

# **Crafting a School for Today:**

**Findings from an Exploratory Study**

October 2014

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**Prepared for the Webster Groves School District Board of Education**

**by the Department of Curriculum and Instruction**

# School for Today

## DESIGN ELEMENTS

### I: DEMOCRACY

#### Principles

- Adult as Curator/School as Village
- Learner Directed
- Inclusive Voices
- Culture of Trust

### II: RESPONSIVE SPACES

#### Principles

- Influenced by the Learner
- Adaptable
- Interactive
- Ecology and Aesthetic

### III: COMMUNITY

#### Principles

- Connection and Contribution
- Citizenship

### IV: SYSTEMIC ADAPTIVENESS

#### Principles

- Research
- Interdependence
- Learning Organizations
- Compass Leadership

## Purpose

Beginning in February, 2014, the Webster Groves School District Board of Education charged the Department of Curriculum and Instruction with conceptualizing an “innovation school”. The primary reason for initiating this project stemmed from a Vertical Study of Learning in the Webster Groves School District which was conducted from May of 2013 through January of 2014. The report provided preliminary data and findings to help the Board of Education and the staff of the Webster Groves School District understand the current dynamic of learning, preschool through grade twelve, and offered insight for envisioning and realizing an enhanced learning paradigm.

This exploratory study is a response to the Board of Education’s request to conceptualize an “innovation school” - extending the Vertical Study of Learning. The primary goal of this summary report is to share outcomes of an exploratory study. It is anticipated that these findings will extend our understanding of the main design elements for an “innovation school”. For the purpose of this study an “innovation school” is purely conceptual. The findings propose a concept based on institutional change, and outline a conceptual framework to be further built upon with supporting theory, design considerations, and operationalization – in future phases of development.

## Framework

The mission of the Webster Groves School District describes the district as a “community” that... “is committed to academic and personal success for every student.” In June, 2013, after extensive work by a group of District staff and community stakeholders, the Board of Education adopted a vision statement that reflects the core values of the mission. The newly adopted vision statement states:

*“As a learning community, the Webster Groves School District will lead in purposeful innovation that challenges each of us to discover and pursue our passions and make a positive impact on the world.”*

Following the adoption of this vision statement, the Board of Education charged the curriculum department with conceptualizing an “innovation school.” Related to that undertaking, the team chose to explore the nature of innovation, how innovation might be defined for any school within the District, and how the concept of innovation might influence learning as it occurs throughout the District.

In order to explore and develop ideas, in an authentic as well as transparent way, a timeline for completion of the investigative process was developed.

<b>PHASE</b>	<b>I - WHY</b>	<b>II - WHAT</b>	<b>III - HOW</b>	<b>IV - INITIATION</b>
<b>Timeline (Approximate)</b>	Spring/Summer, 2014	Fall, 2014	Spring, 2015	Fall, 2015
<b>Focus</b>	Conceptualization – Exploration Process	Design Process	Development Pre-Operations	Operationalize
<b>Guiding Question</b>	What if?	What can be?	What will be?	What is?
<b>Aim</b>	Concept Essential Components Initial Vision	Prototype Design Constructs	Creation Actualize	Begin

During **Phase 1**, group participants explored the possibilities of what innovation and an “innovation school” could be like. This phase was meant to put preconceived notions aside and to look through the creation of a concept. A variety of methods were utilized to help discover different ideas, concepts, philosophies, and methods. After this work was completed, an initial concept, with the key characteristics identified, was prepared for the Webster Groves School District Board of Education.

During **Phase 2**, group participants will focus on the creation of a design for an “innovation school” or “school for today” stemming from the concepts presented during Phase 1. Design considerations will include systemic implications and, depending on the direction given by the Board of Education, site-based implications for a single school of innovation.

During **Phase 3**, group participants will focus on actualizing the design considerations from Phase 2 in order for the concept and design of an “innovation school” or “school for today” to become operational. Relevant stakeholder groups will be included in this phase as more detailed form is given to the concepts and subsequent elements of design from Phase 2.

This exploratory study and resulting report reflect research gathered during Phase 1 - conceptualization of an “innovation school”. Subsequent phases are proposed to the Board of Education for consideration in actualizing the results of this study. The concepts presented provide a framework for decision-making through the multi-phase process.

## Methods

Over eighty members of Webster Groves School District including staff and community participated in the exploratory study by open invitation. This initial group, named “The Collaborative”, participated in an introductory meeting on April 7, 2014, during which members of the Collaborative were invited to participate in one of three self-selected teams developed to dive deeper into research on the topic of innovation. If members of the Collaborative were not able to participate on a self-selected team, they were encouraged to maintain participation. They were given the responsibility of overseeing the work of the teams in order to unify and support the process. All research conducted by the three teams and Collaborative utilized the lens of the Vertical Learning Study’s findings to help organize ideas and concepts explored and discovered. The three teams which the Collaborative members could select from included:

**1) Research Team** - Members of this team were invited to participate in a series of video conferenced interviews with a variety of leaders in the field of education. The leaders were asked open-ended questions, and the participants listened to their responses. Once the interview

concluded, participants debriefed about the themes they heard and the “wonderings” that arose.

Leaders who are respected in the area of educational innovation and who were likely to provide insights, ideas, and experiences, were solicited from members of the Collaborative. Of the names collected, six individuals agreed to participate in the study conducted by the Research Team. They included:

**Melissa Bradford** - Melissa is co-founder and a staff member at Tallgrass Sudbury School in Riverside Illinois, and holds a Masters Degree in Education (K-9) as well as a Bachelors Degree in Philosophy from Northwestern University. For 7 years she taught junior high science in the public school system. She is now an adjunct faculty member at Joliet Junior College - teaching math and science in her spare time when not staffing at Tallgrass Sudbury.

**Dr. Jere Hochman** - Dr. Hochman is the superintendent of the Bedford Central School District in Westchester County, New York. Dr. Hochman states that he is a “lifetime public school teacher, principal, and superintendent”. In addition to being a leader within the New York State School Superintendents, Dr. Hochman continues to teach and speak on the topics of organizational change and public policy at the national level.

**Dr. Brenda Fyfe** - Dr. Fyfe is the Dean of the School of Education at Webster University. Dr. Fyfe has studied the Reggio Emilia schools and philosophy for 20 years. Over this period of time she has organized delegations to Reggio, collaborated to bring the 100 Languages of Children Exhibit to St. Louis twice, obtained grant funding to support the professional development of teachers from several schools, authored chapters in books and several journal articles on Reggio-inspired topics such as negotiated learning, the relationship between documentation and assessment, parent participation, conversations with children, and making learning visible in higher education. Dr. Fyfe has presented as a keynote speaker and has served on many panels at national and international conferences on Reggio-inspired practice and research. Dr. Fyfe is a former president of the Association for Constructivist Teaching and currently serves as this national organization’s membership chair and treasurer. Dr. Fyfe has also served as an elected board member of the American Association of Early Childhood Teacher Education.

**Dr. Larry Lezotte** - Dr. Lezotte is an American educational researcher, consultant, and speaker, notable for his expertise on creating effective K-12 schools. Dr. Lezotte is the founder of Effective Schools movement. He has written widely on effective schools and

speaks across North America. In recognition of his efforts, Dr. Lezotte received the 2003 Council of Chief State School Officers' Distinguished Service Award, and in 2009, he became the ninth recipient of the Brock International Prize in Education, presented each year to outstanding Americans who have made a difference in education. The Brock International Prize in Education recognizes an individual who has made a specific innovation or contribution to the science and art of education, resulting in significant impact on the practice or understanding of the field of education.

**Terrell (Terry) Heick, III** - Terry is an educator focused on social improvement through learning innovation. He is the founder and director at TeachThought, a company whose mission is to clarify and actuate deep, connected, and self-directed learning possibilities for students. He has expertise and influence in the following areas: Thought leadership on how learning is changing in a digital world; Curriculum development aligned with Common Core, Project-Based Learning, and Mobile Learning initiatives; Philology, including the use of media to transfer cultural legacies; Adaptive learning and learning pathways as modern differentiation; Pattern of humanized, localized, then globalized learning applications. Terry has presented on these related topics at 2010, 2011, and 2012 Global Education Conference.

**Matthew Murrie** - Matthew is an English professor and Coordinator of Innovation for the Center for Engaging the World at Westminster College. He is also the Cofounder and Chief Curiosity Curator of the What If... Conference. He has over a decade of teaching experience in five countries on three different continents as a public school teacher, Peace Corps volunteer, and college professor. Matthew is the author of *While You Were Sleeping and Every Day on Earth*, owner of World Spectacular LLC and an "edupreneurship" pioneer.

**Andrew McHugh** - Andrew is the Founder, CEO at Dasein Design. Andrew was the Cofounder and Chief Curiosity Curator of the What If...Conference. His background is in philosophy, design, math, physics, and systems for people to network. He's created a bikeshare program, developed a few web applications, and worked for systematic sustainability change.

**2) Task Force** - Names of individuals, respected in their field and thought to be able to provide valuable insight, ideas, and experiences surrounding innovation as it relates to education, were solicited from members of the Collaborative. It is intentional that many of those selected were not directly involved in public education. These individuals were invited to participate in a

discussion, to delve into their different thoughts and ideas about education. Members of the task force primarily observed and listened. The participants of the Task Force were:

- **Kelly Garrett**, Executive Director of KIPP Schools St. Louis;
- **Steve Shankman**, Entrepreneur, developer of Riverport Amphitheater and numerous other ventures;
- **Tuan Nguyen**, Director of Education of the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis;
- **Tamara Rodney**, Adjunct Professor at Webster University and St. Louis Community College specializing in English as a Second Language (ESL) education.

Once the discussion concluded, members of the Task Force were led through a debriefing session with Marc Maness (consultant specializing in human centered design research methods) in order to develop the themes and ideas that emerged throughout the process.

**3) Social Media Collaboration** - Members of this self-selected team of the Collaborative were charged with using social media as a data source for information, research, and ideas that were innovative in nature and would contribute to the developing concept. Information was hashtagged (#) using the language of the findings of the Vertical Study of Learning in order to categorize and manage data.

Data from the three teams of the Collaborative - Research Team, Task Force, and Social Media Collaboration offered far-reaching, current, and seminal information from which to conceptualize an “innovation school” or “school for today”. What follows is a description of the evolving concept.

## **Developing a Concept**

Conceptualization is the process of establishing what is meant by a term. For the purpose of this report and exploratory study, the term “innovation school” is referred to as “school for today”. Conceptualizing a “school for today” formed from the consideration of key attributes (*design elements*) identified through the exploratory study. Additional steps involved in the process of conceptualization included: (a) further description of each key attribute (*design element*) identified through the exploratory study and expressed as *principles*, further contributing to the understanding of a “school for today”; and (b) the identification of relationships which tie all *design elements* and supporting *principles* to each other and to the whole (*conceptual framework*).

It should be pointed out that “School for Today” is presented as a thought question “What if the first public schools were being conceptualized and created today?” Not on the premise,

how can we build a school to meet the needs of today. The first philosophical position presents the view that a school founded upon the tools, social needs and realities of today, would be forward reaching. It would be designed and developed in today's world with all of the richness technology, diversity and possibility that this level of American innovation allows. That is by it's definition futuristic. Thus School for Today does not mean the limited confines of this late 20th century or early 21st century time period. School for Today is forward thinking and futuristic by design.

Special attention was given in the design of the exploratory study to find data sources that offered opportunities for narratives and patterns (overlapping concepts) to be produced in the data. Data collection and management involved interpretation and categorization of narratives and patterns (*design elements/principles*) for the purpose of understanding the term, "school for today", from which to propose an initial vision and considerations for designing for innovation.

Questions that guided this exploratory study included:

- How does our learning community bring about institutional change that advances the vision of the Webster Groves School District?
- How does this change initiative transform learning for all?

Present in the design of the study were the newly adopted Webster Groves School District values - *Learning, Curiosity, Diversity, Courage, Community, Individuality, Tradition, and Innovation*. These values were embedded in dialogue with Collaborative members, Research Team, Task Force, Social Media Collaboration, and contributors in the field that participated in the study.

## Findings

The intent of the following findings is to provide an understanding of *design elements* and *principles* relative to their significance in conceptualizing a "school for today". These *design elements* and supporting *principles* work together, offering relevant thinking found to be seminal in innovating schools and learning practices. No one *design element* or *principle* may be solely responsible for the success or failure of future design considerations as they all work in harmony in formulating a concept.

Four *design elements* were found in the exploratory study to be central to conceptualizing an "innovation school" or "school for today" - *Democracy, Responsive Spaces, Community, and Systemic Revisioning*. Each contributes to the understanding of the term, "innovation", in both

systemic and practical application in designing for learning in a future-forward context. Design element *principles* further define, with more specificity, aspects unique to a deeper understanding of the *design elements* presented. All serve in combination to contribute to a concept for a *School for Today*.

## **Design Element: DEMOCRACY**

### **Principles**

#### **Adult as Curator - School as Village**

In the *School for Today*, the role of the “teacher” deepens to that of “curator”. Teachers are born with an innate gift. Teachers as curators use their gifts to work in the background. Like artful teachers, “curators” provoke critical thinking, problem finding, raise questions, challenge assumptions, see fascination in failure; drawing attention to details, patterns, and nuances. Teachers as curators are influential and sensitive to the learner. The “curator” appears when the learner is ready. This shifts from traditional thinking on pedagogy that is divided by relations of unequal power toward a pedagogy of shared understandings through listening that is unified by relationships and shared power. The barrier of the language of “student” is removed. What is fostered and valued is interdependence, exchange, and collaboration as processes that transform learning across traditional divisions of power within and across disciplines.

Teachers as curators are seen as curious, asking the questions, not as solely having the answers. By facilitating learning, the learner owns what he/she does. The *School for Today* thereby becomes a place of research for all learners - children, adults, parents/guardians, community. Conversation/shared dialogue imposes and advances curricula. Creativity evolves as a new literacy. Assessments are made meaningful as learners, and their learning, are self-actualized.

The *School for Today* embraces the culture of a “village”. Every contact for the learners in this “village” has a direct and important impact on how the learner views the greater world and conducts him- or herself within it; duly influencing the person they are becoming. By embracing the shift from school-as-a-factory to school-as-a-village, traditional ways of framing learning are reconsidered, i.e. learners grouped by age, subject-specialization, etc. The *School for Today* does not impose beliefs and systems but rather nurtures the learner to grow, treating everyone’s achievement as being of worth and value. This becomes the shared responsibility of the “village”.

**Learner Directed**

The *School for Today* considers how, where, what, and with whom learning occurs to be a right of the learner. *The School for Today* promotes education based on learner-directed and learner-managed learning. This supports a shift from dependency to independence and interdependence of the learner, from managed to co-constructed learning, from projects that are temporary attention grabbers to invitational learning and choice in opportunities. Passion and interest of the learner are central to this transferal. There is no “done” with passion. For the learner, there is a drive to learn even when things are difficult, further empowering passion. Interest brings hope and inspiration to this pursuit. The learner is comfortable learning new things; develops a confidence in relying on his/her own judgment; and is capable of pursuing his/her passions and interests to a high level of competency. This is valued as a ‘right’ of the learner.

In a *School for Today*, learning is a function of time, and time belongs to the learner. Time is the variable; learning is the constant. For example, children will learn to read in their own time, not all at the same time. Learning is seen as ongoing. Time is not set by a clock or spent in remediation. Time is determined by an openness to the learner’s needs, interests, and intrinsic development. This requires breaking away from predictable outcomes for learners. The *School for Today* accepts the responsibility to ensure that every learner grows to his / her maximum potential and that not everyone will learn at the same rate of time.

In the *School for Today*, learning is values-based with learner-driven paths. Meaning cannot be made out of an experience without it being values-based. The learner in the *School for Today* seeks self-knowledge in pursuit of good work with a connection between learning and purpose. A foremost consideration is what each learner is uniquely suited to. The role of the learner is central as his/her personal involvement determines success. There is a trust in the learners to know that they will make decisions that are good for them. The purpose becomes developing self-actualized learners.

The *School for Today* embraces personalized learning that yields social change by building systems that allow people to connect with each other for idea generation, consensus-based decision making; learners self-organizing themselves into groups who are able to work together and share ideas openly and freely while valuing a place for the independent learner in a system that honors groups. Technology is a way of bringing a broad range of learners into the circle. The attitude of contribution and collaboration supplants attitudes of competitiveness. There is a shared responsibility for one another’s learning. There is a shared value for contributing to the future.

**Inclusive Voices**

Shared voice and inclusion is central to the *School for Today*. Empowering and valuing differences through learning about one's self is promoted in a culture of democracy that has open conversations about participation, responsibility, and accountability. In such a democracy, everything is possible with possibilities reflecting many values, perspectives, and priorities. In the *School for Today*, there is awareness and attention to cultural and social membership that acknowledges and validates each member. Members feel advantaged because of the sense of personal responsibility, self-control, and continued enthusiasm for learning. Every learner feels a sense of belonging.

**Culture of Trust**

A person who trusts values the thinking of others. This level of trust propels the *School for Today* to endorse risk. Learning does not occur without risk. Failure becomes a necessary skill with space to play allowing for such risk to occur. The School for Today promotes a learning ecology where genuine growth occurs in time requiring a culture that collectively and individually thinks about itself and its practices. This includes encouraging trust, risk, and freedom of teachers to try and do different things. Constraints are minimized. A culture of trust expects uncertainties and ambiguity to be embraced as a part of unfolding learning.

In the *School for Today*, democracy does not presume free choice. The *School for Today* seeks to understand "why" - the purpose and belief – in all aspects of decision making. Public education IS a democracy - a democratic value. In the *School for Today*, children and teenagers are given all the rights and responsibilities of democratic citizenship; where learners truly practice the principles of free speech and freedom to have input on their own experiences; where the learners develop rules/shared agreements that affect them, and play a role in seeing that these are carried through. Additionally, the *School for Today* advances by developing ongoing understandings that evolve through democratic dialogue with families, stakeholders in the broader community, and within the culture. Democracy is the end goal - participation, accountability, and responsibility.

**Design Element: RESPONSIVE SPACES****Principles****Influenced by the Learner**

Learning spaces in the *School for Today* are influenced by the learner. This is engendered by a culture of trust and empowerment of the learner. Learning spaces, absent the traditional view of “teacher”, create project spaces where the learner can play and experiment. This does not make the “teacher” absent but rather a responsive designer of the space and participant in problem solving as part of the learning process. In the *School for Today*, “walls” echo the learning process, reflecting evidence of ideas, thought, and evolving path, not just products, for all to see. Much like a start-up company, an environment is created that evokes and reflects innovation from the learners.

Learning happens when people interact. In the *School for Today*, common spaces are created for learners to come together to create and interact. Such contributive spaces grow and change over time. Common spaces are democratic. Play, citizenship, and personal contribution yield social change.

### **Adaptable**

In the *School for Today*, spaces are intentionally designed and fluid. Space exists for individual, small group, as well as for large group learning. The utilization of learning spaces is determined by the learner. Learning spaces are flexible to expand and contract with the energy of learning and are responsive to the movement of learners between spaces. Every space has within it potential for learning. Learning spaces in the *School for Today* are influenced by learning contexts in the real world, not solely by traditional thinking on school design, so as to break away from less adaptive models.

### **Interactive**

Spaces that evoke opportunity for experiencing learning are reflected in the design of the *School for Today*. Learning spaces are playful and inspire trying new things. Spaces promote challenge and risk both in their design and in the materials present for the learner. Both digital and physical spaces are inviting and valued as spheres of social development. The traditional classroom becomes an experience - a “playground” atmosphere that evokes “aha’s”. Adults meet those entering and ask, “How may I assist you?”

### **Ecology and Aesthetic**

In the *School for Today*, the environment is considered a teacher. Learning environments in the *School for Today* are pleasurable, with sensory contrasts, where the learner finds comfort. Spaces create how you want to think within the space and are influenced by color, texture, music, greenery . . . elements inspiring innovation by

engaging all five senses in the process of learning. A rich normalcy allows for comfortable spaces that nurture well-being and belonging.

Learning extends beyond the school's physical walls. Learning in nature is a key element in the *School for Today*. Osmosis with the world outside invites more of a “living” space than a “school” space. Additionally, learning spaces in the *School for Today* allow access and exchange with digital and virtual worlds providing a rich platform for supporting exploratory learning.

## **Design Element: COMMUNITY**

### **Principles**

#### **Connection and Contribution**

The *School for Today* values learning from and with others in a culture of membership that connects humans. Within this culture, learning about one's self through differences, both in individuals and learning contexts, creates a culture of connection in which humans “touch” each other and their worlds. The *School for Today* embraces a social system, building a voice of how and why related to learning and lowering the divide between school and the community (both local and global). “Community” becomes a life-support system. Learning becomes human, not solely academic.

In the *School for Today*, connections with community, contribution to the community, and partnerships built with the community lowers the divide between subjects, school, and the community. Physical environments and resources (interactions - using others as resources) for learning are designed with intention to extend beyond school walls and into the community. The *School for Today* looks to the local community for opportunity for authentic learning experiences or “experiential learning.” Learning becomes community based as resources are accessed and interactions forged. The community becomes the classroom. Daily communication around the learner and seeking the connections to standards of learning assures continuity and accountability as well as a built-in process for continual reflection and renewal.

#### **Citizenship**

Connections with individuals anywhere enhances learning and is unique to each learner's experience in the *School for Today*. Seeking answers and making connections on the global level helps each learner connect with something bigger than themselves. Local acting and global thinking (crystallization of local learning) are values at the core of the

Webster Groves School District's vision statement and are supported in the *School for Today*.

## **Design Element: Systemic Adaptiveness (Leadership)**

### **Principles**

#### **Research**

In the *School for Today*, "school" is a premise for research. Research means to search and search again. Innovation will require not only showing the numbers as related to data as data, in the traditional sense, can be backward looking. A continuous process of reflection and reflexivity involves examining both learning systems and the research relationship in addressing assumptions and preconceptions and how these affect decisions. Critical reflection in relation to an ongoing study invites exploration, bringing forward ongoing learning and understanding as to how research might influence a system of learning and the application of evolving theory. Emergent data is not judgement based but rather pushes and tugs at the status quo. This may start small but must, ultimately, fit into the overall system as momentum is gained and sustainability is seen to make better the current system. Application of an ongoing research analytics embeds a process of transforming data into insight for authentic decision making through a lens of inquiry that evolves and examines principles and theories. In the *School for Today*, leadership does not seek to be 'right' but to become less wrong by the ongoing collecting and reconciling data and adjusting practices accordingly; accepting disruption toward a more cohesive and expansive way of thinking about learning.

Research in the *School for Today* requires identifying and measuring with new, not old, "lodestones", such as citizenship, meaningful innovation, happiness, learner as doer, etc. Frameworks developed from ongoing research present the opportunity to work from mental models, not prescriptions. Openness to new and unfamiliar ideas, and the sense of urgency that emerges, are necessary mind-sets as it is determined what will be 'let go' in the transformation to a learner-focused culture. 'Letting go' gives way to organized abandonment and thoughtful managing for necessary and anticipated disruption. Foremost in the research process is determining what is meant by "innovation", for the purpose of clarity and alignment with the WGSD vision for learning and organizing for change.

#### **Interdependence**

Interdependence within a learning organization promotes deeper visioning of a system as an ecosystem. The concept of interdependence promotes mutual dependence toward building a system of learning based on new thinking with a clarity of purpose found in the complexity of interdependence. Individual, community, and systemic transformation are interdependent of one another. Changing one changes the other. Great leaders anticipate change. Efforts in the *School for Today* are made so as to not oversimplify but honor the complexity of change. Leadership overseeing the *School for Today* orients toward understanding the change processes of each dependent element and seeks to understand and be responsive to the implications of each in the change process. Innovation and structure can co-exist. Committing to understanding interdependence brings skill and betterment to systemic thinking, in the hope of transforming learning for all.

### **Learning Organization**

In the *School for Today*, everything is possible but is contingent on the learning of the adults and the organization, not just the traditional view of solely the "student" as learner. This includes community members being invited to learn and feel connected; networking becomes an enterprise bringing people together from diverse parts of the learning community (local and global) to contribute to better informational connectivity. Anticipated disruption to any system of learning presents both a cultural and didactic problems. The answer is in the creation of networks that are cohesive and continuously learning. Learning only comes when answers are not known. Leadership in the *School for Today* welcomes what is not known and trusts what is learned while adhering to a high level of "educational standards" in supporting all learning environments.

Leadership in the *School for Today* embraces a democratic environment that allows for a willingness to 'unlearn' and 'reimagine' ways that have been 'learned' over time, as education largely remains influenced by the past. Tradition and time-honored practices bring a sense of stability because they are equated with success. The idea of 'school' is iconic; therefore, if you design a new way of thinking about 'school', you will get a 'school', without rethinking embedded mental models. Extrapolated into the future, there is no guarantee that what has worked in the past will translate to future practices. There are no guarantees that the future will look anything like the past. As contexts change, existing practices may no longer apply and the learning organization risks following blindly into the future while fealty honoring the past, despite wisdom otherwise. A cultural shift in the way we see education and learning necessitates. Rather than a piecemeal, fragmented response to this impending shift to a learning culture, systemic change in thinking and practice, informed by thinking and values in a new

paradigm emerging around systemic thinking, research, and complexity evoke forward possibilities.

Within the learning organization in the *School for Today*, reflective practice becomes a source of professional renewal. Valued is 'maverick' thinking and questioning of certainties; finding those who will challenge assumptions. A willingness to 'unlearn' and 'reimagine' brings forward opportunity for new thinking - What could happen if? What might happen when . . . ?, and the ongoing consideration of how best to equip young people to not only cope with their future but shape their future. Continually considering what we want young people to be, beyond 'educated', is central to ongoing learning.

### **Compass Leadership**

Leadership in the *School for Today* has central to all decision making the mission, vision, and core beliefs of the WGSD. These values become the "whys" of the learning organization and serve as a compass for decisions and aspirations. Leadership in the *School for Today* accepts that charting the course forward requires the need for a 'compass' over a 'map', believing that knowing where the organization is heading means moving forward. No longer do we manage for stability but for anticipated disruption. Since the world is in constant change, whatever is faced in the process of moving forward can be shaped through ongoing research and evolving learning, always following the direction of the compass. Compass leadership navigates in a constantly changing world. This offers the possibility of a system of learning that is authentic and responsive to systemic conditions of uncertainty and complexity; one that nurtures the increasingly important qualities of organizational agility, adaptability, creativity, innovative thinking, responsiveness, and hope. Learning always moves forward. Courage informs and strengthens leadership - courage to initiate action, courage to be open to change, courage to bring a voice to the challenges of change and to instill courage in others in supporting the good of all.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The *School for Today* Conceptual Framework is a cohesive framework that has as its foundation the vision and mission of the Webster Groves School District. The concepts presented in the framework - Democracy, Responsive Spaces, Community, Systemic Adaptiveness - provides a visual summary of the study outcomes for conceptualizing a *School for Today*. This framework serves as a groundwork for ongoing design considerations, offering a unifying and inclusive vision for a *School for Today*.

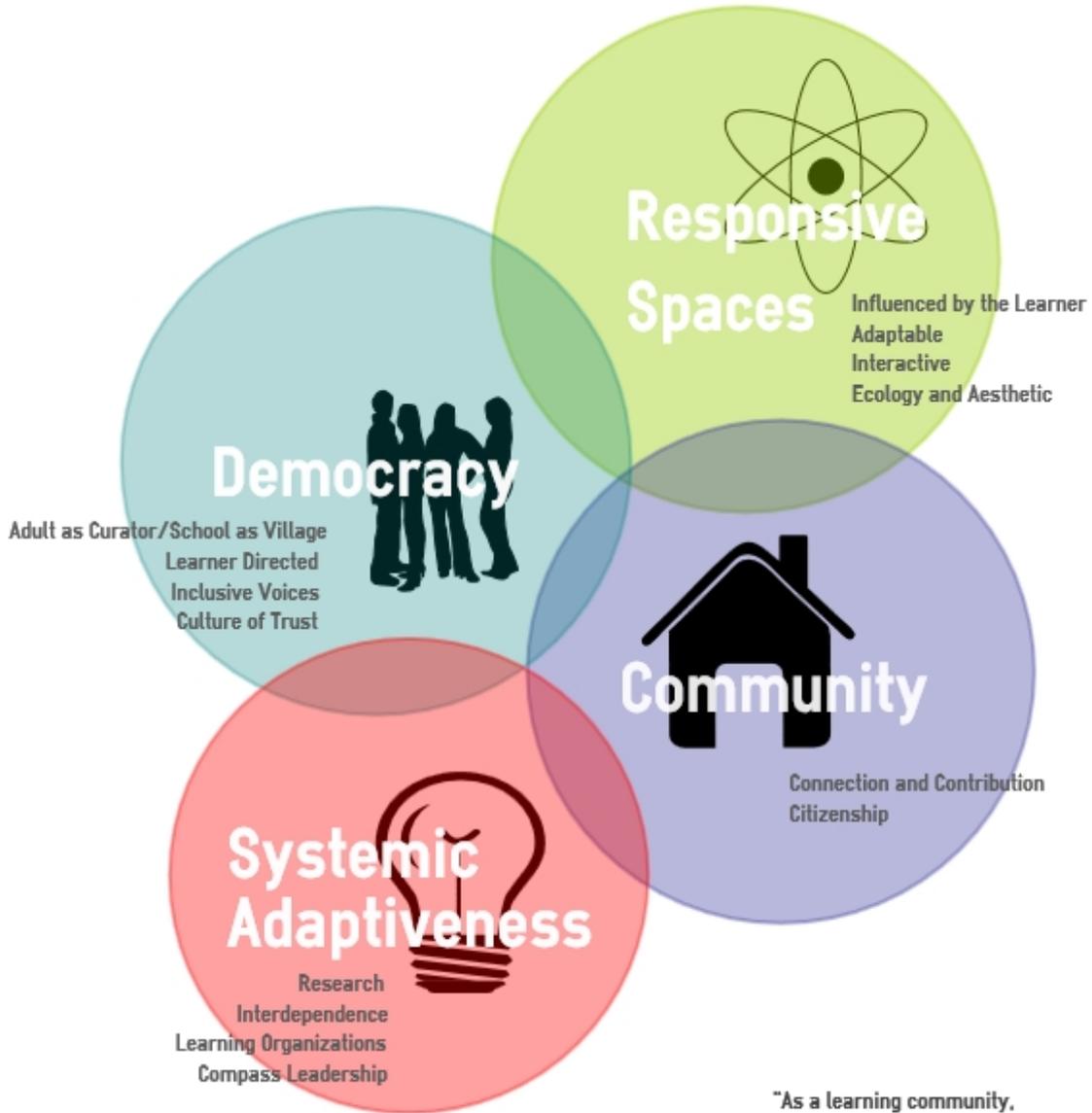
The *School for Today* Conceptual Framework represents a commitment and coherence to the Webster Groves School District vision, mission, and core beliefs. This framework allows for continued development, with flexibility in mind, so as to be responsive to innovation in educationally relevant ways that support development and vitalize the District culture as a whole, not as simply the issue of a singular school, informing the questions:

*How does our learning community bring about institutional change that advances the vision of the Webster Groves School District?*

*How does this change initiative transform learning for all?*

# School for Today

Conceptual Framework ↓



The Webster Groves School District community is committed to academic and personal success for every student.



"As a learning community, the Webster Groves School District will lead in purposeful innovation that challenges each of us to discover and pursue our passions and make a positive impact on the world."

## Conclusion

As an outcome of adopting a forward-thinking ‘vision’ for all learners that embraces ‘purposeful innovation’, the Webster Groves School District Board of Education charged the Department of Curriculum and Instruction with conceptualizing an “innovation school” – deemed through the study as a “school for today”. The primary reason for initiating this work stemmed from a Vertical Study of Learning in the Webster Groves School District conducted from May of 2013, through January of 2014. The report generated from the Vertical Study of Learning provided preliminary data and findings to help the Board of Education and the staff of the Webster Groves School District understand the current dynamic of learning, preschool through grade twelve, and offered insight for envisioning and realizing an enhanced learning paradigm.

This exploratory study and summary report is a response to the Board of Education’s request to conceptualize an “innovation school”. The fundamental goal of this summary report is to develop and extend conceptual understanding of the phenomenon of an “innovation school” - deemed in this study as *School for Today* - and provide a contribution to the conceptualization and ongoing study of innovation. The findings propose a concept based on social change, and outline a conceptual framework to be further built on with supporting theory, design considerations, and operationalizing – in the further stages of development.

This report is a response to the call for new theoretical, conceptual and applied alternatives for renewing school systems. Offered in this exploratory study are findings that suggest a need for a system wide shift toward a culture of forward thinking and future learning. Invariably from our research design, we posit that a learning organization and system can cope with the complexity of “innovation” within the wider community. This responsiveness results in the viewing of innovation as process and product oriented rather than purely conceptual. It can then be seen as a system of learning.

Four *design elements* were found to be central to the concept of a forward looking School for Today. These are *Democracy*, *Responsive Spaces*, *Community Integration*, and *Systemic Revisioning*. Conceptualizing a *School for Today* involves the ongoing task of exploring a variety of *design challenges* for developing these elements into a coherent structure. These *design challenges* are offered as specific "parts" of a future solution and serves as a collective conceptual foundation for the school for today.

The creation of a *School for Today* is also dependent upon careful, trained implementation and ongoing understanding of supporting *principles*. These rich supporting principles that sure up each element, give practical application to the design elements as presented. These principles are the real “value added” even in what might appear to be a traditional schooling framework.

As this report documents, we the stakeholders of the WGSD have the means for creating the School for Today. Our design elements and supporting principles have sound basis in evidence from high level and longitudinal analysis. They point toward a layered strategy for reinvigorating our learners and positioning them for the 21st century knowledge environments that are emerging. We invite our community to join this effort to improve the educational experience of every child that is today served by the Webster Groves School District. Moreover, it is our anticipation that our community will provide a democratic, responsive, and vigorous learning experience to those learners yet to come.