



The Business of Education

Transforming the Teaching and Learning Experience

A White Paper

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The EDU-LUTION starts with U.

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Designed for educators by educators, Upstart Vibe is a status quo disruptor introducing new ways of thinking, innovative approaches, and transformative practices. It is a virtual K-12 community marketplace providing access to Solution Providers, vetted education related services and products, crowdsourced action research projects, a community of like-minded practitioners, and resources and tools to offer real solutions to today's education challenges. Join us. The edu-lution starts with you.

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TRANSFORMING THE TEACHING AND
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Executive Summary

Experts agree the global disruption to education caused by the pandemic is unparalleled, triggering wholesale learning loss across the globe. While learning loss is not a new concept in education, what is unprecedented is every child across the globe, at the exact same time, has been impacted more deeply than ever recorded in history. Now is the time for the education community to play bigger than ever before. Teachers and administrators must adopt a radical urgency to embrace new solutions to today's education challenges and maintain a laser focus on student success.

To meet this challenge comes an evolutionary idea – the Upstart Vibe (UV) Flywheel. This student success framework launches an innovative operational strategy. Proven to propel organizations exponentially, it harnesses its power and potential from research. Think Amazon – from a radical idea to sell books online to **The Everything Store** – Amazon's growth trajectory was intentionally designed and drew deeply upon Jim Collins' research presented in **Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap and Others Do Not (Collins, J. 2001)**. Over the last 20 years, many organizations, including Facebook, Apple, Netflix, and Google leveraged innovation flywheels to become the most valuable businesses in the world.

This research-based and fully vetted flywheel strategy can be channeled to help education ecosystems achieve the same unprecedented and consistent results. We translate a “business” strategy into an operational strategy applicable for use in any K-12 educational setting. This paper introduces the UV Flywheel as an operational strategy with student success at the center, elevating student success as both a goal and an outcome.

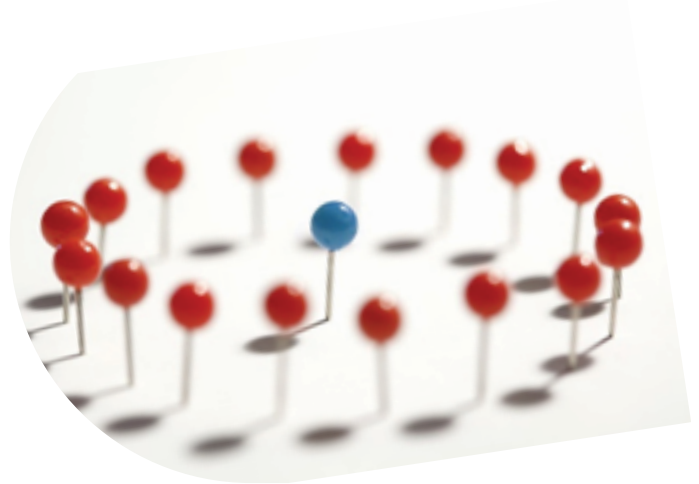
A brief overview of Jim Collins' flywheel effect reviews the foundational knowledge on which this strategy is built. It provides an overview of an operational strategy – what it is and why you should care. We introduce the components of the UV Flywheel with a deep dive into each of the six: **Student Success, Leadership, Empowerment, Innovation, Engagement, and Growth**. Each component has been chosen, sequenced, and researched, with an extensive bibliography listed within the **Appendix**.



We conclude with a call to action to join the Upstarts of the education world to add your radical results to the student learning equation. Also, you are invited to engage in a national, crowdsourced action research initiative designed to share progress on the UV Flywheel components, while using them as improvement guides within your institution.

The Flywheel Effect

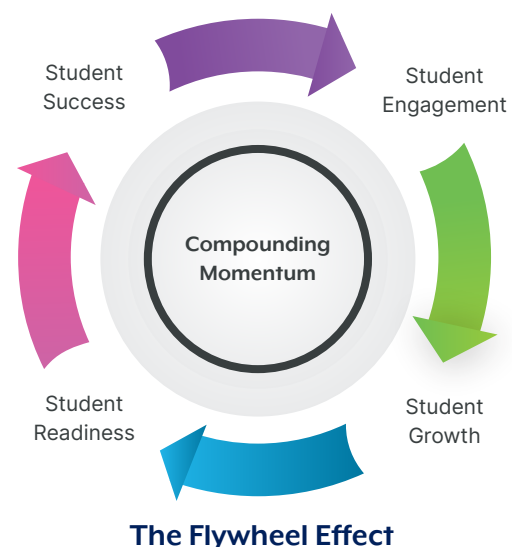
Jim Collins, researcher, teacher, and author of **Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap and Others Do Not** (Collins, J. 2001), wanted to discover what made companies successful and others not. He sought to answer a central question, “**Can a good company become a great company, and if so, how?**” Through his successful research project, he uncovered the essential elements that helped catapult organizations to extraordinary results and sustained them for 15 years or more. The answers he sought needed to be universal and applicable to any organization. His research process focused on the evidence of these organizations – their results – rather than data collected to prove or disprove a devised theory. Data from multiple organizations gave the research team the ability to identify the key characteristics shared amongst all great enterprises.



A significant over-arching finding of the research was that those organizations making the leap to achieve extraordinary results did not do so in a single, defining moment or event. Instead, the process to greatness resembled “...pushing a giant, heavy flywheel” persistently, in a single direction, over and over, turn upon turn, building momentum until its own weight propels it toward innovation, discovery, development, and beyond. Jim Collins and his research team “cracked the code” on what makes an organization – any organization – great. These findings can be leveraged to transform organizations already achieving good results into ones that attain extraordinary outcomes. And for those on the Struggle Bus, it can be the roadmap leading to the radical transformation organizational leaders envision.

The flywheel effect should not be underestimated. Its power to generate compounding momentum is second to none. A good operational strategy that ensures alignment between and among all of the moving parts and pieces of an enterprise, compounded, creates value for those served by it. **An operational strategy fosters alignment between the people, processes, and the pulse of the organization with its mission, vision, and values serving as the very heartbeat to propel it.**

The principle of the flywheel is simple. Each component of the flywheel generates the next component not as a next step, but rather as an inevitable outcome from the component that came before. Refer to the illustration below.



As illustrated, if students are engaged, you can't help but have student growth. And if you have student growth, they can't help but be ready for the next level. And if you have readiness, you can't help but have student success. And if you have student success, you can't help but have engaged students. And when students are engaged, you foster student growth, and round and round it continues, picking up speed the more times it rotates. Read your way around the flywheel once, twice, three times, and one can begin to feel the movement of this simple illustration. Once the flywheel starts moving, **the more revolutions it makes, the higher impact and outcomes it yields**, taking on a life of its own – the “Flywheel Effect.”

Flywheel Development

An organization's flywheel is developed through the evaluation of what the organization does well versus those areas that need to be shored up and the value it intends to create for those it serves. Crucial questions to consider are:

- ☑ What value do we seek to create?
- ☑ To create this value where does our flywheel begin?
- ☑ So then by doing that beginning thing, we can't help but expect to have what?
- ☑ And if we have that, then what has to happen next as a result of that?
- ☑ And then what? Does this lead us to the top of our flywheel to begin the cycle anew?

Each component of the flywheel should be easily explainable for “**why**” it comes next. Collins recommends that flywheels should be limited to four to six key components. These components encapsulate the organization's operational strategy through the analysis of strengths and opportunities in light of the value they create or desire to bring about. If there are more than six, it is essential to back out of the minutia as the flywheel is in danger of being overdesigned.



Once a flywheel is developed, institutions pour tremendous resources into supporting each individual component. They have a laser-like focus on their flywheel's architecture to ensure that the components are correctly scaffolded and sequenced. They then execute the flywheel with particular attention to the effectiveness of achieving their desired outcomes for student success and embracing a culture of continuous improvement.

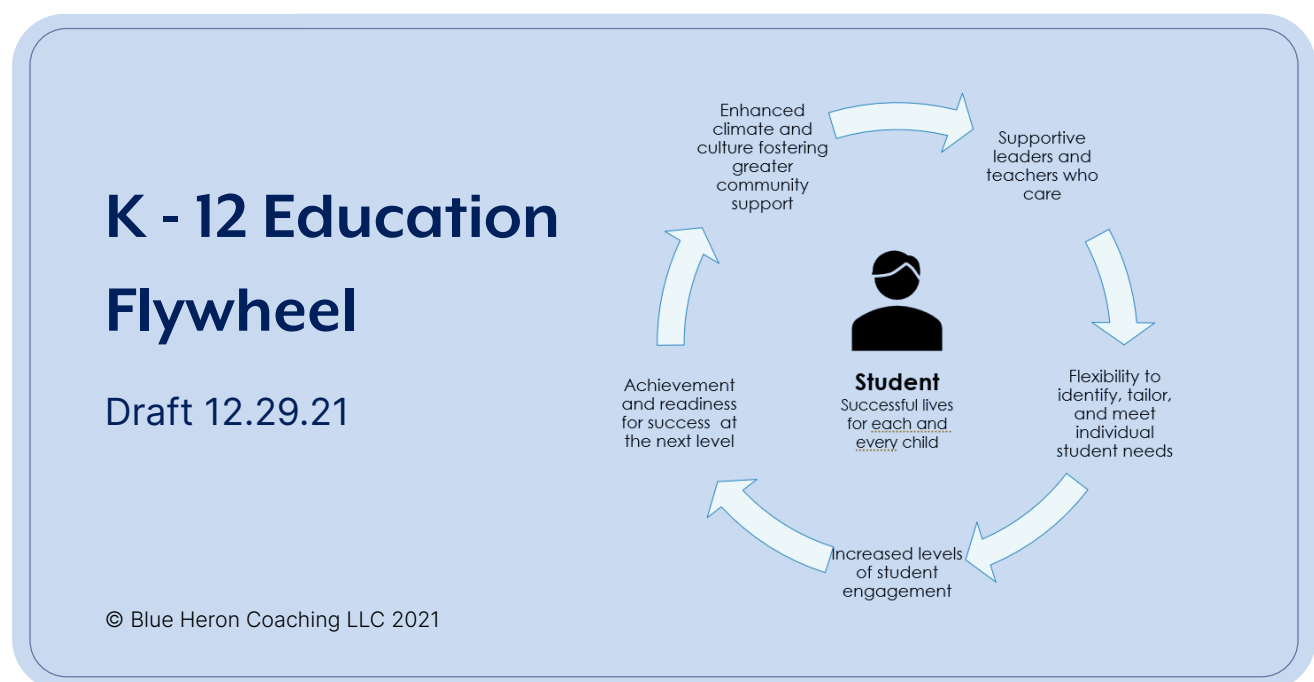
Conducting a careful, systematic analysis of the flywheel's components helps to reveal its accuracy in terms of yielding desired outcomes over the long-term. Beyond this, deepening understanding about the fundamental factors that provide the flywheel's momentum affords great opportunities to extract insights into the highs and lows of organizational success. The flywheel serves as a beacon for those within the organization as it clearly communicates the enterprise's priorities and helps to delineate the resources required to support their execution. Using the flywheel as an intentional operational strategy also leverages institutions' abilities to lead with their heartbeats – vision, mission, and values – as the flywheel is tightly aligned to them. In turn, this ensures collaborative and coordinated efforts across the entire teaching and learning environment, contributing to a healthy culture and climate conducive to student success.

Upstart Vibe Flywheel

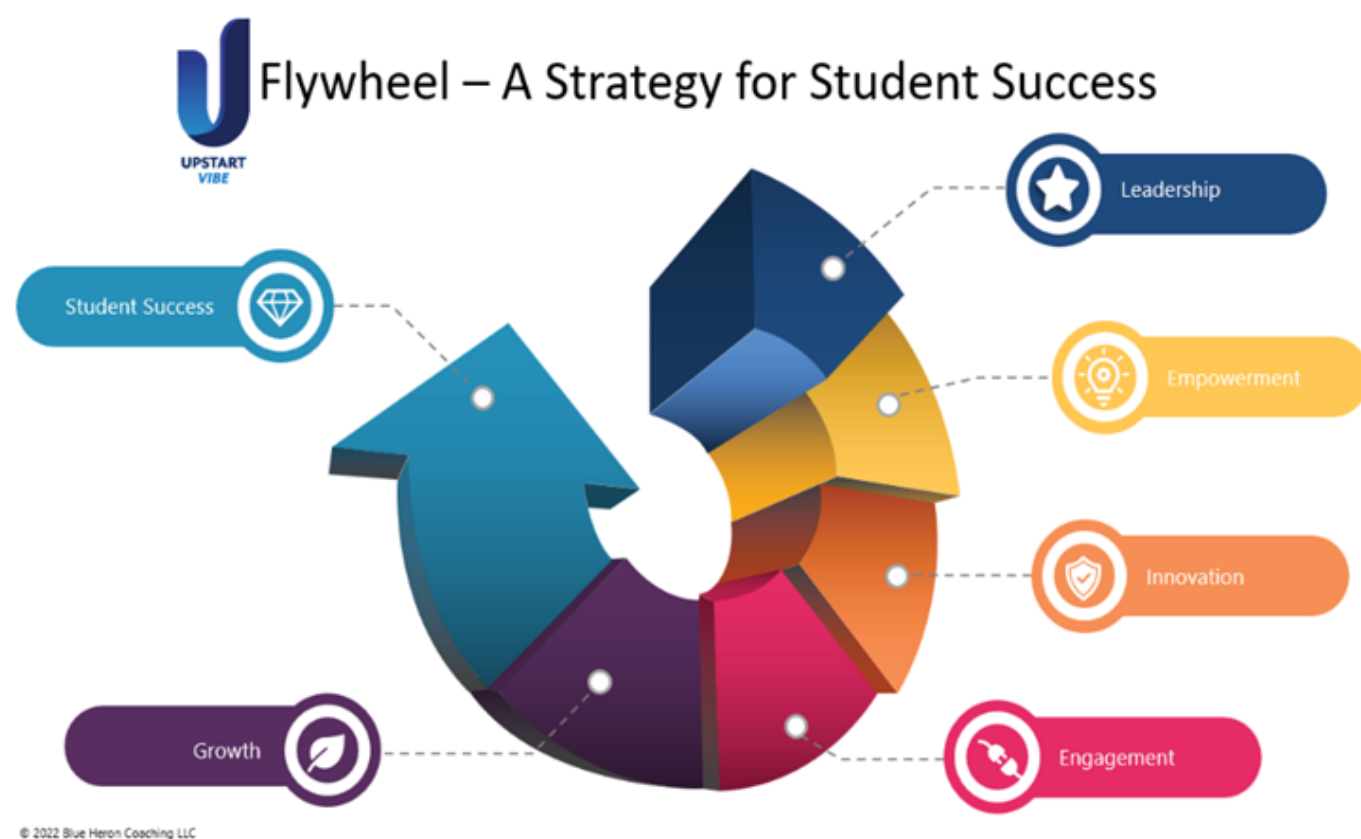
In December 2021, Year 2 of the global pandemic, an education mastermind was assembled by Upstart Vibe (www.upstartvibe.org), an industry disruptor building a digital gateway for educators to access real solutions to education challenges. A group of professionals specifically selected for their deep expertise with the realities of schooling comprised the mastermind. They combine educational expertise spanning nearly 250 years, ranging from state departments of education to regional education service agencies to public and private school systems. They were serving or had served as policy makers, district superintendents, executive directors, principals, and classroom teachers. The combined expertise of the Upstart Vibe mastermind extends over multiple positions and duties, including key K-12 educational leadership positions with direct responsibility for the success of all learners.



Their purpose for gathering was to flesh out a flywheel that could be universally executed across K-12 institutions throughout the United States. While taking the pandemic into consideration, the Upstart Vibe mastermind explicitly intended that this work and solutions would not become a passing fad or “The Next Big Thing.” Rather, they wished to offer common, practical sense, and expert advice that would stand the test of time and address the pressing issue of the day – student success. Through a facilitated session, the mastermind conducted a macro analysis of national education: the universal elements education did very well and those things that were clear misses. From this analysis, a flywheel emerged. See below for an early iteration of the UV Flywheel.



The first iteration of the UV Flywheel was tested against empirical evidence related to the successes and disappointments of national education practices. After these analyses, minor tweaks ensured that **Innovation** (enhanced climate and culture) was more strongly coupled to teacher **Empowerment** (flexibility to identify, tailor, and meet individual student needs). Through this process, the mastermind distilled the essence of key phrases and outcomes into six components. They sequenced the six components with **Student Success at the top** as both the destination and journey, elevating it to a key component of the flywheel as illustrated in the graphic that follows.



The UV Flywheel includes five additional components: **Leadership, Empowerment, Innovation, Engagement, and Growth**, sequenced in the order listed. It is absolutely critical these components are tested again and again against the desired goal/outcome of student success. Education ecosystems must be intentional in creating their vision of student success. Broadly sharing this vision to enhance the very real possibility of attaining it is both strategic and necessary. The biggest win will be measurable and replicable student success from the direct impact of turning the flywheel as the institution executes an operational strategy designed to yield this outcome.

The UV Flywheel is a model that can be used in your institution to build your own flywheel tailored to your institution. There are any number of resources available to help get you started. Barring a custom flywheel, the UV Flywheel can serve as your framework as you test your successes and misses while leaning into student success.

A set of practices has been developed to help unpack intent and meaning of each component of the UV Flywheel with the exception of one. The **Student Success** component should be unpacked within your education ecosystem, including the identification of practices that will be universally instituted to bring about the desired vision. We know “success” is as varied and unique as the learners who are served and as result your institution must develop its own persona of the successful student.

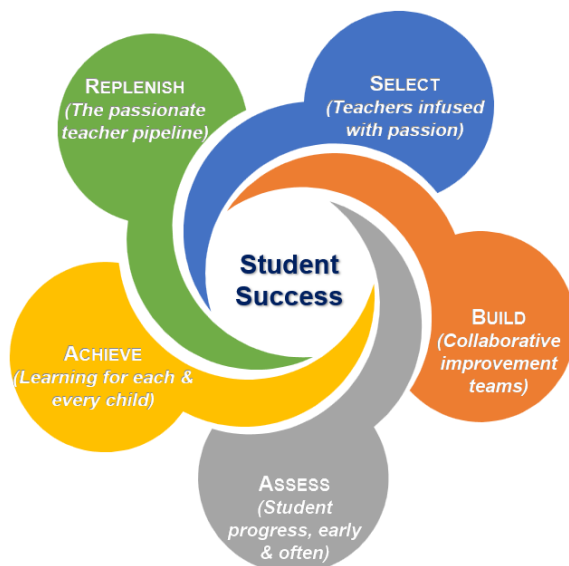
Drilling down into each component separately is important and useful to understand how to operationalize the component within your unique environment and can point to opportunities for celebration or improvement. Equally important is the macro perspective – viewing the whole of the Flywheel. All components working in concert, highlighting intentional outcomes, can yield the momentum to create the exponential results institutions desire and our students deserve.

Student Success

Student Success is at the top of the UV Flywheel. It is both a desired end and a goal to achieve. To this point, it is a valuable placeholder as the UV Flywheel is turned. All things begin and circle back to student success. Student success, as practitioners well know, is not an accident. Instead, it is intentionally designed, explicitly nurtured, and passionately monitored to ensure what is desired is achieved.

In diving into the research, there were a few instances of the flywheel framework being adopted and/or executed within education settings. Collins’ shared the example of Ware Elementary School located on the Fort Riley Army base in **Turning the Flywheel: A Monograph to Accompany Good to Great (Collins, J. 2019)**. Fort Riley Army base, as you can well imagine, had mostly transient families. The principal had difficulty in attracting and retaining qualified staff and the student performance data did not reflect well with the school’s achievement outcomes. Using Collins’ research, the principal developed and implemented a Ware Elementary School Flywheel. Refer to the illustration below.

WARE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL FLYWHEEL



Turning the Flywheel: A Monograph to Accompany Good to Great (Collins, J. 2019)

Upon executing the school's flywheel, the principal and staff took a school with fewer than 35 percent of students reading at a satisfactory level and catapulted their growth and achievement. At the end of the first year of implementing their Flywheel, 55 percent of students reached a satisfactory reading level. In the third year of implementation, 69 percent attained this level and in the fifth year, 96 percent achieved a satisfactory achievement level. In years, seven, eight, nine, and beyond, 99% of its students achieved a satisfactory reading level. This flywheel has been sustained for more than 15 years. Its results and impacts on student success speak for themselves.

As your institution sets about naming or refining its successful student persona, consider the following questions:

- ☑ As a result of students' time in our institution, how will they have grown beyond just one more trip around the sun?
- ☑ What will my students know and be able to do?
- ☑ What does 'readiness and success for the next level' mean for our students?
- ☑ What does 'student success' mean for our students?
- ☑ How will we know if we are successful in achieving this?

Once you have these answers, identify the practices your education system will implement to support the attainment of your successful student persona and monitor progress in achieving the desired results. Communicating and building a coalition to support student success is key – success attracts success.

Leadership

Institutions that achieve student success as matter of course are led by supportive leaders and teachers who care. To this end, immediately following Student Success on the UV Flywheel is **Leadership**. In countless readings and resources, school leadership rose to the top of the list of impacts. Leaders and their "leadership" translate to culture setting. Experts agree that schools are unique in that they are one of the few environments that allow you to determine the building culture within a few minutes upon speaking with its leaders. Think about it. Can you walk into Costco, meet managers or shift leaders, and determine that organization's culture? At best it is challenging, and at worst it is difficult if not outright impossible. Education is unique in this sense and as a result it is important to ensure robust leadership learning and personal development opportunities are available for current and aspiring leaders within the education ecosystem.

Research reveals that education leadership impacts have more than likely been understated with deep tentacles extending to student achievement and other key outcomes, including higher levels of teacher growth and retention. Effective leaders work to eradicate policies that serve as barriers to student success. They shape a vision built on high expectations for student achievement and clearly communicate their vision to build momentum toward attaining it. They recognize that fostering an inclusive climate and culture which places students' wellbeing at the center is foundational to the institution's purpose of developing human talent and potential.

Sharing leadership and instituting a culture of distributive leadership is paramount to fostering the next generation of education leaders. Effective (sustainable and systemic) improvement does not happen in a vacuum. It requires broad engagement and commitment by faculty and staff. Developing and expanding teacher leaders and entrusting them to build coalitions of support for improvement efforts is simply smart strategy for bringing about universal success. The UV Flywheel takes a deep dive into teacher empowerment and its role in facilitating student success in the next section, **Empowerment**.

Effectively managing human leadership potential along with technology, finances, and intellectual capital are crucial to continuous improvement planning seen through the lens of student growth and attainment. Combined, these practices build a culture and climate centered on student success.

Empowerment

A natural outcome of well-developed and supportive leaders is **Empowerment** of those whom leadership serves. In the UV Flywheel, teacher empowerment is the next component on the framework. In Todd Whitaker's recent book, *What Great Teachers Do Differently* (Whitaker, T. 2020), he concluded that great teachers and great principals share many of the same qualities. Being a great teacher includes demonstrating great leadership skills. Likewise, in the education setting, being a great leader includes having great teaching skills.

Teacher empowerment is receiving attention because of the global pandemic and rightly so. Turning classroom instruction on a dime from an in-person model to an effective virtual learning mechanism during the pandemic sat squarely on the shoulders of classroom teachers – and the world paid attention to their efforts. Teachers should continue to be supported to improve and sharpen their own pedagogy and personal well-being. Consider how in the space of a few months, years of hard-work and hard-won learning were undone when children lost as many as two years of learning. Meanwhile, leaders were placed in untenable positions to prioritize community safety over individual children's needs – gut-wrenching and heart-breaking decisions to be certain.

Now, more than ever, it is important for the American public to come together to provide the needed support to help our educators find the wherewithal to 'keep on keeping on'. Lifting their voices and issues, and partnering with them to solve authentic problems should be of primary concern for communities across country. As we clearly and abruptly found out, teaching is hard work, and our kids need their teachers. We need our teachers fostering tomorrow's earners and problem solvers. We need our teachers to be a part of "The Village" we know it takes to raise children. To this end, we must explicitly empower teachers entrusted with our most precious of precious resources – our nation's next generation.

To extrapolate the elements of teacher empowerment, the School Participation Empowerment Scale (SPES) framework was examined. This tool was developed by Short and Rinehart in the 20th century. It incorporates six dimensions of empowerment, including decision making, autonomy, professional development, impact, status, and self-efficacy. Research has proposed a seventh dimension, although there was no evidence it was ever integrated within the framework. The suggested dimension to be included was "Professional Knowledge." Note that this critical attribute is implicitly embedded within the professional development dimension.

The research on teacher empowerment in terms of its direct impact on student achievement was mixed. What was clear however, was teacher empowerment fosters confidence, trust, and agency – all major contributors to job satisfaction and effectiveness. It promotes collegiality, collaboration, and ownership and brings about desirable outcomes aimed to facilitate enhanced student success. Its importance to effective institutions of learning should be underscored.

Innovation

Rounding to the next component on the UV Flywheel is **Innovation**. Empowered teachers produce impactful results leading to enhanced climate and culture and foster innovation throughout the education ecosystem. According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2018), measuring innovation is predominantly focused on measuring processes.

Organizations looking to gauge the level of innovation within their education culture should look toward practices that reveal their own internal improvement processes, including determining effectiveness in mission and vision attainment; benchmarking and tracking progress in student achievement; conducting impact evaluations on new and old programming, and extrapolating measurable impacts from innovative interventions. Recognizing ongoing efforts of staff and faculty to innovate and empowering them to explore new approaches for old problems are key practices as innovation is unpacked and fully instituted within the institution.

Now is a primary opportunity to reinvent the way the education programming is delivered as our “normal” has been disrupted as never before. Our economy does not look the same as it did at the top of the 21st century, nor does it remotely resemble the 20th century when our education systems were largely fashioned. Innovative learning environments and education practices help learners become better thinkers and problem solvers while working collaboratively. This equips our learners with the tools to pursue successful lives in the dynamic global society in which they will live and work.

Engagement

Student **Engagement** immediately follows the Innovation component. Strong leaders who care and empower teachers to act in the best interests of students lead to innovative teaching and learning environments. Those environments in turn create the desired conditions and practices to optimize student engagement.

Teacher practices clearly impact the degree of student engagement, but that isn't the sole impact. Engaging content contributes greatly to student engagement along with policies and practices that support their learning and engagement. Teachers should be empowered with broad leeway to use relevant and authentic learning. Students should have opportunities to inform key decisions impacting their instruction and education experience. Adopting a universal belief system focused on high expectations for all will also greatly benefit the education community. Beyond this, the entire education ecosystem should embrace ownership for all contributing factors leading to student engagement – recognizing they are partners with roles to facilitate and create high levels of student engagement.

Students respond powerfully to believing they are both seen and heard. And “when students are motivated and feel a sense of belonging their learning improves.” (Darling-Hammond, L. 2018) Student engagement begins with understanding students – their interests, likes, dislikes, hobbies, backgrounds, cultural supports, and individual needs. With this key aspect of student engagement missing, educators will struggle to align learning environments with engaging and relevant content, and miss connecting students to their own learning.

A key point is that successful learning happens when students are actively engaged. It is desirable then, to concentrate the institution’s efforts on creating an innovative culture and climate that engages students. Helping students and faculty explore personal mastery and their internal success drivers, as well of topics of customized interest lead to desirable gains in learning ownership and agency development. Taking steps to ensure this desired end will greatly benefit the education community and the stakeholders it serves.

Growth

Engaged students are students invested in their own learning. It is easy to see how acquiring this attribute leads to achievement and readiness for success at the next level – or growth. The final component on the UV Flywheel is student **Growth**.

The growth component focuses on practices related to data – its collection, analysis, and application. Identifying and instituting systemic measures to monitor student engagement will assess the effectiveness of existing practices and point to needed adjustments. Creating identifiers and setting progress measures to reveal effective practices and conditions that foster all students achieving and growing should be undertaken throughout the ecosystem as this component is unpacked.

Additionally, nurturing and developing students’ self-efficacy to direct their own learning and develop ownership of student agency can empower them to dream and plan for successful futures. Beyond this, it is crucial to build and implement a systemwide process that cultivates the development and refinement of Social Emotional Learning (SEL) skills in both students and adults as when we coach others, we coach ourselves.

Helping students realize that they can do, be, or have any future they desire generates healthy, positive, and growth-oriented mindsets focused on living successful lives. Once the institution is achieving student growth, it is well on its way to attaining student success. And one can actually argue that student growth is student success – and our UV Flywheel’s cycle begins a new.

Call to Action

Using the UV Flywheel or your institution’s customized flywheel offers broad potential to realize exponential student success. Leveraging over 25 years’ worth of data to extrapolate what makes good organizations great, Collins found that sustainable organizations yielding replicable results were those that turned their flywheels over and over and over again. Successful organizations stay the course. They do not turn their flywheels once, twice, or 10 times and give up. Instead, leaders in these organizations persist turning their flywheels over and over 100, 1000, 10,000, times and beyond to realize exponential results. This same promise can be realized in education ecosystems to achieve transformative results that catapult student success.

The call to action is to act boldly as our children need us to reverse the negative trends caused by the global pandemic. A set of practice inventories has been developed and are available to gauge your institution's improvement progress using the Upstart Vibe Flywheel. To gain early access to them, reach out to Blue Heron Coaching through the website, www.blueheroncoachingllc.com. Plans are underway to provide a digital means to participate in a national, crowdsourced action research project. Look for more information as this process unfolds.

The Inventory Practice aligned to each component of the flywheel is research based and identifies benchmarks to grow into and reach toward as your institution fully operationalizes the UV Flywheel.

Wherever you are on your journey to regroup, reimagine, and reignite today's classroom, your Upstart Vibe community stands ready to serve and support your efforts. Your work is mission critical to help return wholeness and wellbeing to tomorrow's promise and potential.

About Upstart Vibe

Designed for educators by educators, Upstart Vibe is a status quo disruptor introducing new ways of thinking, innovative approaches, and transformative practices. It is a virtual K-12 community marketplace providing access to Solution Providers, vetted education related services and products, crowdsourced action research projects, a community of like-minded practitioners, and resources and tools to offer real solutions to today's education challenges. Join us. The education starts with you.

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