Today's Student Experience Lab
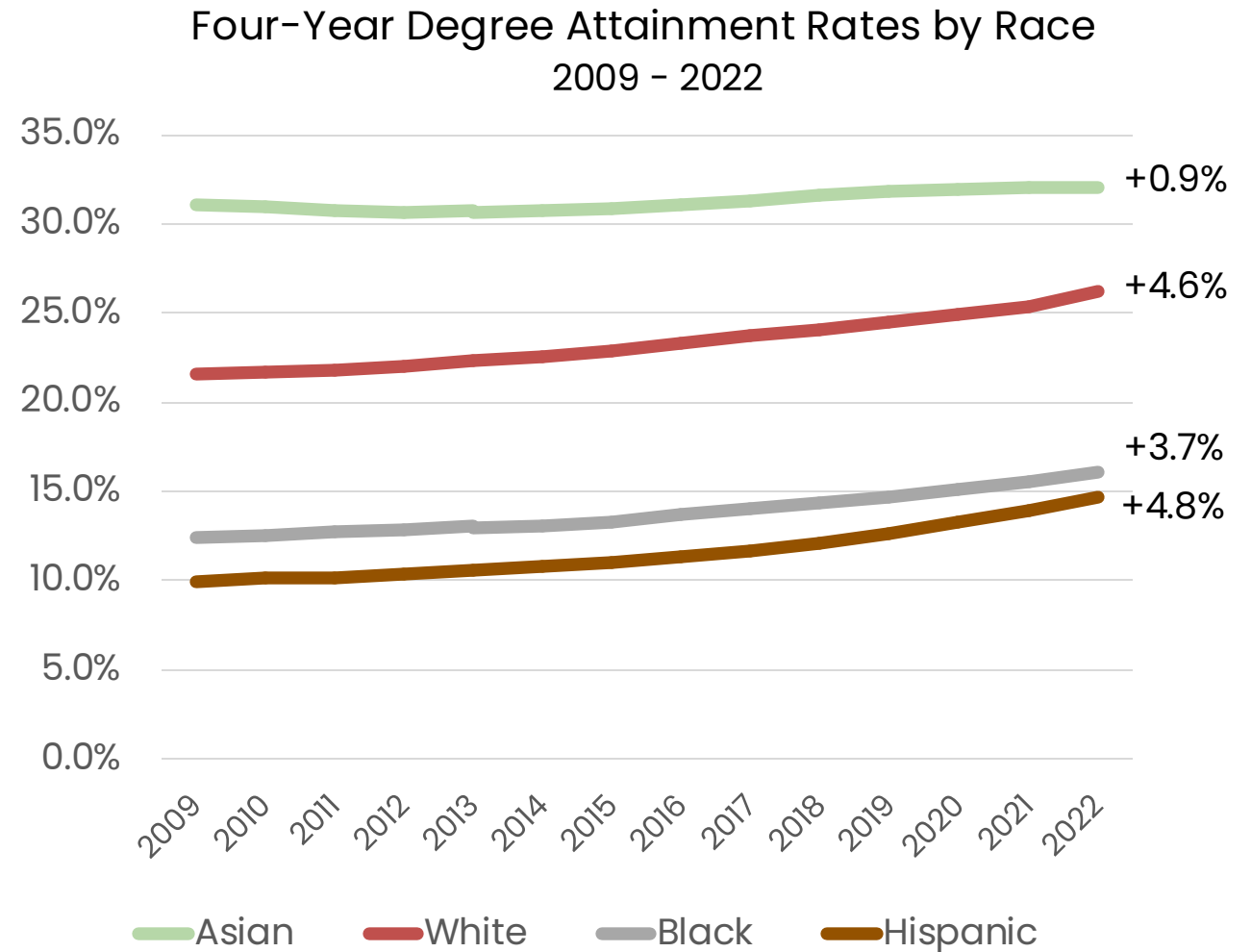
Helping colleges maximize the educational value students gain from their investments of time, energy, and money.

kinetic seeds

While attainment rates inch ever upward, the progression of equity has been painfully slow - and in some cases has been made worse.

That's right - the equity gap between White and Black 4-year degree graduates increased from 12% in 2009 to 12.9% in 2022.

Four-Year Degree Attainment Rates by Race
2009 - 2022

+0.9%
+4.6%
+3.7%
+4.8%

35.0%
30.0%
25.0%
20.0%
15.0%
10.0%
5.0%
0.0%

2009 2010 2011 2012 2013 2014 2015 2016 2017 2018 2019 2020 2021 2022

— Asian   — White   — Black   — Hispanic

Source: A Stronger Nation, Lumina Foundation (no data for 2020)

**What's going on here? With millions of dollars invested, why are equity gaps remarkably unchanged?**

"Sometimes it feels like institutions are not set up for people like me. I feel like I don't belong here, and often, people invalidate that by just saying, 'oh, you do belong here.' Well, it certainly hasn't felt that way."

Iyanna

Black Woman, First-Generation, 3rd Year Student

Six Conditions of System Change
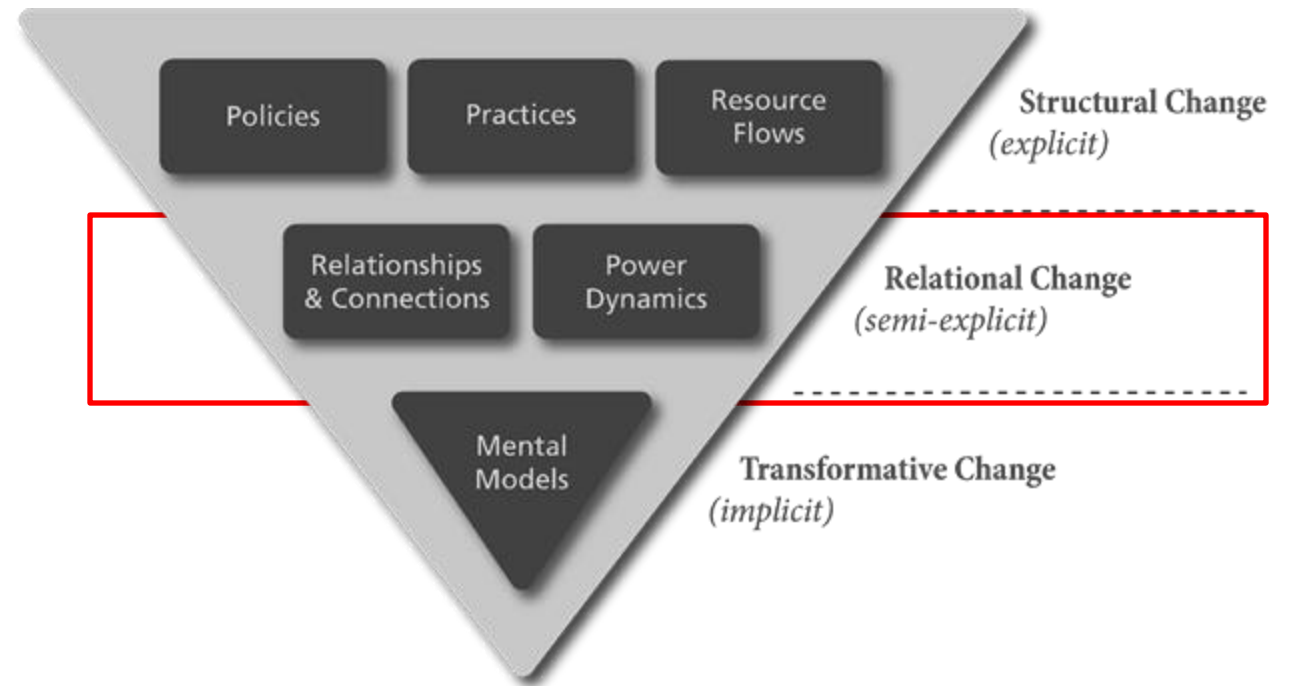
The balance is off. We focus a lot of effort on structural change and **too little effort on relational change.**

Policies

Practices

Resource Flows

Structural Change
(explicit)

Relationships & Connections

Power Dynamics

Relational Change
(semi-explicit)

Mental Models

Transformative Change
(implicit)

Source: Waters of Systems Change, FSG

The value of relational change lies in in its ability to foster genuine connections, mutual understanding, and trust between students and the people who serve them.

(Essential ingredients for creating learning environments that inspire engagement, account for power dynamics, and promote a sense of belonging.)

Obstacles to Achieving Relational Change

01
Silent Gap in Student-Centered Change

- Lack of collaboration between students and decision-makers.

- Traditional approaches to student success have long excluded, overlooked, and silenced the voices they are meant to support.

02
Marginalization of Student Voices

- We sideline students from shaping their own futures.

- Few opportunities for students to instigate change result in plans designed for them, not with them, leading to misaligned agendas.

03
Lack of Student Inclusion in Institutional Transformation

- You cannot transform what you do not include.

- Students, as primary bearers of systemic inequities, need active participation in educational reform to create fair and just learning environments.

What's the answer?

To ensure students get the most from their educational investment, we need to prioritize and empower student voice in service of institutional change.

That's what Today's Student Experience Lab is all about.

"I feel affirmed in spaces where I visibly have a place and I'm very visibly recognized as a person taking up space, and where that is met with acceptance, validity and support."

Marcus

Non-Binary, First-Generation Hispanic Sophomore

Lab Approach

In-relations Service Design

A methodology designed to disrupt existing power structures in education, ensuring that the experiences and perspectives of minoritized students are seen, heard, honored, and actively reflected in decision-making processes and policies.

Elements of In-Relations Service Design

collectivism and reciprocity

relational development

empowerment

Community-centric decision-making	Emphasis on inter-connectedness	Equipping for agency and autonomy
Shifting and sharing power with students	Building deep, meaningful relationships	Prioritizing the group over individual interests
Honoring shared responsibilities	Valuing each other's contributions	Encouraging cooperation
Integrating student voices into decision-making and policy	Fostering mutual understanding and trust	Building a strong sense of community

In-relations service design methodology fosters genuine, long-term student relationships and shared power within educational environments.
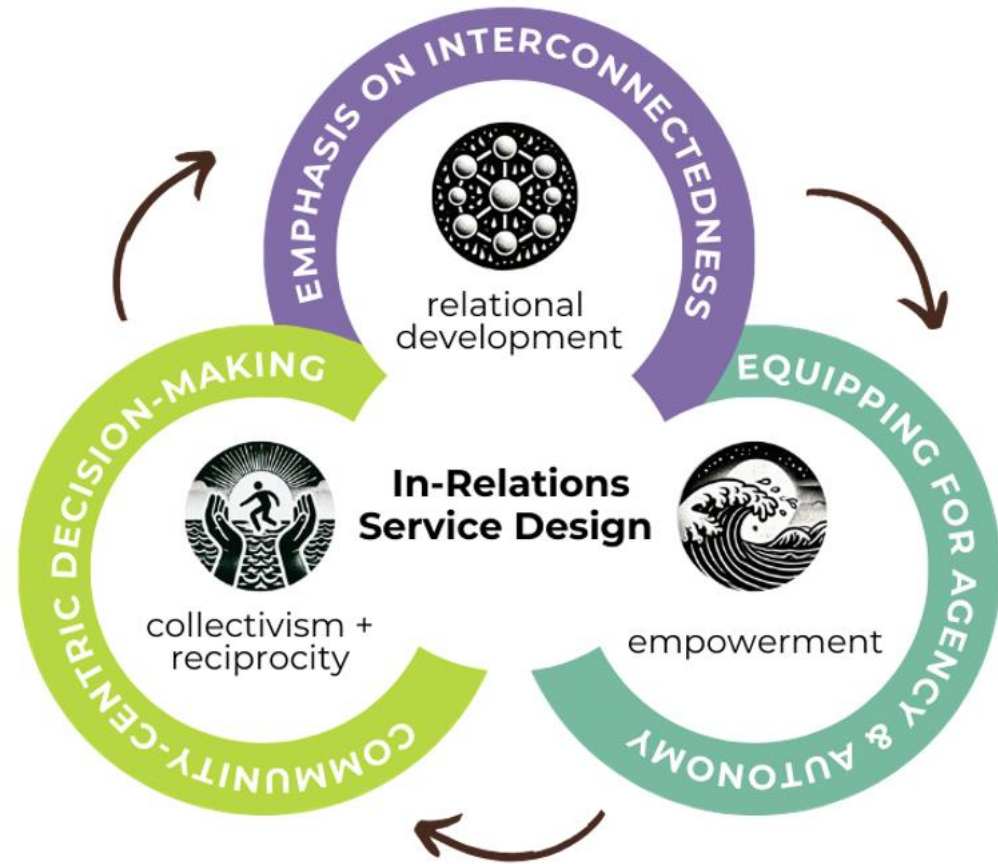
Once this approach is adopted, there is no turning back from addressing the **root issues of inclusion and power imbalances** because the disparities and injustices that become evident through this process are undeniable.

Process and Outcomes

How do we get there?

Experiential Learning for **STUDENT EMPOWERMENT**
Active Insight for **RELATIONAL GROWTH**
Institutional Strategies for **CLOSING EQUITY GAPS**

Shift Power.
Share Power.

**A Student-Designed Framework to
Drive Empowerment and Ensure Success**

Empowering students requires genuine collaboration. The **Shift Power, Share Power Framework** - designed by and with students nationwide - centers on self-advocacy and institutional backing, recognizing the varied challenges students encounter on their way to a college degree. More than just shared decision-making, it's about understanding and appreciating the diverse backgrounds and experiences of students and then taking action to create an environment where each and every one can thrive.

**WHAT STUDENTS
NEED TO FEEL
EMPOWERED**

**WAYS TO
BOOST AGENCY
AND AUTONOMY**

(See the full framework here)

Experiential Learning for
STUDENT EMPOWERMENT

1. Students are immersed in a variety of dynamic roles thoughtfully designed to integrate with the **core principles of hands-on learning**.

2. Through **active participation**, students draw on their personal experiences to meet the real-world challenges presented to them

3. In addition to gaining **new skill sets**, students are offered **financial compensation** and are duly **recognized and credited for their contributions**, ensuring their efforts are acknowledged academically and professionally.

The Chemistry of Student Success

Nine Elements of a Thriving Student Experience

([See the report here](#))

Active Insight for
RELATIONAL GROWTH

1. **Mixed-method research** that engages student cohorts to deeply assess and comprehend the evolving landscape of learning and student success.

2. **Actionable insights** that empower students and embolden institutions to implement equitable policies, innovative academic programs, and effective support systems.

Institutional Strategies for **CLOSING EQUITY GAPS**

Incubated at Berklee College of Music with active student participation, the <u>Thrive Method</u> delivers an institutional model for designing and developing student-centered curriculum, policies, practices, programs, and support services.

1. Strategic **innovation plans** that bring student voices to the forefront of institutional change.

2. **Capacity-building workshops and targeted guidance** with students and stakeholders to reform and revamp program and support services informed by direct student feedback and involvement.

3. **Faculty and staff training and resources** to effectively support and sustain new initiatives.

What we've begun is a **beacon of hope** in a landscape that far too often fails to amplify and humanize the voices of those most affected by the structural flaws and inequities in higher education.

The **Opportunity**

Today's Student Experience Lab elevates and amplifies student voice in service of the transformative changes taking place across higher education.

If you are a college or university, consider partnering with us to tap into a wealth of insights from diverse student populations or collaborate to develop your own research action plan to engage students in areas most meaningful to your vision and mission and their academic and personal development. Not ready for a full-scale implementation? We have workshops available to help you explore and pilot student voice strategies.

If you are a policymaker, engage with us to understand the nuances of student experiences that can inform effective policies and practices. We can provide data and narratives that highlight the real-world impact of legislation (or the lack thereof) and identify critical areas for development and support.

If you are a funder, consider critiquing your strategy and investment plans against the backdrop of our student voice capabilities to ensure your contributions align with the most pressing needs and opportunities of today's students.

Contact Information
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About **Kinetic Seeds**

Working at the intersection of innovation and behavior change, Kinetic Seeds is a design consultancy that tackles complex educational challenges. Our approach uncovers powerful insights and opportunities through liberatory design methodologies, translating them into new and engaging student experiences.

At our core, we believe that students' voices can be instruments of meaningful change. Our expertise in engaging students has supported a wide range of stakeholder efforts—from institutions to state systems—to amplify student voice and address challenges within the education ecosystem more effectively.

We purposefully collaborate with partners who understand that diversity is part of our unique social fabric and key to human flourishing. Consciously working to "design out" the inequities embedded in our systems and structures is our passion.
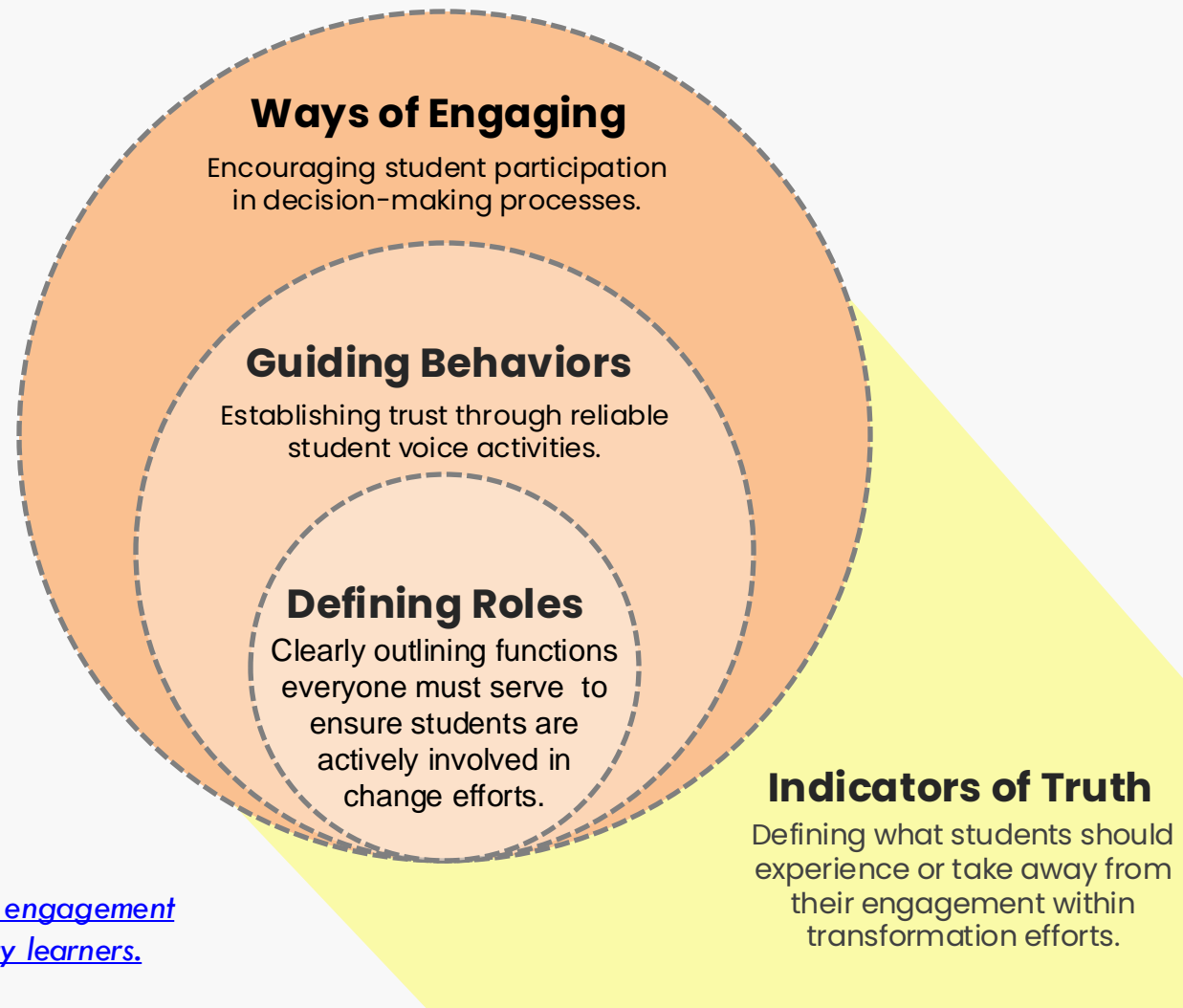
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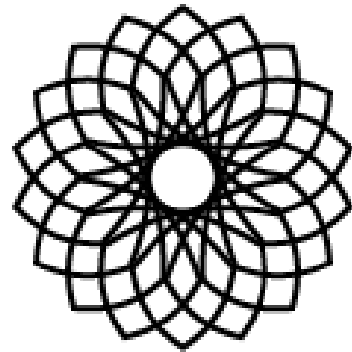
Appendix: Lab Engagement Principles

We recognize students as the foremost experts in their own experiences. We acknowledge that students possess unmatched insights into systemic problems. We embrace the fresh, fearless perspectives students bring to the table.

To implement equitable change, the Lab relies on a set of evidence-based student engagement principles that promote active participation, trust, and clear role definitions.

Access the Full Framework Here:

Flanagan, C., & Dixon, J. (2022, August). *Shift Power. Share Power. An engagement framework for transformational change with and for today's new majority learners.*

Ways of Engaging
Encouraging student participation in decision-making processes.

Guiding Behaviors
Establishing trust through reliable student voice activities.

Defining Roles
Clearly outlining functions everyone must serve to ensure students are actively involved in change efforts.

Indicators of Truth
Defining what students should experience or take away from their engagement within transformation efforts.
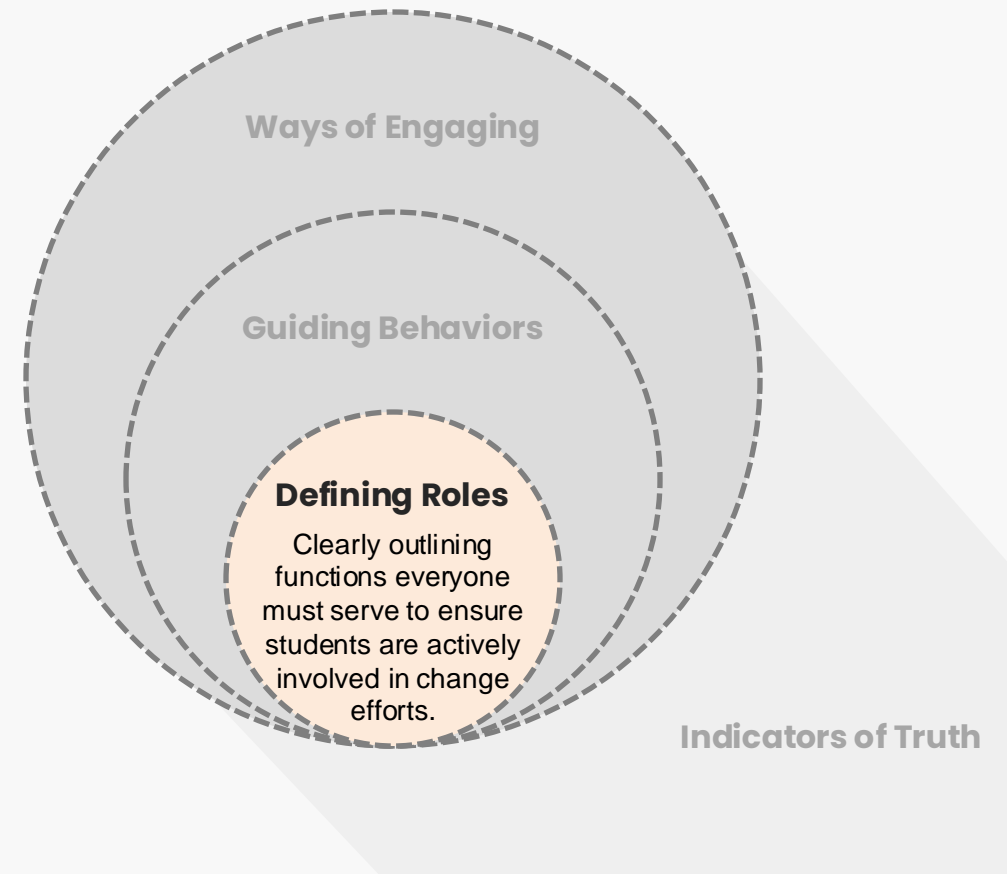
As **Responsible Co-creators** we acknowledge that while students should play a profound role in transformation efforts, they are not responsible for the outcome. That burden is shouldered by us.

As **Tireless Seekers** we recognize that the lived experience of students is vibrant and alive with stories. We ask humbly, take only what is given to us, and use it with the utmost care and respect.

As **Privilege Deconstructors** we lead with equity-mindedness. We question social structures that aim to preserve a hierarchy of human value, reflect upon processes that produce inequities, and take action to disrupt the status quo.

As **Conscientious Change-Agents** we tame the inclination to act with urgency, by incorporating initiative, responsibility, vigilance, and love into our practice to end the harm educational systems have caused systematically marginalized students.

Ways of Engaging

Guiding Behaviors

Defining Roles
Clearly outlining functions everyone must serve to ensure students are actively involved in change efforts.
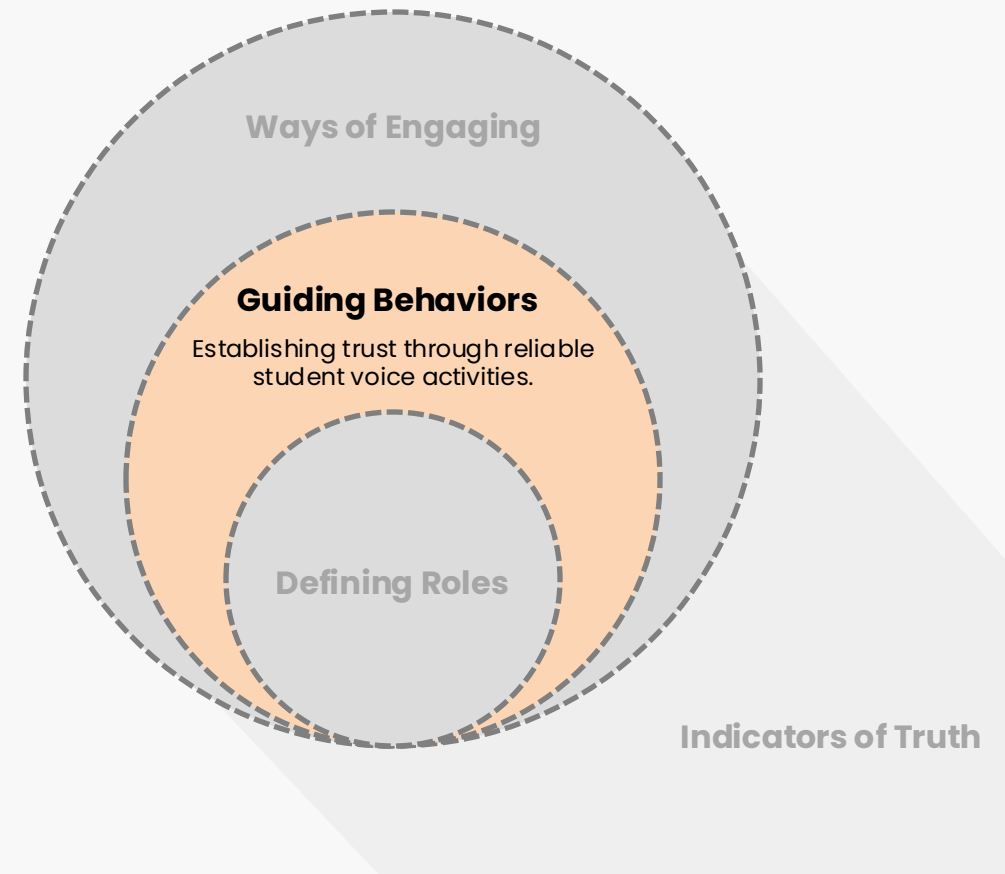
Indicators of Truth

We **make time** to reconsider our own organizational design and professional capacity to create opportunities—in all shapes and sizes—for strengthening student voice and engagement in transformational change.

We **expose our intentions and actions transparently** because we know that engaging directly with decision-makers bears risk for some students and that their act of sharing takes courage and vulnerability.

We **de-escalate patterns of harm** with the understanding that this is not an extraction process to validate our own thinking, but rather a demonstration of mutual reciprocity where we offer our open-hearted selves to learn from— and grow with— today's students.

We **acknowledge and embrace the discomfort** that naturally arises from critique and challenge—while welcoming the gift that students are presenting—as we dare to try something new.
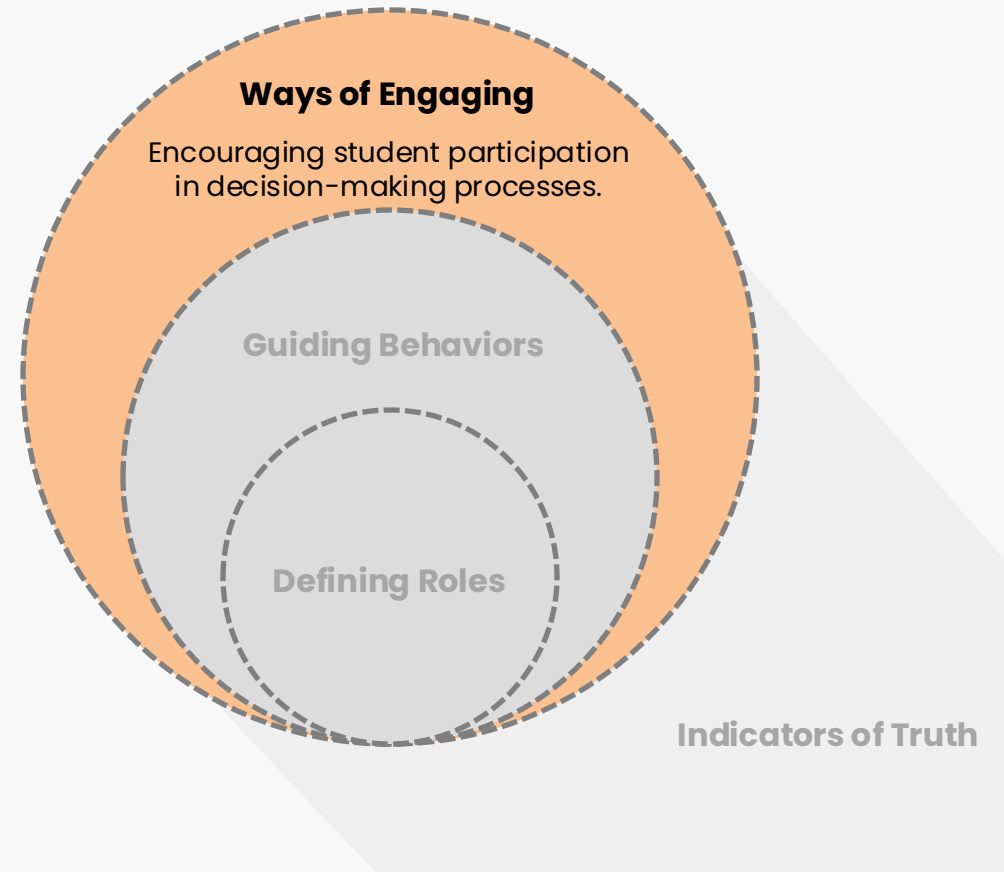
Ways of Engaging

Guiding Behaviors
Establishing trust through reliable student voice activities.

Defining Roles

Indicators of Truth

Informative participation means we make decisions based on an understanding of the lived experience of new majority learners gleaned both qualitatively and quantitatively.

Co-creative participation means we engage students fully as partners playing an active and collaborative role in the development and testing of new ideas and strategies.

Student-led participation means we proactively put students in the driver's seat of change-making efforts as academic and administrative level expertise become resources for students to drawn upon.

Decision-maker participation means students have a recognized and formalized role in decision-making processes.

Ways of Engaging
Encouraging student participation in decision-making processes.

Guiding Behaviors

Defining Roles

Indicators of Truth

Students should benefit from:

Culturally appropriate and accessible opportunities that meet students where they are at, are sensitive to their values, acknowledge safety concerns, and encourage participation in a variety of formats/modalities.

Increased agency, autonomy, and authority in decision-making processes that affect their student experience.

Fair compensation that is both monetary and supports the development of new skills and competencies that fosters students' ability to become change-agents in the world.

Amplified sense of belonging that generates feelings of security and support such that students can bring their authentic selves to this effort of transformation.

Ways of Engaging

Guiding Behaviors

Defining Roles

Indicators of Truth

Defining what students should experience or take away from their engagement within transformation efforts.