

The Future of
**CENTRAL TECHNICAL
SCHOOL**



ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT

We are here because we believe in our collective abilities to create the Central Technical School (CTS) that all in our school community deserve. We are reimagining the vision and mission of CTS as the foundation for what's next. We believe in the students and adults of this school to create a learning community that centres and celebrates our humanity.

The acknowledgement that schools and their structures were fundamentally built on oppressive practices, coupled with living through a pandemic, has highlighted why the CTS of the past, will not meet the needs of students today and in the future. Schools are at the forefront of societal change. We believe in our ability to be good for each other.


We, the students, are leading. We are capable. Nothing about us should be decided without us.¹

This pursuit of learning and community was led by:

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And our collaboration and learning process was facilitated by  using the Real-World Problem Solving Journey underlined by the methodology of Integrative Thinking.

¹ Inspired by "Nothing About Us Without Us" invoked by disability activists in the 1970s.



Dear Students of CTS,

We're writing to you because this school is part of your life story and you should get to choose the words on the page.

A group of 12 of us started this journey of change at CTS, and less than a year later we're sharing a vision and mission statement for our school, and where adults and students need to take action for this to be a good place for us all. If we could do this with 12 of us — imagine what's possible if you took actions to create this change, too?

It's worth it. School and learning can be joyful and how you find your purpose. You deserve to be happy with your education. You deserve to enjoy learning and have CTS be where your interests and passions come alive. Change is possible and this project can become proof of that.

"A lot of students know that there is something fundamentally wrong with our system. But we're just taught that "This is how school is supposed to be." We don't know any different. But it's important to acknowledge that change is possible. It's possible for us to have a school environment where we all enjoy school, and actually want to go. We also need a commitment from the student body to start recognizing the flaws within the school, and actually fight to change the flaws within that system." - Sara

"If we don't make any changes, people are going to say 'Oh yeah, that school is still how it was years or decades ago. It will make the high school experience boring and bland.'" - Raven

To create change, we have to be real. There are things that adults need to take action on to create the change we need (and that's why we wrote them a whole letter too), but it's not only up to them! We have to take action and be co-creators of the change we want to see. To do this, we have a lot of unlearning to do. We have to commit to changing our mindsets and beliefs. Our first thought in a class shouldn't be about the mark. We have to see ourselves as the whole people we are. We aren't defined by a mark, and it shouldn't be the thing we value most in learning.

You are smart and you can learn. If you don't care about school or aren't doing well, it's not because you're not able, or because you just naturally can't "get" a subject, it's because of how school was designed. School needs to change because schools were designed before there was a lot of understanding about the human brain and how different learning styles, mental health and inequity affect learning.



“School was set up during a time when we had limited knowledge of the human brain, where we didn’t know much, or care about mental health or learning barriers.” - Joey

“It’s not just the adults or staff in our school that needs to change. It’s also us, it’s also our beliefs and values.” - Maya

This change can’t happen without you. We need each other because we deserve change and only us students truly know and live the CTS student experience. This makes us experts, but we’re not asking you to act like experts or have all the answers. We’re asking you to show up for yourselves, the students around you and those who will come years after you graduate.

We believe in you, and we believe in us. You’re already part of this because this is your school. Now we need your help to keep momentum. We trust you and know you’re capable. We’ve given you many ways-in to creating change throughout this document – build with us on this foundation.

We hope this inspires you the way it inspired us. You have a wonderful responsibility as the future of this place.

We believe that we can do this.



Dear Adults of CTS,

We want you to read this document open-minded. We're not judging you. This document and the work the 12 of us did is because we believe that we are all worth it. We love learning. We want to love learning at CTS. It's about building a school that is for all of us, and for future generations. There is work that you, and work that us the students, will have to do.

"I would love for the adults reading this to understand that it's time for change to happen...You need to find something that resonates with you and work on it, at least one thing." - Rashae

We learned that two things can be true at once: your expertise and lived experience and our needs, expertise and lived experiences. It's not one or the other. We will not choose between adults being right or students being right. We don't want our school to be one where we dismiss each other. It's both. Societies and cultures around the world and throughout history have poured all their love into the children and were guided by the wisdom of adults and elders.

We want a school and a place to learn where we share all the things that make you and us, so us, excellent. It's the only way that we can be a learning community. We need relationships that make us human. We need to know each other. We need to be a community of learning; that is how we will experience liberation.

Here's the thing. Either you think we can do it: learn, think and create. Or you don't. We need to know that you know that we can do it, and we need you to act accordingly.

"Our generation is changing, our society is changing. As a whole, Central Tech is one community, even though we all come from different places, we need to learn how to understand and have empathy for one another" - Salem

"We're doing this for future generations, as well as ourselves, so they don't have to go through what some of us have gone through, with our identities being told that they're wrong, or dealing with discrimination for any sort of reason and feeling uncomfortable in a space where we're supposed to learn. - Christina

We hope that you see in this document how much we see you, care about you, and want to be in this with you. You need to take something from this work and work on it. If everyone is working on one piece, change is going to happen. This is the journey. We want to learn. You have control over how you teach the curriculum. It's time for us to be on this journey together.

We believe that we can do this.



Dear Central Technical School Community,

Change can be scary, but when I think of the risks of not embracing meaningful change it scares me more. Let me tell you about how I came to care so deeply about this place that I didn't quit when most would've. Our students, staff and community deserve better, and will only get better with our collective commitment, action and care.

Here's how it started...

I was a newly appointed Principal in the Toronto DSB assigned to CTS, the largest school in Canada. I could not believe my luck or should I say, challenge? I was scared, but also excited. My first year as Principal was a tumultuous one. I was asked numerous times what CTS's vision was? I could not answer. Staff who have been here for many years have used different ways to bring clarity to who we are - "*We are a tech school! . . . an arts school! . . . an experiential learning school! . . . a school where everyone can be successful.*" None of these descriptions gave us identity, an ethos, or any direction for change. I was confused, and did not feel I was doing my job as a leader.

My first year...

My first year as Principal was a year of learning, reflection and self-auditing. At the same time, we were coming out of the COVID pandemic, a time difficult for both students and staff. Everyone was on edge about COVID, the two-hour classes, short lunches, and quite frankly, "learning recovery measures" that were just not working. It was hard, hard, hard. Instead of quitting, I decided to get back to who I was as an Instructional Leader. I worked closely with leaders in looking at how current vision developmental practices are problematic and engaged in human-centred design to look at how we might better engage our students, caregivers and community in the vision of our school.

What it meant...

I knew as Principal, I had to get back to my essential core belief about school improvement - students need to be at the centre. Especially if I wanted to create a school environment where CTS students felt nurtured and their identities affirmed. What did that mean? I wanted students to craft our vision and mission. With the help of Nogah and Margaryta of I-Think, we created a space where students felt safe, confident and nurtured to express their feelings, ideas and dreams of what education can look like. Students engaged in complex thinking with one another and staff, they facilitated focus groups, interviewed educational and community leaders and challenged their own thinking to develop CTS's vision and mission.

Where we're going...I hope you'll come with us

This was incredibly hard work, and this amazing group of students rose to the challenge. Our students are capable and they can do hard things, I am incredibly proud of them. But the work is not done. The admin team, teachers, office staff, teaching assistants, school-based safety



monitors, caretakers, and students need to be held to an account. What will we do to ensure that our new vision and mission is actualized? That is the next step. I believe we can do it, and create the school that we know CTS can be.

I can't wait to do this with you,

Anne Chirakal
Principal, Central Technical School



THE FUTURE OF CENTRAL TECHNICAL SCHOOL

We are building a CTS where every student has the sense of self, skills and knowledges to choose their next steps and experiences.

Learning is joyful. Hard *and* joyful. CTS needs to be a place where we can learn. Our communities are looking to CTS, our education and learning as our gateway to opportunities and a good life.

We know that every student is on their own path, and that as young people we want voice and choice in that path. We believe that our school can be this place, for everyone.

We believe that Central Technical School can be a place of exceptional student learning.

VISION

Our vision is that Central Technical School is a place where all students leave with:

- A love of learning
- The real-world skills to choose their next steps
- A strong sense of self and others

MISSION

To be this, Central Technical School needs to be a place of:

- Student-centred imagination and action
- Cultural enlightenment
- Safety



VISION

A vision is a declaration of what we are taking action to achieve. Our vision is that every student leaves CTS with:

A love of learning
The real-world skills to choose their next steps
A strong sense of self and other

A love of learning

Learning is the excitement and motivation to be curious. A love of learning is a commitment to being open-minded. In school, it's the feeling when we get up in the morning, wanting to learn in your classes, passionately. It's learning the skills to ask questions, find information, form critical thoughts, knowing others well enough to help them connect to how dynamic this is, and being patient with the process of growth.

We are innately curious. Let us learn what we love so we can get lost and immersed in discovery and learning.

A love of learning is fueled by the relationships in school. We love when you tell us what you're learning about. We love connecting with community partners because they are here sharing their passions, and this inspires us. We love telling you about what we are immersed in, and love it even more when you ask us questions about it. When we share our curiosities with each other, we connect. Let us love learning together.

With a love of learning, we will go into our future engaged.

The real-world skills to choose their next steps

We want choice for what's next in our lives. High school is a bridge to our futures; it should be for any future that we want. Two things are at play here.

The first is what we are learning. With each subject area, we are learning skills and different ways of understanding the world around us. We want to spend our time practising skills we can use. Help us understand why it's important, listen to us when we share that we don't see the connections and work with us to make it relevant.

The second is our future. The best thing you can do for us is expose us to lots of possibilities, respect when we say we know what we want and respect us when we don't know what we want. Build us up with experiences to practise skills, ones that expose us to possibilities that help us dream, and connect what we are passionate about to our aspirations for the future.

With real-world skills, we will go into our future with confidence to choose.



A strong sense of self and others

Having a strong sense of self is being confident in who you are, sharing it with others, and being curious about who other people are, and affirming them. It's a commitment to growth; a reminder that you know yourself, but you don't know yourself entirely and there is room for growth. Every subject area in school can teach us about ourselves to build that strength and about others. All of our peoples, ancestors and histories are powerful. All of our histories are tied to remarkable innovations in communities and across subjects like the arts, language, maths, sciences... School should be a place of affirmation and where we get windows into the many ways that we are powerful.

We are each entire worlds.

When you are good within yourself and you feel strong within yourself, it's easier for you to be more empathetic and understand other people; you believe that others are just as powerful, complex and nuanced as you are.

With a strong sense of self and others, we will go into our future with pride.



MISSION

A mission is a declaration of the culture we are taking action to create. For this vision to come to life, our mission is to make Central Technical School a place of:

Student-centred imagination and action
Cultural enlightenment
Safety

Student-centred imagination and action

Imagination is engagement. This means we are reimagining all aspects of the school experience: how curriculum is taught, how it's assessed, how students take ownership of our learning, how student voice is centred, our connections to community and our relationships with each other.

Imagination is commitment to the future.

Student-centred action is how we get there. Actions don't have to be perfect for us to know that the adults in the school community care and are trying. Student advocacy and actions don't have to be perfect for the community to know that we know we are worthy.

With student-centred imagination and action, our school will meet the needs of all students.

Cultural enlightenment

We are a school made up of every area of this city, and this city is made up of people from everywhere in the world. It's one thing to learn *about* cultures and diversity, but no identity is one thing, no person is a monolith. At CTS we have the unique opportunity to be engaged with and celebrate cultures, and affirm the many ways people embed their cultures in who

they are and how they show up at school. Every classroom, club and community partner, centres the nuances of how cultures are embodied and are experienced.

With cultural enlightenment, our school will be a place that celebrates the many gifts that students, adults in the school building and the community, bring to make us, us.



Safety

We are safe when we are in community and we look out for each other: where we are held accountable, where hate is called out and each of us is confident that everything will be okay.

Our school must be a place where we know at our core that every student is capable.

Where we protect each other's dignity and identities. Where we interrupt bullying, more specifically racism, homophobia, transphobia, sexism, bigotry. When harm happens, we are a place that uses practices focused on harm-reduction and strengthening community. We welcome and seek out these practices and approaches, like restorative practices, to centre our humanity and growth when navigating conflict or tension.

We are psychologically safe. This means that this school is a place where each of us can grow in, a place that each of us feels respected for our identities, and for what we think and feel. It's a place in which our feelings are taken into consideration.

We are emotionally safe. Safety doesn't necessarily mean comfort. Learning, unlearning and relearning is hard. We honour the process of growth by creating space for each other to learn, make mistakes and change.

We are physically safe. We can express our racial, sexual, gender, religious and other identities and perspectives without being hurt or intimidated.

With safety, our school will be a place of learning.



OUR STRATEGY: MAKING IT HAPPEN

Co-creating this future - where our Vision and Mission are real - requires us to dive into the complexity of change. We used Pro-Pro Charts and Causal Models to look for leverage points: where the CTS community should concentrate our efforts and actions for the highest impact. We identified six areas for action.

We treat each other as precious

Adult knowledge and imagination to ensure a learning culture for all

Assessment that honours the brilliance and the diversity of learning journeys of students to ensure choice in their next steps and experience

Shared power and responsibility to keep what's good working, and take actions on what is not

Access to a diversity of adults to affirm the many identities of students and adults

Advocating to change the inequities in the Toronto District School Board to have the ability to make choices that best support our vision



We treat each other as precious

In our interview with Nick Bertrand, he shared the Mohawk word: Konnorónhkwa, which means we hold all of you as precious. He uses the word to explain the world view of seeing young people as deserving of having the whole community pour all their energy and love into them. **We, the young people of CTS, are precious. Just. As. We. Are.**

For us, it also means that the adults can be human with students too. We are interested in who you are. We want you to tell us about yourself, your life and what you're passionate about. It's this kind of knowledge that helps us, students, treat

you as precious too; when we get to see you beyond your title.

This is about our relationships with each other. It means that we need everyone, and all the parts of everyone, to make this community what it is. It's how we will see each other, learn from each other and grow because of each other.

Adult knowledge and imagination to ensure a learning culture for all

Teaching is a creative endeavour. Every day, teachers create hours of learning experiences for students. You've heard it before, but the ways that things used to be taught aren't connecting for us in the same ways they have for (your) past students. Research continues around the world on effective teaching and learning. We will bring that knowledge to this school. No one is above learning. With this knowledge, we continue to identify barriers to student success and learn together how to dismantle them.

CTS invests in fostering adult imagination of what's possible. Curriculum is a box much bigger than teachers were taught it can be. There are so many ways to bring those expectations to life. There are teachers in this building, city, country and beyond who are pushing the boundaries of what teaching and learning can look like. We want you to be inspired by what's possible for how we can learn together.

CTS invests in the adults deepening their knowledge on all things teaching and learning. This means advancements in your

subject areas, including perspectives and expertise from around the world, diverse cultures and world views. This looks like following your curiosity, engaging in professional development and inquiry, seeking additional qualifications and reframing thinking about teaching and learning. In the classroom, it looks like appreciating and teaching for multiple learning styles. This means seeking and appreciating many ways of meeting students where they're at.

CTS invests in high school teachers, educators and staff learning, specifically how to teach literacy and numeracy. We learned that high school teachers aren't taught how to teach reading, yet we know that too many students come into high school not at grade level. How can you teach us (insert any subject here), if we don't have the literacy skills?! It's not your fault Teacher's College didn't teach you that. But it's your responsibility to learn how to, now that you know it's a barrier for us. The same goes for Math.



We want to trust that what you're asking us to spend our time on is worthwhile and meaningful. We want to be excited about coming to class and learning with you.
Depth of knowledge and imagination

fosters possibility. That possibility is how CTS will be a place of exceptional student learning. We need you to believe that all of us are brilliant, capable and have gifts.

Assessment that honours the brilliance and the diversity of learning journeys of students to ensure choice in their next steps and experiences

We get it. We have to get marked. But it wasn't always like that. Marks were created to reinforce hierarchy with narratives of only who is smartest and most skilled as having value. Right now, marks are too often weaponized and act as gatekeepers to our future; marks don't help us learn or see our own brilliance. This change means we have to bring students and families along too. We have grown up thinking that essays, tests and exams are the only way to show you how smart we are. We too need to unlearn that brilliance and smartness can only look like a few things. And we need to relearn the many ways that we can be brilliant and smart.

We will focus on documenting learning and on assessment practices that advance our knowledge and choices. We need to focus on the process of learning with feedback. We want learning and assessment to strengthen the relationships between teacher-and-student and student-with-student. (Yes! Assessment can build relationships instead of tearing them apart).

We will show each other just how much brilliance lives in this community.

Shared power and responsibility to keep what's good working, and take actions on what is not

Adults alone are not responsible for making CTS the learning community we need it to be. Students also need to step up with consistent and dependable commitments, and take accountability. Yet, students alone are not responsible for advocating change. Adults need to provide support and action. The hierarchy that says adults know more and better than young people, or suggests that the opinion of adults is more valid than that of students, prevents us from collaborating. You need to believe in our worldviews and voice as having value. As

students, we need to believe that we can learn from older generations; that not everything needs to be thrown out and built from scratch. We need to be in community with each other, so that we can unlearn and relearn together.

We will build the ways that everyone can bring forward concerns and ideas. We will build the ways that we take action, together, to co-create our learning community.



Access to a diversity of adults to affirm the many identities of students and adults

Representation matters. Our halls are filled with intersectionalities of identities: race, ethnicity, gender identity, sex, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, age, religion/religious beliefs, national origin, neurodiversity, and differing developmental and physical abilities. **Please do not forget we are navigating these identities and it affects each of us differently.**

When we see and learn from others like us, living with pride and richness, we have permission to be ourselves. When we have permission to be ourselves as we are, not as

you think we should be, we create the conditions for learning.

This access must recognize that just because someone has a similar background or identity, it doesn't mean we will automatically connect. This access must recognize the constraints of hiring. It asks adults, how are you supporting students' strong sense of self, even when you have different identities?

Advocating to change the inequities in the Toronto District School Board to have the ability to make choices that best support our vision

Rules and systems were built in the Toronto District School Board that might work for many, but not for us. Many things about our context are different from other high schools in the same Board: our geographical spread of students from all parts of Toronto, the diversity of specialised programs, the number of students and size

of our buildings, being downtown, and access to community partnerships, etc. **We are a gem of a place; a gem that encounters too many barriers to reach our potential.**

We will mobilise and advocate together to dismantle the barriers that prevent the students and adults of CTS access to experiences, knowledges and choices.



OUR PROCESS

Strategy is about making choices to have impact. When we know change is necessary, and the status quo isn't working, we can default to making a long To-Do List. Instead, we approach strategy as a theory of change:

1. Imagining the world we need to create, by naming our aspiration
2. Diving into the complexity of what will cause our aspiration to be realised
3. Deciding where our efforts and actions are most impactful

To create this strategy, we used I-Think's Real-World Problem Solving Journey with the methodologies of Integrative, Design and Systems Thinking. Our process looked like this:

Frame the Problem

No matter our age, when we hear about a problem, our instinct is to jump to solutions. For some problems that is the way to go. For us, with a task as complex as this, in order to come to recommendations, we needed to slow down and really understand what the problem is. A robust understanding includes knowledge of the context and the people involved. Spending time to frame the problem offers problem solvers different entry points they need to better understand the context and the people that are affected.

1. Focus Groups

We first went to students to highlight what they love about our school and what could be improved on. We engaged 6 classrooms in grades 9-12.

2. Ethnographic Interviews

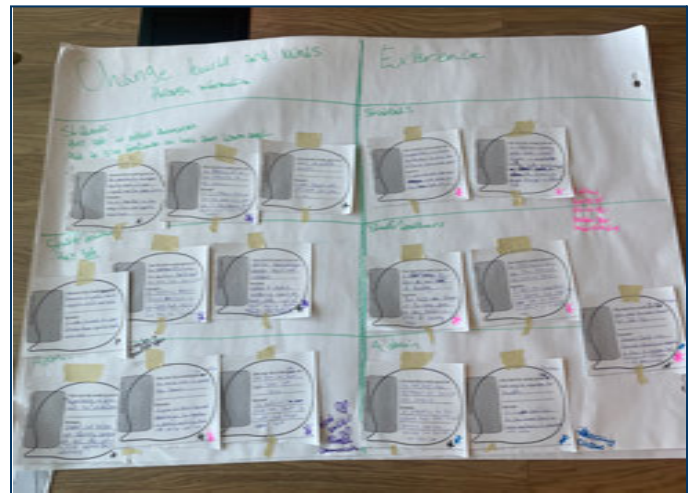
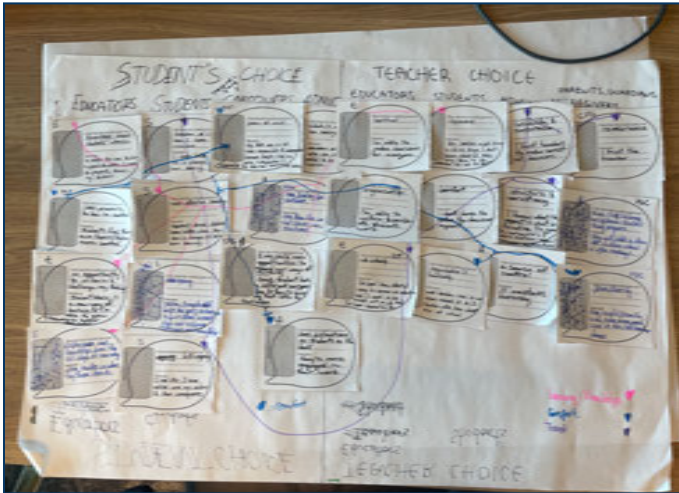
We interviewed others to expand our thinking. We used ethnographic interviews that asked open-ended questions, to give experts the opportunity to let their knowledge guide us to places we may not have anticipated. We interviewed:

- Anne-Marie Longpre, Teacher, Toronto DSB
- Colleen Russell-Rawlins, Director of Education, Toronto DSB
- Mike Gallagher, Former Superintendent of Education, Toronto DSB
- Nick Bertrand, Education Officer, Ontario Ministry of Education and former Indigenous Education Lead
- Rachele Bloomfield, Restorative Schools Coordinator, Peacebuilders Canada
- Sakaana Yasotharan, Former Toronto DSB Student and Toronto Metropolitan University Graduate



2. Pro-Pro Charts

We're all used to Pro-Con Lists. Pro-Pro Charts look at what's good about each option for stakeholders to identify what matters most. Once we had clarity on our leverage points, the leadership team at CTS identified areas of tensions that might prevent them from being able to take action. We worked through the tensions using Pro-Pro Charts.



Build Better Models

Imagination is a skill and a mindset—a belief that things can be different and better than they are today. The goal is to connect our thinking and learning to the recommendations we make.

1. Brainstorming

We brainstormed actions that all in our community can take to have the impact we need and bring this vision and mission to life.



2. Testing (That's what you're invited to do with us)

This document and the process that we, the students, embarked on this year, was about thinking, challenging and coming up with ideas. As a school community, we now have to test, shape and implement these ideas to have impact.

