
3.0 The FirstSchool Framework in Action: Applying FirstSchool Values to Facilities Design

In this chapter we summarize the key values and assumptions that underlie our work and describe how we applied our values to the design of the FirstSchool Facility.





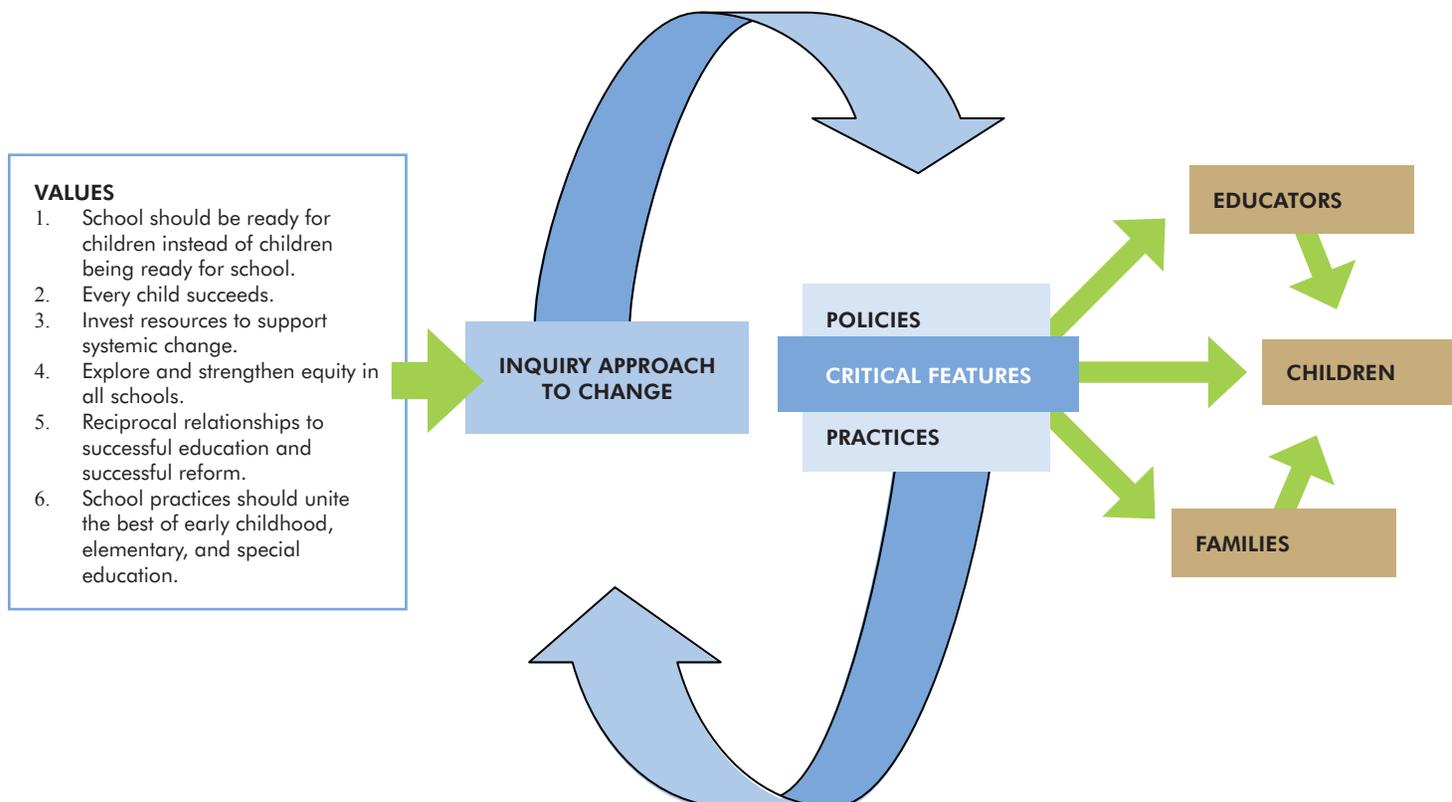


THE FIRSTSCHOOL FRAMEWORK IN ACTION

Applying FirstSchool Values to Facilities Design

FirstSchool values, and the specific application of FirstSchool design principles to those values, are the foundation on which optimal learning environments can be built. FirstSchool partners with districts and schools that share these values. The work of FirstSchool is to engage stakeholders in ongoing inquiry, and to work together to execute ideas that culminate in the development of an optimal physical environment for school staff, children and their families.

FirstSchool Conceptual Framework



The spaces in which children learn and develop must promote and provide for expanding notions of education.



Value 1. Change is based on making schools ready for children, not making children ready for schools. Instead of making younger children “fit” into the K through 12 system, FirstSchool asks, “What do schools need to do to make schools welcoming and accessible for all children and their families?”

Value 2. School must be a place where each and every child can succeed. It is the responsibility of schools to ensure that the indoor and outdoor physical environment takes into account each child’s unique needs and challenges by providing a variety of settings to support individual learning needs.

Value 3. If we are to dramatically transform the early schooling experience for children in the United States, schools must be willing to invest resources and time to bring about systemic change. Fundamentally, schools must be clean, safe, and environmentally sound. Beyond this, schools must consider their physical environment as a vital component of quality for students, staff, and families. Schools must be willing to invest time and money to assure this.

Value 4. Schools must be willing to actively explore and strengthen equity in all aspects of schooling. Schools must take into account culture, race, ethnicity, and socio-economic status when considering how to make schools ready for children and how to insure that each and every one succeeds. It is irrefutable that schools are not succeeding with all children. A broader repertoire of experiences and instructional approaches must be made available to children. The spaces in which children learn and develop must promote and provide for expanding notions of education.

Value 5. Positive, reciprocal relationships are key to successful reform and successful education. Positive relationships and effective communication are pivotal to an affirmative environment. Proper design of physical space plays a primary role in facilitating the development and maintenance of relationships throughout the school community. Indoor and outdoor spaces that are conducive to communication, such as cozy areas, small outdoor clearings, and conference rooms that insure privacy, set the tone and send the message that getting to know one another and engagement in a variety of groupings is important.

Value 6. The FirstSchool concepts build on the best of early childhood, elementary, and special education practices. These different systems have much to offer each other. FirstSchool is building on a strong knowledge base to ensure that the first years of school provide a solid foundation of learning for each child. Learning environments should reflect what we know about how diverse young children interact with their surroundings across the pre-kindergarten through third grade span.