THE STORY OF CROSSTOWN HIGH

FILM COMPANION GUIDE

TheFirstClass.org

"Where I come from, it was very structured, it was very much pencil, paper, lecture. You come to Crosstown, and it's completely different."

- Hayley
Class of 2022

ABOUT THE FILM

"The First Class" follows the founding class of Crosstown High in Memphis, one of the XQ schools across the country that is redefining the future of learning. Join Crosstown students on their journeys from 9th grade through the triumph of graduation as they imagine life on Mars, step into the lives of refugees, learn to think critically, and ultimately find themselves. This intimate verité film gives voice to the beauty and value of the American high school—and the possibility of what high school can be for students everywhere.

ABOUT THE FILMMAKER

Known for creating change through his documentaries, Lee Hirsch's premiere film "AMANDLA! A REVOLUTION IN FOUR PART HARMONY" was theatrically released to acclaim, winning the Audience Award at Sundance. Lee's feature documentary "BULLY" premiered at Tribeca and hit the national zeitgeist, igniting a viral call to action across the US to address the enduring damage of bullying in schools.

ABOUT
CROSSTOWN HIGH

Crosstown's journey began in 2015 when Memphis parent Ginger Spickler saw a billboard advertising the XQ Super School Challenge with a call to **design the high school of the future**.

She invited teachers, parents, students, local architects, writers, and business owners to join a **design team that grew to 69 people**. This diverse team gathered input from **more than 200 students** and also hosted community conversations. After listening and reflecting, the team identified two main goals: community members wanted more engaging and meaningful learning for their students, and they craved a racially diverse school to reverse the tide of de facto segregation in Memphis.

Crosstown High opened in 2018 with a commitment to being "diverse by design" by recruiting students from across Memphis. The modern, lively high school sits inside the Crosstown Concourse—**a ten-story, one-million-square-foot landmark** redeveloped with more than **40 businesses, nonprofits, health facilities, and civic groups**. The public charter school graduated its first class in 2022 and serves about 480 students in grades 9-12.

HIGH SCHOOL TRANSFORMATION IS NECESSARY

Each new school year, more than 3.6 million students enter high school in America.[1]

Less than half of those who graduate will be ready for college or career.[2]

In Memphis, that number is only 20%.[3]

SEEING IS BELIEVING

Determined to overcome these challenges in Memphis, the Crosstown design team opened a bold new high school based on their shared vision.

During its first year in 2018-19, Crosstown's students had the highest attendance rate in Memphis,[4] and ranked 1st among their peers in Geometry and English statewide.[5]

When Crosstown High's first class graduated in the spring of 2022:

- 95% of students graduated on time, compared to 80% of students in the Memphis-Shelby County Schools.[6]
- 84% planned to attend college,[7] compared to 66% of seniors nationally.[8]
- Collectively, students earned over $10 million from various scholarships.[9]

Crosstown's class of 2022 also:

- Exceeded their district peers on most state benchmarks.[10]
- Outpaced state and national ACT college readiness rates.[11]
- Exceeded national AP course exam participation rates.[12]

The class of 2023 continued these trends.

1. Table 203.10. Enrollment in public elementary and secondary schools, by level and grade: Selected years, fall 1980 through fall 2031. National Center for Education Statistics. October 2022.
2. 2018 SAT Suite of Assessments Annual Report. College Board. October 25, 2018.
3. 2018-19 TN Ready Graduate Data Download. Tennessee Department of Education. 2019.
4. 2018-19 Attendance and Graduation Files Data Download. Tennessee Department of Education. 2019.
5. 2018-19 Assessment Files Data Download. Tennessee Department of Education. 2019.
6. 2021-22 Graduation Cohort Data Download. Tennessee Department of Education. 2022.
7. XQ Senior Survey for the class of 2022.
8. "Class of 2022: Planning for the Future in Uncertain Times." YouthTruth. April 2022.
9. Number reported to XQ by Crosstown administrators.
10. 2018-19 Assessment Files Data Download. Tennessee Department of Education. 2019. 2020-21 Assessment Files Data Download. Tennessee Department of Education. 2021.
11. Crosstown ACT data reported to XQ by Crosstown administrators. State and national ACT data from ACT, "U.S. High School Graduating Class Trends." October 2022.
12. Crosstown AP data reported to XQ by Crosstown administrators. National AP data from College Board, "AP Program Results: Class of 2022." April 2022.

HOST A SCREENING

Bring your community together with "The First Class."

We're on a mission at XQ to transform the high school experience so students are better prepared for college, career, and the future. By hosting a screening of "The First Class," you're inspiring educators and students—along with your friends, neighbors, and community and business leaders—to come together and transform the high school experience for your community.

Whether you're gathering a close-knit group of five or congregating a community of 500, we have everything you need in our **Host A Screening Guide.**

Scan to Host a Screening

START A CONVERSATION

"The First Class" is more than just a film—it's a catalyst for change, sparking conversations about the future of high school education.

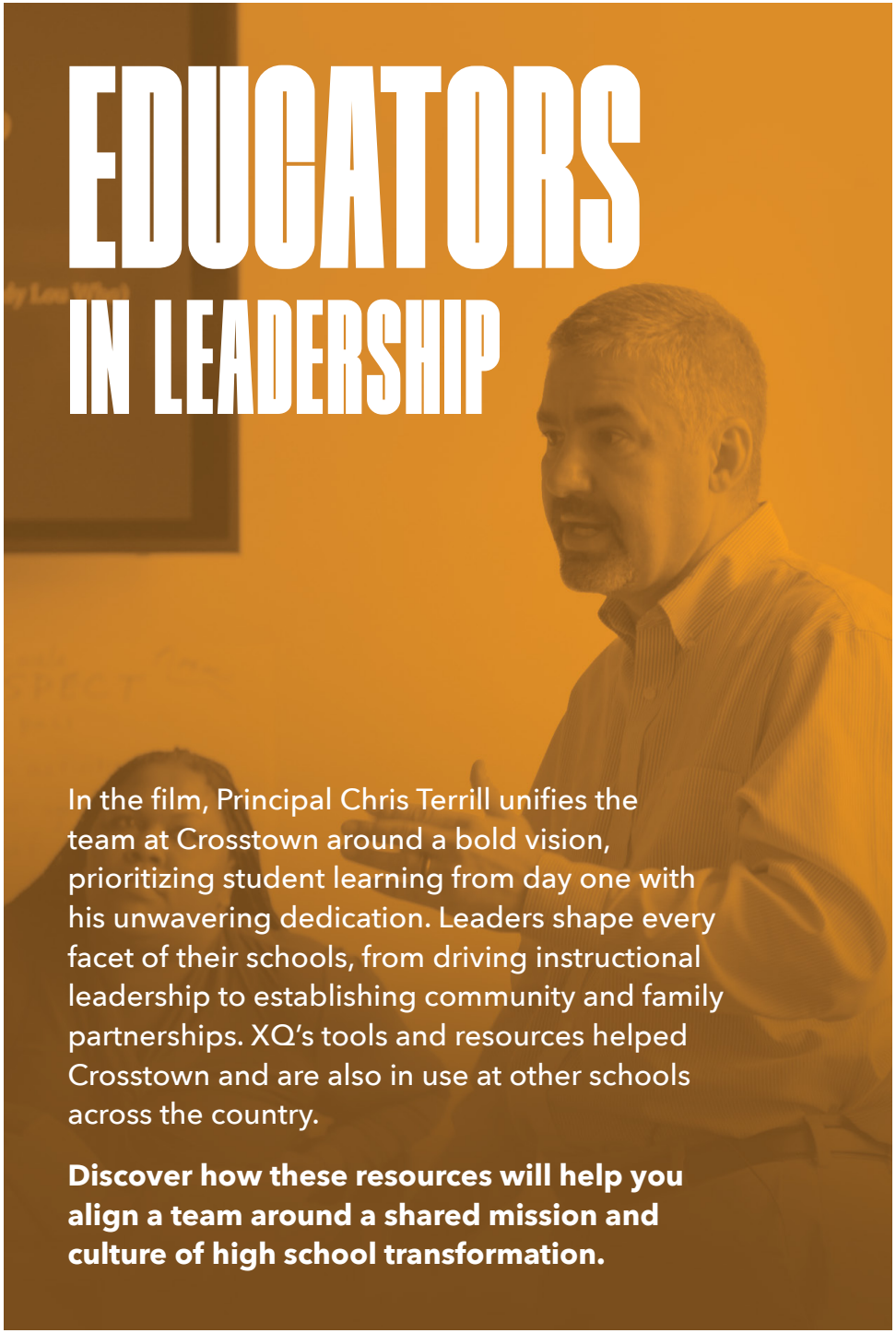
We've crafted a two-part **Discussion Guide**, tailored to help you achieve your specific goals and ambitions:

- The General part of the Discussion Guide offers a starting point to explore Crosstown High's innovative approach to education with thought-provoking questions and discoveries about the transformative potential of reimagined high school experiences.
- The Extended part of the Discussion Guide investigates how the six XQ Design Principles shape the design and innovation at Crosstown High. Reflect on scenes and themes from the film, and engage with questions tailored for specific roles within the high school ecosystem.

Scan to access the Discussion Guide

TRANSFORMING HIGH SCHOOL WITH XQ TOOLS & RESOURCES

RETHINKING HIGH SCHOOL TAKES MANY PATHWAYS. OUR **TOOLS AND RESOURCES** HELP EDUCATORS, POLICY MOVERS, COMMUNITIES, AND STUDENTS TAKE THOSE **NEXT STEPS.**



EDUCATORS IN LEADERSHIP

In the film, Principal Chris Terrill unifies the team at Crosstown around a bold vision, prioritizing student learning from day one with his unwavering dedication. Leaders shape every facet of their schools, from driving instructional leadership to establishing community and family partnerships. XQ's tools and resources helped Crosstown and are also in use at other schools across the country.

Discover how these resources will help you align a team around a shared mission and culture of high school transformation.

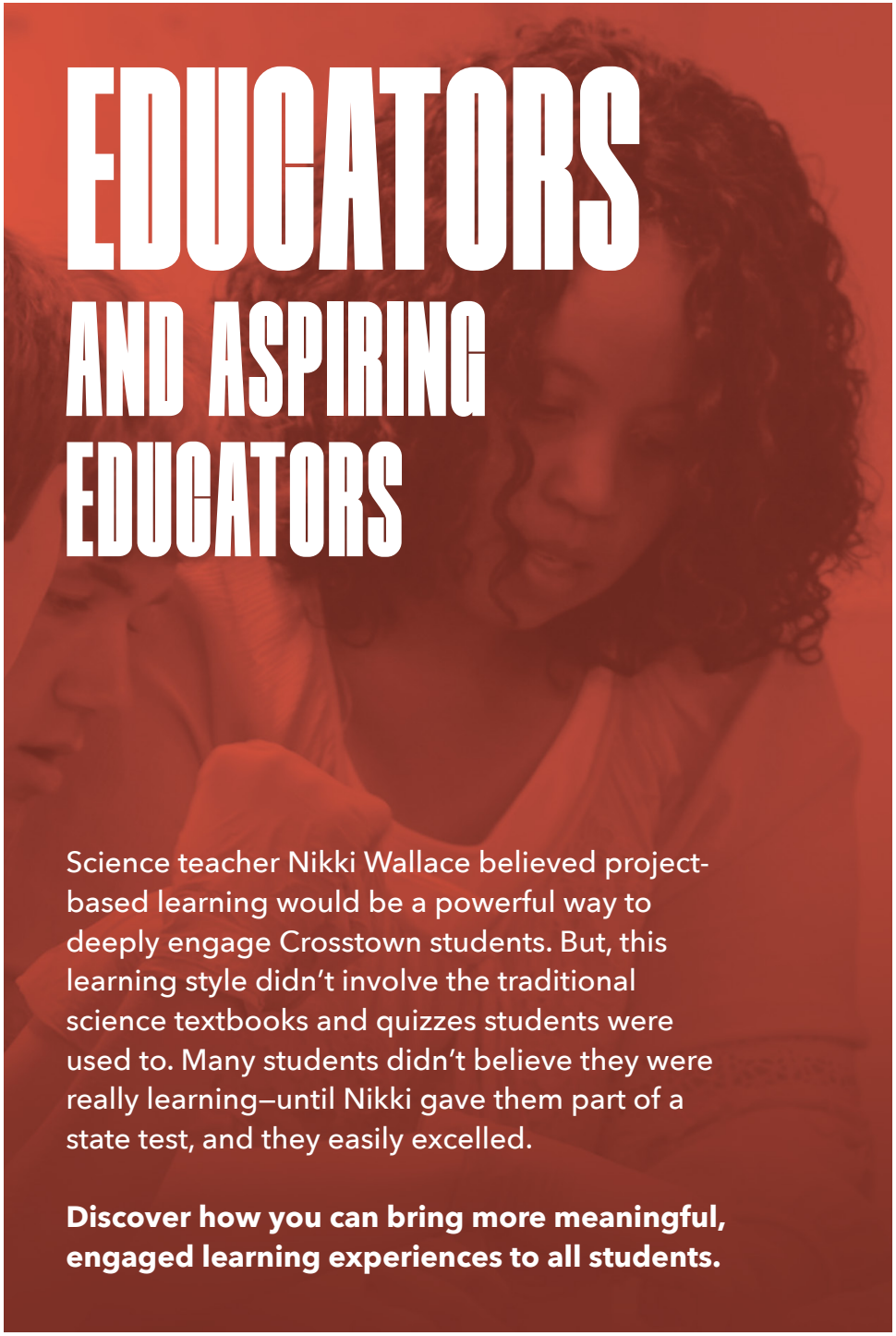
LEAD HIGH SCHOOL TRANSFORMATION

1. **Innovative Schools**
   Explore how high school transformation is underway through the unique journeys of each XQ school and partnership. See firsthand how their approaches are shaped by XQ's Design Principles and Learner Outcomes, empowering transformation.

2. **District Readiness Assessment**
   Use this self-guided digital tool that helps district leaders/teams assess their current readiness conditions for high school transformation at scale and what it takes to succeed.

3. **XQ Design Principles and Rubric**
   Determine how your school can achieve success through XQ's six research-backed Design Principles, which are used in schools across the country, including Crosstown. The rubric helps school teams assess where they are on their journey to transformation.

Scan this code
to view XQ resources
for educators in leadership



EDUCATORS AND ASPIRING EDUCATORS

Science teacher Nikki Wallace believed project-based learning would be a powerful way to deeply engage Crosstown students. But, this learning style didn't involve the traditional science textbooks and quizzes students were used to. Many students didn't believe they were really learning—until Nikki gave them part of a state test, and they easily excelled.

Discover how you can bring more meaningful, engaged learning experiences to all students.

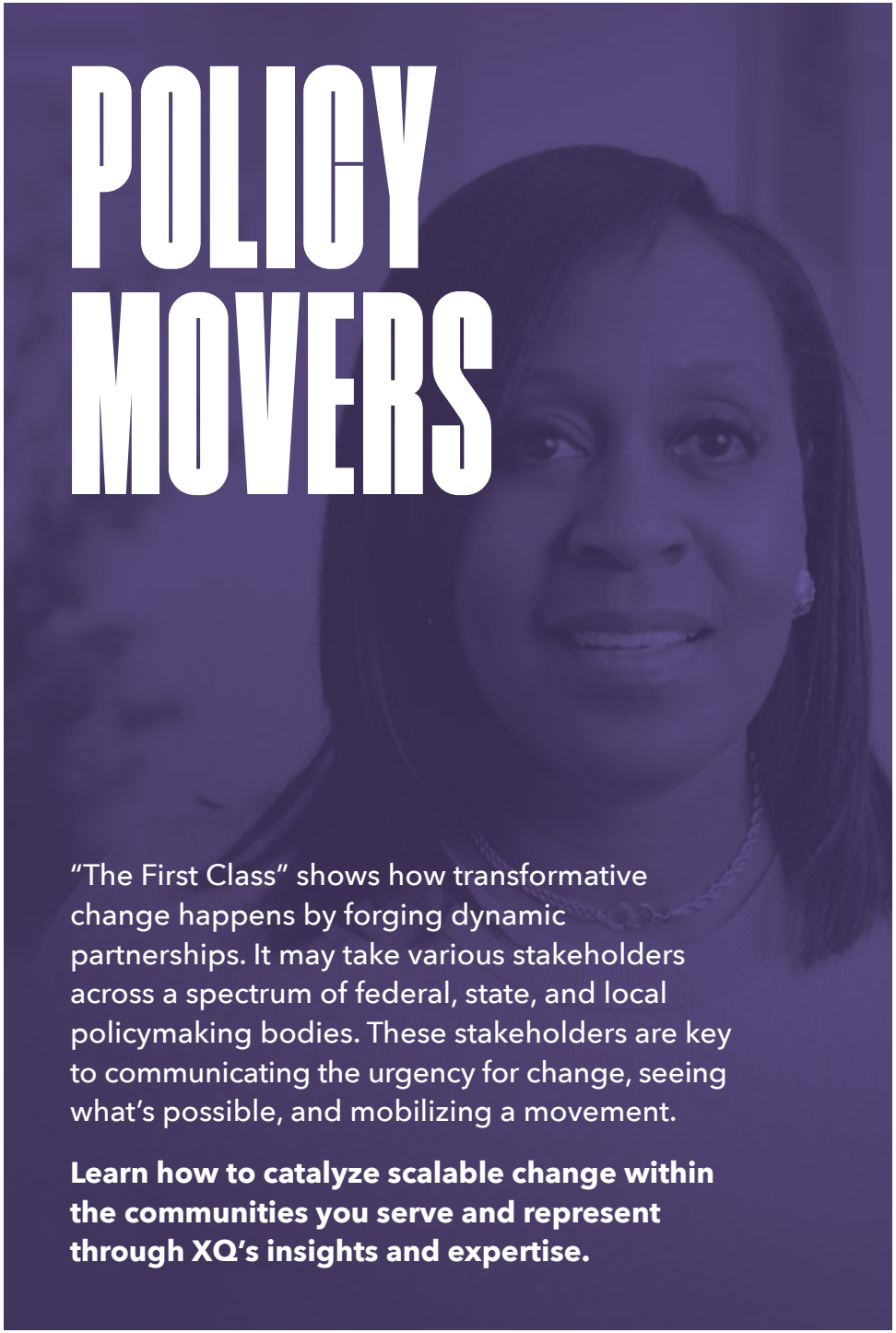
CRAFT MEANINGFUL LEARNING EXPERIENCES

1. **Educator Project Plans**
   Learn how to create the rigorous, authentic learning experiences observed in the film. This guide includes outlines and templates so you can build successful projects to transform student learning.

2. **XQ Learner Outcomes and Competencies**
   Create and implement interdisciplinary learning experiences focused on the essential knowledge and skills students need to navigate future challenges. The XQ Learner Outcomes and Competencies bring academic, cognitive, and social-emotional skills and knowledge together in an actionable framework.

3. **The XQ Xtra Newsletter**
   Read the latest insights, inspiration, and ideas driving real-world results at innovative high schools across the nation. Sign up and receive the XQ Xtra Newsletter delivered to your inbox.

Scan to view XQ resources for educators and aspiring educators



POLICY MOVERS

"The First Class" shows how transformative change happens by forging dynamic partnerships. It may take various stakeholders across a spectrum of federal, state, and local policymaking bodies. These stakeholders are key to communicating the urgency for change, seeing what's possible, and mobilizing a movement.

Learn how to catalyze scalable change within the communities you serve and represent through XQ's insights and expertise.

SHAPE HIGH SCHOOL TRANSFORMATION

1. **Student Performance Framework**
   Discover how to change the traditional high school model to benefit all learners for college, career, and whatever the future holds. Move beyond the outdated system that equates learning with time spent in a classroom and explore new ways to define, capture, and certify student learning.

2. **XQ Schools and Partners**
   Get inspired and learn about the various communities, partnerships, and school systems working with XQ. Then, take the lead by helping other communities join the movement to rethink high school and better prepare all learners for the needs of tomorrow.

3. **The Future of Work**
   Read about how policy movers can ensure every high school better prepares students for the future of work. High schools must change—in your state and around the country. Check out key workforce and education statistics, including graduation rates and college enrollment and completion data.

Scan to view
XQ resources for
policy movers

FAMILIES & COMMUNITIES

The founders of Crosstown High wanted their school to meet the needs of Memphis, so they created a diverse team of community members from all walks of life to collaborate on the school's design. XQ's tools and resources will help your community transform the high school experience by creating authentic and rigorous learning for students.

Learn more about how XQ helps communities transform their high schools into more engaging and academically rigorous places that benefit all students.

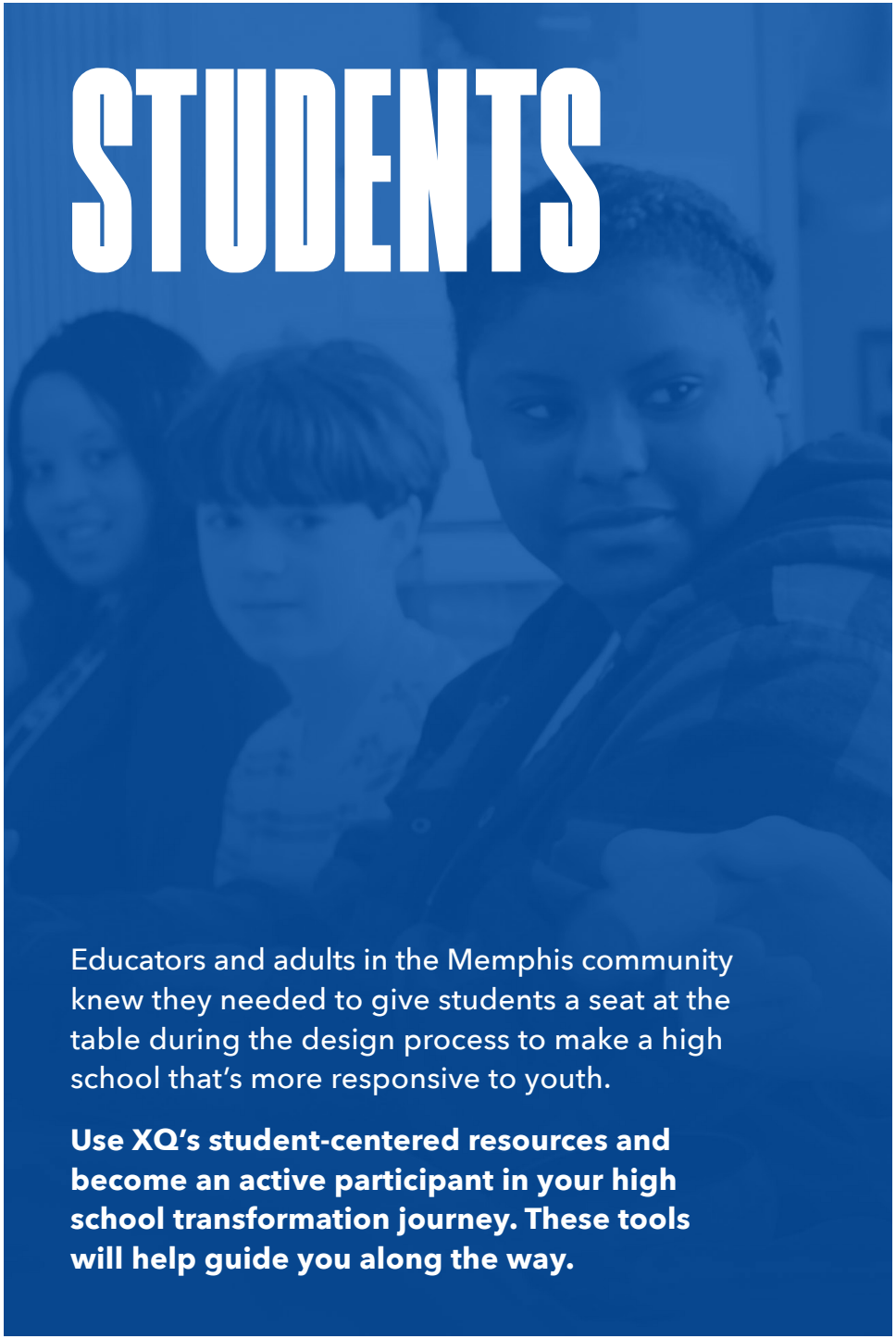
ENGAGE YOUR COMMUNITY TO RETHINK HIGH SCHOOL

1. **XQ's Insights**
   Explore articles that delve into pressing questions about today's high schools. Gain key insights to steer community discussions around how your schools can equip all students for college, career, and whatever the future may hold.

2. **Stories of High School Transformation**
   Learn how educators, students, families, and community members collaborate on meaningful changes to improve the student learning experience in public high schools across the nation.

3. **DC+XQ: Transforming a School District**
   Watch our video series following XQ's redesign process with the DC Public Schools. This partnership with the local community is making existing high schools more engaging and meaningful for all students.

Scan to view
XQ resources for families
& communities



Educators and adults in the Memphis community knew they needed to give students a seat at the table during the design process to make a high school that's more responsive to youth.

Use XQ's student-centered resources and become an active participant in your high school transformation journey. These tools will help guide you along the way.

CREATE A STUDENT-CENTERED CULTURE

1. **The Youth Voice Toolkit**
   Become a change-maker for improving your high school experience. This kit helps students build agency, consensus, and capacity to become case-makers and instrumental voices for transforming high school.

2. **Youth Voice Cards**
   Change the high school experience by making your voice heard. The Youth Voice Cards help you capture and amplify student voices through various topics and discussion points.

3. **Ladder of Youth Participation**
   Collaborate with adults to create a school where student voice is at the center of decision-making. This resource outlines different levels of student participation, allowing students, educators, and school leaders to assess and improve youth engagement within their schools.

Scan to view XQ resources for students

XQ Institute is the nation's leading organization dedicated to rethinking the high school experience so every student graduates ready to succeed in college, career, and real life.

XQ®

OUR MISSION

Our vision is for young people everywhere to have vibrant high schools where students can grow as civic participants, critical readers, proactive problem solvers, original thinkers, generous collaborators, and learners for life.

We work in communities throughout the country—with individual schools like Crosstown, school systems, and states—to help them dream big about what high school could be, turn their innovative ideas into action, and create more rigorous and equitable schools.

Because seeing is believing, we meet people where they are to share the importance and possibility of change through listening, learning, and multimedia storytelling—such as "The First Class" film.

Join the conversation with us **@XQAmerica** across social channels using **#TheFirstClassDoc** and **#RethinkHighSchool.**

Scan to visit
XQSuperSchool.org

TheFirstClass.org

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