**STEP 1:**

# CONNECT

- Define the system you need to address, the scope of change you want to make, and whom you are making the change for
- Empathize with the identified school level challenge
- Determine if you are designing for impact, urgency, or ease

After identifying your own bias, power and privilege, you are now working to **connect with the specific system** for redesign, the scope in which you will be redesigning, and the targeted group for which you are redesigning. It will be important to continue to be self-aware of your power, privilege and biases so you can check your thinking and make intentional steps to uplift voices without power. To truly Connect with the challenge, a team must:

1. **Determine the information you need to collect**
2. **Decide from whom you need the information**
3. **Engage with stakeholders to identify your problem statement**

## DETERMINE THE INFORMATION YOU NEED TO COLLECT

**First**, brainstorm the different systems that you want to redesign. We defined school-level systems as policies and practices regarding people, time, and money within a K-12 institution. Then, select data points around one area of historical inequity for different marginalized groups within your school based on the system you selected. Be sure to collect data to represent a variety of marginalized groups within your current system.

You can start defining these systems within your schools by asking yourself the following questions:

1. **What are the gaps among the different sub-groups within your school?**
2. **How wide are the gaps in learning outcomes in your school? Are they narrowing or widening?**
3. **What changes have you made to reduce these differences in learning outcomes?**

| **EXAMPLES OF POTENTIALLY INEQUITABLE SYSTEMS** | Staffing/Master schedule |
|---|---|
| | Intervention structure |
| | Instructional models |
| | Grading |
| | Parent engagement |
| | Consequence/reward systems |
| | Student engagement |
| | Student safety |

| **TOP RESEARCH BASED MARGINALIZED INEQUITIES IN SCHOOLS** | Socio-economics status[3] |
|---|---|
| | Race[3] |
| | Age/ Grade[3] |
| | Ability groups[3] |
| | Instructional Tracks[4] |
| | Gender[4] |
| | School created social categories[4] |
| | Geography and mobility[5] |
| | LGBTQIA+ |
| | English Language Learners |
| | Students with Disabilities |

You can find a chart of different data points aligned with the prioritized systems on the next page.

| BIG ROCK | SYSTEM | MARGINALIZED GROUPS IMPACTED | DATA POINT |
|---|---|---|---|
| Cultural | Safety | • Students whose family structure (families led by a single parent, older sibling or grandparent) is not supported by the design of our systems and society<br>• Students who return home alone<br>• Students who are dependent on school transportation for school<br>• Undocumented students<br>• Students with disabilities<br>• Students from poor and working-class communities, children raising/supporting younger siblings | • Family survey on choice of transportation<br>• Students with chronic late pick-ups<br>• Family contact preference<br>• Instances of bullying<br>• Number of students identified as "At Risk" by social worker<br>• Number of students identified as McKinney-Vento |
| Cultural | Parent Engagement | • Parents with disabilities<br>• Single-parent working families<br>• Queer parents/guardians<br>• Parents with language barriers<br>• Parents working multiple jobs | • Attendance/ tardies<br>• Referrals or discipline rates<br>• Parent attendance for events<br>• Communication log<br>• Types of parent engagement activities |
| Operational | Staffing and Master Scheduling | • Underperforming students as determined by achievement and growth data<br>• Students with lowest attendance rates<br>• Students with disabilities<br>• Students from working-class families and students raising/ supporting younger siblings<br>• Students with jobs/ financial responsibilities for their families | • What is developmentally appropriate optimal learning time<br>• Course offerings and selection<br>• Attendance/ tardies<br>• Prioritized decisions in creating the last master schedule |
| Instructional | Instructional Models for Personalized Learning | • Underperforming sub-group based on behavior and academic data<br>• Classes with least culturally responsive curriculum<br>• Students with unequal discipline data<br>• English Learners<br>• Student with disabilities | • Reading & math levels based on sub-population<br>• SPED referrals<br>• Referrals or discipline rates<br>• MTSS support models<br>• Stereotypes placed on kids |
| Cultural/ Instructional | Student Engagement | • Students with disabilities based on student talk time<br>• Student who is behind academically (Level of DOK provided)<br>• Students in classrooms where the content or teacher ostracizes them because of their cultural background, whether intentionally or unintentionally | • Attendance/ tardies<br>• SPED referrals<br>• Referrals or discipline rates<br>• Minutes with targeted instruction ⟶ MTSS Tier 2 minutes<br>• Stereotypes placed on kids<br>• Intervention rosters |

From your identified systems that you are interested in connecting with, begin to reflect on:
• *Is the system dictated by policy? (e.g. number of minutes required for a class)*
	• *If so, this may not be within your locus of control to redesign.*
• *Do you have autonomy over how the system is designed?*
	• *If so, seek to understand the assumptions and biases that the designer may have brought when creating the system.*

## DECIDE FROM WHOM YOU NEED ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

**Engaging** with stakeholders through empathy activities will help to deepen your understanding of the data you collected and shed light on how previous decisions have helped to create the existing structure. You will also begin to build the trust needed to redesign the system which, in turn, will also allow you to center your redesign on the everyday, lived experiences and pain points on those for whom the systems are intended to serve. Lastly, empathizing with your stakeholders will help you determine the core challenge for which to solve. To engage stakeholders to collect this information and develop a deeper connection to core school challenge, consider using a combination of the following empathy activities:

**INTERVIEW:**
Interview some of your stakeholders impacted by the challenge. Begin your questions with sentence stems like "Tell me about…" in order to ask open-ended questions that invite people to tell stories. Use an empathy map to capture the learnings collected.

**OBSERVATION:**
Be a fly on the wall and observe your user. Take notes on the high and low points in their daily experience, or through the lens of your identified challenge.

**IMMERSION:**
Walk a mile in their shoes. A great immersion experience with students is the Shadow a Student Challenge, where you not only follow a student around for a day, but also participate in all of the same activities as the student. If they are doing math problems, so are you! If they are running in gym class, you are running alongside them.

It will be important to consider how you will build safe spaces for people to share their feedback. Not every stakeholder will be open about sharing right away, so consider giving people **multiple opportunities** as needed. You might also collect data from your school community in the form of surveys, focus groups, and town halls. Additional guidance can be found in our stakeholder engagement guide.