



New York State
EDUCATION DEPARTMENT
Knowledge > Skill > Opportunity

Students Reimagining School



Background

As part of the Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI) support model, all participating schools are required to implement a Civic Empowerment Project each year. These projects are designed to engage students and families in school decision-making. One available option is Students Reimagining School, a yearlong, student-centered design experience.

Students Reimagining School Overview & Benefits

Overview

Students Reimagining School is a structured, collaborative initiative that engages a cross-functional school team in a yearlong exploration of school improvement. Participating schools assemble diverse teams, conduct empathy-based inquiry into student experiences, prototype innovative solutions to shared challenges, and present their work at a statewide showcase. Throughout the year, teams connect with NYSED and other participating schools through virtual check-ins to share learning and progress.

Benefits

Participation in **Students Reimagining School** provides:

- Authentic opportunities for students, staff, and families to contribute meaningfully to school improvement.
- Leadership development for students, fostering civic engagement and personal agency.
- Increased empathy, responsibility, and connectedness across the school community.
- Real-world skill-building in areas such as research, design thinking, communication, and financial literacy.

What is Students Reimagining School?

Students Reimagining School is inspired by the [Everyone Graduates National School Redesign Showcase](#) and leverages proven tools and resources from that effort. The initiative centers on themes of **Agency, Belonging, and Connectedness**, helping school teams explore how these values can be strengthened through student-driven design.

Each team will present their project at the **Students Reimagining School Showcase** in Albany, NY in the spring—an event where students, educators, and policymakers come together to celebrate and learn from student-led school improvement efforts.

Implementation Process

Step 1: Form the Redesign Team

Each participating school forms a **Redesign Team** composed of students, teachers, school leaders, and—ideally—family or community members.

- **Team Composition:** We recommend 3–8 members actively participating in virtual sessions. Schools may determine the best configuration based on local context.
- **Designate a Site Coordinator:** One member should serve as Site Coordinator, acting as the liaison between the school team and NYSED.
- **Initial Enrollment:** The Principal or Site Coordinator must submit the [initial selection form](#) by **September 1**.

Step 2: Explore, Design, and Prototype

NYSED-Led Design Sessions

Schools will participate in three virtual design sessions led by NYSED between **October and December**. These sessions may be completed live or asynchronously.

Session	Focus	Key Activities
Session 1 – October	Understanding Perspectives	Introduction to empathy interviews; begin planning "observe, engage, immerse" activities such as interviews, shadowing, and observations.
Session 2 – November	Empathy Mapping	Analyze and synthesize what was learned through interviews and observations. Identify common themes or "headlines."
Session 3 – December	Prototyping	Develop "How Might We" questions and begin brainstorming early prototypes for testing.

School-Based Design Time

In addition to NYSED-facilitated sessions, teams are expected to meet regularly on-site to conduct research, build prototypes, and prepare for implementation.

Month	Focus	Suggested Activities
October	Inquiry	Conduct empathy interviews, shadowing, and school observations.
November	Analysis	Share findings, develop empathy maps, and identify core themes. Optional: Create a vision board reflecting an ideal school experience.
December	Prototyping	Develop and prepare testable versions of your ideas.
January - March	Testing	Pilot your prototype in the school, gather feedback, and refine the design.
April	Showcase Preparation	Finalize presentation materials and reflect on lessons learned and next steps.

Step 3: Share Progress

In **February or March**, teams will participate in a virtual progress-sharing session with other schools. This midpoint check-in allows teams to exchange insights, gather feedback, and refine their prototypes with support from peers.

Step 4: Participate in the Showcase

In **spring**, participating schools will travel to **Albany, NY**, to present their projects at the Students Reimagining School Showcase. This culminating event provides an opportunity to highlight student leadership, share outcomes, and inspire broader change among peers, educators, and policymakers.

Site Coordinator Role

Each school must identify a **Site Coordinator** to oversee the implementation of the program. This individual ensures timely communication, supports coordination of meetings and activities, and promotes strong student and family engagement.

Recommended qualifications include:

- Experience supporting student or family engagement
- Ability to facilitate collaboration across stakeholder groups
- Enthusiasm for design thinking and student-centered improvement

Possible candidates may include:

Assistant Principals, civics teachers, afterschool program leaders, school counselors, student government advisors, or parent volunteers.

Additional Guidance

Participating schools are encouraged to:

- Align this initiative with school or district priorities and curriculum where possible.
- Utilize the tools and supports provided throughout the year to strengthen implementation.
- View this project as a launch point for deeper, sustained student engagement in school design.

For questions or further support, please contact our office at fieldsupport@nysed.gov.