

The Ripple Effect

Real Skills from Summit to Strategy

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Our Story Tonight



The Drop
Our Learning
Characteristics

First Ripple
AASA Summit in D.C.

Second Ripple
Designing the PD
series

Third Ripple
Teachers
implementing in all
three buildings

**The Widening
Circle**
Student impact in
classrooms

CENTER CASS SCHOOL DISTRICT 66 LEARNER CHARACTERISTICS

RISK TAKERS

Risk takers take on a challenge and see it through using a 'possibilities' mindset

INNOVATORS

Innovators create alternative ways of thinking. They unblock old patterns or habits of thinking leading to creativity. Innovation allows for non-linear thinking.

COLLABORATORS

The purpose of collaboration is to work together effectively and efficiently to meet a goal. Effective group members are interdependent, take on meaningful roles, and contribute meaningfully to the group.



SELF-DIRECTED

A self-directed learner sets goals and pursues them independently. They regularly self-assess and seek feedback to improve learning and performance

EMPATHETIC

An empathetic learner is one who strives to demonstrate sensitivity and empathy for others and can look at, understand, and appreciate differences between others.

CRITICAL THINKERS

Critical thinkers do not simply believe whatever they read, hear, or view. They remain skeptical, ask critical questions, and seek alternative points of view.

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATORS

An effective communicator conveys their message thoroughly and is receptive and responsive to others.

Our New Reality

In an ever-changing world with technological advances and AI Integration, career paths and opportunities are evolving

Future Careers Require

Adaptability
Emotional Intelligence
Lifelong Learning
Self-Regulating
Critical Thinking



How Do We Build This?

Exercise EF skills daily:
Focus and Flexibility
Working Memory
Self Regulation

Kristine Gilmore, AASA

AASA Real Skills Summit

Three days in Washington, D.C., learning directly from the nation's leading researchers in brain science, executive function & student engagement

Why Schools Must Evolve

"Public education must evolve."

AASA's charge to districts:

- Make EF skills part of ALL curriculum
- Train educators to teach these skills explicitly
- Create real-world environments where students practice & apply them
- Measure what we value

The Researchers We Learned From

Ellen Galinsky

Author, *The Breakthrough Years*

Ethan Kross

Univ. of Michigan • Author, *Chatter*

David Yeager

Author, *10 to 25: The Science of Motivating Young People*

Rebecca Winthrop

Brookings Institution, *The Disengaged Teen*

Kristine Gilmore

Chief Leadership & Learning Officer, AASA

Damien Fair & Philip Zelazo

Univ. of Minnesota Neuroscience & EF

We didn't just attend; CCSD66 presented our Learner Characteristics on the national stage!

What We Brought Home

Relationships First

Relationships are the foundation of learning.

Student voice and connection must come before content.

echoed by Galinsky, Fox & Hau.

Explorer Mode Is the Goal

Dr. Winthrop's framework: students in 'Explorer Mode' take risks, create, collaborate, and self-direct.

EF Skills = Future-Ready Skills

Kristine Gilmore (AASA) named adaptability, critical thinking, self-regulation, collaboration & empathy as essential workforce skills.

OUR COMMITMENTS

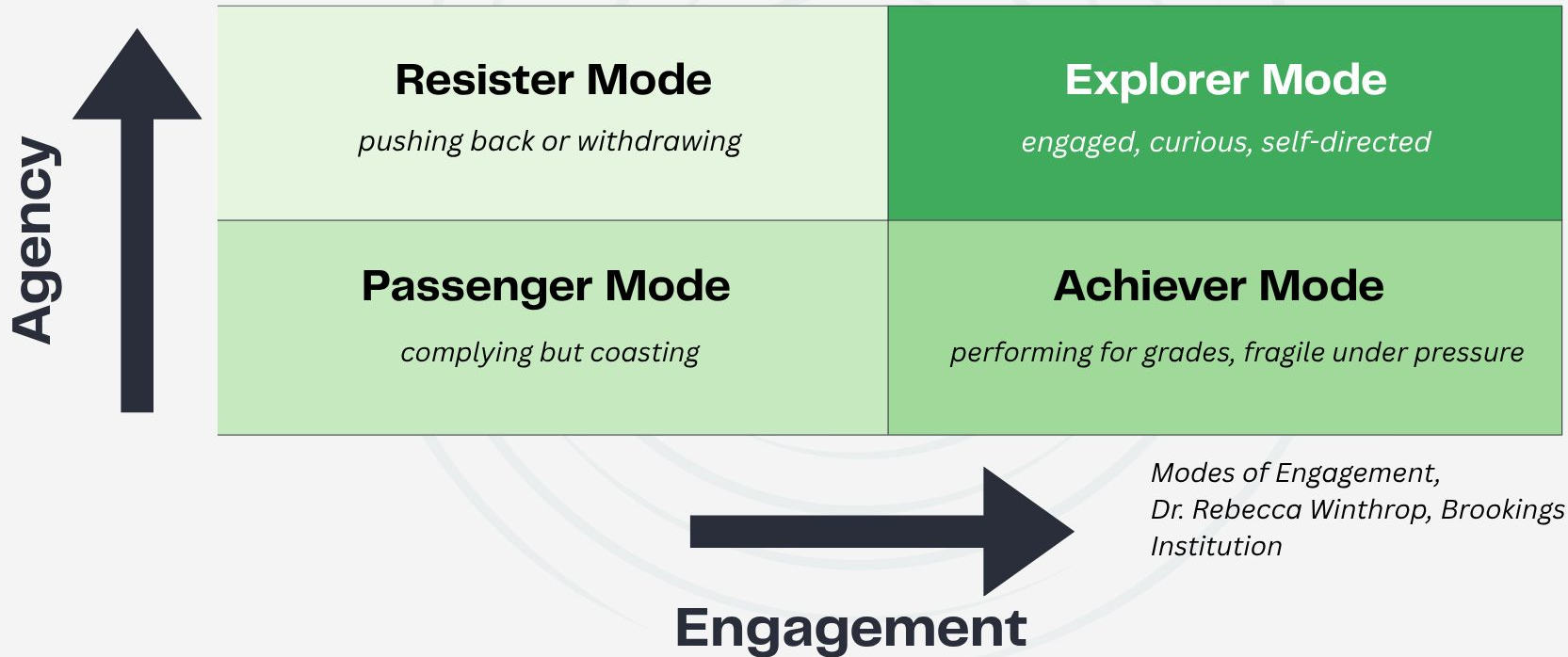
Prioritize belonging & student voice in every classroom

Shift practices to create more exploration & creative learning moments

Integrate EF skill development across ALL curriculum

Our Goal

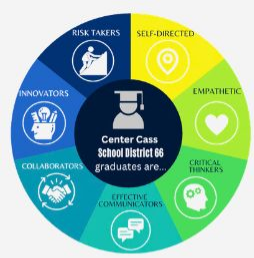
Move every CCSD66 student toward Explorer Mode



First Ripple: The Why



Our Journey So Far



BUILDING
BRAVE THINKERS

SOLO SCHOLAR



BRAIN BASICS

CO-CREATING IMPACT

2026/2027
SCHOOL YEAR & BEYOND

Executive Function Resource

Built by CCSD66, used in all three buildings throughout the Real Skills PD series

Executive Functioning Skills

that bring our Learner Characteristics to life

Use executive functioning skills with purpose. These classroom-ready activities transform learner characteristics from abstract goals into concrete, daily practice across every content area.



Risk Taker Activities- 3rd Grade			
Primary EF Skills: Cognitive Flexibility, Emotional Control, Task Initiation			
Content Area	Topic	EF Skill	Activity
Math	Explain Your Thinking	Emotional Control, Metacognition, Effective Communicator (explaining thinking)	"Math Talk Presentations" - Students present problem-solving at the board, explaining reasoning even when uncertain
	Multiple Methods	Cognitive Flexibility, Task Initiation	"Try Every Way" - Solve problems using unfamiliar methods; embrace confusion as part of learning
Literacy	Book Recommendations	Task Initiation, Emotional Control, Effective Communicator (persuasive speaking)	"Recommendation Stand" - Students defend book choices to peers, risking that others might disagree
	Sharing Writing	Emotional Control, Task Initiation	"Author's Chair" - Share writing with class and receive feedback; practice accepting suggestions
Science	Adaptation Designs	Cognitive Flexibility, Task solutions	"Extreme Environment Challenge" - Design organisms for harsh environments; test if the designs would work
Social Studies	Debate Starter	Emotional Control, Cognitive Flexibility, Critical Thinker (forming arguments)	"Take a Stand" - Students choose positions on age-appropriate issues, defending views respectfully
Art	Style Experimentation	Cognitive Flexibility, Task Initiation, Critical Thinker (analyzing styles)	"Artist Study & Try" - Students learn about art styles and attempt to create in those styles
	New Techniques	Task Initiation, Cognitive Flexibility	"Technique Tuesday" - Try art techniques never used before; expect messy first attempts
Music	Improvisation	Cognitive Flexibility, Emotional Control, Task Initiation, Collaborator (musical dialogue)	"Musical Conversations" - Students improvise musical responses to each other

EF skills are the "how" behind our Learner Characteristics.

- Maps each characteristic to its EF skills
- Turns abstract goals into observable, teachable behaviors
- Classroom-ready activities for every content area

Teacher Showcase: Shifts in Action

Staff did not just attend – they tried, reflected, and adjusted

Elizabeth Ide



Explorer Mindset

Building agency vocabulary during Morning Meetings & Teamwork Tuesdays.



Live Refocusing

Prompting active student refocusing:
"Enter explorer mode."

Prairieview



Spotlights

Celebrating peer learner characteristics to build shared EF vocabulary.



Self-Reflection

Students self-assess strengths, struggle points, and personal growth goals.

Lakeview



Curiosity Project

Student-chosen research driving inquiry & productive struggle.



Discussion Protocols

Redesigned discussion routines around key EF skills right after Workshop 1.

Where the Two Meet

One philosophy, both sides of the child

Academic Mastery



A clear picture of what success
looks like

Mastery-based approaches
Priority standards

Learner Characteristics and SEL



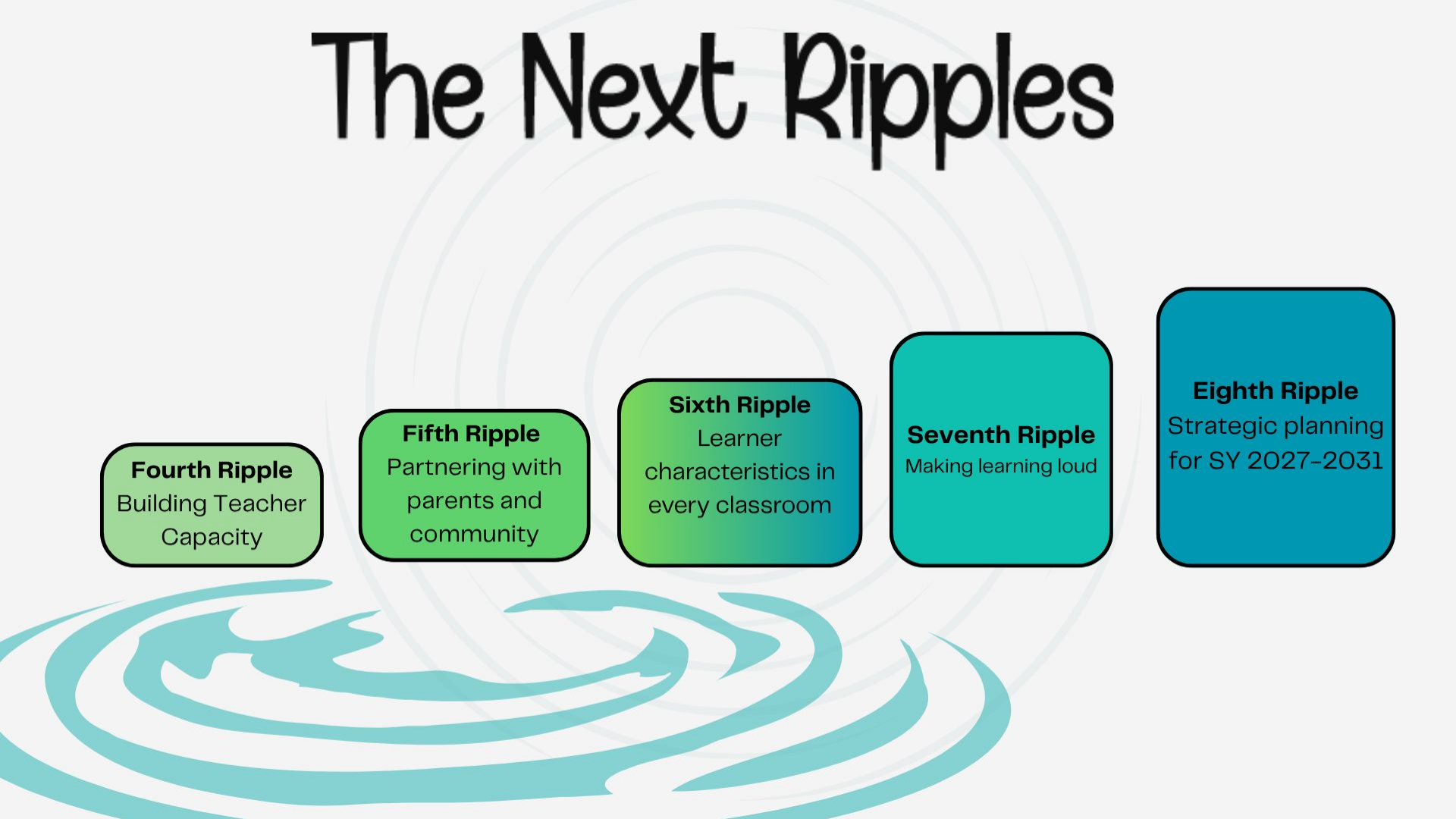
SEL data informs student goal setting
Every student has their own areas of
strength

Reflection becomes ownership

"Measure what we value"

Growth against a clear picture of success, not
points. The heart of our strategic plan.

The Next Ripples



Fourth Ripple

Building Teacher
Capacity

Fifth Ripple

Partnering with
parents and
community

Sixth Ripple

Learner
characteristics in
every classroom

Seventh Ripple

Making learning loud

Eighth Ripple

Strategic planning
for SY 2027-2031

Every Ripple Starts with One Drop

Thank you!

Joy DeFors , Carrie Fitzgerald, Kari Gemmell, Ashley Sanchez

