

Discussion Guide

***Most Likely to Succeed* was made to stimulate dialogue about what matters most for students today and in the future. Our aim is to encourage individual communities to design their own solutions, and not to prescribe one model. This section outlines many ways to use your screening as a catalyst for meaningful conversation that leads to positive action in your community.**

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Discussion Formats

There are three general models in which you can structure your post-film discussion:

- 1. A traditional Q&A**
- 2. A formal panel discussion featuring local education leaders**
- 3. An interactive working discussion, where there is a guiding topic and some generative dialogue resulting in a next step or action (Discussion formats should be considered in relationship to your strategy and target audience, but this option is our favorite!)**
 - Note: If possible, you may want to break up into smaller groups to facilitate discussion and idea generation

You can blend or improvise around these formats, but anything that engages the voices of your participants is likely to be more successful on all fronts.

Below, you will also find the film broken up into nine segments, each addressing various themes. If you are unable to screen the film in its entirety, this focused, episodic format will allow you to stimulate meaningful discussion in a shorter period of time.

Tips for Facilitating and Managing Dialogue

As a facilitator, you should aim to establish common objectives, create a climate of collaboration, and provide the structure, guidance and content to make your discussion effective.

Key Facilitator Responsibilities:

- 1. Designing, introducing, and enforcing discussion structure and norms**
- 2. Calling on people to share input or questions**
- 3. Challenging assumptions**
- 4. Summarizing content**
- 5. Insisting on closure and action/follow up**

Facilitation Tips:

- Appoint a note-taker/timekeeper to record key insights and keep everyone on track.
- Employ active and reflective listening. Continuously paraphrase and reframe the conversation in order to clarify thought process and make sure you understand what is said. For example, use phrases such as: “What I’m hearing you say is…” or “Do I understand you correctly that…”
- Ask open-ended questions, which result in answers that are analytical and exploratory, and where ambiguity, diversity and multiple factors can be included. A closed ended question results in a simple answer of “Yes/No” or just a factual response (Do you like the idea of project-based learning?). An open-ended question is broader in its quest: “In what ways could project-based learning play a bigger role in your classroom or school?” is an example.
- For any big, vital question, ask everyone to take a minute or two initially to write down their thoughts. Then open up to discussion and solicit everyone’s input.
- Anticipate the “tough to talk about” issues and make sure you create pathways to get those items on the table. Humor is a great tool!
- Get everyone involved with a body poll: How many of you are (parents, teachers, students?) Who in the room has…? How many of you are…?
- Don’t be afraid to quickly and politely cut off a line of discussion that is off topic. One tip is to honor the speaker by assigning it to “the parking lot” - documenting it for later discussion.

Setting the Stage for Conversation

Create buzz and generate excitement! Conversation can begin the minute people arrive for your screening. Signal to your audience that their voice matters by greeting them with an invitation to participate in the conversation following the film. Invite students to volunteer as greeters to personally welcome audience members. Distribute writing utensils and the playbills from your toolkit to give your guests some context and a platform to actively engage with the film’s ideas.

Introducing the Film

A screening like this is a special event and a warm welcome is appropriate. This is a moment for the hosts to introduce themselves and briefly express why they organized a screening. It’s also your chance to urge people to remain after the film and join in dialogue. A few tips to consider:

- Keep it short! This is critical - people are eager to get to the film and you want to protect your time afterwards. We suggest keeping your welcome to no more than 5 minutes.
- Let people know what comes next:
 - Why you need and want them to stay for the post-film discussion
 - Will there be a panel or special guests?
 - How will you conduct Q&A
- Be clear about time expectations, for example: the film run time is 89 minutes followed by 30 minutes of dialogue
- Encourage your audience to reflect and take notes on the prompts in their playbills while watching the film.

Sample Script:

Good evening everyone. Thank you all for taking time to join us for this special screening of MLTS. My name is XXX and together with YYY we hope tonight will be an opportunity to talk about what matters most for our students and how we support learning in our community. Please stay with us once the film ends for a discussion featuring ZZZ/an interactive

session to discuss key ideas in the film/a Q&A with ZZZ/a panel conversation with ZZZ). As you watch the film, reflect and take notes on the prompts in your playbill.

The film runs for 89 minutes. We'll spend 30 minutes afterwards in our discussion and conclude at xxPM.

Discussion Questions

Tip: Try to transition into your discussion immediately after the film ends to avoid losing audience members. Start tapering down the audio 15 seconds into the credits, bringing it to total silence by the 30 second mark. You can also give folks a few minutes to discuss their responses to the prompts in their playbills with a neighbor and share key takeaways on social media.

Questions for All Audiences

A general screening with a mixed audience of students, parents and educators is often the most powerful way to build awareness and dialogue across your community. The following questions can be used to to facilitate a discussion about the need for transformation in your community's schools. They are designed to encourage people to personally reflect on the issues raised by the film and contemplate how they apply to the everyday reality of your community's students. You can also use these questions to moderate a panel discussion.

1. **Student Outcomes:** In the film, Andrew McAfee, the associate director of the MIT Center for Digital Business says, "I think we need to take a good, hard look and figure out what kinds of people, what kinds of skills are demanded in the technologically extraordinary society and economy that we are creating."
 - What skills do you think are essential for our students' futures?
 - How do our school curricula integrate the content, academic disciplines and skill development our students need?
 - What would you do differently or better to ensure student outcomes are aligned with what matters most for the future?

2. **Variety in School Environments:** High Tech High is one example of many different kinds of schools. As the film's narrator notes, every school visited in the making of the film was different, and maybe "that's the point."
 - What are some important differences between the school experience you see in the film and the school experience your students have?
 - What kinds of learning happen in this movie that you might explore in your schools?
 - What kinds of learning are you already doing that you'd like to preserve or strengthen?

3. **Teaching and Learning:** John Dewey writes: "If we teach today as we taught yesterday, we rob our children of tomorrow."
 - What does this statement mean to you? What relevance does it have to how we educate our students today?
 - When you think back on your school experiences, what had the biggest impact on you? What stands out for you as an outstanding learning experience?
 - What are characteristics or elements of teaching and learning you'd like to see in "tomorrow's" education?
 - If you could change one major aspect of students' educational experience today, what would it be? Why?

4. **Student Agency:** Mark Aguirre, the humanities teacher who asks his students to stage a play, asks us "How can kids learn to make decisions when we never ask them to make decision?"
 - How do students in our school learn to make decisions? What are some examples of how our students experience leadership?
 - How much autonomy do our students have in creating and defining projects or big initiatives for themselves?
 - Women and people of color are often underrepresented in positions of leadership. Do you think this plays a role in the student Samantha's initial reluctance to see herself as a leader? How can we empower young people of underrepresented populations to view themselves as leaders?

- 5. Grit and Perseverance:** In the opening scene when the student believes her homework isn't relevant, the teacher encourages her to work hard on it to "build character." In the closing scene, a student keeps working to complete his project long after his due date or grades have been given, because he believes the project is important.
- Are both of these experiences equally effective in building grit?
 - How do we best encourage students in our schools to develop grit?
- 6. Projects and Process:** Larry Rosenstock reflects "If you build a house, it's a project. If you make a school, it's a project. If you make a documentary film, it's a project. If you write a book, it's a project. Most of what people do in life involves observation, reflection, documentation, exhibition and going through these different phases of being able to create something."
- What do you think of this statement in relationship to learning?
 - How important is the process of observation, reflection, documentation and exhibition? How does this process happen in your school?
 - What other learning is needed to support and encourage a process of observation, reflection, documentation and exhibition?
 - What is one thing your school can do to encourage more of this kind of learning?
- 7. Reflection and Assessment:** At one point in the film, a 9th grade student, Samantha, is encouraged by a teacher, Mark, to reflect on her own interests and abilities. When asked "what do you think you need to work on the most?" she answered, "I think I really want to improve on becoming stronger, being confident in myself." Similarly, Brian is asked by his teachers to reflect on his work on the wheel by focusing on planning and process.
- To what degree, in your school, are students encouraged to participate in self-reflection and self-assessment?
 - How is it different from traditional assessments like tests?
 - What are the benefits or challenges of reflection and assessment of this kind for students, parents and teachers?
- 8. Innovation and Change in Schools:** High Tech High is a "build from scratch school" but the film refers to many other schools where innovation is happening inside the existing model. In some cases, change is small and incremental but has high impact: consider a pilot of a new interdisciplinary course, a project based learning week, or a new after school club.
- What are some success stories of innovative initiatives at your school?
 - What can we do to encourage schools to try new and innovative things, even at the risk of having some of them fail?
 - If you could change on major aspect of students' educational experience today, what would it be? Why?

Questions Aimed at Educators

In addition to the questions above, there are more specific questions and topics that can be addressed with faculty, staff and administrators. If your screening event is purposed for professional development and/or strategy and planning, there are two potential approaches to utilizing the film: showing in its entirety (89 minutes) and then discussing its content afterwards; or, showing segments as outlined below and conducting short discussions. If you have time, we think there is highest value in showing the entire film and hosting a discussion. This sets the stage for follow up events and shorter sessions that create an arc for learning and design in schools that you can sustain.

Alternatively, if time is short and you need to jump in, we've identified nine segments that address specific areas of inquiry:

- What's not working for this student (and this system)? (0:00-10:25)
- High Tech High and student-centered instruction (11:00-15:33)
- Assessment: traditional, performance-based, authentic, and self- assessment (15:30-28:40)
- Models of instruction: content v. skills (and what it means in the future) (28:45-37:31)
- Test prep: issues of accountability (37:31-45:30)
- The Three C's: Career/college/civic life, or creativity/ communication/ critical ability? (50:00-52:00)
- Placing a bet (parents' perspectives) (52:00-55:00)
- The Exhibition (55:00-1:15:00)
- "A sense of purpose": What do we want schools to do? (1:16:00-1:26:00)

Questions

1. Relevance, personalization and meaning are words used more and more frequently to describe high quality student learning experiences.

- How do these words resonate with or relate to the work you do as a teacher?

2. What is the purpose of school?

- To what extent is preparing a student for college similar or different to preparing them for life? What are the implications of this?
- In your opinion, what are the most important things school should prepare a student for after graduation? Why?
- What happens in school now that supports this vision?
How do you, as a teacher, want to do this work?

3. As technology continues to change how we live and work, what do we need to learn?

- What skills and content knowledge do you think are most useful for your students to acquire?
- What are the implications for teaching?
- How do we align teaching and assessment to these outcomes today?

4. What in your experience as an educator has had the greatest impact on students?

- What skills and content knowledge do you think are most useful for your students to acquire?
- What are the implications for teaching?
- How do we align teaching and assessment to these outcomes today?

5. How can a community support and encourage teachers to take on innovative initiatives?

- What could our school do to be even more supportive?
- How do you think your school community would react to something innovative that didn't go well the first time?
- If you felt you had the support of your community, are there small innovations you'd like to introduce to your classroom?
Would you commit to a few this school year?

Questions Aimed at Students

1. What do your parents expect from you and your educational experience? How does your school support you in meeting these expectations? What would you like them to know and what would you like to change?
2. How do teachers and your school learn about your experience as a student? What would you like them to learn or understand? What would you like to learn that is not available to you now? Discuss.
3. When do you believe you are learning at your best in school? What are those experiences like?
4. What makes learning successful at school for you now? What could be different? What would you like to see stop or start happening?
5. Lillian Hsu, a graduate student at the High Tech High Graduate School of Education, designed “The Incarceration Project”, a project for her senior English students involving several different subject areas and types of study. Her students analyzed a play about the 1992 LA riots, interviewed a broad cross-section of community members on their views regarding incarceration, and wrote a play reflecting their learning called “We Don’t See, We Hear: A Play about Incarceration.” The English students collaborated with the senior art class, who designed the set, and the senior government class, who created a playbill featuring historical facts about incarceration.

This project enabled students to engage with their community and tie in their own experiences in order to analyze important events from local history.

- What do you think about projects that combine subjects like this project combined English, Art, and Government? What benefits or challenges do you think they would involve? What subjects would you choose to combine?
- Do you feel like your interests, heritage, and aspirations are reflected in the things you learn at school? If so, in what ways? If not, how might you imagine this being done?
- If you were to design a project like this one, what locally relevant issue would yours address?

Questions Aimed at Parents

1. If your child comes home from school describing an innovative new initiative with similarities to what you saw in the film, would you support your school, or be concerned?
2. Do you think there’s a trade-off for your child between building the strongest possible college application, and building the strongest possible character?
3. Did your education adequately prepare you for the work you do now? What skills do you feel were missing from your education, that you want your child to be learning today?
4. From a parent’s perspective, what learning experiences have been the most engaging and rewarding for your child? What about these learning experiences makes them significant?
5. As a parent, how do you see yourself participating in or contributing to your child’s education? Are there any additional actions you’d like parents in your community to start taking?

At the End of Your Screening

The close of your post-film discussion is an excellent time to harness your audience's energy and announce any next steps you want them to take. We've included some suggested action steps below, but it's best to tailor these ideas to your community's schools and objectives.

We also encourage you to use this time to get feedback from your audience, which can be useful data when referencing demand for change in your community. By a show of hands, take the poll below and share your audience's results with us on your post-screening survey!

See how many of your audience members are:

- a) Ready For Change, Let's GO!
- b) Interested; Want to Learn More
- c) We've Got Other Things to Do

What's Next: Suggested Calls to Action

- Have a team of people identify all the amazing innovations already happening in your school or district and exhibit them in some format, like a newsletter or presentation. Each month, you can feature a different initiative and discuss the critical skills it's helping students develop. This will cultivate awareness about the great work being done in your community and serve as a foundation and inspiration for building more scalable efforts.
- Set a date and time for a follow-up discussion and invite your audience to attend. This can even be the first of an on-going series of discussions you launch in your community! Creating a space for folks to continuously share feedback and inspiration with each other can be key in fostering progress.
- Create a Facebook group for your community to join and share ideas. You can use this outlet to collaborate with fellow community members, share interesting articles, and invite folks to any future events. Be sure to invite us (facebook.com/MLTSfilm) to join if you do this!
- In order to more easily connect and share with other MLTS groups throughout the country, *please use the following naming convention: Most Likely to Succeed Community Group: [insert school/organization]*
- Do your best to gather and solidify main points from the post-film discussion, and present them at the closing of the event. Invite audience members to share some of these insights or action items with local political and education leaders via social media.
- Remind your audience to log on to MLTSfilm.org to join the mailing list and check out our "Moving Forward" section for resources aimed at educators, parents, and students.