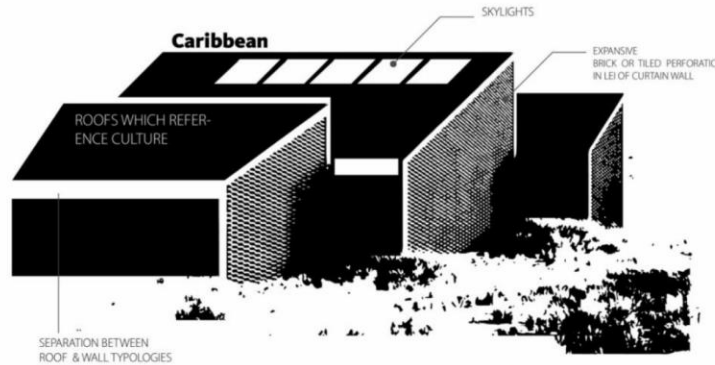
REPRESENTATION

EXTERIOR FACADE

The facade should inspire learning, and creativity but it should also provide a **sense of culture** and **school belonging**. While the Modernist aesthetic of large expansive glass, curtain walls and clean lines tend to proliferate the architectural landscape, its a largely Eurocentric aesthetic which when placed as the aspirational standard, can give a sense of inferiority to other groups and cultures.

As a group we sought to look at **Representation**, as the design standard or rule of thumb, so the exterior facade wouldn't only privilege notions centered around the quality of light and space, but the culture as a well.

We considered that by creating a series of questions, perhaps they could become apart of a system of design rules for consideration when creating school facades.

What's the demographic breakdown of the area?
What's the predominant language of the group?
Are there any important history and artefact's or symbols important to the neighborhood?
Are there any forms of materiality significant to the predominant culture?

Caribbean

ROOFS WHICH REFERENCE CULTURE

SKYLIGHTS

EXPANSIVE BRICK OR TILED PERFORATION IN LEI OF CURTAIN WALL

SEPARATION BETWEEN ROOF & WALL TYPOLOGIES

Sacred vs Non Sacred

Having areas along the facade that are more tactile are important for constructing school belonging, in addition to dismantling architectural troupes which dictate everything must be blank, colour blocked or serene

ELEVATING BIPOC VOICES IN EDUCATION

GENSLER   BLACK LIVES & DESIGN

Key Takeaways from Students

Exterior Façade
• Visibility of Nature
• Representation of Culture
• Materiality of Patterns & Textures

Classrooms
• Natural Light
• Flexibility
• Biophilia
• Variety

Hallways
• Accessibility
• Inclusion
• Wellbeing
• Environment

Other Space Types
• Libraries are not just spaces for books
• Nurse's Resource Room should be inviting and private
• Cafeterias should consider seating variety and apps for ordering ahead

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Student Charrette

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Uncommon Schools

At School

The first thing I do when I get to school is go through the health screening and uniform check in the foyer. Then I swipe in with my ID so I can go to class.
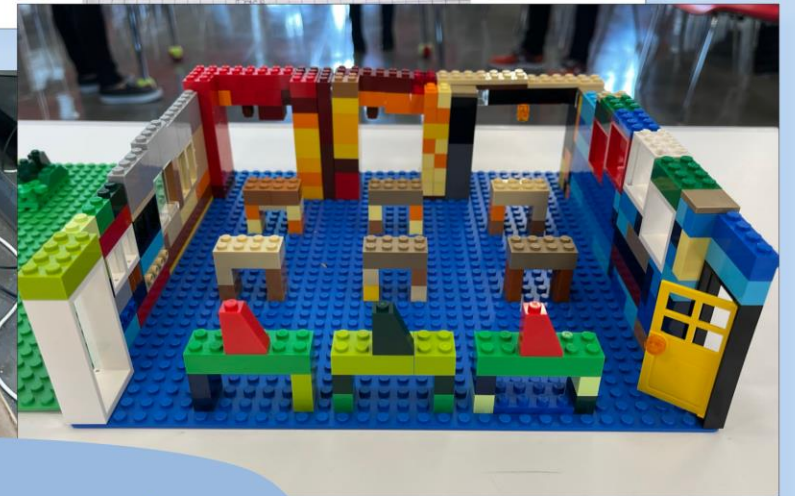
I really like the foyer windows and how big the space is. I think it makes the school look good and the windows (and the fact that there isn't a lot of stuff in it) makes the foyer feel open. This and the art room are my favorite places.
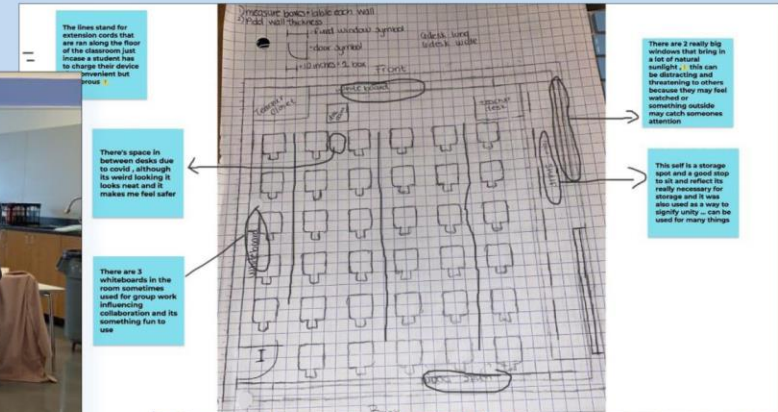
Not Safe/Comfortable   Safe/Comfortable

"Every little detail matters when it comes to school design."

- Alexus, Senior at Uncommon High School

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Asking & Listening

Students often go unheard

"I want to go above and beyond because being in this program is a chance for me to be heard, I never really had the option to say 'Oh, this is how I feel a classroom should be' — I was normally just placed in a classroom based on someone else's opinion."

- Alexus, Senior at Uncommon High School

Credit: Matthew Santiago, Uncommon Schools

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Education Leaders Round Table

EDUCATION AND THE BIPOC EXPERIENCE

Safety and belonging in educational spaces play an essential role in the lives of BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) students. Yet, when it comes to designing learning spaces, these students often do not have enough of a voice. To create spaces where a diverse student community can flourish, we must understand how students truly see education spaces today—and find new ways to make students feel safe and included.

METHODOLOGY

We surveyed students from 18 high schools, primarily public, in New York City to learn more about their perception of school design. The survey was organized into four main categories: demographics, safety, belonging, and experience. We also asked students to view images of different schools and classrooms and then describe their impressions.

The voices of BIPOC students are often absent from discussions around designing great learning spaces.

The Center for Research on Equity and the Built Environment, formed in the wake of George Floyd's murder and the growing Black Lives Matter Movement, is directly focused on addressing issues of systemic racism, inequity, and social injustice through the lens of the built environment.

Gensler RESEARCH INSTITUTE © 2021

"Intent is irrelevant — it makes it about the abuser and not about the person who is being harmed. It has to be all about the end user impact. What is the impact, not what do I intend the impact to be."

— **Shraddha Nunziata**
Director of Experiential Learning at Uncommon Schools

"How do they [teachers & administrators] ensure consistency room to room? It can't be about you being 'chosen' ... What is the school doing to ensure the student experience is not just dependent on luck?"

— **Ben Samuel-Kalow**
Founder and Head of School at CREO College Prep

"We can have a kid within a school that feels like they belong in one classroom based on one relationship with a teacher, but in the school itself, that school can be punitive, particularly within black and brown bodies."

— **Dr. David Kirkland**
Founder & CEO of ForwardED and Professor of Urban Education

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Key Takeaways

Listen more

Students may not always have the right words; we need to listen more closely. Once heard, they feel empowered and more motivated.

Students appreciate ownership and independence

High school is critical in developing personal drive and establishing oneself. Ownership over their work, time, and space contributes to their sense of belonging.

Every detail matters

Students are impressionable — the way a school is managed and maintained effects the way students feel in the space.

Dismantle Eurocentric ideas in façade design

Schools often embrace western design principles. It is important for schools to reflect their student demographic to create a sense of belonging.

Classrooms as places for refuge and prospect

Classrooms provide a safe place for different learning and teaching styles. Students come from different backgrounds, but they are united in the classroom.

Corridors as a third place

Corridors are one of the only places where students do not feel as though they are supervised. They are also a place for displaying student work and provide opportunities for impromptu interactions.

Speak their language

Relating to the students and their perspective in the world helps them communicate their experiences.

Engage students

Students have more insight than they even realize once they are given the platform to share.

Spread reach

Engaging all stakeholders involved in school design and construction is critical to make an impact.

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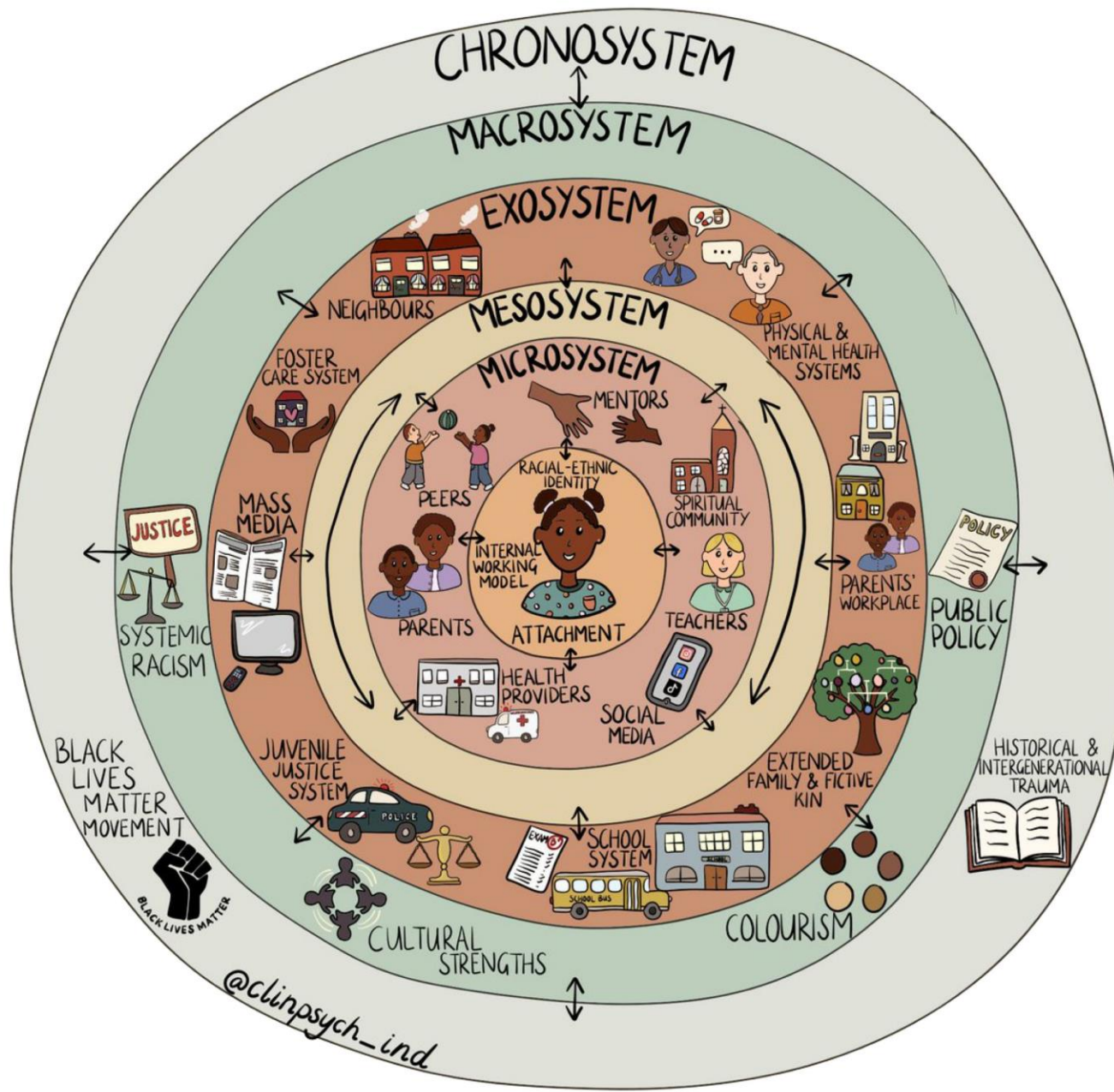
How to Make it Tangible Every Day

The Designer
The Educator
The Administration
The City
The Nonprofit
The Private Organization

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Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Model

Let's hear from you:

Where are you in the ecosystem of a student's life?
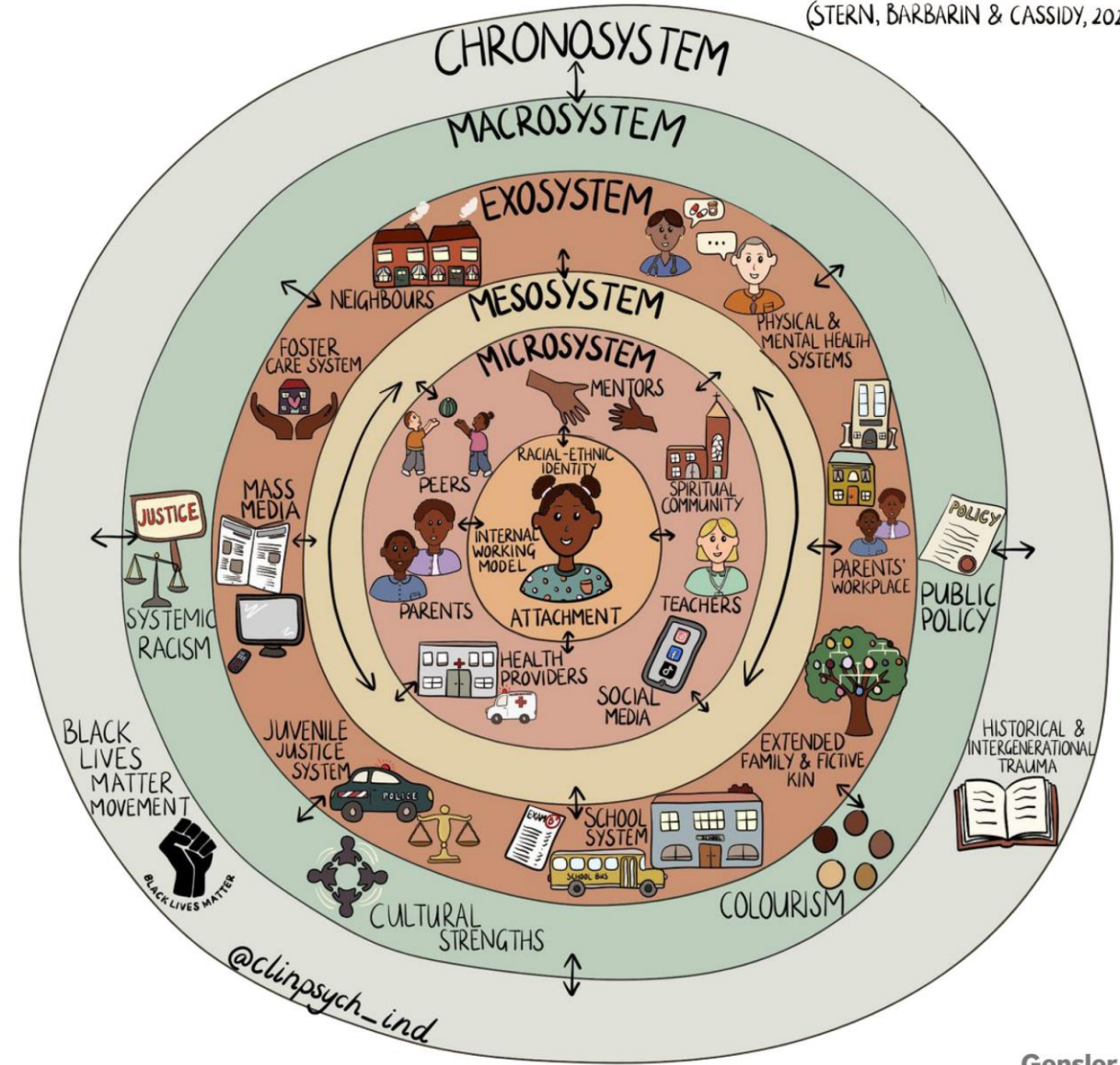

Scan or go to
www.menti.com
and use the code
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BRONFENBRENNER'S ECOLOGICAL SYSTEMS MODEL (1974)
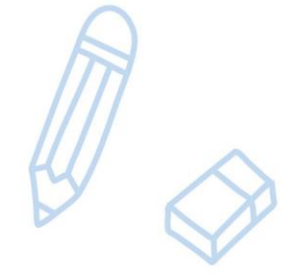ADAPTED TO FOCUS ON BLACK YOUTH DEVELOPMENT & ATTACHMENT PROCESSES IN CONTEXT
(STERN, BARBARIN & CASSIDY, 2021)

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Framework

How do we make it tangible?

Engage

Purpose

Students know how they learn best and education is about their experience. They are the stakeholders that need to be heard.

Process

Consider hosting student charrettes and visioning sessions.

Creating surveys to distribute to student populations

Takeaways

During the engagement process remove any potential bias. The engagement should be a space safe for students to share.

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Elevate

Purpose

Demonstrate to the students how you will to put their voice forward.

Highlight those voices not typically heard and bring it to those with the power to enact change.

Process

Use the student's words directly and refrain from speculating or paraphrasing.

Put your bias aside and be open to learning something new from the students.

Takeaways

Write, discuss, present and collaborate with others in the industry.

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Design

Purpose

Projects are opportunities to realize what was heard.

Understand how the student experiences are unique to the given project.
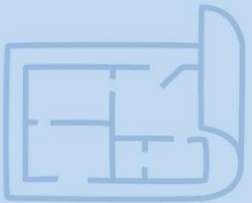
Process

Be the facilitator and make space for student engagement during the design process.

Be open to new solutions.

Takeaways

Design solutions that are informed by the student's voices and centered around their experience.

Any opportunity can be impactful regardless of scale.

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Share

Purpose

Each project can have an impact on the students it serves and also be a resource for others.

Demonstrating how student voices are integrated into projects can motivate others to consider their own engagement process.

Process

Emphasize how the students influenced the design.

Reflect on lessons learned throughout the design process, not just the final outcome.
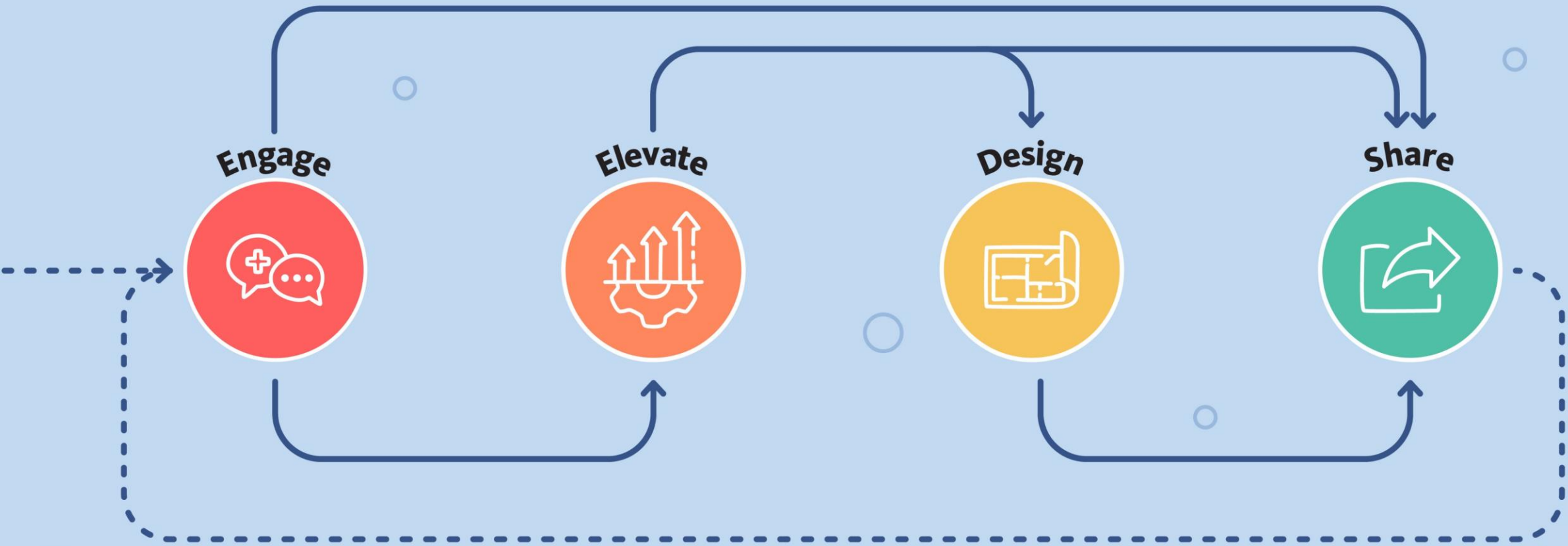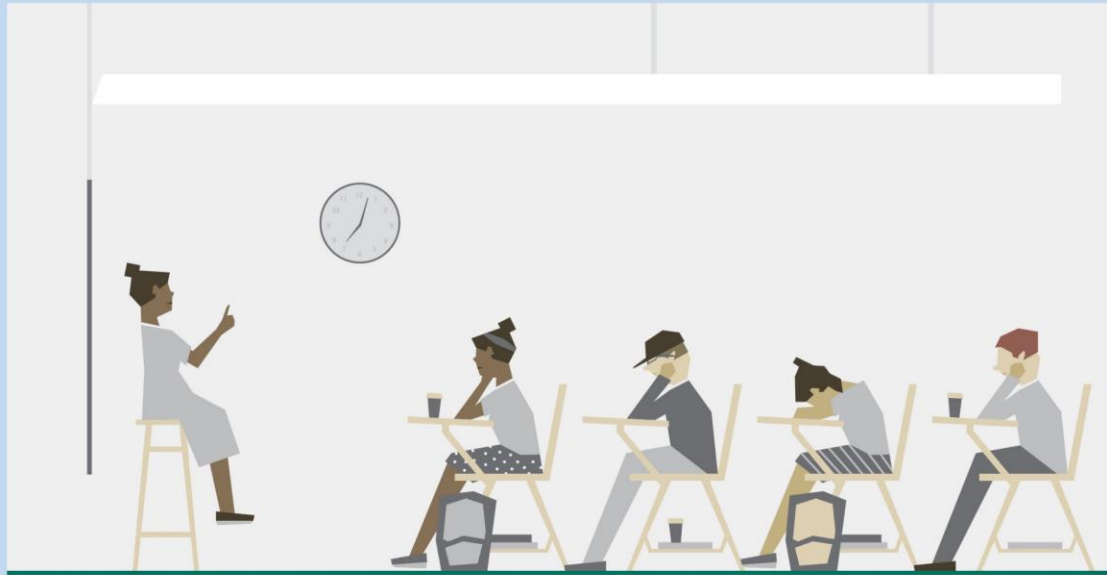
Takeaways

Measure the impact against the initial intention.

Reflect on what you learned and ways to improve your own process.

Blog, write, and speak to empower others to reflect on their design process.

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Engage

Elevate

Design

Share

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Actions You Can Take

Talk with your students about their experiences

Reach out to a local AIA chapter about how to get involved

Make this a topic of conversation amongst your colleagues and peers

Get involved in your local school district

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Thank you!

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