

# Redefining School Culture Amidst Return-to-School Planning



Adapted from: "Seizing  
the Moment to Create the  
School You'd Want for  
Your Kids" by Relay  
Graduate School of  
Education  
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**COVID-19 hit at the same time  
the US faced a racial reckoning -  
and some schools are using this  
opportunity to imagine better  
schools for all students.**

**Principal TS Hoard seized the  
moment to improve school  
culture.**

# Revisiting Mission When Everything's in Flux

Like many of FLI's partners, many school leaders imagined "what's possible?"

"As the country wrestled with the twin pandemics of COVID-19 and systemic racism, Principal TS Hoard found himself deeply engaged in self-examination.



"He asked himself how the school could do even better at truly empowering and caring for all of its students."



# Reinvigorating School Culture and Climate

**Hoard saw an opportunity in planning for the 2020–21 school year and set out to reinvigorate his school's culture.**

**The keys to his theory of action were to:**

- Elevate relationships and trust over compliance.
- Make high-level discourse central to all instruction.
- Show greater appreciation for students' identities, and instill in them that they can write their own futures.



**So, what pushed Principal Hoard to start this change in his school community?**



**"Like so many Americans, Hoard found himself soul-searching last summer, as the movement for racial justice was stirring the nation's conscience to new levels.**



**Hoard and his team asked themselves how they could be more culturally responsive and better support the empowerment, growth, and future success of the young men of color in their charge."**





As part of that inquiry, staff read "Between the World and Me" by Ta-Nehisi Coates. The book recounts his the author's time in school as dominated by arbitrary rules and learning that seemed disconnected from his life and lacking purpose.

**Ta-Nehisi Coates' brutal retelling of his school experiences moved Hoard and his team.**



"I took it personal ... And then I realized we needed to make a shift.... When our students leave our building, what are they going to say about us?"





**Hoard realized that a compliance-driven culture simply set the wrong goals for his students.**

**Hoard prompted his staff to consider why they became educators and why they chose to be at a school committed to expanding opportunity for young men of color. Staff took a cue from Coates, and wrote letters to their students:**

**"I want you to know that 'I hear you and I see you'"**

**"You are STRONG, SIGNIFICANT, POWERFUL and in FULL CONTROL of your destiny."**



**Gestures that connect teachers to their students can build empathy, trust, and boost achievement.**

**Hoard and his staff agreed to a common goal to accelerate the intellectual development of their students'.**

**They committed to a small handful of specific and significant shifts in practice; they emphasized:**

- 1. Building authentic relationships with students.**
- 2. Engaging in community conversations centered around students' interests and experiences.**
- 3. Sharing students' own complex, content rich ideas.**

**These shifts just don't help students - they also re-invest teachers, especially during a time when relationships of all kinds have been challenged.**



# **Commit to empowering students in the 2021-22 school year! FLI CAN HELP!**

**contact us: [info@futureleadersincubator.org](mailto:info@futureleadersincubator.org)**



## **IMPLIMENT SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING**

FLI helps educators develop culturally responsive social emotional learning curriculum that meets the needs of all students, and includes work in the anti-bias development and inclusive practices.

## **PARTNER WITH FLI TO DEVELOP A DIVERSITY, EQUITY, INCLUSION & ANTI-RACISM TRAINING PLAN**

FLI provides DEIA professional development training for educators and leaders to create anti-racist, inclusive practices

## **PARTNER WITH FLI FOR 2021-22 RETURN TO SCHOOL PLANNING**

FLI support schools with equitable, trauma informed return-to-school plans that include curriculum support, leadership development, professional development, strategic planning, and so much more - all through an equity lens.