Milestone
Democratic
School

• A Plan for Engaging, Participatory, Future-Forward Learning •

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Iteration #1
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- Ms. Hedi Rudd and the incredible community at Badger Rock Neighborhood Center for their welcoming generosity (and delicious food - thanks Chef Kipp!)
- Our community supporters, sponsors, friends, and allies
Jurie Mayo

Hello, my name is Jurie, I am 19 years old, and I have been a community organizer with Freedom Inc for four years. I joined this project because I feel like having a queer, black, and gender non-binary voice would be able to help shape this school.

Devika Pal

My name is Devika Pal. I am 13 years old. I am born and brought up in Madison Wisconsin. My parents are immigrants from India. I chose to go into this project because I feel like there should be a school in which students find learning engaging, where they are heard and where it prepares us for the future.
Stefano Oviedo

I’m a young student the age of 18 who lives in Madison, Wisconsin, that’s very open minded, and a proud Mexican. I want to see a change in the education of students and to help them to get the next step in their lives.

Gersely Rios

I am 13 years old and I am from Venezuela, I just moved from there to Madison, Wisconsin. I enter this project because I think that as a Latina, woman, and an immigrant of this country, I can contribute some of my ideas and experiences to this “school-to-be” in how to teach students that education and respect are important values wherever you are, they are highly appreciated.
I am a thirteen year old. I live in Madison, Wisconsin. I joined this project because I wanted to make a school where students are able to express themselves. Merry Christmas and if you don’t celebrate that then have a good day!

Malik McDonald

I am 38 years old – I’ve been a student, a retail worker, a construction worker, a counselor, and a teacher. I joined this team because I believe in democracy and I know that young people deserve the chance to guide their own learning.

Sean Anderson
Learning/Design Plan

Phases of Participatory School Design:

Note: The design team moves from one Phase to another only by Formal Consensus of the entire team.

**Start Here:**
**Build Our Team**
How can we design in trust together?

**Name Our Challenge**
What kind of school is possible?

**Understand Our Challenge**
What goals do we have? What constraints are we under?

**Generate Ideas**
Brainstorm our perfect school.

**Evaluate Ideas**
Which ideas meet our goals? Which can be done within our constraints?

**Develop Our Plan**
Write a plan for our school?

**Run an Iteration**
Teach and learn in our new school.

**Evaluate the Iteration**
How did our first try go?

**Repeat...**
At Milestone Democratic School, we believe that:

- All people work and learn better when they feel emotionally and physically safe;
- Real, meaningful learning is always engaging;
- Everyone has the right to choose what they learn, when they learn it, and how they learn best; and
- Education must prepare us to succeed in this world as it is, and also help us develop the tools to make the world a better place.

By making this school, we are contributing to the creation of a different and better world.

Our vision for this world is:

- A democratic one
- Where everyone has a voice, and
- All voices are heard and respected.

Our mission is to bring this world into being, by helping people to:

- Learn to think critically,
- Find out who they are and who they want to be, and
- Develop democratic skills and attitudes so they can share power in their communities.

To make sure that our school is constantly growing, improving, and changing along with us and the world around us, we are committed to a flexible school structure. Being able to change our school to respond to the needs of our communities is the most important part of our school design. At weekly School Meetings, we will check in on problems and possibilities, and make decisions democratically - “one person, one vote,” including all students and staff. At least once a year, we will gather a Design Team of diverse voices, including students, teachers, staff, families, and community members, to evaluate and reiterate our school design - take it back to scratch and interrogate every decision democratically through consensus.
Each of us as Learners, Building a School for Us

Our story

This school is designed by youth, people of color, LGBTQ folx, builders, dreamers, and doers: a team of designers who care about learners and learning. This school is designed to serve anyone who wants choice and connection in their learning - for those who believe in democracy, deep learning about this world, and creating a better world as we learn.

The story of this school design is of young people from different backgrounds volunteering their time, researching in their communities, and using restorative and democratic processes to create a school based on their highest aspirations. Milestone Democratic School’s story starts in December of 2017, when the non-profit Community | Learning | Design received initial authorization from the University of Wisconsin’s Office of Educational Opportunity to begin developing a new public charter secondary school. Over the summer of 2018, C|L|D launched a community organizing campaign to build partnerships with youth-service organizations and to recruit school designers. A team of five dedicated youth were selected from applicants after interviews and consultations with families. This team held regular design sessions after school and on weekends throughout the fall of 2018, following a curriculum for Participatory School Design authored by the directors of C|L|D.

After training in Restorative Practices, Formal Consensus, and Design, the team crafted a “Possibilities Statement” by consensus. This statement became the guidepost for all visioning and development of school design elements:

“Our school can be a place where learning is cool, where everyone has a voice and everyone is heard, and where the most important step is the next one.”

Out of this Possibilities Statement, and using storytelling as a critical ideation tool, a set of Design Criteria began to emerge. The team quickly realized, however, that this set of goals for our school was missing input from important voices. After identifying “youth not in the room,” stakeholders, and experts who should have input on our design, the team conducted several weeks of “listening sessions,” which were then analyzed for additions to our list of goals. Our final list of Design Criteria, adopted by consensus, states:
Our school should:
• Provide relevant learning that will help us in life
• Make students feel environmentally safe
• Give students choice over what they learn and how they learn it (flexibility)
• Focus on social, emotional, and academic success (accountability)
• Be staffed by teachers who can empathize and relate to students
• Be governed in a way that includes students, teachers, and staff
• Be accessible and welcoming to all, regardless of income, race, ethnicity, gender expression, culture, or identity
• Treat everyone as an individual
• Organize time for better learning
• Empower everyone to be authentic
• Allow people to make meaning and grow towards mastery every day
• Use real-life experiences and problems for hands-on learning
• Create safe relationships to push students towards high expectations
• Build agency for equity, inclusion, and justice
• Help us navigate the world as it is, while also allowing us to create the better world we want
continued...

From this broad set of goals, the team ideated and evaluated a series of design elements. The document that follows, also adopted by consensus of the Design Team, represents the best of the ideas we collected and generated to answer the question, “How do we create a school that will bring this possibility to life, while meeting each of these goals?”

We understand that this plan does not include all the details necessary to open our school. To continue this planning process, including writing the first handbook and hiring the first staff, the Design Team will continue to meet over the next year and work through restorative, consensus-based design to make all the necessary decisions to plan for opening.

Iteration #1
The school will start off serving between 30 to 100 students, ages 14 to 18. The maximum number will be 200 students. Students will be centered in advisories, which will have no more than 16 students per advisor. Most classes offered will be no more than 20 students per teacher.

The physical space we create will support us as learners by having big open spaces, and round rooms for decision making. It will also have a space for being quiet and chill, a makerspace for creating, building and making, a gym, and gender-neutral bathrooms.

The teachers in this school will be empathetic, have diverse backgrounds, have had experience with trauma, and support democratic agency of their students. Teachers will have democratic agency also, to make sure that MDS recruits and retains the best staff possible. Teachers will be hired by the Design Team based on their ability to have empathy and relate to youth. The Design Team will intentionally recruit diverse teachers, with a focus on teachers of color and teachers from different countries around the world. At least some of the teachers should always be young people. The first role teachers will fill is as advisors to small groups, who coach their advisories on projects and internships. The advisors will also teach classes that are requested in School Design and School Meetings.

The schedule the learners will experience in this school is designed for best learning. The beginning of the school day will start off with a “soft start” of breakfast, open meeting and project work time, and gym access. At nine a.m., the classes and advising will start. The school days will be Monday through Friday, but during the weekend the building will be open for students to access to food, hygiene, the makerspace, and gym. The school will be year long, with longer breaks during each season.
Milestone Democratic School will be a remarkable school because of its abilities to create an engaging process of learning. Students will be able to work in a diverse and culture-based environment, with the assistance of teachers, advisors and the students themselves. Our school will be based on a democratic system where each student is able to decide what are the things that they think is important to be academic, social and emotional successful in their future. Our idea of “Student-directed Project Based Learning,” working one-on-one with advisors, and creating Learning Plans based on specific individual goals will help us create this engaging learning.

MDS will work with the community by making internships a part of every student’s school week. Also, we will use community experts to help advise projects, which will help the student to feel an affinity with people that they already know as well as people they have never met before.

Another thing that our school will be different from the others it is that the actual learning would be involved in equality and critical thinking, which will help them to be good citizens.

Treating everyone as an individual, hands-on learning, and keeping tab of the student’s progress, are some of the principal elements that our school, which will make sure that students are actually learning and growing academically, socially and emotionally. One-on-one coaching from an advisor, based on progress toward each student’s goals, will be the main way student growth is tracked.
Making every voice heard

The way our school will make sure that everyone feels safe, comfortable, and respected when making their voices heard is having daily circles, along with check-ins.

When decision-making in our school, we will make sure that all voices are heard by having a whole school meetings where every person is equal to one vote, and the decision is made by majority rule. When we redesign the school (at least once per year) by evaluating and reiterating our design process, we will make sure the Design Team is diverse and representative, and includes students, teachers, staff, families, and community members.

The way that authority will work in our school, to make sure that all voices will be heard is by making sure we use Restorative Justice and circle practices.

Families’ voices will be heard by having open communication. We can do this by having conferences with families and guardians focused on learners’ strengths and needs. Also, families will have open invites to attend weekly school meetings as observers and to give their opinions (though they will not be able to vote).

The way that we’ll make sure that all voices are heard in the way we teach and learn make is by making sure that everyone is included in discussions. When we give and receive feedback, assessments, and evaluation, we will make sure that all voices are heard by weekly staff and student evaluations. Which means that one on one meetings will happen in order to give critiques on one another.

Our justice practice will ensure that all voices are heard by, holding students accountable instead of disciplining them, by keeping everyone safe, while treating everyone (including offenders) as individuals with a right to be heard, and a right to learn. Restorative Justice will help us do this.
The school will make everyone feel safe and comfortable and respectful to plan their next step in life, from wherever they are starting. It will be a place where you feel that you know, and that people know you, by not being too big and not to small. Comfortable and inviting.

We will use community resources to help show what to look forward to for the future, and what students need to be ready the for their next steps. Each student will be out of the school for part of their school week to go to internships with businesses, community organizations, or government. Students will use community mentors for the the path they desire as they work on projects and internships.

This school will help students get to the next steps in life by making individual learning plans showing step by step what to expect and what is needed. By setting specific learn goals, students and advisors will write plans to reach them. They will have their own personalized learning to get to their goal.

Students will receive evaluations, feedback, and assessments that will help get them to the next step. Students won’t get shut down, and advisors won’t make feel them feel they like they failed and didn’t do it right. Instead we will show them how to bounce back from their mistake, in one-on-one coaching to give feedback on their learning plans.
This School Plan is a living document. As the Design Team grows (let us know if you want to join!) and the planning process for Milestone continues, we will continue to practice democracy in our design work to ensure that this school serves young people and their communities in the best way possible.

Please reach out to us to talk more about this work! We’d love input, advice, words of encouragement, words of warning, or anything else you want to share.

Til next time,

*The School Design Team of Milestone Democratic School*