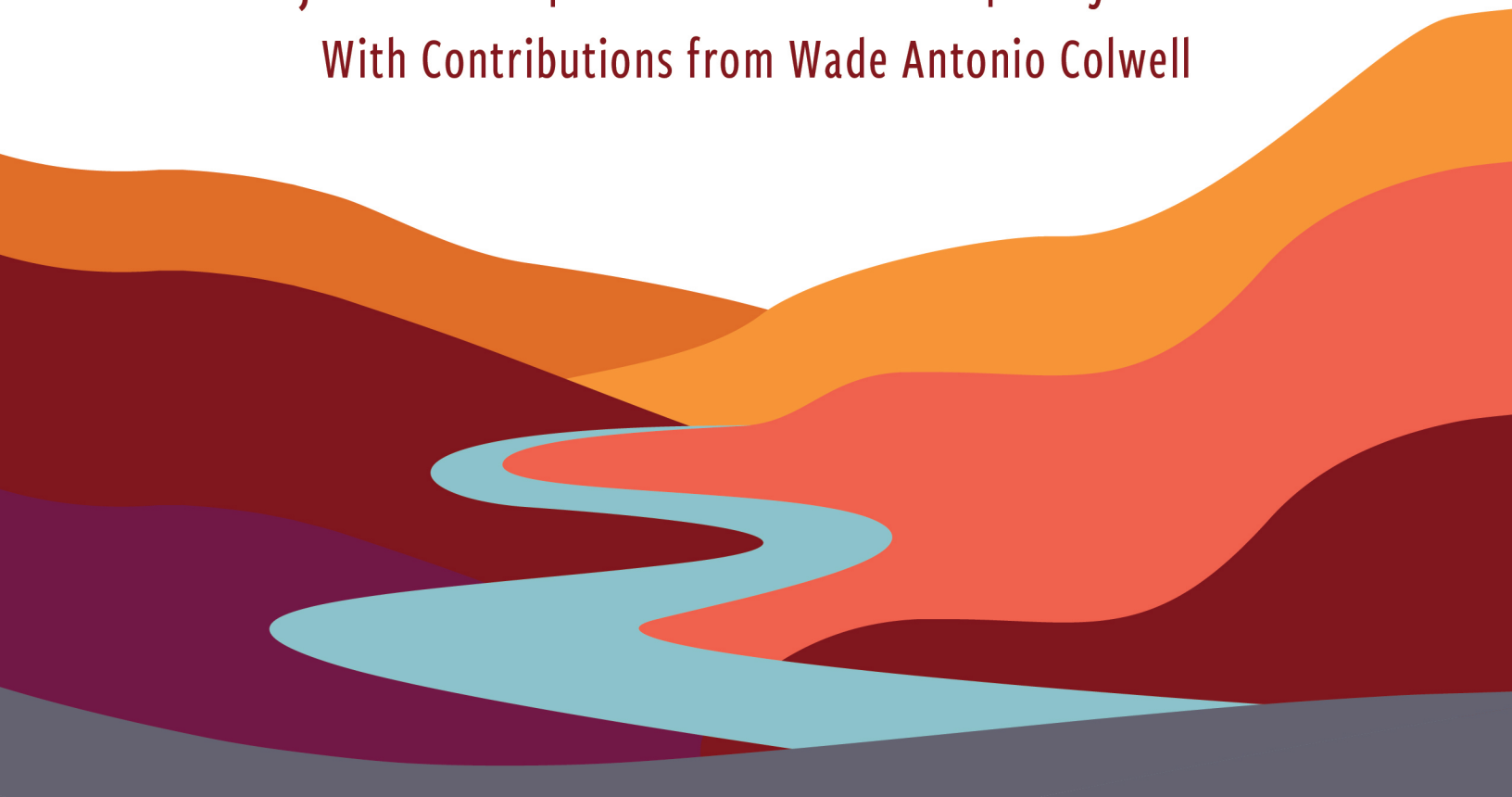


# **CREATING SCHOOLS THAT WORK FOR ALL OF US**

**A GUIDE TO EMPOWERED STEWARDSHIP**

**Benjie Howard | Patricia McDonald | Gary Howard**

**With Contributions from Wade Antonio Colwell**



# Creating Schools That Work for All of Us

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## Appendix B: YES Collaborative Inquiry Snapshots

### **YES Inquiry Snapshot #1: Transforming Discipline and Belonging for Black Students**

This YES Inquiry Snapshot presents a streamlined version of the YES Inquiry Cycle, intentionally excluding the YES Engagements to highlight the core phases of the process. In practice, the YES Engagements are woven throughout each phase to deepen understanding of the Achievement Triangle framework and to build relational trust, reflection, and action.

At its core, Youth Empowered Stewardship (YES) operates through parallel and mutually reinforcing cycles of inquiry where both professional learning and student-led exploration drive systemic transformation. This six-phase model follows an iterative, liberatory design thinking process (Tucker-Ray et al., 2016) that challenges educational oppression and cultivates co-agency. Once internalized, it becomes a lifelong tool for any educator or team to confront and dismantle inequity.



## Phase 1: Notice & Disrupt

This phase begins with a pause—a deliberate moment to examine current conditions and uncover patterns of inequity often hidden in plain sight. It involves interrogating schoolwide data, practices, and narratives that normalize disparities. The goal is to notice who is being underserved and to disrupt the status quo by surfacing systems of harm and amplifying historically marginalized voices.

### Example

The Equity Leadership Team identified glaring disproportionalities in both discipline and academic performance for Black students. These disparities were not only evident in hard data but also confirmed by student survey responses, making it impossible to ignore the need for transformative change.

### Baseline Evidence Statements

- Black students made up 20% of the school population but accounted for 55% of all suspensions and expulsions.
- On statewide assessments, only 30% of Black students were proficient in ELA and 25% in math, compared to 65% and 70% proficiency among their White peers.
- Panorama Climate Inventory data showed that only 40% of Black students reported a strong sense of belonging, compared to 75% of White students.
- A review of discipline records revealed that subjective offenses like “defiance” and “disrespect” were disproportionately applied to Black students.
- Interviews with staff uncovered patterns of implicit bias, with Black students receiving harsher consequences for similar behaviors displayed by their White peers.

This phase catalyzed a mindset shift from viewing discipline as a student behavior issue to understanding it as a reflection of systemic inequity in adult response, policies, and structures.



## Phase 2: Empathize & Deepen Awareness

Gather qualitative and experiential evidence by deeply listening to students, families, and communities. Honoring non-dominant narratives helps illuminate root causes and fosters human connection. This phase builds relational trust and centers marginalized experiences.

### Example

Listening sessions revealed powerful stories of alienation, fear of punitive consequences, and a longing to be seen and valued. Students shared experiences of being unfairly disciplined and misunderstood by educators. Families expressed a desire for culturally responsive relationships and instruction that affirmed their children's identities.

### Sample Questions Used

- When have you felt respected or disrespected at school?
- What would an ideal relationship with your teachers look like?
- How is your culture recognized or ignored at school?

### Empathy Evidence

- 70% of Black students and families described negative staff interactions and exclusion.
- 75% of students expressed low academic self-confidence tied to frequent negative feedback and lack of affirmation.



### Phase 3: Define & Reframe

Triangulate empathy-driven insights with schoolwide data to define a clear “puzzle of practice.” Reframe challenges to address root causes, not surface-level symptoms. Shift from student blame to systemic responsibility.

#### Example

##### **Puzzle of Practice**

*How might we redesign disciplinary policies and classroom practices to ensure equitable treatment, affirm identity, and increase academic self-efficacy and belonging for Black students?*

This reframing led to identifying bias in discretionary discipline decisions and classroom practices as core contributors to the inequities.



### Phase 4: Ideate & Imagine Beyond Constraints

Liberate the team from deficit-based mindsets. Encourage bold, justice-driven possibilities that transcend compliance and focus on liberation. Embrace creativity to envision learning environments rooted in equity, agency, and belonging.

#### Example

The team imagined the following:

- Replacing punitive discipline with restorative justice.
- Facilitating professional learning on culturally responsive teaching and implicit bias.
- Launching student-led affinity groups focused on identity and belonging.
- Engaging families as equity partners through a Family Advisory Council.
- Revising the curriculum to reflect diverse cultures and anti-racist perspectives.



## Phase 5: Prototype & Co-Create

Move from imagination to implementation. Design small, testable pilots with the people most impacted—students, families, and educators. Co-creation ensures strategies are grounded in lived realities and positioned for success.

### Example

The following were prototyped:

- **Restorative Justice Pilot** for one grade level.
- **Culturally Responsive PD Series** delivered by the district equity team.
- **Student Affinity Groups** held twice a month in the counseling center.
- **Family Advisory Council** co-led equity conversations and initiatives.

Students and families were included as co-designers throughout.

### Theory of Action

**If** we co-design and pilot equity-driven prototypes—

- including a **Restorative Justice Pilot** that replaces punitive discipline,
- a **Culturally Responsive PD Series** that equips educators to recognize and disrupt bias,
- **Student Affinity Groups** that cultivate identity, agency, and belonging, and
- a **Family Advisory Council** that centers family voice in school decision-making—

**And if** these prototypes are developed with and for the communities most impacted by school-based harm,

**Then** we will transform school culture by:

- reducing racial disproportionality in disciplinary practices,
- affirming student identities in classrooms and community spaces,
- building staff capacity to implement culturally responsive pedagogy, and
- fostering authentic partnerships with families grounded in trust and shared power.

This theory of action centers the belief that lasting change happens when historically marginalized students and families are positioned not as recipients of reform, but as co-leaders in shaping equitable, humanizing school environments. There will be a SMARTIE goal established for each prototype tested.





## Phase 6: Evaluate & Sustain

Assess impact using an equity lens. Measure what matters, including shifts in relationships, agency, and power. Use feedback to iterate and ensure long-term sustainability. Equity transformation is not a one-time initiative, but a continuous commitment.

### Example

Semester-long pilot outcomes included:

- **40% decrease** in discipline referrals for Black students in the restorative pilot.
- **25% increase** in belonging scores for affinity group participants.
- Families in the Equity Council reported **stronger trust** and engagement.

The team reflected on successes and areas for growth and committed to scaling effective strategies. Sustained professional learning on bias and institutionalizing equity-centered family engagement were identified as next steps.

## YES Inquiry Snapshot #2: Centering Immigrant and Multilingual Learners Through Inquiry

This YES Inquiry Snapshot presents a streamlined version of the YES Inquiry Cycle, intentionally excluding the YES Engagements to highlight the core phases of the process. In practice, the YES Engagements are woven throughout each phase to deepen understanding of the Achievement Triangle framework and to build relational trust, reflection, and action.

At its core, Youth Empowered Stewardship (YES) operates through parallel and mutually reinforcing cycles of inquiry, where both professional learning and student-led exploration drive systemic transformation. This six-phase model follows an iterative, liberatory design thinking process (Tucker-Ray et al., 2016) that challenges educational oppression and cultivates co-agency. Once internalized, it becomes a lifelong tool for any educator or team to confront and dismantle inequity.



### Phase 1: Notice & Disrupt

This phase begins with a pause—a deliberate moment to examine current conditions and uncover patterns of inequity often hidden in plain sight. It involves interrogating schoolwide data, practices, and narratives that normalize disparities. The goal is to notice who is being underserved and to disrupt the status quo by surfacing systems of harm and amplifying historically marginalized voices.

### Example

School and district leadership identified troubling inequities for immigrant and multilingual learner (ML) students through a combination of survey data and community feedback. These patterns reflected both systemic gaps in language support and relational harms such as bullying and cultural invisibility.

### Baseline Evidence Statements:

- 80% of immigrant students reported a low sense of belonging on Panorama surveys.
- 70% reported low academic self-efficacy.
- Over 50% of ML students were classified as Long-Term English Learners (LTELs), signaling persistent barriers to language acquisition.

- Incidents of bullying against immigrant students increased significantly, correlating with national anti-immigrant rhetoric.
- Despite extensive professional development, classroom observations and teacher evaluations revealed that language objectives were rarely implemented.
- Staff interviews surfaced internalized discomfort and bias related to national anti-immigrant narratives, which shaped interactions and disciplinary decisions.

This phase prompted the team to reframe these issues as symptoms of structural inequity rather than isolated behavior or language deficits.



## Phase 2: Empathize & Deepen Awareness

Gather qualitative and experiential evidence by deeply listening to students, families, and communities. Honoring non-dominant narratives helps illuminate root causes and fosters human connection. This phase builds relational trust and centers marginalized experiences..

### Example

Empathy interviews and listening sessions revealed widespread emotional and academic harm experienced by immigrant and ML students. Students described feelings of invisibility, cultural erasure, and verbal harassment. Educators acknowledged a lack of confidence and tools to support ML learners.

### Sample Questions Used

- Can you describe a time when you felt welcomed or unwelcome at school?
- How do interactions with peers or staff affect your feelings about your identity and academic abilities?
- Have you experienced bullying or discrimination because of your immigrant background?
- How are your home language and culture recognized or ignored at school?
- What support do you wish you had from your teachers and school administrators?
- Can you talk about your confidence in your academic abilities?
- How do you think your teachers view your potential as a student?

### Sample Questions Used, Cont'd

- Can you describe a teacher or class that makes you feel respected and valued?
- What would make school feel safer and more supportive for you?
- How can your family's strengths and culture be better included in your educational experience?

### Empathy Evidence

- Students reported frequent experiences of isolation and verbal harassment.
- Many felt academically overlooked, noting that their linguistic assets were ignored.
- Staff expressed uncertainty and discomfort in addressing bias-based bullying and meeting the academic needs of ML students.



### Phase 3: Define & Reframe

Triangulate empathy-driven insights with school wide data to define a clear “puzzle of practice.” Re-frame challenges to address root causes, not surface-level symptoms. Shift from student blame to systemic responsibility.

### Example

#### **Puzzle of Practice:**

*How might we build a supportive, affirming school environment that actively protects immigrant students from bullying, consistently implements language objectives, and fosters belonging and academic self-efficacy?*

This reframing helped shift the focus from fixing students to transforming systems and practices that marginalize them.



## Phase 4: Ideate & Imagine Beyond Constraints

Liberate the team from deficit-based mindsets. Encourage bold, justice-driven possibilities that transcend compliance and focus on liberation. Embrace creativity to envision learning environments rooted in equity, agency, and belonging.

### Example

The team envisioned and proposed:

- School-wide anti-bullying campaigns centering immigrant student experiences.
- Comprehensive cultural competency training with embedded strategies for using language objectives.
- Peer mentorship programs to foster connection and support among ML students.
- Family-community partnerships that celebrate cultural diversity and multilingualism.
- Curriculum enhancements that uplift immigrant narratives and multilingual voices.



## Phase 5: Prototype & Co-Create

Move from imagination to implementation. Design small, testable pilots with the people most impacted—students, families, and educators. Co-creation ensures strategies are grounded in lived realities and positioned for success.

### Example

The following were prototyped:

- **Anti-Bullying Initiative** led by students and supported by the counseling department.
- **Language Objective Coaching Cycles** facilitated by instructional coaches to build consistency.
- **Peer Mentorship Program** connecting ML students with trained peer leaders.
- **Monthly Cultural Showcases** organized by a schoolwide team to elevate multilingual and cultural identities.

### Theory of Action

If we co-create and implement targeted, equity-centered prototypes—

- such as a student-led **Anti-Bullying Initiative**,
- consistent **Language Objective Coaching Cycles** for teachers,
- a **Peer Mentorship Program** for multilingual learners, and
- **Monthly Cultural Showcases** that celebrate linguistic and cultural identity—

**And if** these strategies are developed in partnership with those most impacted,

**And if** we continuously collect feedback, reflect, and refine these practices through a liberatory inquiry process,

**Then** we will foster an affirming school climate where:

- Immigrant and ML students feel protected from identity-based harm,
- Culturally and linguistically sustaining instruction is the norm,
- Peer relationships cultivate belonging and academic confidence, and
- Multilingualism and cultural identity are recognized as powerful assets.

This will result in increased belonging, academic self-efficacy, and equitable access to meaningful learning for immigrant and multilingual learners, sustained by a community-wide commitment to shared power and continuous transformation. There will be a SMARTIE goal established for each prototype tested.



### Phase 6: Evaluate & Sustain

Assess impact using an equity lens. Measure what matters, including shifts in relationships, agency, and power. Use feedback to iterate and ensure long-term sustainability. Equity transformation is not a one-time initiative, but a continuous commitment.

## Example

Pilot results after one semester showed:

- 35% reduction in reported bullying incidents targeting immigrant students.
- 40% increase in consistent implementation of language objectives across classrooms.
- 30% increase in belonging scores among students involved in mentorship and cultural events.
- Family engagement improved based on positive feedback in surveys and participation.

Reflection sessions affirmed the need to expand mentorship and cultural events schoolwide, evolve professional learning to deepen cultural competence, and institutionalize curriculum reforms that center immigrant and multilingual identities.

## YES Inquiry Snapshot #3: Expanding Access to Advanced Coursework for MLs and Students of Color

This YES Inquiry Snapshot presents a streamlined version of the YES Inquiry Cycle, intentionally excluding the YES Engagements to highlight the core phases of the process. In practice, the YES Engagements are woven throughout each phase to deepen understanding of the Achievement Triangle framework and to build relational trust, self-awareness through reflection, and action.

At its core, Youth Empowered Stewardship (YES) operates through parallel and mutually reinforcing cycles of inquiry, where both professional learning and student-led exploration drive systemic transformation. This six-phase model follows an iterative, liberatory design thinking process (Tucker-Ray et al., 2016) that challenges educational oppression and cultivates co-agency. Once internalized, it becomes a lifelong tool for any educator or team to confront and dismantle inequity.



## Phase 1: Notice & Disrupt

This phase begins with a pause—a deliberate moment to examine current conditions and uncover patterns of inequity often hidden in plain sight. It involves interrogating schoolwide data, practices, and narratives that normalize disparities. The goal is to notice who is being underserved and to disrupt the status quo by surfacing systems of harm and amplifying historically marginalized voices.

### Example

School and district leaders reviewed enrollment data for AP and other advanced courses and found a stark underrepresentation of multilingual learners (MLs) and students of color. While these students made up over half of the school population, they were disproportionately excluded from advanced academic pathways. The team acknowledged that both structural barriers and implicit bias shaped who was seen as “ready” for rigor.

### Baseline Evidence Statements

- Only 12% of students enrolled in AP courses identified as multilingual learners, though MLs represented 38% of the student population.
- Less than 20% of Black and Latino students were enrolled in advanced coursework, compared to 65% of their White and Asian peers.
- Teacher recommendation forms included subjective criteria (e.g., “maturity,” “motivation”) that disproportionately excluded students of color and MLs.
- Families of MLs reported not receiving information about AP pathways in their home language.
- Surveys revealed that 60% of ML students and 55% of students of color felt that advanced coursework was “not for students like them.”
- Counselor interviews revealed assumptions about language proficiency being a barrier to success in advanced coursework.

This phase catalyzed a shift in thinking: from attributing disparities to student “readiness” to identifying systemic barriers in access, recruitment, and mindset.





## Phase 2: Empathize & Deepen Awareness

Gather qualitative and experiential evidence by deeply listening to students, families, and communities. Honoring non-dominant narratives helps illuminate root causes and fosters human connection. This phase builds relational trust and centers marginalized experiences.

### Example

Empathy interviews and listening circles uncovered stories of exclusion, silence, and untapped brilliance. Students shared how their aspirations were often dismissed, and families expressed a desire for more transparent, inclusive pathways to advanced coursework.

### Sample Questions Used

- Have you ever wanted to take an AP or advanced class? What happened?
- What messages do you receive—spoken or unspoken—about who belongs in honors or AP courses?
- How do your teachers support or discourage your academic goals?
- What does academic challenge feel like for you?
- How are your strengths in language, culture, and identity valued in your classes?
- What information do you and your family receive about advanced course options?
- What would it take for you to feel confident enrolling in a more rigorous course?

### Empathy Evidence

- Students of color described a “hidden gate” around advanced classes, often tied to teacher referrals and tracking decisions made as early as middle school.
- ML students shared that they were steered toward intervention or ELD-only courses, even when they had high academic potential.
- Families wanted their children to be challenged, but didn’t know how to advocate or navigate the process.
- Students expressed internalized doubt, saying things like “AP is for the smart kids—not for me.”
- Teachers reported discomfort with identifying MLs and students of color as candidates for advanced courses due to deficit-based assumptions.



### Phase 3: Define & Reframe

Triangulate empathy-driven insights with schoolwide data to define a clear “puzzle of practice.” Reframe challenges to address root causes, not surface-level symptoms. Shift from student blame to systemic responsibility.

#### Example

##### Puzzle of Practice:

*How might we redesign course placement systems, educator mindsets, and student supports to ensure multilingual learners and students of color are equitably represented, supported, and affirmed in advanced academic pathways?*

This reframing helped the team realize that representation in advanced coursework is not about student ability—it’s about access, expectation, and invitation.



### Phase 4: Ideate & Imagine Beyond Constraints

Liberate the team from deficit-based mindsets. Encourage bold, justice-driven possibilities that transcend compliance and focus on liberation. Embrace creativity to envision learning environments rooted in equity, agency, and belonging.

#### Example

The team envisioned and proposed:

- **A Transparent AP Access Campaign** featuring student voice and multilingual outreach.
- **Revamped Recommendation Practices** using asset-based indicators and student self-nomination.
- **Culturally Responsive Academic Prep Workshops** to support MLs and students of color before and during AP coursework.

- **Counselor and Teacher Training** to disrupt bias and normalize high expectations.
- **Peer Ambassadors** who mentor and encourage historically excluded students to pursue advanced coursework.
- **Family Workshops in Home Languages** to demystify the AP process and co-construct goals.



## Phase 5: Prototype & Co-Create

Move from imagination to implementation. Design small, testable pilots with the students, families, and educators most impacted. Co-creation ensures strategies are grounded in lived realities and positioned for success.

### Example

The following were prototyped:

- **“AP For All” Peer-Led Campaign** featuring testimonies from students of color and MLs in advanced classes.
- **Equity-Based Course Recommendation Rubric** co-developed by teachers, counselors, and students.
- **AP Prep Learning Lab** open to first-time AP students, with built-in tutoring and wellness supports.
- **Student-Led Family Forums** about AP access and opportunity, conducted in English, Spanish, and Arabic.

### Theory of Action

If we co-design and implement targeted, equity-centered prototypes—

- such as an “AP for All” campaign,
- an inclusive recommendation system,
- academic and emotional support spaces for first-time AP students, and
- multilingual family engagement strategies—

**And if** we develop these solutions with students and families most impacted by exclusion from advanced coursework,

**And if** we continuously collect feedback, refine implementation, and challenge deficit narratives about readiness,

**Then** we will create a school culture where:

- MLs and students of color see themselves as capable, college-bound scholars,
- Advanced courses reflect the full diversity of the school community,
- Educator mindsets evolve toward equity and asset-based practice,
- And families are empowered as co-navigators of academic opportunity.

Each prototype will be accompanied by a SMARTIE goal to ensure accountability, impact measurement, and inclusivity.



## Phase 6: Evaluate & Sustain

Assess impact using an equity lens. Measure what matters, including shifts in relationships, agency, and power. Use feedback to iterate and ensure long-term sustainability. Equity transformation is not a one-time initiative, but a continuous commitment.

### Example

Pilot results after one semester showed:

- A **50% increase** in ML and student of color enrollment in at least one AP course.
- **90% family participation** in AP forums, including multilingual families.
- **Improved educator mindset scores** on a pre-/post-equity belief survey.
- Peer mentors reported increased self-efficacy and leadership skills.
- Students in the AP Learning Lab had higher course retention and reported stronger academic confidence.

Based on feedback, the school committed to expanding the recommendation system schoolwide, offering AP prep supports earlier in the pipeline, and formalizing a multilingual family advisory group to co-lead the next inquiry cycle.