

HOW TO FOSTER CHANGEMAKING CULTURE TOOLKIT

A **changemaker** is someone who **imagines a better reality**, **takes action**, and **collaborates with others** to bring that **new reality into being for the good of others**.

The purpose of this toolkit is to support you in understanding **what a changemaking culture is** and **what it could look like**. With the written and video examples, we try to provide examples for ways that you and your team can foster a changemaking culture within your school, district, or organization.

DEFINING CHANGEMAKING CULTURE

Changemaking culture in schools is all about **creating a space** where everyone—students, teachers, and the whole school community—feels encouraged to notice problems, dream up ideas, and take action to make things better for everyone. It's rooted in the belief that **anyone can be a changemaker**, no matter their age or background. In this kind of culture, students are supported to lead with empathy, work together, think creatively, and tackle real-world challenges.

Teachers help spark curiosity, encourage initiative, and create opportunities for **students to make a difference**—both inside and outside the classroom. In a fast-changing world, a changemaking culture helps young people **not just keep up, but step up**—to lead, adapt, and shape the future in positive ways.

TIPS

Establish **clear expectations**
& **goals** for changemaking.

Celebrate **all efforts** of changemaking,
no matter how small!

INTEGRATING CHANGEMAKING

Integrating changemaking into your school, district or organization shouldn't be another responsibility to add to your plate, but something that you can **integrate naturally** into the work that you already do with young people. **Consider ways you can tie changemaking into existing work.**

DISTRICT LEVEL

IDEAS FOR DISTRICTS

- **Create a simple, shared definition of what changemaking means for your district—and why it matters.** Make sure it includes values like empathy, student voice, and real-world problem-solving. Then, embed that vision in everything: school goals, PD, celebrations, and decision-making.
- **Empower principals and teacher leaders to pilot and experiment.** Celebrate small wins and allow room for learning (including from what doesn't work).
- **Build systems where student input isn't just invited—it's expected.** This could include youth advisory councils, student panels at PD sessions, or students on school improvement teams.
- **Invest in teacher and staff development.** Offer PD and resources to help educators embed changemaking into their curriculum and classroom culture—without overwhelming them. Highlight changemaker practices during walkthroughs, PLCs, or coaching cycles.
- **Highlight what is working!** When a school or classroom does something powerful, help share that story. Host learning showcases, make space at leadership meetings for peer sharing, and invite cross-school collaboration.
- **Align existing initiatives with changemaking values.** Look at where your current work overlaps: SEL, project-based learning, equity, career readiness—they're all great entry points. Changemaking can bring these efforts together under one human-centered umbrella.
- **Create time and space for student-led work.** Support schools in carving out time for changemaker projects—whether it's in advisory, enrichment, or integrated into core subjects. Make it easier for teachers to say yes.
- **Build community partnerships to extend impact.** Partner with local organizations, businesses, and youth-serving nonprofits to support student-led initiatives. Invite them in as mentors, audiences, or collaborators.
- Take a look at our list for the **School level**, as there are a lot of ideas that could also be relevant at a district level too.

CASE STUDY

Learn about how a school district in Anne Arundel County, Maryland implemented changemaking **across their schools** in this video.



DISTRICT LEVEL

EXAMPLES

- A public school district launched the Student Voice and Leadership (SVL) initiative where middle and high school students **research issues** affecting their school and **present proposals to school leadership**.
- Students were given **control over part of the school site budget** (~\$10k–\$50k) through participatory budgeting.
- Another school district partnered with **design thinking organizations** to host Empathy Design Labs where students, educators, and administrators co-created solutions around inclusion, equity, and school climate.
- A Student Experience Department was created to ensure that students are **co-creators** of school culture and climate initiatives.

