

## Key Takeaways: Developing Skills, Habits, and Mindsets

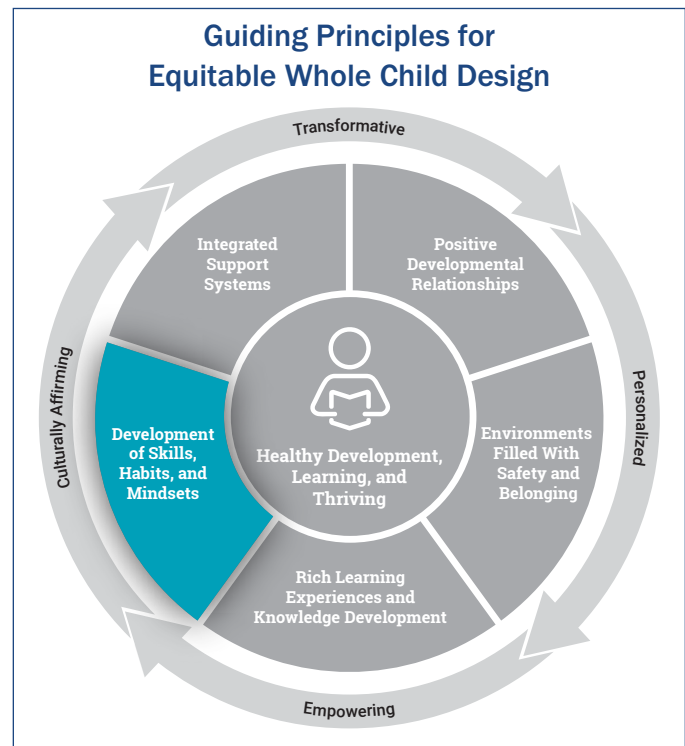
The Guiding Principles for Equitable Whole Child Design show how practitioners can integrate a range of structures and practices to maximize learning and development. Among its five elements are the development of skills, habits, and mindsets, which are essential to engagement, learning, and achievement.

Advances in neuroscience show that the parts of the brain are cross-wired and functionally interconnected: There is not a math part of the brain that is separate from the emotional and social skills parts of the brain. For deep learning to occur, educators need to simultaneously develop students' cognitive, social, and emotional skills, which can serve as the **building blocks** for academic learning. These skills, including executive function, growth mindset, personal and social awareness, interpersonal skills, resilience and perseverance, metacognition, and self-direction, can and should be taught, modeled, and practiced just like traditional academic skills and should be integrated across curriculum areas and all the settings in the school. When such skills are practiced sufficiently to become habits, they develop engaged and productive learners who can be resourceful in new situations while treating others with kindness and contributing positively to their communities.

Schools can develop young people's skills, habits, and mindsets through structures and practices in the following ways:

**Integrating Cognitive, Social, and Emotional Development Into Learning:** Academic learning must be accompanied by curriculum and instruction that engages students in developing their social, emotional, and cognitive skills. To develop skills in coherent ways across classrooms, schools can identify the skills, habits, and mindsets they value as a community as an important starting point. These, in turn, can inform the adoption of structures to support student mastery toward those goals. These can include:

- **dedicated and consistent time** for social, emotional, and cognitive learning—in classroom meetings, advisories, and other settings—which helps students develop a sense of purpose, growth mindsets, and targeted skills such as self-direction, self-awareness, and perseverance, along with other valued competencies;
- **evidence-based programs and curricula**, which enable students to explicitly learn and practice valued skills, habits, and mindsets in active, well-sequenced ways; and
- **integrated opportunities and routines** (e.g., collaboration protocols, schoolwide conflict resolution strategies, staff modeling of these skills in approaches to problem-solving) that reinforce skills, habits, and mindsets in intentional and organic ways during classes, lunchtime, recess, extracurriculars, and other parts of the school day.



**Developing Productive Habits and Mindsets:** Students’ beliefs and attitudes have a powerful effect on their learning and well-being. Thus, helping young people build productive habits and mindsets can set into motion a cascade of effects that accumulate over time to result in more positive school outcomes, such as an increasing sense of connection to school, a greater self-concept, and higher levels of academic engagement. Instructional strategies that support this development include those that:

- **nurture productive mindsets that enable perseverance and resilience**, including frequent opportunities for feedback and revision that allow students to see and experience their growing competency and mastery;
- **develop executive function**, which can include well-designed projects and exhibitions of learning that help young people develop the ability to plan, organize their efforts, problem-solve, and self-manage;
- **develop interpersonal and communication skills** through opportunities for well-structured student collaboration, presentation, and peer-to-peer interaction that enable students to describe their academic work and learning and develop their teamwork skills; and
- **promote self-awareness and metacognitive thinking** through opportunities for reflection, self-regulation, and self-assessment (e.g., reflection protocols, rubrics, cumulative portfolios of work) that enable students to take stock of their strengths, challenges, and progress.

Educators can model these practices in culturally affirming ways, provide appropriate scaffolds, enable productive struggle that leads to new skills, and affirm students’ abilities and assets to make this learning and skill development visible and supported.

To see the full playbook, visit <https://k12.designprinciples.org>.

