

How World-class Schools Deliver for All Students

World-class schools are vibrant and inspiring places that set a high bar for all students and consistently support each and every one to reach his or her full potential. No two schools are alike, but this report outlines six practices they commonly share that you can put to work right now in your own school community.



Are Mission-Driven



Build & Develop a Great Team



Offer Rigorous Academics for All Students



Cultivate a Culture of Joyful Learning



Are Data-Driven



Engage Parents as Co-Educators & Leaders

About Innovate Public Schools

Innovate Public Schools is a nonprofit organization focused on ensuring that all Bay Area students, including low-income students and students of color, receive an excellent education. There are some high-quality schools in the region serving low-income students that are proving what's possible. But there simply aren't enough of them. We seek to make the region a place where every child from every neighborhood from any background has access to world-class public schools. We're building a movement of parents, educators, and business and elected leaders who together will make this vision a reality.

This report draws on our team's decades of experience in high-performing schools. Through our [Start-up Schools Fellowship](#), which is grounded in the practices highlighted in this report, we support educators from school districts and charter schools to launch new schools and turn around low-performing schools. Innovate Public Schools publishes easy-to-understand school quality data and research to highlight both problems and solutions. We also provide training and support for parents in high-need communities so they can effectively advocate for better schools.





World-class Schools...

1) Are mission-driven

World-class schools have a unique identity that begins with a compelling vision of what success looks like and they relentlessly pursue it. The school's mission and values are clear, are tied to ambitious outcomes for all students, and permeate every aspect of the school.

- A Mission and values in sync:** The mission reflects outcomes desired for all students and is aligned with the school's values.
- B A shared vision.** The school establishes a clear vision of excellence and everyone—leaders, staff, students, and parents—has a part in realizing it.
- C Strategic use of money and time.** Resources are allocated in a way that supports the realization of the school's mission.
- D Deliberate systems.** There are systems in place to keep the mission, vision, and values front and center and urgent every day, and make sure everyone is putting the mission in action.

What to look for

- The school's mission and values are posted throughout the school, and staff in a variety of roles can explain how the values ensure students will be prepared to fulfill the school's mission.
- On any given school day, you can hear students and teachers discussing the school's mission and values and see them demonstrate behavior that is aligned with those values.
- School is thoughtful and consistent about using effective systems to support the mission. From the way students answer questions in class to the manner in which they pass out papers, the school has defined a clear "way that we do things." Students and staff can explain the reasoning for doing things in this manner.
- When asked, teachers and school leaders can provide recent examples of how they've said "no" to initiatives and programs that weren't going to help them achieve the mission of the school.
- Everyone works to build and maintain the school culture. Teachers and students work together to accomplish goals and everyone in the school acts in a manner that demonstrates a unique sense of identity and pride.





World-class Schools...

2) Build and develop a great team

A world-class school has staff who are committed to the school's mission and to continually working together to improve.

- A A rigorous process for hiring.** The recruitment process identifies candidates who are not only talented, but also deeply committed to the school's mission, values, and beliefs.
- B Everyone is learning.** Through individual and group trainings embedded into the school day, week, and year, teachers and leaders stay at the cutting edge and put powerful practices to work in the classroom.
- C Frequent, meaningful feedback.** Staff are evaluated and given timely feedback about their performance. They receive support to help them constantly improve, with strong teachers staying and growing with the school, and teachers leaving who are neither effective nor improving rapidly.

What to look for

- The school has a rigorous process for recruiting and hiring staff. This might include having candidates participate in multiple rounds of interviewing, doing sample lessons, and roleplaying conversations where they receive critical feedback about their lessons. When asked, the school leader can explain what they're looking for in each part of the hiring process and this guides their final decision-making when hiring right people for the team.
- School leaders and teacher coaches are in classrooms weekly, if not daily, providing meaningful feedback to teachers to help them improve their practice. Teachers report feeling that the feedback is valuable and is helpful to them as they grow in their practice.
- The school schedule includes time specifically set aside for teachers to spend multiple hours each week collaboratively developing lesson plans and providing each other with meaningful feedback to make lessons rigorous and engaging for students.
- Teachers constantly improve their practice by implementing new strategies they've learned from their colleagues and from school leaders. When asked, teachers and school leaders can give examples of how, in the past week or month, they've acted on feedback from others to drive improvement in instruction in the classroom and across the school.



World-class Schools...

3) Ensure rigorous academics for all students

World-class schools engage and challenge each and every student.

- A Rigorous instruction.** The school ensures instruction is strong every day, in every classroom, and that students are able to analyze and apply what they are learning in complex, real-world scenarios.
- B Personalized and robust student support.** The school has a clear strategy to: adapt teaching to the varied needs of each student, check student progress daily and, within hours or days, provide additional support or challenge where needed. The school also provides an array of social-emotional supports to ensure that all students are able to fully engage in a rigorous academic program.
- C Beyond academics.** High-quality programs nurture a wide range of skills and interests, including arts, athletics, and other interdisciplinary learning opportunities that supplement the school's core academic model.
- D Culturally competent.** Staff understand and recognize students' diverse cultural backgrounds as an asset, and help students do the same.

What to look for

- Teachers have a strong command over what and how they teach their class and anticipate where students will likely struggle. They don't water down what students need to learn. Instead, they design very challenging lessons and build in extra help along the way to ensure all students master the content.
- In a typical classroom, students are learning content and discussing and applying it in ways that seem advanced for that grade-level. Observers might often be surprised to see the quality of student work and level of conversation in classes compared to what they'd expect for students at that age.
- In virtually every classroom, observers will see teachers working with students in small groups to ensure they get help where the data shows they need it. Teachers can explain why they grouped those students, what they needed help with, and what data or observations led the teacher to make those groupings.
- During much of the day, students are applying the skills and content they've learned to take on real-world, multi-step problems and projects that require critical thinking.
- Students challenge and develop themselves in new ways as they participate in a variety of artistic, athletic, and service-oriented classes.
- The school fosters a culture of pride and awareness around the diverse cultural backgrounds of its students. On most days, an observer would hear staff and students candidly discussing and grappling with issues of race, sexuality, socio-economic status, institutionalized privilege or discrimination. Often, conversations with families address these topics as well.



World-class Schools...

4) Cultivate a culture of joyful learning

In a world-class school, students, parents, and staff celebrate the pursuit of knowledge and inspire students to persevere through challenges and excel.

- A High expectations.** Leaders and staff demonstrate a belief that all students can achieve at high levels.
- B Growth mindset.** The school fosters the belief that everyone - staff and students alike - can improve through effort. Teachers hold themselves accountable for student learning and students are celebrated for their progress.
- C Celebrating challenge and risk taking.** Students make great strides because the culture supports students to confidently learn from mistakes and push themselves to achieve new things at an incredibly high level.
- D Relationship-based.** Staff cultivate deep, trusting relationships, helping them understand and meet students' unique needs.

What to look for

- All school staff use language that demonstrates their deep and unwavering belief in the potential of all students to achieve significant academic gains and find success in college and life. This belief is expressed clearly throughout classes and during school events. Instead of hearing, "Of course she's behind, she has such a hard home life," you hear, "Things have been hard at home, so what can we do to make sure she doesn't fall behind?"
- The school doesn't have different and lower expectations for some students versus others. For example, groups of students wouldn't be discouraged from taking challenging AP or Honors classes. Inside a classroom, lower expectations might look like a teacher allowing some students to spend a class socializing, quietly ignoring the lesson, or otherwise not engaging. A teacher with high expectations for all wouldn't let any student off the hook and would immediately engage them in the work to be done.
- School staff demonstrate a belief that they and their students are "works in progress." That means that both students and teachers acknowledge their mistakes, welcome critical feedback, and can apply it to improve. In world-class schools, the most effective teachers have formal roles mentoring and teaching other teachers, and even the most effective teachers are working to improve their own practice.
- Students are encouraged to struggle with the challenges presented to them during their classes, not punished for mistakes or allowed to conclude they aren't "good" at a subject. The school praises students for their learning and growth - taking on, struggling with, and mastering exceptionally rigorous content.
- Teachers show a genuine interest in knowing their students and learning about their lives outside of school. When students and teachers talk to each other, it's clear that they have built a mutual trust that allows them to challenge one another.



World-class Schools...

5) Are data-driven

When making decisions, world-class schools consistently use data to improve and drive student learning.

- A Meaningful assessments.** Teachers are trained to analyze assessment results and use them throughout the week, month and year to tailor their instruction.
- B Students invested in data.** Students know their goals for growth and their progress towards those goals.
- C More than academics.** Data is leveraged to inform decisions not only about academics, but about school culture, operations, budgeting, staffing, and more. Both staff and students consistently use data to get better.

What to look for

- Teachers check student progress on a daily, weekly, and monthly basis (often by leveraging technology) to ensure that students are staying on track and making progress.
- Both students and their teachers can speak clearly about progress, areas where they are ahead or behind, and what they need to work on (today and in the future) to meet their goals for the year.
- When asked, school staff can explain and give examples of key data points that the school tracks that align with its mission and how they've used that data to make changes and inform important decisions.
- Staff know very deeply the content and skills students need to learn. They seek out different types of data to understand where students struggle and provide exactly the help they need.





World-class Schools...

6) Engage parents as co-educators and leaders

World-class schools include, engage, and empower parents as vital members of the school community.

- A Frequent communication.** Parents get timely updates on their child's progress.
- B Thoughtful communication.** The school goes to all necessary lengths to ensure an ongoing dialogue with parents.
- C Parents as co-educators.** The school values, encourages and supports parents' involvement in their child's education, both inside and outside the school.
- D Parents in leadership.** A wide range of parents hold leadership positions at the school, and have a meaningful voice in major school decisions.

What to look for

- Parents report receiving frequent, easy-to-understand communication from the school in their language. They report that school staff have visited their home and/or have called, emailed or texted to share good news, as well as concerns about their children.
- The school leader can explain how the school gets input and involves diverse parents, and can give specific examples of how parents have informed decisions at the school.
- Parents have a formal role in a decision-making body at the school. This might be a school site council where parents would approve parts of the school's budget or a hiring committee where parents would help interview candidates.
- Parents report that they feel welcome at the school and are invited and encouraged to participate regularly.
- Many different parents are present at the school before, during and after school, both to help but also to learn more about how they can support their students at home. The school gives parents many different ways to be involved, and offers suggestions and activities parents can do with their child to help them be more successful in the classroom.
- At least 5% of the families, from all backgrounds, are so engaged in the life of the school as leaders that they can lead tours with visitors and express clearly the mission, values, key programs, and uniqueness of the school.