

Student Voice

Playbook

In this book we will provide you with easy ways to incorporate student voice into your student’s educational experience. This will include things that we do at the district level, school-wide and right down to the classroom. These activities will help engage students in the student voice process, help develop their skill set to provide insightful feedback to all staff and will strengthen your school climate.

**What is Student Voice?**

***Student voice is the practice of educators intentionally, purposefully, and systematically eliciting student viewpoints on a specific topic for improvement purposes.***

**The 5 Elements of Student Voice:**

1. Topics relevant to students
2. Students have ongoing discussions with adults
3. Students are involved in planning and decision
4. Shared power between students and adults
5. Students are involved in the actions to address school improvement

**Preliminary results from our Penn State and Villanova WCSD Student Voice research project:**

1. Classroom student voice practices are related to greater student academic engagement (but not to self-reported grades)
2. School-level student voice practices AND school-level responsiveness to student voice are related to greater student academic engagement, and the more student voice opportunities students perceive exist at the school, the higher the students' self-reported ELA and Math grades are (as well as their engagement)

**STUDENT VOICE CONSIDERATIONS**

* 1. Are the student’s selected representative of the student population, not just by cultural background, but also by engagement level, and student body “clicks” or groups?
  2. Do all students have opportunities to participate in student voice activities?
  3. Are the issues you are addressing student chosen, or more adult centered? Students will be more willing to participate in action if the issues are relevant and chosen by them.
  4. Is action possible? Student voice only works if there can be follow though.

**Student Voice at the District Level**

Below is a list of how Student Voice is incorporated at the district level. Students share valuable feedback and information to help improve the educational environment for ALL students in WCSD.

**WCSD Superintendents Student Advisory Council**

The WCSD Student Advisory Council (SAC) is a council of students representing all high schools in the WCSD. There are a minimum of 2 students from each school who serve on the council and provide valuable feedback to the Superintendent and other WCSD leaders. The SAC works on various topics throughout the school year and provides recommendations to leadership from the student perspective. Students meet one Tuesday a month from 4pm-6pm. Students interested in serving on the council can fill out a form on the WCSD student voice website or can be recommended by a school’s principal or other staff member.

**WCSD Board of Trustees Student Representative**

The WCSD Board of Trustees (BOT) has a student representative that serves on the board. In addition to serving on the BOT the student representative also serves as the SAC President. During meetings the SAC president informs the board on what discussions and recommendations students have brought forth at our monthly meetings. The student also provides feedback to the BOT on agenda items from the student perspective. This position is elected on a yearly basis by members of the SAC.

**Student Speakers**

SAC students are provided opportunities to speak publicly for various district events. Students introduce leadership, present on topics, and participate in panels for various district events. During these engagements students improve their skills in speaking and presenting publicly, as well as give direct feedback to various staff within our district. Students have spoken at Principals academies, all staff meetings, the WCSD state of education, in addition to other various district events.

**WCSD Student Voice Showcase**

Annually the WCSD Student Voice/Office of Accountability in collaboration with the WCSD Student Advisory Council hosts our Student Voice showcase. Student representatives from all High School, Middle School, and some elementary schools are invited to attend, as well as all school and district leaders. During this event, we celebrate all the amazing work done throughout the school year utilizing student voice. The showcase includes student led activities, student speakers, and student led workshops in which students show how to incorporate student voice into the various areas of our educational system. Additionally, the day also includes an exhibit of the various innovative student voice-created projects and solutions from our various schools.

**Other areas of student Voice involvement**

In addition to the roles outlined above, student voice is utilized in other areas of our district. Students have served on the committees that hired the superintendent, provided feedback, and collaborated on the superintendent’s strategic plan, met with the facilities modernization group, and actively serve on the Washoe Ed alliance board.

**Utilizing Student Voice at the school level**

In this section you will find various ways that student voice has been used at the school level. From simple surveys to being involved in my complex decision-making. Student voice can have a profound impact on the educational setting.

**School specific student voice advisory council**

One of the most effective tools for incorporating student voice into a school is the creation of the school’s very own council or committee. The committee or council can meet regularly to discuss key issues going on in the school and provide staff with student feedback. These committees should be created and consist of students from all different engagement levels and backgrounds. It is important to gain insight from ALL populations of the school to get more accurate feedback. In addition, members of the school’s council should serve as members of the district SAC to bring forth items that could be impacting students on a larger basis.

**School wide QR surveys**

One easy and effective way to illicit student voice is using QR code surveys. These simple surveys can be created using Microsoft forms and shared through fliers posted in the school. Surveys can be broad in nature or on a more specific topic but quickly provide feedback to teachers or administrators on important subjects. Using incentives to participate can increase involvement and give a more complete picture of the student body’s perspective. This tool has been used to provide feedback on attendance, bell schedules, and more.

**The Student Voice Locker**

A successful tool to provide great feedback from students is the student voice locker. To create the student voice locker, designate a locker in the school that students can decorate. After the locker is decorated attach sticky notes, or notepads where students can write ideas and give feedback. Once students write their note it can go in the locker and a staff member/student can open to read. These notes can be used to lead discussions with student voice councils, or other leadership meetings.

**Lunch time with the principal**

This is a quick yet effective tool that some schools have used to integrate student voice. The principal will make themselves available once a month to meet with any students interested in talking in a town hall forum. Meeting in the gym or theater the during lunch the principal or other school administrator makes themselves available to talk to students about certain areas they are seeking feedback or leave it open ended. This creates a more accessibility and connectedness.

**Student Representative on Hiring Committees**

Allowing a current student to sit in on an interview with a potential teacher, coach, or staff member empowers their feeling of choice and buy in. Gaining a students feedback on candidates can also help to ensure good teacher and student relationships.

**Student Voice in the classroom**

Using student voice in the classroom creates opportunities for teachers to build trust with their students and heighten their engagement. Bringing student voice to the classroom can be a powerful tool to increase the desire to learn and for students to take more ownership in their education.

**Feedback opportunities:** One of the simplest ways to have student voice incorporated into the classroom is to give students opportunity to provide feedback on various aspects of the classroom, such as curriculum, assignments, and rules. Teachers can use surveys, polls, interviews, focus groups, or other methods to collect feedback from students and use it to improve the teaching/learning experience.

**Collaboration:** This practice involves students in making decisions that affect their learning, such as choosing topics, projects, activities, materials, or assessment methods. Teachers can use several processes, such as voting, brainstorming, or consensus-building, to involve students in decision-making and empower them to take ownership of their learning.

**Classroom Discussions:**

A third way to have student voice is to create opportunities for dialogue between students and teachers, as well as among students themselves. Teachers can use strategies such as discussions, debates, circles, or forums to encourage students to share their ideas, opinions, questions, and concerns with each other and with the teacher. Teachers can also use active listening, open-ended questions, and respectful responses to foster a culture of dialogue in the classroom.

**Teacher Advocacy:**

Another powerful tool to build student and teacher trust is through advocacy. This can be done by supporting student-led initiatives that address issues or problems that students care about. By identifying student passions, interests, and goals and providing them with resources, guidance, and encouragement to pursue them teachers can increase their connection to their students and create opportunities for more open dialogue.

**Informal Student evaluations**

While the idea can be a scary one, giving students the opportunity to provide you with direct feedback can be beneficial both to the student and the teacher. Students feeling heard and valued only furthers student voice in the classroom. As a teacher, getting feedback from your class can provide you insight into the things you are doing well, and identify areas that teachers can grow professionally.

By having student voice in the classroom, teachers can create a more meaningful, relevant, and enjoyable learning experience for their students and themselves. Student voice can also help teachers build positive relationships with their students and foster a sense of community and belonging in the classroom.

**Student Voice Projects Using Design Thinking**

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**Design Thinking Process for Student Voice:**

**Creating groups:** Student design implementation can be whole group or small group depending on age and ability of students.  We recommend identifying students with diverse perspectives and experiences.

***Purpose of Design Thinking (from Stanford Design Model):*** *“Design thinking is a non-linear, interactive process that teams use to understand users, challenge assumptions, redefine problems and create innovative solutions to prototype and test,” (Interactive Design Foundation).*

**Stage One Empathize and Discover:**  Seek to understand problems or concerns for a particular group through an empathetic approach designed to help students understand diverse perspectives on a single issue.

* Students or class draw, or brainstorm issues, concerns, or problems related to school and/or their learning environment.
* Guiding Question/Discussion:  How does that concern/problem make you feel?  For which students is this a concern or problem?
* Collaborate with classmates and peers and solicit their feedback.
* Action steps:
* Observe, interview, and engage:  Are concerns/problems a collective belief?  What data do we have to understand whether it’s a common belief or uncommon belief?
* Personalize problem:
* Example:  Student feels the school wide behavior (PBS) incentives are not motivating and students have no input.  Is this a collective concern and something others empathize with?
* **Activity:  Empathy Interviews**

**Stage Two Interpret and Define:** Construct a common belief solution from student insight and determine a meaningful challenge/problem to address.

* Peers or class define presented problems and feelings associated with problems
* What problem/s are a collective belief?
* Example: Do other students agree that the school wide PBS system does not incentivize and motivate students?
* Begin to understand the root cause of the problem.  Why is this a problem for students?
* Example:  Why do students think the current PBS system does not incentivize students?  Is the root cause of its lack of success because of a communication problem or a problem with understanding?  Are the incentives themselves not motivating?  Is it a lack of consistency across teachers?
* **Activity**:  **Point of View Brainstorm**

**Stage Three Ideate (idea generation):** Brainstorm alternative ways to address the problem and generate solutions.

* Refine ideas and prioritize
* Example:  After narrowing the root cause of the PBS system to the quality of incentives offered, students might brainstorm student-driven incentives and prioritize and rationalize feasible solutions to promoting the new incentives to students.
* **Activity:  Examples of Ideation**

**Stage Four Experiment and Prototype**: Identify the best possible solution to the problem from the Ideate phase.

* Create a representation of problem and solutions
* Pictures, story board, interactive display
* Test prototype, solicit feedback and make changes
* Example: Solicit student feedback to re-design school wide PBS system and create a new plan.
* **Activity: Examples of protypes**

**Stage Five Test and Evolve**: Test solution or redefine and make changes to problem (revisiting previous stages).

* Measure and determine whether prototype solution is effective using data from student feedback and surveys, refine and revise based on data.
* What works and what doesn’t?
* Goal is to try something on a small-scale for a short time period, study it, and then decide whether to ditch it, expand it, or tweak it.
* Example:  Does student feedback and data support the new PBS plan?  Data may include behavior data:  Are incentives promoting positive behaviors based on behavior data?
* FAIL EARLY. In design thinking failing early is an important part of the process.
* **Activity: (If applicable) survey building and data analysis of prototype**

**Design Process Evaluation Checklist**

Prior to beginning design phase discuss with students the goal:  Develop a new mindset to creatively solve problems through futurist thinking.

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| ***Step One:*  Empathize & Discover** Tasks (check if complete):    ***Students will:*** | **Objective:  Explore students’ concerns and emotions within their environment**  Examples: |
| Identify problems/issues within their environment/community | PBS, school lunches, attendance, discipline, grades, connecting with others |
| Consider if problem is collective or personal | Rank and/or graph problems in order of collective concern.  Determine which problems would be easiest/hardest to address and would impact the most students. |
| Use informal data to determine if students’ beliefs are a collective concern | Interviews, student feedback and discussion |

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| ***Step Two:*  Interpret & Define** Tasks (check if complete):  ***Students will:*** | **Objective:  Articulate problem statement**  Examples: |
| Define above problems and feelings associated with problems | See above examples |
| Determine root causes of problems | School lunches – unhealthy, avoidance  Is the root cause that the food is unhealthy?  Or is the root cause avoidance because students are leaving school and missing out on socializing with peers. |
| Create a point of view/problem statement specific to students and issue. | Point of view/problem statement should include:   * A description of your user, a need and insight/emotion tied to need.  Is socialization more important than healthy food for teenage students? * 9th grade students need opportunities to socialize while eating healthy food. |

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| ***Step Three:*  Ideate** Tasks (check if complete):  ***Students will:*** | **Objective:  Solicit ideas to solve problem**  Examples: |
| Brainstorm solutions from point of view/problem statement | Using above example, students brainstorm solutions.   * Brainstorm: no judgment, get as many ideas as you can and all ideas matter.  Brainstorm can include words and visuals. * i.e.) redesign cafeteria to promote socialization, provide good tasting healthy food options so students remain at school, flexible seating options to promote socialization …… |

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| ***Step Four:*  Experiment & Prototype** Tasks (check if complete):  ***Students will:*** | **Objective:  Present a solution to problem and create a measure for effectiveness**  Examples: |
| Create a representation of problem and solution | Prototype, story board |
| Solicit feedback | Surveys |

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| ***Step Five:*  Test & Evolve** Tasks (check if complete):  ***Students will:*** | **Objective: Implement solution, analyze data, revise, and refine prototype**  Examples: |
| Measure effectiveness of prototype and revise using feedback data | Data analysis, observations, feedback, and interviews |



**Design Process Introduction Activity:  Design a Flag**

**Goal: Ignite creativity and connection**

* Student will take 5 minutes to design their own flag, drawing images they believe connect with them.

* Once done, students share with a partner and explain their flag

* Encourage students to be creative, they do not need to be an artist to participate

* All ideas matter

Note: Design thinking requires creative thinking. Activities that get students/participants are called “stokes” and are a great way to get design thinkers to start the process using their creative side.



**Step One Activity:  Empathy Interviews**

**Objectives:  Explore students’ concerns and emotions within their environment**

* Students will develop and explore empathy skills while collecting data.
* Students will have opportunities to hear varying viewpoints and share information on the chosen topic.

**Overview/Process:**

* Develop Interview Questions:  Based on the ranking of collective concern, address the number one concern

* Option:  Develop interview questions with students or teacher develops interview questions.
* Interview questions should provide opportunities to dig deeper into the concern.
* Interview questions should solicit emotion and insight related to concern.

* Allow students opportunities to ask follow-up questions to determine what the interviewee is emotionally connected to.

* Attached is a link to an example of an empathy interview form from a previous design group.  In this video [Design Thinking workshop with Justin Ferrell of Stanford d. School at The Irish Times - YouTube](https://nam10.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.youtube.com%2Fwatch%3Fv%3DZ4gAugRGpeY&data=05%7C01%7CNTruax%40washoeschools.net%7C7a4440f11e5f48660df808db0bb33532%7C3cacf5495e3641cca3de89459e121def%7C1%7C0%7C638116636694346200%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=ygdjQfyhOAr1O7PB03HWekwHVFxdJIguras1XC3zUU8%3D&reserved=0)  this process takes place from 12:43 to 13:10

The following are important characteristics of an empathy interview:

* *Engaged Listening:*  Looking and listening closely for passionate responses to the concern/subject.
* *Beginner’s Mindset:*  Approach subject without bias.
* *Judgement Free*:  Learn from the interviewee’s responses.
* *Curiosity:*  Keep asking why.
* *Optimistic:*  Find potential in the responses not obstacles.



**Pitfalls and Strategies for Step One: Empathize and Discover:**

***Goal:  to ensure that students are engaged in the student voice process by listening to their opinions and acting on their feedback.***

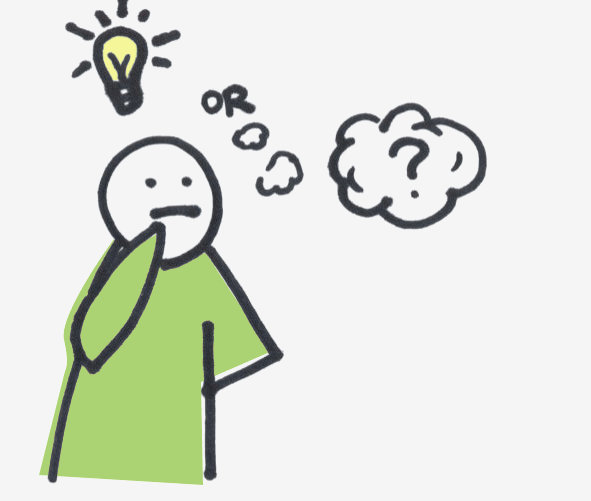
* **Pitfall: Eliciting only the loudest students’ opinions =** *Students who are vocal and outspoken tend to take center stage; however, it is important to listen to all students’ insights.*
* ***Strategy****:  Find ways to encourage all students’ opinions.  Ex) Students can write or draw their insights and turn in to the facilitator.*

* **Pitfall:  Yes or No Questions =** *Questions should create conversation and deeper insight*.
* **Strategy**:  Frame questions to be open ended.

* **Pitfall:  Leading questions** = *Avoid questions that will get us answers we may want*.
* **Strategy:** Create unbiased questions that will give us truthful responses.

* **Pitfall:  Shooting down student opinions =** *Avoid eliminating students’ experiences or ideas.*
* **Strategy:** Encourage every student to participate.  Ex) Students can write their opinion and turn it in to the facilitator.

* **Pitfall:  Over facilitating =** *Know when to lead and when to listen.*
* **Strategy:**  Allow students opportunities to facilitate.



**Step Two Activity:  Interpret and Define**

**Objective:  Articulate Problem/Point of View Statement**

**Overview/Process:**

*\*Note - During this phase, avoid identifying solutions, this process occurs during Step Three.*

* Using the information gathered from the empathy interviews, determine the root cause of the concern.

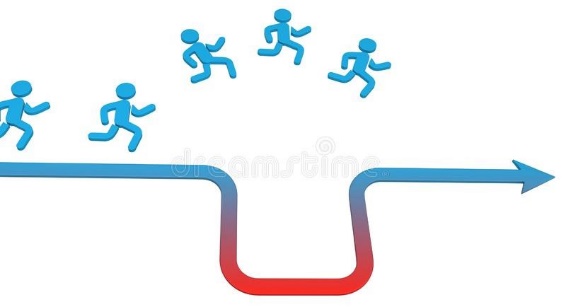
* During this phase:
* Identify the user, their need, and what insights were gathered. To accomplish this task, create three columns on a sheet of paper.
* *An example of this step can be found on 22:14 of this video*[*Design Thinking workshop with Justin Ferrell of Stanford d. School at The Irish Times – YouTube*](https://nam10.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.youtube.com%2Fwatch%3Fv%3DZ4gAugRGpeY&data=05%7C01%7CNTruax%40washoeschools.net%7C7a4440f11e5f48660df808db0bb33532%7C3cacf5495e3641cca3de89459e121def%7C1%7C0%7C638116636694346200%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=ygdjQfyhOAr1O7PB03HWekwHVFxdJIguras1XC3zUU8%3D&reserved=0)

* **Create Three Columns:**

* **Column One - USER** (students)
* In this column list all the potential users for our protype (representation of problem)
* **Column Two**- **NEED**
* In this column use the feedback from the empathy interviews
* List the needs of our interviewees (user/student).
* **Column Three - INSIGHT**
* In this column list the reasons we uncovered for why our user would need our protype.

**Outcome:**  Using above information, create a ***problem/point of view statement***for Step Three.

* Statements should include the following:
* User/students
* Needs
* Because (from insight)



**Pitfalls and Strategies for Step Two: Interpret and Define:**

***Goal:  to ensure that students are engaged in the student voice process by listening to their opinions and acting on their feedback.***

* **Pitfall: Avoid problem solving in this phase.**
* ***Strategy:****Remain focused on defining the issue and re-direct students when they jump to solutions.*

* **Pitfall: Trying to solve base level issues.**
* ***Strategy:****Explore root causes and deeper connections to the issue.*

* **Pitfall: Judgement.**
* ***Strategy:****Allow students opportunities to share their feedback freely, even if it’s not something everyone agrees on.*



**Step Three Activity:  Ideate**

**Objective: to solicit creative and innovative ideas to problem solve your issue.**

Below are two examples of brainstorming activities:  to increase creativity use visualization and background music.

**Brainstorm Activity:  Yes, And**

Materials:  chart paper, makers, ball

**Process/Overview:**

1. With students, develop and decide on the main idea from the problem/point of view statement.

* Write the main idea on chart paper.
* *Example idea: interactive classroom to increase engagement.*

1. Each student will contribute to the idea.

* To increase participation, have students sit in a circle.  Give students a ball they pass to classmates.  The classmate who possesses the ball contributes to the idea.
* Allow every idea and use the phrase, “***yes, and”*** as they add something to the idea.
* Facilitator writes all ideas on chart paper that add to the main concept.
* For example: Students want an interactive classroom, ***yes and*** there is no assigned seating, ***yes and*** there is a space where we can work in groups, ***yes and*** there are no textbooks, etc.

1. Review brainstorm and determine the most significant idea. Begin to discuss and develop ideas for a prototype based off the information from the brainstorm.

**Brainstorm Activity:  Sketch Storm**

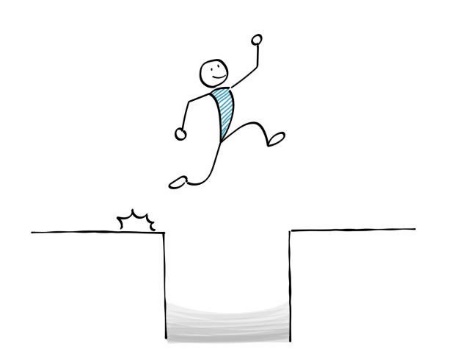
Materials:  paper and pens

**Process/Overview:**

1. Present the problem/point of view statement and ask students to sketch the ideas that come to mind for our users.

* *Example idea:  sketch all the elements of an interactive classroom for our users (students).*
* Students may use stick figures or other drawings but avoid words.
* Provide students a time limit for their sketch storm.

1. Students will share their sketches with their classmates.
2. Students decide on the sketches that capture their ideas best and refine with feedback.
3. Begin to develop ideas for the prototype.



**Pitfalls and Strategies for Step Three - Ideate:**

**Goal:  to encourage creative brainstorming**

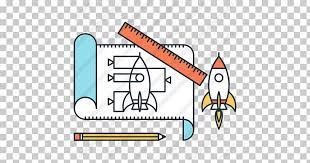
* **Pitfall:** Dismissal of ideas.

* **Strategy**: Encourage and accept as many ideas as possible, no matter how extreme; you can filter after the activity.

* **Pitfall:** Too much time.

* **Strategy**: use time constraints on brainstorming to get students to respond freely with ideas and encourage rapid fire responses.

* **Pitfall:** Over analyzing responses
* **Strategy:** Evaluate responses and solicit feedback after the brainstorm process is complete.



**Step Four Activity:  Prototype**

**Objective: To creatively design an interactive solution for our users.**

**Story Board**

Materials: chart paper and markers

**Process/Overview (with students):**

1. Create a storyboard displaying our users need for our prototype/solution and the impact our prototype would have on our users.  (Illustrate how the prototype works on the storyboard, problem, and solution).
2. Once completed, share the storyboard with school leadership and other stakeholders.

**Video**

Materials: camera, actors, props

**Process/Overview (with students):**

1. Create a video re-enactment of problem/solution showing the prototype in action.
2. Be creative and have fun.
3. Ex) Have a student encounter the problem and demonstrate how the prototype/solution changed their experience.

**Physical Model** *(good choice for large prototypes which are difficult to implement without a visual)*

Materials: cardboard, paper, glue, etc.

**Process/Overview (with students):**

1. Create a physical interactive prototype that students can engage with.
2. Options may include:
3. Prototype using a phone or computer demonstrating problem and solution
4. Diorama of the prototype in action.
5. Ex) Create a scene where your prototype is used.

**User Centered Stories**

Materials: paper, pen, computer, printer

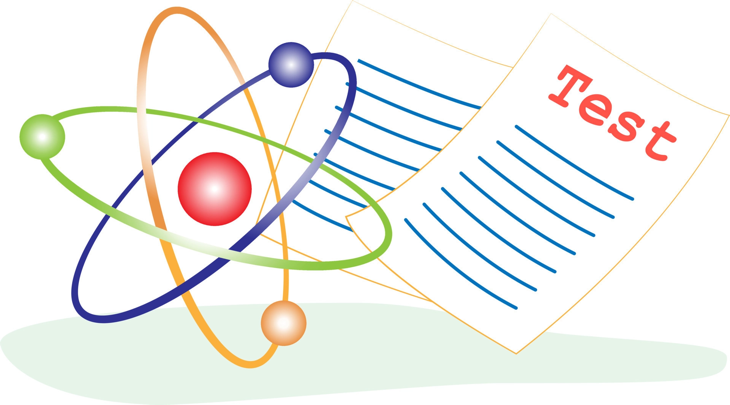
**Process/Overview (with students):**

1. Author a story about our users and how this prototype has impacted their life.
2. In the story describe how our user interacts with the prototype.
3. Explain why our users might need the prototype.



**Goal:  to present a measurable solution to our problem**

* **Pitfall:** Striving for perfection.
* **Solution:** Fail early to test ideas. If the prototype doesn’t work, return to earlier steps, and revise the design.



**Step Five:  Test and Evolve**

There is no specific activity for Step Five.  During this phase, pitch your prototype idea with leadership and a small group of users (other students, teachers, etc.) and determine the feasibility of your proposed solution.

What hurdles might you encounter in launching this prototype on a larger scale?  Should you scrap this solution and start over, edit the prototype, or launch it on a larger scale to more users?

During this phase, collaborate with stakeholders and make revisions based on feedback.  If leadership allows, test the prototype on your users and solicit feedback.  Using feedback, revise prototype until you feel your solution is ready to implement.