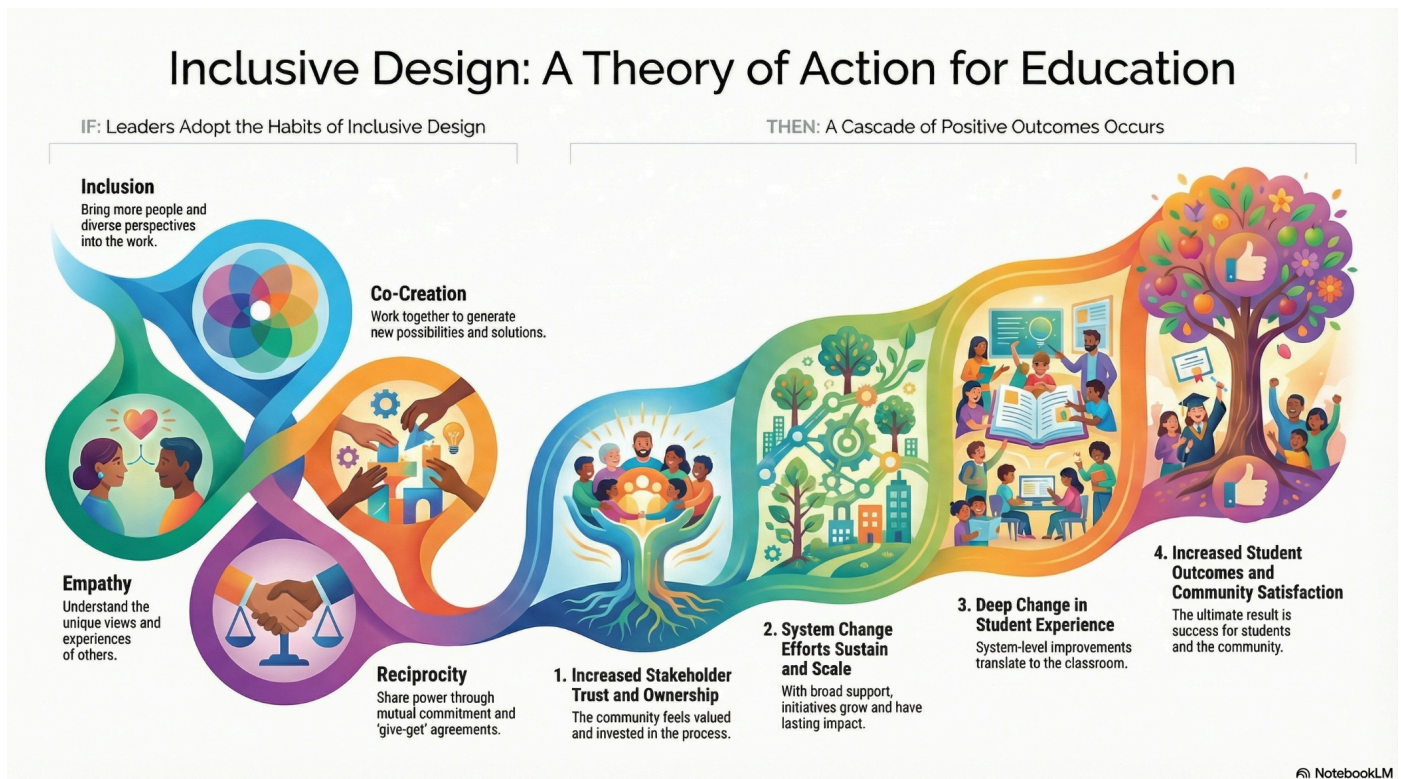


2025 Impact Report

Building Trust, Durability, and Transformation in Public Education

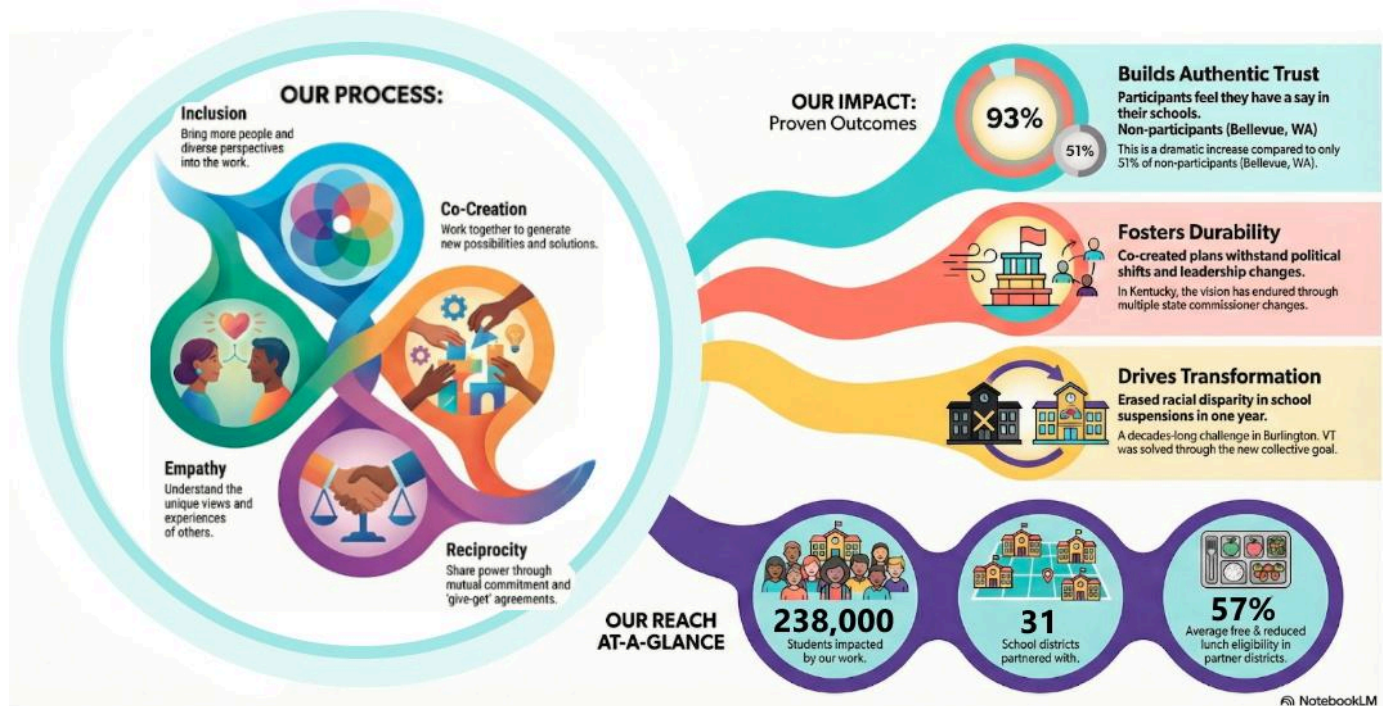
CIE begins where many reforms falter—by cultivating authentic trust between education systems and the communities they serve. Our design process of ***inclusion, empathy, co-creation, and reciprocity*** draws in diverse voices and creates shared ownership. This trust becomes the engine that sustains initiatives and enables systems to change at their deepest levels.



Our Inclusive Design projects have impacted **238K students** in **31 districts**, reaching **1 in 10 students** attending public schools in the **5 states** where we have worked directly with districts.

We have demonstrated success in diverse settings, from **midsized cities** to **fringe rural districts**, with an average free and reduced price lunch eligibility of **57%**.

The Ripple Effect: How Inclusive Design Transforms Public Education



1. We Build Authentic Public Trust and Shared Ownership

By engaging impacted members of their communities in a process of genuine co-creation, we help leaders build the broad-based trust and public will necessary to tackle complex challenges. Participants don't just "buy-in" to a plan; they become its authors and champions.

As a result, our partners see a dramatic increase in stakeholder trust and ownership:

- In [Bellevue, WA](#), the strategic planning coalition CIE facilitated resulted in members feeling far **less likely to feel ignored** by school officials than non-members (13% vs. 44%) and far **more likely to feel they have a say** in what happens in their schools (93% vs. 51%).
- In [Allen County, KY](#), the district leveraged CIE's inclusive design approach to redesign its assessment and accountability model, resulting in **overwhelming community support**: 96% of parents say the district's goals match their own, and 92% feel personally committed to helping improve schools—well above national confidence levels. When asked what contributed to their sense of satisfaction, trust, and ownership, parents and community members pointed to numerous examples of including people beyond the "usual suspects," engaging people with empathy, and empowering people by involving them in decision-making.
- To [Burlington, VT](#) Superintendent Tom Flanagan, "one of the key levers to building trust was co-creating the strategic plan," resulting in **authenticity**. "It's so clear that this plan was co-constructed because it's the priorities that people had for the 10 years before I got here. They know it's not my strategic plan."
- Our work in [Vicksburg, MS](#) **activated student leadership**: upon co-creating the strategic plan, students launched their own campaign to support it.

- According to Karen Perry, who leads the University of Kentucky Center for Next Generation Leadership, CIE's unique contribution to the [Kentucky United We Learn](#) initiative to design a new system of state assessment and accountability was "**building the capacity of leaders** to lead for change in a way that is trust-building." She said that CIE's approach to systems change "**is now spreading** across Kentucky and will continue to pay dividends over many years, because district leaders now feel like they know how to engage their communities in a more authentic way than they did before."

2. We Foster Durable Plans and Sustainable Leadership

Trust is not just an outcome—it is a strategy for durability. When a plan is deeply owned by the community, it can withstand political shifts and leadership transitions. This stability, in turn, allows superintendents to lead with a clear, community-backed mandate, contributing to longer and more effective tenures.

For example:

- In [Kentucky](#), the co-created Kentucky United We Learn vision has **endured through multiple state education commissioner changes**, with one leader attributing durability to the fact that CIE's process builds "a deeper and wider set of roots for trees that are planted."
- [Burlington, VT](#) Superintendent Tom Flanagan is in his sixth year, far **exceeding the average tenure** for urban district superintendents, which he attributes to the trust and clarity built through the co-creation process.
- The [Bellevue, WA](#) Superintendent described the strategic plan as an "anchor" that **helped him make difficult budget decisions** during a shortfall while **retaining public will and support**.
- A [Burlington, VT](#) school board member described the outcome as "more than just a strategic plan, it's **a constitution for our district**."

3. We Drive Deep, Transformational Change

Our work is not just about creating better plans; it's about transforming how leaders lead and how communities and systems interact. By practicing the habits of inclusive design, our partners experience fundamental shifts in their own perspectives, in relationships and power dynamics throughout the system, and in their community's collective vision for what is possible. This leads to tangible breakthroughs on long-standing challenges.

The process itself becomes a catalyst for profound change:

- The [Burlington](#) school district's strategic plan led to **successfully erasing the racial disparity** in school suspensions last year, a challenge that had persisted for decades and that became a collective goal for the co-created plan.
- [Burlington](#) district leaders say CIE's unique approach has become "**the way we're approaching big change efforts now**: co-construction, designing at the margins, going slower, and having multiple cycles before we land on a plan."

- In [Bellevue, WA](#), one in three coalition members reported that CIE's inclusive design process gave them a fundamentally new perspective, with one stating, "I found myself truly listening and helping build trust where it may have been broken previously. I hope it is the **beginning of many conversations.**"
 - Because of Karen Perry's partnership with CIE, the [UK Center for Next Generation Leadership](#) has "**picked up the language of CIE's four habits**, and we now **deeply believe in them** and have seen good, solid evidence that they are truly trust-building actions on the part of leaders." **And it's growing**, she says: "I could tell you lots of districts where the language of inclusion and empathy and co-creation and reciprocity have begun to find their way into their work." This approach has led to an innovative state-wide accountability policy that balances state and local priorities, demonstrating that co-creation can drive policy change.
 - CIE's approach to inclusive design has had a profound impact on several [Kentucky](#) district leaders, including Denise Isaacs, Floyd County's coalition co-lead, who said "this is the **most meaningful work I've ever done**.... and the thing I will miss the most when I retire;" Jesse Bacon, Superintendent in Bullitt County, who said it "has been **the thing that's been missing from my leadership** since becoming Superintendent, and has brought a lot of clarity about the importance of community engagement in our decisions;" and Travis Hamby, Superintendent in Allen County, whose vision for innovation gained "specific language, strategies, and **a more clear picture** of the difference that it can make when you really engage other people in the journey."
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[A Distinctive Approach](#)

Our impact is a direct result of our distinct process. We build the capacity of leaders to "lead for change in a way that is trust-building" (Karen Perry, Kentucky). By grounding systems change in the core habits of inclusion, co-creation, and reciprocity, we help our partners create a more open, responsive, and effective educational ecosystem. This is the work that endures, and it is the work that transforms.