Reimagining School Safety:

A Guide for Schools and Communities

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OVERVIEW

While school safety ideas and practices have evolved over the last several decades, the variety of school safety tools, policies, and degrees of success highlights a need for more conversation about the very concept of ***safety***: what it is (and is not), who gets to define it, how it is achieved, and at what cost. Safety is often defined as the absence of a negative (such as the absence of violence, bullying and harassment, or substance use) and many efforts to achieve safety—such as through metal detectors, zero-tolerance policies, and similar means—tend not only to be unsuccessful but also to consistently cause ***harm***, particularly to Black and Brown youth (Nakamoto et al., 2019; Stern & Petrosino, 2018).

This guide aims to help education professionals reimagine and redefine school safety such that safety is not the absence of a negative but rather the existence of positive elements such as interconnection, belonging, voice, and agency. The guide is intended to support educators and education leaders to create systems of mutual care and shift the paradigm about what safety is and how it is achieved, building safe schools through an ***asset frame***, which means defining people by their strengths and aspirations rather than their deficits and challenges. Further, working from this paradigm of safety and centering the lived experiences of students and families—especially those who have been kept furthest from institutional power—can be a key component of designing systems that are more equitable and sustainable.

This interactive guide pulls from different frameworks and concepts, including ***complex adaptive systems, restorative justice, co-designing,*** and ***design thinking***, to provide educators, school leaders, and district administrators with mindsets, strategies, and grounded examples of what is possible by reimagining school safety.

INTRODUCTION

For many people, if asked to imagine school safety, the sights and sounds that come to mind are likely to be shootings, fights, and other forms of very real violence impacting school communities regularly across the country. People tend to conjure images of the things they are trying to avoid. When asked to imagine the opposite of harm and violence in schools (and in society), some people may have visions of students in harmony or adults and young people sharing feelings of trust; but for others, the opposite of harm and violence can be hard to imagine, let alone implement.

Most efforts to keep students, educators, schools, and communities safe are currently driven by the idea that safety is the avoidance of harm and violence and that some individuals and groups of people are more worth protecting than others. Critical pedagogy theorists such as Henry Giroux argue that schools, if left unexamined, work to shape and control students who deviate from dominant, normative ways of being in the United States—especially students of color; students with emotional, behavioral, and cognitive disabilities; and students who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ+) (França, 2019; Osher et al., 2015).

This tendency to shape and control is deeply embedded in the design of safety and discipline policies and practices in educational settings, resulting in the creation of exclusionary forms of discipline, the placement of physical barriers around spaces of learning, and the increasing use of law enforcement on campuses to discipline and punish students, to name a few examples.

Necessary questions emerge about whether the dominant ideology shaping most schools' approaches to safety has led to the desired results, about the effectiveness of these policies and practices and for whom they are effective, and about at what cost they are or are not working.

In shifting how safety is defined so that it is not the absence of violence but the existence of systems and structures that support mutual care, belonging, and interconnection, schools' policies, practices, and values shift toward creating strong communities and places of collaborative learning.

Asset-based, aspirational concepts of and approaches to safety are too often absent from school communities' conversations.

This guide aims to help you reimagine school safety by centering the voices and lived experiences of those closest to the issue and providing opportunities to make education systems and safety efforts more equitable. "Equitable" in this case means removing the predictability of who gets to be and feel safe and who does not. According to equity coach Erin Trent Johnson, founder and CEO of Community Equity Partners, achieving ***equity*** means that "social outcomes must no longer be predicted by race, class, and gender. To do this, we must acknowledge and examine power structures, including systemic advantage and disadvantage that hold inequities in place" (Walrond & Romer, 2021, p. 6).

This guide begins with a brief history of school safety within the United States. The guide then introduces a reimagined definition and paradigm of safety and the different elements that support safety's creation and achievement. Each subsection offers reflection questions, exercises to try, and grounded examples of schools and districts doing this work. Lastly, the guide invites educators and education leaders to begin reimagining school safety by using design thinking, a nonlinear process for individuals, teams, schools, and districts to envision, iterate, and build safe schools within their contexts.

Reimagining not only requires new ways of doing but also new ways of thinking and being. When beginning the process of reimagining, thinking about all the things needed to shift systems in big and small ways can be daunting and can impede getting started or continuing the process of reimagining, especially when things inevitably become challenging. Folks who begin such an effort are strongly encouraged to think big, step small, and navigate mindfully.

Small choices matter.

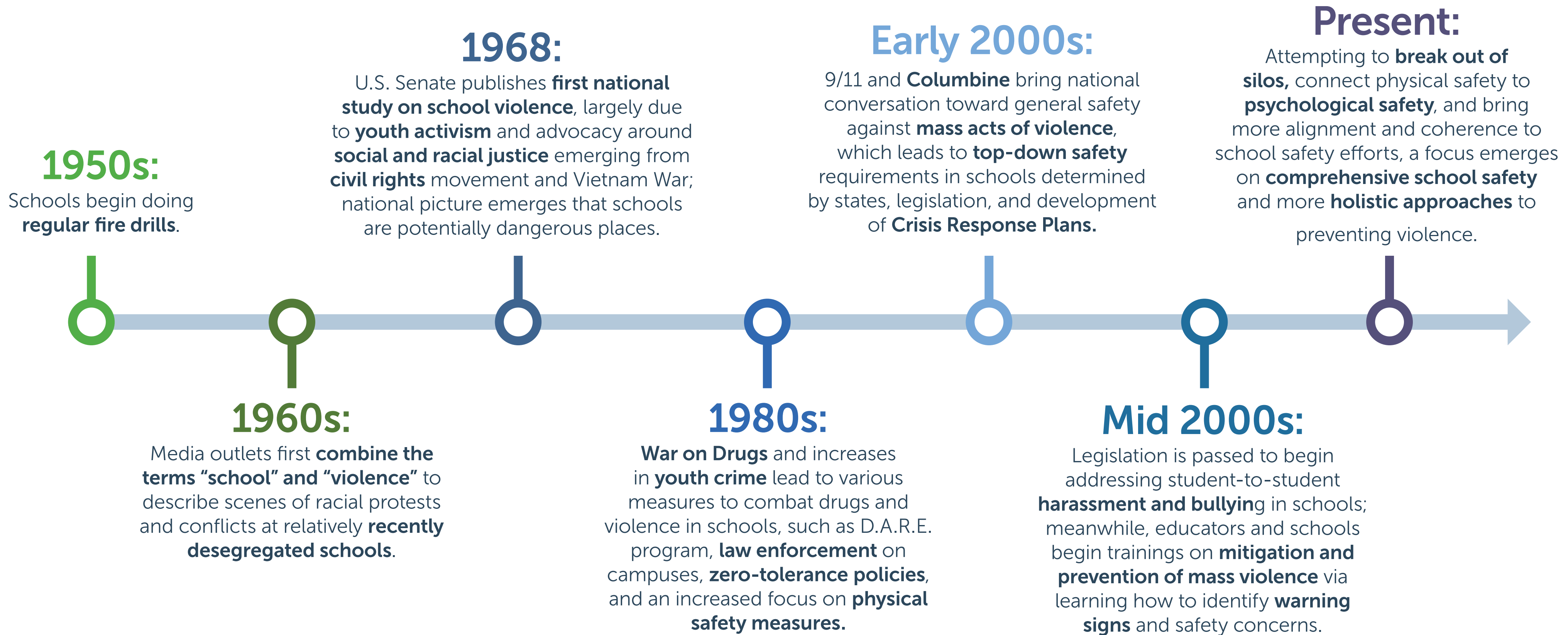
> *Small choices and decisions create new habits, new mindsets and mental models, and new ways of being—which ultimately turn into larger systems changes. Thus, participants in a reimagining process must unlearn and relearn ways of thinking and being through small, daily, moment-by-moment choices.*

These incremental shifts can allow you to see the larger system for what it is, pay close attention to patterns and trends, notice what is working, and identify leverage points for change.

This guide not only will take you through activities to encourage, practice, and reflect on these mindset shifts but also will share key resources that offer examples of what making these shifts can look like in practice. If the tasks begin to feel too daunting, remember that a single individual, a single choice, or a single shift at the micro level can have profound ripple effects at the macro level to generate larger systems change. This phenomenon is known as ***fractal change***. As adrienne maree brown puts it in *Emergent Strategy*, "How we are at the small scale is how we are at the large scale" (2017, p. 52).

PAST AND PRESENT: THE EVOLUTION OF SCHOOL SAFETY

Timeline points:



In looking to the future of school safety and finding ways to achieve a more comprehensive, holistic, and equitable approach, examining how school safety has evolved in the United States over the past several decades can be useful for remembering that how "safety" is defined very much depends on specific historical and social contexts. Indeed, the concept of "school safety" would not have originated without its opposite. Media outlets first combined the terms "school" and "violence" in the 1960s to describe scenes of racial protests and conflicts at relatively recently desegregated schools (Fuentes, 2018). Among other precipitating events, the Civil Rights Movement, the assassination of high-profile leaders such as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Vietnam War spurred an increase in youth-led activism on college, middle school, and high school campuses, leading some journalists to claim that schools were prone to violent unrest (Fuentes, 2018). With the U.S. Senate publishing the first national study (known as the Dodd Report) on school violence in 1968, a picture began to emerge in the national imagination of schools as potentially dangerous places (King, 1970).

> *That student advocacy for social and racial justice has been perceived as "unsafe" and "violent" underscores the fact that the concept of "school safety" has never been neutral.*

Although school safety efforts were occurring prior to the 1980s (e.g., regular school fire drills began in the late 1950s), the 1980s are often considered as a notable era in school safety. At this time, communities impacted by racial and socioeconomic oppression were experiencing America's so-called War on Drugs. After the drug war was declared, crack began to spread throughout the country, concentrated especially in poor Black neighborhoods (Alexander, 2010). The U.S. Congress passed the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986, establishing a series of "mandatory minimum" prison sentences for various drug offenses, with a notable gap between how possession of crack was treated versus possession of powder cocaine—5 grams of crack triggered an automatic 5-year sentence, whereas it took 500 grams of powder cocaine to trigger the same sentence (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2020). These mandatory minimums led to a disproportionate increase of incarceration rates for nonviolent Black drug offenders.

National media coverage claiming an increase in drug use and interpersonal violence drove public perceptions that juvenile crime in particular was not only rising substantially but also becoming more severe, leading to the passage of laws in 41 states between 1992 and 1995 that made prosecuting juveniles in adult criminal court easier (Fuentes, 2018). Because the focus of these community issues was on young people, many assumptions were made that the issues related to drugs and violence must be in schools (since that is where young people spend most of their time) and therefore must be addressed through schools (Fuentes, 2018). Consequently, a host of strategies to combat crime and violence included not only new education-based prevention programs, like the Drug Abuse Resistance Education program (known more commonly as D.A.R.E) but also an influx of law enforcement in schools and the widespread use of zero-tolerance school discipline policies (Maxime, 2018). Stubborn disparities have come along with the implementation of these programs—with Black, Pacific Islander, and Native American students; boys; and students with disabilities disciplined at disproportionate rates (Losen & Martinez, 2020).

This era of school safety also brought an increased focus on physical security measures in schools, which included assessing and enhancing the physical security of school campuses (Cornell et al., 2021). Fencing, access control, and security personnel became common at most schools, with ***exclusionary security measures*** such as metal detectors being more common at schools serving youth of color and students experiencing poverty (Kupchik & Ward, 2014).

Another major evolution in school safety came in the early 2000s; however, this shift was not unique to schools. Following the school shooting at Columbine High School and the 9/11 terrorist attacks, conversations throughout the country focused on safety in the sense of being prepared for mass acts of violence. This focus led to new federal legislation and led many states to prepare for potential emergencies by having Emergency Operations Plans (EOPs) or Crisis Response Plans and coordinating with first responders for response efforts (Maxwell, 2006). The plans usually must be "multihazard" in nature and address not only response but also preparedness, mitigation, and recovery. The focus on preparation for violence also brought training requirements for school staff and expectations to practice responses through emergency drills (Cornell et al., 2021).

During the early to mid-2000s, a focus on addressing issues such as harassment and bullying among students in schools also began to emerge. This focus was prompted in part by tragic incidents of students harming themselves or others or taking their own lives after being harassed or bullied (Christensen, 2015). Students who identify as LGBTQ+ and students with disabilities and special health needs are at an increased risk of being bullied (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, n.d.; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, n.d.). Many states made significant strides in addressing bullying through the development of laws and policies, yet all states addressed the issue differently. Some states developed very defined laws and policies, while others required local districts to develop their own policies, with the state offering a model for developing such policies. Most states, at a minimum, required local districts to investigate and respond to complaints of bullying, and some required prevention programming for students and/or staff training on preventing, identifying, and responding to bullying. To support the states' growing efforts to address bullying, the U.S. Department of Education in 2010 initiated a study to determine the common components found in state laws, policies, and regulations focused on bullying (Stuart-Cassel et al., 2011). The most commonly covered components found in this kind of state legislation included requirements to develop district policies, statements of scope defining school jurisdiction over bullying incidents, definitions of prohibited behavior, and specification of disciplinary consequences.

The focus on school safety also began to address the prevention and mitigation of potential issues through training school personnel to become proactive in identifying safety concerns. Many states require some type of safety "inspection," "audit," or "assessment" to be conducted regularly to identify deficiencies that could then be corrected.

Although the information above presents the evolution of school safety as a linear progression through time, many of the elements and responses to school safety are intertwined, often overlapping or emerging as a focal point at various times throughout history.

Currently, many schools throughout the country are moving toward more ***comprehensive school safety***. There is a desire to streamline the various pieces of school safety, which have become multifaceted and dynamic and encompass not only the areas mentioned previously but others as well. There is a renewed focus on prevention that is rooted in supporting all students' psychological safety, mental health, and identities. Finally, the movement toward a more comprehensive approach also provides an opportunity to break out of silos and work across disciplines and sectors, bringing more alignment and coherence to school safety efforts.

Although recent shifts in the ways that school safety is addressed represent improvements in how school safety has been conceived over time and may have benefits in the present, many issues remain unaddressed—issues that lie at the root of safety concerns. Schools, like society in general, are facing unprecedented levels of stress and tension. An overreliance on technology and social media and ongoing systemic oppression, along with other issues, continue to push against structures of safety and have led to the dissolving of social contracts or the unspoken agreements that everyone has a collective responsibility to maintain community well-being. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated these existing inequities, with young people showing an increase in stress and other mental health issues, including self-harm and suicidal thoughts and an uptick in challenging student behaviors such as interpersonal aggression and violence (Chatterjee, 2022).

Further, ***deficit narratives*** describing school environments and young people frame exclusionary discipline and policies of control as crucial to achieving and maintaining school safety. Not only do these practices and policies often fail to achieve school or public safety, but they often cause harm to young people and school communities. For instance, Black and Latinx students generally feel less safe at school than do their White peers, and Black students also feel consistently less safe in the classroom compared to their White and Asian classmates (Lacoe, 2015; Nakamoto et al., 2019). The shift to pursuing comprehensive school safety through an equity lens puts the inequities of past attempts at school safety into an even sharper focus. With this focus, interrogating current understandings of safety involves examining what kind of safety is being achieved, for whom, and at what cost to students and others.

Reflect:

Pause here to reflect on your own experiences with schooling as a young person, using these prompts adapted from *Lessons in Liberation* (Love et al., 2021).

1. What is one negative schooling experience you remember? How did that experience make you feel? Underneath that feeling, what did you need in that moment?
2. What is a positive schooling experience you remember? How did you feel? What need was met?
3. Looking at the feelings and needs you identified, consider how you define school safety. What feelings would a safe school elicit? What needs would be addressed?
4. Consider how your responses may or may not have changed from the time you were a young child to now.

Practice:

Find staff members, community members, and elders to share their perspectives on how school safety has changed over time in your school or district. Then, based on their stories, your observations, and any additional research, create a timeline of how school safety has evolved at your school or district. What similarities do you notice between your timeline and the timeline in the "Past and Present" section of this guide? What differences do you see? What do you attribute these similarities and differences to? What further wonderings and questions do you have now?

Learn:

- "A Brief History of School Violence in the United States" (2018) by Annette Fuentes. In this excerpt from her nonfiction book *Lockdown High: When the Schoolhouse Becomes a Jailhouse*, Fuentes offers a history of how people have come to understand violence and safety in American schools from the 1800s to the early 2000s. As you read the excerpt, notice what surprises you, what aligns with the timeline offered in the "Past and Present" section of this guide, and what might differ.
- What questions does this resource spark in your team? What are you now wondering about? How might this resource connect to what is possible in your own context? What specific actions might you take next?

SCHOOL SAFETY REIMAGINED

The Paradigm of Safety

> *"Safety is not the absence of threat; it is the presence of connection."*
>
> *– Stephen Porges (as cited in Jackson, 2020).*

Most often, what are defined as infractions of school rules are, in reality, social issues that school structures currently provide ineffective solutions for. Attempts to bring safety to schools via school safety officers, metal detectors, surveillance cameras, fences, and zero-tolerance policies can, in fact, cause harm to the very students schools are trying to protect. Students who have been marginalized are impacted most by the policies and practices that have been created to keep students safe. For instance, Black students and students with disabilities are suspended at disproportionately high rates when compared with their peers (Sparks & Klein, 2018), and schools where more than 75 percent of students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch are more likely to have at least one full-time School Resource Officer (SRO) (Robers et al., 2015). In fact, research shows that students who attend schools with higher suspension rates are 15–20 percent more likely to be arrested and incarcerated as adults and are also less likely to attend a 4-year college, with male students and students of color being most impacted (Bacher-Hicks et al., 2019).

Implicit biases also affect educators' interpretations of student behavior, shaping views of who is deserving of safety and who is disrupting safety. Educators perceive student behaviors differently depending on their students' racial identities. For example, a White student may be seen as practicing self-advocacy whereas a Black or Latinx student may be labeled "aggressive" for taking the same action. In fact, studies show that educators have higher expectations for White students than Black students and that Black students are less likely to be placed in gifted education classes (Will, 2020). Black students are also more likely to be perceived as older (e.g., Epstein et al., 2017) and more threatening (Wilson et al., 2017).

Therefore, creating different structures that can adapt to and transform school and societal issues means surfacing people's implicit biases and shifting ideas about what safety is, how it is defined, who it is for, and how it can be achieved. But first, getting a clear view of what traditional paradigms of school safety are is important for then reimagining what school safety can be.

> *Shifting the paradigm for how everyone in school communities views, defines, and achieves safety is not so much about creating something new as much as reconnecting with fundamental principles of being human. Through this shift, the paradigm of safety is not about exclusion but about belonging—not a pushing out but a folding in.*

Reimagined safety means having individual and collective needs being met and means each person has access to resources, experiences freedom from discrimination, feels connected to others, and sees that a future for themselves is possible.

Redefining safety as being grounded in self-care and collective care and ***mutuality*** is less about creating policies to prevent harm and more about visioning systems and cultures of support and interconnection.

> *Safety, therefore, is not just the absence of harm and violence, but the creation of systems that acknowledge humans' inherent indispensability, connectedness, and dignity.*

This definition of safety and these ideas are not new. They come from activists and movement makers, particularly those most harmed by systemic oppression, who, over decades, have been committed to collectively transforming those systems. In a reimagined paradigm of safety, an individual's safety is rooted in others' safety and their needs being met and vice versa. Therefore, creating systems and structures that elicit and support strong relationships and strong communities is crucial. Safety becomes less about walls and rules and more about the deepening of interconnectedness. Comprehensive school safety plans that encompass safety beyond the physical and that include social, emotional, and psychological safety all emphasize the importance of developing strong, authentic relationships that lead to connection, belonging, and sometimes necessary healing (e.g., Battistich et al., 1995; Bowen, 2021).

Table 1 provides a glimpse of traditional and reimagined paradigms of safety and serves as a roadmap for the remainder of this section on reimagining the practices, policies, and very premise of school safety.

Table 1. Traditional Safety in Comparison With Reimagined Safety

Traditional safety: Safety is the absence of harm and violence	Reimagined safety: Safety is the creation of systems and cultures of mutuality and care
Exclusionary	Inclusive
Punitive	Restorative
Transactional	Transformational
Technical	Adaptive
Individual	Relational
Top-Down	Codesigned at the margins
Complicated	Complex
Linear	Nonlinear

Reflect:

This guide's Paradigm of Safety section discusses holistic, relational approaches to reimagining school safety. As you consider Table 1, reflect on your school site. Which words would you currently select to describe your setting? Why? Then, read this tip sheet, "Rooting Social and Emotional Well-Being Efforts in Equity: A Reflection Guide" (Walrond, 2022), consider the thematic questions listed at the end of the tip sheet, and reflect on the rating you might give your school based on its current social and emotional well-being efforts. In what ways do you see the practices associated with a "high rating" reflecting the principles outlined in this Paradigm of Safety section?

Practice:

Grab a piece of paper and colorful pens or markers. Spend some time rereading the section above. Then, reflect on the following questions:

1. In a reimagined paradigm of safety, what would safety look, feel, and sound like?
2. What and who make you feel safe?

Now, capture all of the words and images that come to mind in response to those questions, not worrying if they make sense or not. Dream big! Then, pause and look at what you have created. What would be different in a school that centered these ideas of safety?

Learn:

- "Putting Care in the Center of Our Schools" (Chicago Public Schools, 2021). In this 7-minute video, students and staff members at Curie High School in Chicago share the shifts they made to transform their understanding of school safety. As you watch the video, pay attention to how individuals discuss the different safety paradigms as described in this Paradigm of Safety section and the specific actions they took to transform the culture at Curie High School.
- What questions does this resource spark in your team? What are you now wondering about? How might this resource connect to what is possible in your own context? What specific actions might you take next?

School Safety as a Complex, Adaptive System

> *"When you change the way you look at things, the things you look at change."*
>
> *– Max Planck*

Why is school safety so challenging to understand, describe, and address? In part, the difficulty may stem from failing to consider the inherent ***complexity*** of the relevant problems and systems.

It can be helpful to understand the nature of problems and their related systems as they lie on a continuum from simple to complex. The following is adapted from Glouberman and Zimmerman (2016):

- **Simple** problems or systems are "technical" in nature, are described by basic terminology, and can be addressed by techniques that, once mastered, carry a high assurance of success (e.g., following a recipe).
- **Complicated** problems or systems are of a larger scale or have increased requirements around coordination or specialized expertise yet have a relatively high degree of certainty or outcome with repetition ("deterministic") (e.g., sending a rocket to the moon).
- **Complex** problems or systems are based on relationships and their properties of self-organization, interconnections, and evolution ("adaptive") (e.g., school safety).

In terms of this continuum, schools and society have historically viewed violence through simple or complicated lenses and accordingly have created conditions to achieve safety that have been complicated at best but not complex. For example, a ***simple*** challenge may need to be addressed but, once understood, has a solution that has a high likelihood of success. Such is the case with door locks. Once a person installs the locks properly and people consistently lock the doors, the locks will prevent people from entering or leaving most of the time.

In systems change work, a ***complicated*** challenge may be hard to resolve, but with the right technical skills, a plan in place, and the right partners at the table, answers can be determined. For school safety, some complicated challenges might include determining the right policies for truancy or staff procedures for a school lockdown.

Although complicated challenges have a time and place, in order to fully achieve safety in the transformative sense, educators and other leaders must understand the very concept of safety not as complicated but as complex.

Safety is not something that can be achieved by a set of linear steps, top-down policies, or even experts. Safety as a concept and challenge is ***complex***, meaning it is inherently adaptive and nonlinear, it evolves over time. Thus, to work toward achieving safety means engaging in formal and informal processes of ***emergence*** with one's community—observing how properties and behaviors emerge as the parts interact in a wider whole. There are many moving parts, often so interrelated that they cannot be reduced to prescriptive processes and rules. Understanding how all these moving parts operate together helps those involved in change processes begin cocreating solutions to complex, adaptive issues.

Systems thinking is a way to understand the nature of complexity. It is a way of seeing and understanding a situation that emphasizes all parts of the systems (including the people) and their relationships with one another rather than in isolation. Systems thinking actively addresses complex, systemic problems that are inherent to school safety and implementation processes. Systems thinking also assumes that the behaviors and dynamics of a system are qualitatively distinct from those of its component parts (Meadows, 2008; Senge, 1990).

Applying systems thinking to reimagine a complex system like school safety diverges from the scientific method traditionally used in education, which is generally a linear approach that includes determining the problem, developing and implementing interventions, and evaluating outcomes. The linear approach says something works or it does not, without accounting for change over time or the many dynamic factors at play.

As this guide emphasizes, an engineering or systems design approach is a better fit for addressing complex challenges, inviting the community to identify a challenge, need, or aspiration; gather information; develop potential solutions; select one or more to prototype and test; and continue to iterate as conditions and understandings evolve over time. This approach is generally nonlinear and may involve creating policies and processes that did not previously exist, resulting in something new even if the process begins with something that already exists. Altogether, problems cannot be solved at the level of the problem—which is what most existing approaches to safety try to do. Instead, educators and other leaders must transcend the problem and explore what does not yet exist in order to create new knowledge and solutions.

Reflect:

Here is a reflection process, adapted from Daniel Christian Wahl's *Designing Regenerative Cultures* (2016), to encourage systems thinking habits.

1. Consider the complex system of school safety at your site. How are you defining what is part of the system and what is not?

2. What is the wider context that the system in question operates in?

3. Who are the key agents whose interactions and relationships define the system structure and drive the system's behavior?
4. How is your perspective of the system in question shaped by your worldview and values?
5. What are the key "emergent properties" of the system that could not have been predicted by simply looking at the individual "parts" of the system?
6. How does your participation in the system and your way of describing it affect what you are observing?
7. How do you hope to have an impact on the system?
8. What assets do you bring to this endeavor to adjust the system?

Practice:

You will need a pad of sticky notes and a writing utensil for this exercise. It might be helpful to explore the "Habits of a Systems Thinker" (Thinking Tools Studio, n.d.) before you begin.

1. Reflecting on the larger school safety system, identify one issue related to school safety that particularly troubles or challenges you. Write it on a sticky note.
2. Now, instead of coming up with just one solution to respond to this issue, try to identify several leverage points that could make an impact on the larger system. Work to brainstorm 10 or more leverage points, even those that seem unrealistic or impossible, and write each on a different sticky note. Place those sticky notes around the first sticky note.
3. Now consider the individuals and groups of people most affected by this school safety issue. Write each individual or group on a different sticky note. Place those sticky notes around the middle ring of sticky notes.
4. Finally, replicate this exercise with at least two of the individuals or groups you listed, letting them brainstorm their own potential leverage points.
5. What did you uncover by moving through this process? What areas of overlap did you find? What was different?
6. Take a photo of each sticky note map to save for the Process of Reimagining School Safety later in this guide.

Learn:

- "Intensive Supports for Educator Well-Being: Van Ness Elementary School" (Browning, 2021b). This 17-minute audiocast features a partnership between a Washington, DC, elementary school and a clinical psychologist to offer confidential, free therapy to current teachers and staff members. As you listen, reflect on how this story is a good example of systems thinking in action. Consider how the head of school made the decision to

prioritize her staff's mental health as part of her focus on well-being. What data did she collect first? What were her beliefs and values about wellness and safety? What structures and partnerships did she need to create and/or develop to make this initiative happen?

- What questions does this resource spark in your team? What are you now wondering about? How might this resource connect to what is possible in your own context? What specific actions might you take next?
- If you want to dive deeper into systems change, try this action learning exercise (Kania et al., n.d.) inspired by the article "The Water of Systems Change" (Kania et al., 2018).

Taking a Restorative, Community-Oriented Approach to Safety

> *"The way we respond to our crisis is the crisis."*
>
> *– Bayo Akomolafe (Osta, 2020)*

Imagine a common school safety violation, such as a fight or a weapon being brought to campus, and the following responses from four schools:

School A may do nothing—even though that may be the least likely response—continuing with business as usual in order to avoid any disciplinary action against the student(s) involved.

School B may take a traditional route, suspending or expelling the student(s) and creating new or harsher policies about weapons or fighting as an attempt to prevent the violation from happening again. This is a common reactionary way of creating school safety practices and policies.

School C, following a more comprehensive school safety plan, might provide emotional and/or cross-sector resource support to the individual(s) who caused harm, responding to the harm rather than reacting but still only addressing the incident with a quick fix at the personal and interpersonal levels. The school might provide services to the students, such as counseling or wraparound programs for their families, or facilitate a conversation between the students, but the response lacks a systemic lens and so does not fully address or transform the harm. Both School B and School C seek a solution to the behavioral infraction, which the schools view as a complicated problem.

School D, meanwhile, takes a more balanced approach, emphasizing accountability and healing. School D has school safety policies, protocols, and processes that work at personal, collective, and systemic levels to address the unmet needs and underlying issues that led to the weapon or fight on campus. Primarily, the school's proactive centering of strong relationships and belonging in its daily practices and policies reduces harm, conflict, and misbehavior schoolwide. Further, when conflict and harm do happen (a natural part of being in community), its policies move toward holistic accountability, collective cooperation, and healing. Disciplinary responses support the student(s) who caused harm to practice accountability by centering the needs of those impacted (rather than the broken school rules) and providing community support to the student(s) who caused harm to directly address those needs. Further, by seeing the behavioral infraction as a symptom of a larger, much more complex problem, School D is able to build practices, policies, and systems of support that address the unmet needs that

were a catalyst for the harm, thus transforming the harm into healing and systems of care. (As a small example, check out a reintegration circle from Oakland Unified School District [Friedman, 2013]. Think about the ways this process is supporting a student's return to their community after causing harm.)

Transforming harm is a paradigm, value, and process that comes from restorative justice, a framework or approach that originates from Indigenous communities all over the globe. By redefining harm, conflict, violence, and broken rules or laws as harm to relationships and reimagining justice as addressing the root issues of harm, restorative justice offers a framework for community-centered harm prevention and a new paradigm of what safety means.

If schools and society have traditionally defined safety as something that is achieved when those who cause harm are pushed out, restorative justice believes that safety is achieved when those who cause harm have the community support to engage in accountability practices that meet the needs of those impacted by the harm. Restorative justice aims to get to the root of the harm and prevent the harm from happening again. As restorative justice practitioner Danielle Sered has noted, "no one enters violence for the first time by committing it" (Brown & brown, 2018). In the restorative justice model, healing-centered accountability is achieved for all involved in and impacted by the harm (including their larger communities), relationships are restored (as best as possible), reintegration occurs, and communities remain intact, which is what makes communities safe.

Reflect:

Identify a recent common school safety violation at your site and write a brief narrative describing what happened, who was involved, and the school's response. As you read over the narrative, consider whether your school is most aligned with School A, B, C, or D above. Why do you think that might be? Brainstorm all the individual, interpersonal, and structural elements that contribute to the school's response to this safety violation.

Practice:

Find a colleague, friend, or family member whom you trust. Have a conversation with them in which you take turns answering the following questions:

1. How do you define "harm"? What do you think contributes to this understanding of harm?
2. What does it feel like when you have experienced harm?
3. What do you need when you feel that you have been harmed? What helps you get closer to healing?
4. What does healing look, feel, and sound like to you?

Learn:

- "Restorative Justice at Fremont High School" (RJ at Fremont, n.d.). This website profiles one high school's restorative justice efforts in Oakland, California. If you navigate to "Media," you can watch a 6-minute video to see a community-building circle in action and hear from restorative justice practitioners and students about their experiences. As you explore the website and video, ask yourself which practices, ways of being, and values undergird Fremont High School's approach to restorative justice.
- What questions does this resource spark in your team? What are you now wondering about? How might this resource connect to what is possible in your own context? What specific actions might you take next?

Balancing the Technical, Adaptive, and Relational Elements of School Safety

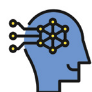
Reimagined school safety explores the idea of safety as having multiple elements. A common misstep among schools, districts, and states in their implementation of school safety (and other initiatives that promote school climate and culture) is emphasizing the technical elements of implementation while decentering crucial adaptive and relational elements needed for success and sustainability. To truly reimagine what safety looks and feels like, schools must center all three types of elements: technical, adaptive, and relational.

The ***technical elements*** of school safety are the policies, plans, structures, models, and other such elements that are written up and handed down to be implemented. Although most policy implementations are technical in nature (often seen in simple and complicated systems), their success and sustainability are rooted in the adaptive and relational elements of school safety.

The ***adaptive elements*** are the mindsets, values, guiding principles, belief systems, and other such elements that are necessary for tailoring and adapting the technical elements to the needs and desires of community members. Often, policies and practices are inadvertently designed from the perspective of simple and complicated lenses—without a real investment in or understanding of the values, practices, and mindsets that bring safety (as seen through a complex, adaptive systems lens). Without the mindsets and values in place to drive the technical elements, implementation can be inconsistent and unsustainable over time because the tools and practices being put in place for reimagined safety may be oppositional to the values, mindsets, and practices that schools have been operating with systemically.

Lastly, the ***relational elements*** of school safety, which include social capital, belonging, collectivism, and trust, play a key role in ensuring the technical elements serve their purpose. Often, technical policies and implementation of school safety are seen and enacted through a lens of individualism. Implementing the technical elements of school safety from an asset frame means valuing interconnection, building social capital between community members, and striving to create a culture of belonging. If the technical elements of school safety function best when the mindsets, values, and paradigms that inform them are in place, those adaptive pieces are at their most grounded when the relational elements are also present. Only with deep levels of community engagement and collectively shared values and beliefs can the technical elements of transformational school safety function at their best.

Because school safety operates at individual, collective, and systemic levels, adaptive, relational, and technical elements each play a role in implementing and achieving school safety. Implementing school safety through only a technical lens is like sitting on a stool with two of its legs missing; all three are needed for success. Further, when all three of these elements are defined and designed by those kept furthest from institutional power, a vision of school safety begins to emerge that centers humans, belonging, and community rather than punitive discipline, deficit ideology, and reactive policymaking.

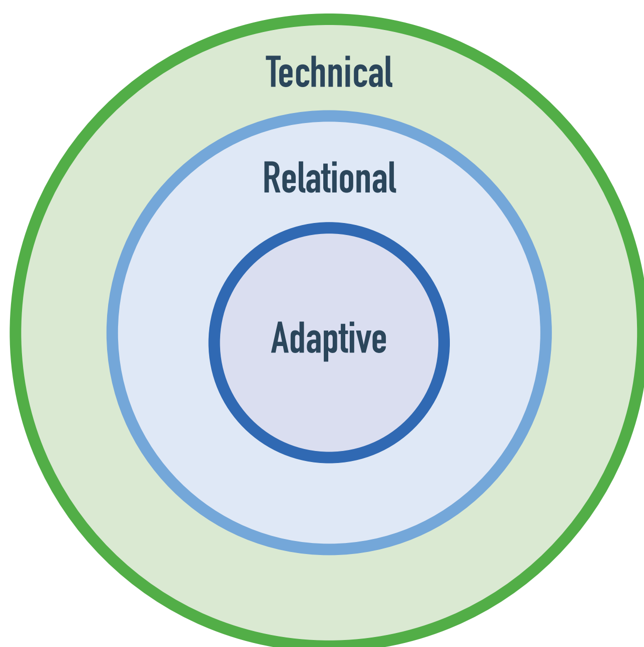


Reflect:

Consider your school site. How does your school define "safety"? Who gets to be safe and from what? What guiding principles, mindsets, and values undergird this definition? (Although it might be tempting to look at your school's mission statement, this exercise will be most fruitful if you consider not just what your school says it believes but what it actually values in practice.) Then, consider your school's culture of belonging. What data does the school have about who feels like they belong and why? If you are not sure how to answer these questions, think about whom you would like to invite to a conversation.

Practice:

Grab a piece of paper and a writing utensil.



1. Draw three concentric circles.
2. Identify a technical element (policy, practice, etc.) of your school's safety plan that you think could be more successful and write it in the outermost circle.
3. Inside that circle, write what is not working currently with this technical element and/or what could be working better.
4. In the middle circle, list all of the individuals, relationships, and groups who are affected by the technical element. Here, you are centering the relational elements.

5. Then, in the innermost circle, write responses to the following questions that are geared to center the adaptive elements: "What are the beliefs about students and safety that have led to the creation of this technical element? Do these beliefs affirm what we say we believe at our school? Why or why not?"

6. As you look at the map you just created, consider how the interplay between the adaptive and relational elements might be affecting the success of the technical element you selected. Reflect on the individuals and groups from the middle circle who have or have not been invited to share their perspectives. Consider what steps you might take next. How might you better balance the technical, adaptive, and relational elements?

Learn:

- "Integrating Identity Affirmation with Teaching and Learning at Native American Community Academy" (Hashmi, 2021). This 20-minute audiocast describes how a school in Albuquerque, New Mexico, infuses racial, ethnic, and cultural identity affirmation into its programs and curriculum. As you listen, pay attention to which adaptive elements (mindsets, values, beliefs) guide the Native American Community Academy and how the staff foregrounds relationships and a spirit of collectivism. Then, note the technical elements (strategies, practices, processes, and so on) that come out of these adaptive and relational elements.
- What questions does this resource spark in your team? What are you now wondering about? How might this resource connect to what is possible in your own context? What specific actions might you take next?

Safety as Codesigned at the Margins

Because human systems are designed by humans, they are inherently not neutral. Systems such as education, health care, and justice are designed and operate from specific ideas and paradigms about what their definitions, purposes, and functioning are. In other words, "systems are perfectly designed to get the results that they get" (W. Edwards Deming Institute, n.d.). People's views of safety, then, are informed by the dominant culture's ideas of what safety is, what it looks like, and how to achieve it.

Safety is typically defined by folks operating at a satellite level, with the technical elements of safety implemented in a top-down manner—as in the policing system, or through rules and laws, and in the hierarchical relationships between individuals (adult-to-student) and between structures (SEA-to-schools), and so on. Without the voices of everyone, overly limited and narrow ideas of safety as a process, an experience, and a system inform the design of school safety systems and subsequent outcomes. Designing school safety in ways that center equity requires "zooming in" to the voices, experiences, and belief systems of those on the margins of schools and society.

> *Centering those who are kept farthest from institutional power means more than just inviting them to offer their feedback or to be part of the conversation; instead, they should be codesigners, equally participating as collaborators in the process of reimagining school safety.*

Just as important to equitable school safety is "zooming out" to examine the larger systems and structures that cause harm and create the conditions for interpersonal harm to exist. The individual and interpersonal harms that necessitate school safety policies will always exist inside of institutional structures, policies, and ideologies that are causing harm to individuals and contributing to the conditions of individuals causing harm.

Without zooming out to these systems, policies only attempt to address harm at the individual or interpersonal levels, missing a key step of addressing root causes of harm, which subsequently (though inadvertently) means that the harm is likely to happen again. Zooming out to understand the role that institutions play in interpersonal harm can help create equitable school safety policies that offer safety to all students.

Because education, public health, and justice systems do not exist in silos but rather are constantly interacting and informing one another, creating school safety policies that transform harm requires reimagining and redefining educational and societal ideas, not just of safety but also of learning, healing, justice, and community. Using data and the principles of codesign to create school safety policies that can adapt, respond to, and transform what are typically identified as school safety issues creates the opportunity for other systems to reimagine, redefine, and redesign their processes and systems' outcomes.

Reflect:

Take some time to write or talk to someone on your team about the following questions.

- Who are the key decision-makers at your school site? Who has the power to make decisions and effect change? How do you know?
- Who has the least power? How do you know?
- How might individual, interpersonal, and structural elements affect the extent to which individuals and groups hold power at your school?
- If you were to codesign a process with a wide range of individuals with varying degrees of social and positional power, whom would you want to invite? Why?
- What would you hope to learn from and alongside them?

Consider what observations, patterns, and questions might arise after completing this exercise.

Practice:

Use the Harvard Graduate School of Education's Relationship Mapping Strategy (Making Caring Common Project, n.d.) to identify which students at your school have at least one positive connection to at least one adult. Consider how the findings from this practice align with other belonging and inclusion data you may have collected.

Learn:

- "Co-Creating an Equitable School Climate with Students at Forest Park Middle School" (Browning, 2021a). This 20-minute audiocast features middle school staff members in Forest Park, Illinois, who committed to partnering with students to codesign key elements of their school's climate and culture. The "Resources to Share" section on the landing page for the audiocast includes the empathy interview protocol that is discussed in the audiocast. As you listen to the audiocast, reflect on the ways in which you see the Forest Park Middle School staff taking to heart the principles of codesign shared in this guide's Safety as Codesigned at the Margins section.
- What questions does this audiocast spark in your team? What are you now wondering about? How might this resource connect to what is possible in your own context? What specific actions might you take next?
- For a deeper dive into the principles of equity-centered codesign, check out "Street Data: Choosing the Margins" (Dugan, 2021), a blog post by Dr. Jamila Dugan, and watch restorative justice circles in action at a school board meeting in Oakland in the video "Students Transform Tense Oakland School Board Meeting Over Budget Cuts into A Circle" (Friedman, 2019). You might also review WestEd's "Anti-Racist Evaluation Strategies: A Guide for Evaluation Teams" for ideas about how to more authentically collaborate with Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) (2021).

Reimagining in Practice: A Suggested Process

School safety, when reimagined, understood as a complex adaptive system, and designed with everyone at the table, is not a structure but an emergent ***praxis*** that can transform harm at all levels. As transformative justice practitioner Mariame Kaba says, "Changing everything might sound daunting, but it also means there are many places to start, infinite opportunities to collaborate, and endless imaginative interventions and experiments to create" (2021, p. 5).

Transforming your school's understanding and implementation of school safety practices entails shifting from a linear process of seeking a single optimal solution to instead looking for multiple leverage points that may be adjusted to improve the system. One-size-fits-all interventions are often a poor fit in complex adaptive systems. Solutions must be envisioned and implemented locally and should reflect the values, contexts, and cultures of the community's key members. Doing so requires ongoing inquiry, reflection, collaboration, negotiation, and action.

Instead of relying on more traditional linear models, design thinking provides a useful framework for reimagining school safety because it offers a "human-centered process" (IDEO, n.d.a) to develop

creative approaches for transforming complex adaptive systems. A recursive process, design thinking has several distinct stages: Empathize, Define, Ideate, Prototype, and Test. Designers spend considerable time in the Empathize stage, or "problem space," gathering as much information as possible from community members and diverse sources before moving to identifying the problem in the Define stage. Team members then dream up as many possible strategies and solutions in the Ideate stage before agreeing on the best solution or approach to create and try out in the Prototype and Test stages. Teams will find that the design thinking process is not linear and that they need to move between stages (for instance, Ideate and Prototype) more than once before arriving at a "product" or policy or approach that is worth implementing. Because no one can eliminate uncertainty, there will be unintended consequences to any solution or change effort. However, staying in the problem space and spending time to see the system can not only reduce uncertainty but also ensure more lasting change.

The following steps describe a process that draws on design thinking for building an equity-centered school safety framework that centers adaptive and relational elements and is driven by the voices and realities of students, families, and communities. This design thinking process draws on the National Equity Project (n.d.) Liberatory Design principles by centering equity and shifting who holds power and agency in the design process.

For additional reading about human-centered design thinking, check out the following resources:

- Liberatory Design (Anaissie et al., 2021)
- Co-Designing Schools Toolkit (n.d.)
- Design Thinking for Educators (IDEO, 2013)
- Design for Belonging (Wise, n.d.)

Now, here are steps for reimagining together…

1. **Assemble your team.**

    a. Before diving into the design thinking process to reimagine school safety at your site, assemble your team! Considering the complexity of school safety initiatives, including individuals with different areas of expertise who represent various groups and come from different backgrounds should be important. Who are the key community members who should be represented on your team?

    b. Ensure that you have individuals representing varying degrees of positional and social power. For instance, students and family members should serve as cocreators and codesigners alongside the district superintendent. In addition to selecting individuals from within your site, consider who should be invited from the larger community. Are there community leaders and groups who are invested in your school safety initiatives that should have a seat at the table?

    c. Before you dive into the design process, spend time getting to know each other as teammates. Although it can be tempting to immediately dive into the task at hand, remember that transformational change starts from within. Slowing down to build connections; to find out why team members are invested in this work; and to identify their

strengths, hopes, and desires will set you up to truly cocreate what comes next. The Co-Designing Schools Toolkit (n.d.)—specifically its "Build Your Team" phase— includes several great community-building exercises that you might try out.

2. **Assess readiness.**

   a. Reimagining and redesigning school safety requires considerable changes at personal, collective, and systems levels by all agents in the system; creating readiness for such change is a crucial element and is often overlooked or underemphasized. Implementing any change effort prematurely can lead to ineffective, unsustainable, expensive, and potentially harmful outcomes. Creating the conditions for reimagined and holistic school safety requires infrastructure, social capital, paradigm shifts, and collaboration. Assessing readiness for school safety will help create the right foundations for implementation success. For guidance, see the District Capacity Assessment tool from the National Implementation Research Network (NIRN) (SISEP, 2019) as well as examples from NIRN's District Readiness (SISEP Active States, 2020).

   b. According to the NIRN, "'Readiness' is defined as a developmental point at which a person, organization, or system has the capacity and willingness to engage in a particular activity" (Fixsen et al., 2013, p. 1). Furthermore, "'readiness for change' is something that needs to be developed, nurtured, and sustained.... It is not a pre-existing condition waiting to be found or an enduring characteristic of a person, organization or system.... Accountability for creating readiness rests with the Implementation Team, not with those who are expected or invited to change" (Fixsen et al., 2013, p. 2).

   c. With your team, respond to the questions in Activity 2 in WestEd's Alignment and Coherence guide (Walrond & Romer, 2021, pp. 22–24) to help you assess your readiness.

3. **Examine implementation drivers.**

   a. Also important to consider are implementation drivers—key components of capacity that facilitate implementation and assure development of relevant **competencies;** necessary **organization supports;** and **engaged, adaptive leadership** (see NIRN, 2015).

   b. In what ways might leadership challenges arise when working to reimagine school safety and implement strategies related to the redesign? What are the challenges? Who is responsible for addressing those challenges, and who else should be engaged?

   c. Just because someone is trained in something does not mean they know how to do it or will continue to do it effectively. Ongoing coaching and professional learning as well as organizational supports are critical for leaders and staff to ensure that what is being implemented is effective and sustainable and that barriers are minimized and supports are in place to ensure streamlined processes and effective implementation. What might these drivers look like in a school, district, regional/county, or state context? In what ways are these particular drivers important to your work on school safety? (See NIRN, 2015, to examine drivers.)

4. **Engage your team in a discussion of the resources in this guide.**

    a. With your team, spend some time engaging with the different resources in the "Learn" subsection offered at the end of each content section of this guide. Each of these resources was chosen to highlight different leverage points that a school might use in its journey to reimagine school safety. You may each choose to interact with all the resources, or you might opt to divide them up and share out what you learn. Below are suggested discussion questions your team might use to deepen your learning journey. With community members from different roles and varying levels of positional and social power on your team, ensure that everyone is invited both to speak and to listen at each round.

    b. **Round 1 – First Impressions:** What did you notice about this resource? How do you feel? What resonated with you? What surprised you? What are you still wondering?

    c. **Round 2 – Visions of Safety:** How did the school, district, or author define "safety"? What were the clues that helped you understand how they viewed safety? What choices—small and large—did this school or district take toward creating its vision of safety? What systems and structures were in place? Who does this system seem to be designed for? How do you know?

    d. **Round 3 – Connections:** In what ways might this resource invite you to reflect on your own site? In what ways are these resources offering visions of school safety that are similar to and/or different from your own? What other connections can you make between the resource and your site? How does this resource help you reimagine the traditional approach to safety? What leverage points does this resource point you toward in your own context?

5. **Move through the design thinking process to reimagine school safety.**

    a. Once you have assembled your team, you are ready to engage in a design thinking process to reimagine school safety at your site. Each stage of the design thinking process—as illustrated in the following figure and spelled out in Table 2—includes key guiding questions, essential mindsets, and a selection of tools to try.

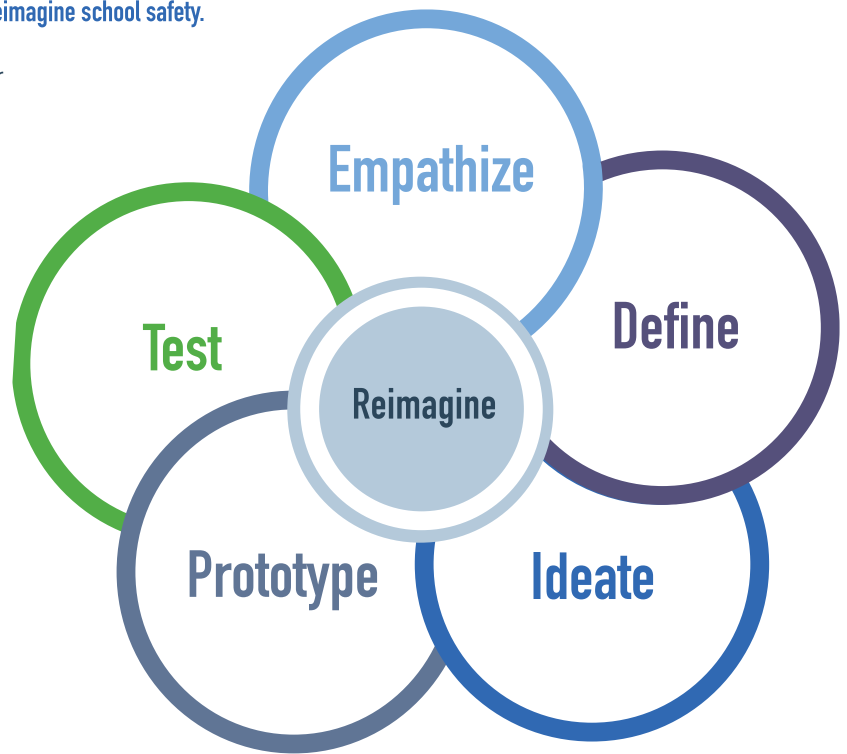
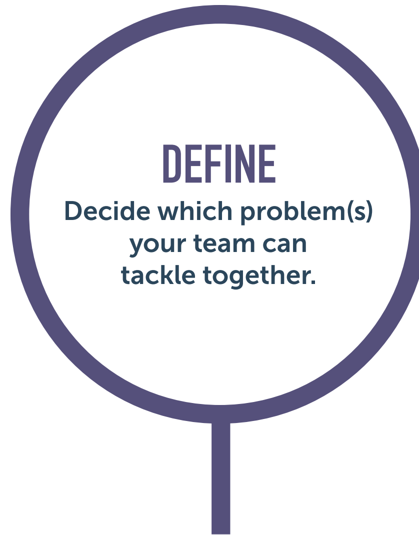


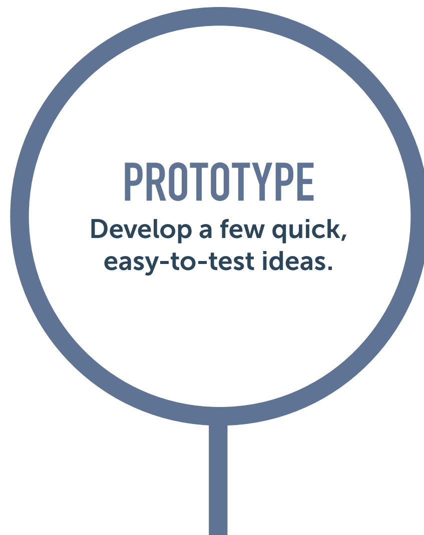
Table 2. Overview of a Process for Reimagining School Safety

Key questions to ask	Key mindsets and habits	Selected tools to try
• Who are the key community members we are designing with? • How might we collect our community members' voices, aspirations, needs, and desires? • What makes our community members feel safe? How do they define safety? • How might we capture their vision of safe and supportive schools?	• Humility • Active listening stance • Building relational trust (Anaissie et al., 2021)	• Shadow key community members (Stanford University d.school, n.d.b) • Conduct empathy interviews (High Tech High Graduate School of Education Center for Research on Equity and Innovation, n.d.) • Engage in chalk talk (NSRF, n.d.a) • Try out empathy mapping (Stanford University d.school, n.d.a) • Convene focus groups • Host a town hall • Conduct a survey

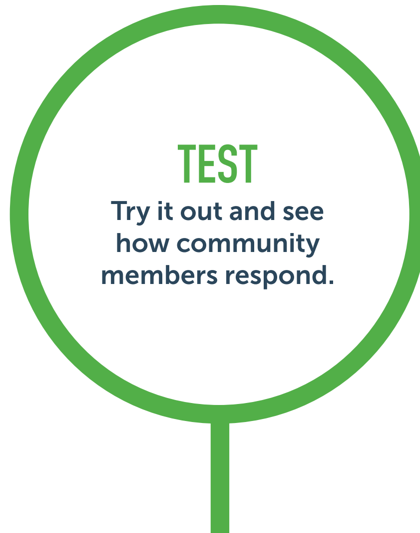


Key questions to ask	Key mindsets and habits	Selected tools to try
• How might the team center the voices, aspirations, strengths, and needs of those closest to our vision for comprehensive school safety? • How might we build on the strengths of our community members to reimagine school safety? • What are the problems with our current system for our most impacted community members? • What are the mindsets that might be shaping our current outcomes? • Which problem or related problems do we feel energized and capable of tackling now?	• Openness to surprise • Curiosity • Fully considering issues and resisting the urge to come to a quick conclusion (Thinking Tools Studio, n.d.)	• Develop a problem statement (Dam & Siang, n.d.) • Answer What? So what? Now what? (Liberating Structures, n.d.) • Engage in chalk talk (NSRF, n.d.a) • Try Peeling the Onion (NSRF, n.d.c) • Engage in assumption storming (Umbach, 2017) • Frame your design challenge (IDEO, n.d.b) • Create Venn diagrams

Key questions to ask	Key mindsets and habits	Selected tools to try
• What is the most radically imaginative way to solve the problem that we just defined? • How can we draw from the resources we discussed previously (in Step 4)? How might we apply those to our current context? • What are all of the creative ideas and approaches that are naturally emerging to respond to the problem(s) we identified? • How might we move beyond what we think we know to imagine a new way of doing things? • How might we encourage radical imagination in our teammates?	• Yes/and thinking • Taking the stance that no idea is off the table • Exercising creative courage (Anaissie et al., 2021)	• Host a brainstorming session • Engage in affinity mapping (NSRF, 2006) • Try a visioning exercise (Strimaityte, 2019) • Grab a pad of sticky notes and write one idea per note • Try out a feedback carousel (NSRF, n.d.b) • Sketch and doodle



Key questions to ask	Key mindsets and habits	Selected tools to try
• Of the ideas we brainstormed, which ones have the capacity for greatest transformation? • How might we create quick mock-ups so that we can share our thinking with our community members? • What would success look like if we moved in this direction?	• Willingness to see the big picture • Ability to imagine your ideas in real life	• Engage in role play or a skit • Build a diorama • Create charts, graphics, and visual aids • Write "even over" statements to help prioritize ideas (Kamer, 2021) • Storyboard your ideas (IDEO, n.d.c) • Host a puppet show



Key questions to ask	Key mindsets and habits	Selected tools to try
• How might we gather our community members' feedback about what we have created? • Does our solution respond to the concerns, desires, and aspirations we gathered in the first stage? • What is working? What is missing? What could be better? • What phase in the design thinking process do we need to revisit in order to refine our ideas based on the feedback we have received?	• Openness to iteration • Willingness to fail forward	• Engage in role play or a skit • Conduct a gallery walk (Facing History & Ourselves, n.d.) • Move through a Charette protocol (NSRF, 2003) • Try out a feedback carousel (NSRF, n.d.b) • Respond to the questions in Chapter 1 (pp. 24–35) of WestEd's Alignment and Coherence guide (Walrond & Romer, 2021)

GLOSSARY

Adaptive elements: Adaptive elements are the mindsets, values, guiding principles, belief systems, and so on, that undergird a larger system.

Asset frame: To apply an asset frame is to define individuals and groups by their strengths and aspirations (their assets) rather than their deficits or challenges.

Belonging: "[B]elonging describes values and practices where no person is left out of our circle of concern. Belonging means more than having just access, it means having a meaningful voice and the opportunity to participate in the design of political, social, and cultural structures" (Othering & Belonging Institute, n.d.).

Codesign: "Codesign" describes a participatory approach to a design process in which community members are treated as equal collaborators in creating solutions to complex challenges that affect them.

Complex, adaptive system: A complex, adaptive system is a "group of semi-autonomous agents who interact in interdependent ways to produce systemwide patterns, such that those patterns then influence behavior of the agents" (Human Systems Dynamics Institute, n.d.). Shifting complex, adaptive systems requires observing how properties and behaviors emerge as the parts interact in a wider whole. In a complex, adaptive system, there are many moving parts, often so interrelated that they cannot be reduced to prescriptive processes and rules.

Complex challenge: A complex challenge is an adaptive challenge based on relationships and their properties of self-organization, interconnections, and evolution—e.g., school safety is a complex challenge.

Complicated challenge: A complicated challenge is more deterministic than a complex challenge and, in comparison to simple challenges, is often of a larger scale and has increased requirements for coordination or specialized expertise; addressing complicated challenges often results in a relatively high degree of certainty or outcome repetition (e.g., sending a rocket to the moon).

Comprehensive school safety: A comprehensive school safety framework considers physical safety, school climate, and student behavior. This comprehensive approach involves key partners to proactively address community needs by developing a range of strategies, interventions, and effective threat assessment to prevent and respond to violence in schools (National Institute of Justice, 2020).

Deficit narrative: A deficit narrative defines individuals and groups by what they lack and cannot do rather than by their strengths and aspirations. Deficit narratives often place blame on individuals for their experiences of oppression instead of recognizing the wider structural and systemic inequities that contribute to their circumstances.

Design thinking: Design thinking offers a "human-centered process" (IDEO, n.d.a) to develop creative approaches to transforming complex adaptive systems. A recursive process, design thinking has several distinct stages: Empathize, Define, Ideate, Prototype, and Test.

Emergence: Emergence describes how properties and behaviors emerge as the parts interact in a wider whole: "The whole becomes greater than the sum of the parts" (Sullivan, 2011).

Equity: In the context of this guide, "equity" means removing the predictability of who gets to be and feel safe and who does not. According to equity coach Erin Trent Johnson, founder and CEO of Community Equity Partners, achieving equity means that "social outcomes must no longer be predicted by race, class, and gender. To do this, we must acknowledge and examine power structures, including systemic advantage and disadvantage that hold inequities in place" (Walrond & Romer, 2021, p. 6).

Exclusionary security measures: According to Kupchik and Ward (2014), exclusionary approaches to safety and security "intend to diminish or eliminate social ties" (p. 336) by working to identify and remove individuals who are seen as "rule-breaking or trouble-making" (p. 337). They offer metal detectors and drug-sniffing dogs as examples of exclusionary security measures.

Fractal change: Fractals are "infinitely complex patterns that are self-similar across different scales. They are created by repeating a simple process over and over in an ongoing feedback loop" (brown, 2017, p. 51). "Fractal change," then, is the idea that a single individual, a single choice, or a single shift at the micro level can have profound ripple effects at the macro level to generate larger systems change.

Harm: Restorative justice acknowledges that harm occurs on a spectrum and includes actions small and large that result in a negative impact regardless of intent.

I**mplicit biases:** These are biases that occur automatically and unintentionally that affect people's judgments, decisions, and behaviors (National Institutes of Health, n.d.).

Mutuality: In interdependence theory, "mutuality" is the tendency of individuals and groups to depend equally on each other's behavior for the attainment of desirable outcomes (American Psychological Association, n.d.).

Praxis: This is the integration of theory and practice. Paulo Freire (1972, p. 52) described praxis as "reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it."

Relational elements: The relational elements of a system include social capital, belonging, collectivism, and trust.

Restorative justice: Restorative justice offers a framework for community-centered harm-prevention by redefining harm, conflict, violence, and broken rules or laws as harm to relationships and reimagining justice as addressing the root issues of harm.

Safety: In the words of Pate and colleagues, “Safety is a complicated word for many people, especially people who have experienced stress and trauma, both directly related to oppression and otherwise. It does not mean the same thing for everyone and what feels safe for one person may not feel or be safe for another” (2022, p. 6). For the purposes of this guide, safety means having access to resources and your individual and collective needs being met, experiencing freedom from discrimination, feeling connected to others, and seeing a future for yourself. Safety, therefore, is not just the absence of harm and violence but the creation of systems that acknowledge humans’ inherent indispensability, connectedness, and dignity. An individual’s sense of safety is rooted in others’ safety and their needs being met, and vice versa.

Simple challenge: A simple challenge is a more technical challenge than complicated or complex ones; a simple challenge usually can be described in basic terminology or addressed by a basic technique that, once mastered, carries with it a high assurance of success (e.g., following a recipe).

Systems thinking: Systems thinking is a way to understand the nature of complexity. It is a way of seeing and understanding a situation that emphasizes all parts of the relevant systems (including the people) and their relationships with one another rather than in isolation.

Technical elements: The technical elements are the strategies, practices, programs, and interventions implemented to solve problems or work toward new initiatives.

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