

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.**

SCHOOL LEVEL

IDEAS FOR SCHOOLS

- **Celebrate everyday leadership.** Spotlight students who show empathy, take initiative, or solve problems—not just the ones who lead clubs or get top grades. Use assemblies, announcements, or classroom shoutouts to lift up changemaking in all its forms.
- **Create low-barrier opportunities to lead.** Not every student wants to run for student council. Think smaller and more inclusive—like suggestion boxes, student-led spirit days, or lunchtime “idea circles.” These can be simple ways for students to practice agency and action.
- **Embed changemaking in existing structures.** Use advisory periods, SEL lessons, service days, or project-based learning time as spaces for changemaking work. It doesn’t have to be extra—it can be integrated into what you’re already doing.
- **Set aside dedicated time and training.** Give educators the opportunity to learn, collaborate, and plan how to embed changemaking into their curriculum and school culture.
- **Model it at the staff level.** If staff are encouraged to try new things, lead change, and support one another, students will feel that culture too. Celebrate teacher-led innovations or collaborative efforts—it sets the tone for the rest of the school.
- **Trust young people with real responsibility.** Give students meaningful roles in shaping school culture—whether it’s redesigning part of the schedule, improving lunch options, or leading a community initiative. When they feel trusted, they rise to the occasion.
- **Keep it visible.** Display student projects, quotes, or stories around the school. Create a “Changemaker Wall” or dedicate a bulletin board to action and impact. Visibility makes the culture feel alive.
- **Intentionally hire and onboard staff who believe in changemaking and youth agency.** Add interview questions like: “How do you empower students to take initiative?” or “Describe a time your students led a meaningful change.” Include changemaking values in job descriptions and postings. During onboarding, introduce the district’s changemaker culture and student agency framework.
- **Go slow to go far.** Building changemaking culture isn’t a one-week initiative. Start small, stay consistent, and invite others into the journey. Over time, it becomes part of how your school thinks, feels, and acts.
- Take a look at our list of ideas for the **District level**, as there are a lot of ideas that could also be relevant on a school level too.

SCHOOL LEVEL

EXAMPLES

- At a middle school, the principal met monthly with a rotating group of students to ask: “What’s working at our school? What’s not? What would you change?” The **staff took their feedback seriously** and **reported back to those students** on what’s being implemented.
- Teachers and staff used **changemaking language casually**, making it a **common occurrence** within their building: “Thanks for speaking up—that’s leadership”, “That’s a creative way to solve that problem”, and “What action can we take together?”
- At an elementary school, students wrote **anonymous notes of appreciation** for classmates and staff. These were posted on a “Kindness Wall” in the hallway. It started with one class and spread to the whole school in one month.
- At another elementary school, students noticed some classmates were alone at recess. They worked with a teacher to set up a “**Buddy Bench**”—a simple bench that signals “I’m looking for someone to play with.” A rotating group of 4th and 5th graders acted as “**Inclusion Ambassadors**” who helped invite others into games.
- At a middle school, staff hosted monthly “lunch and listen” sessions where any student could join a table with the principal to **share ideas**. One student’s idea—longer passing time between classes—was adopted!

CASE STUDY

Bodkin Elementary School, Anne Arundel, MD

Every early Monday morning, teachers across the school nominated students who demonstrated a Changemaker ability for the previous week. Students were celebrated during morning announcements and received a locker pin with the Changemaker ability they had been awarded.

VIDEO

Hear from Dustin in this video, a librarian at Orange County Academy, who is creating a changemaking culture within his school through a **student-led**, carefully cultivated library and his **passion for books**.

