# Rock Your Microschool

## A Project-Based, Multi-Age Microschool Blueprint

rock by rock

# "Reignite curiosity, celebrate purpose, and prepare students to lead thriving lives"

Dear Microschool Founders,

Curiosity is at the core of being human. From the moment we're born, we seek to explore, understand, and engage with the world around us. This instinct to question, solve problems, and make sense of the unfamiliar creates lifelong learners. When paired with purpose, it becomes even more powerful. Both students and educators long for this sense of purpose—the belief that what they do matters and the confidence to contribute meaningfully to their communities and the world.

Too often, our education system loses sight of this hunger for discovery. Instead of fostering deep learning that nurtures curiosity and creativity, traditional schools emphasize memorization, testing, and compliance. This stifles the joy of learning, leaving many students, families, and teachers disengaged and unprepared for a rapidly changing world.

Microschools offer a path to deep, real-world learning and better outcomes for kids. These innovative learning environments have the flexibility to break free from outdated routines and prioritize what matters most:

- **Joy**: Nurturing a love of learning through meaningful challenges.
- **Foundational Skills**: Building core skills like reading, writing, and math.
- **Applying Knowledge**: Using academics to solve real-world challenges.
- **Critical Thinking**: Analyzing, questioning, and innovating to tackle meaningful problems.
- **Life Habits**: Developing skills such as creativity, empathy, and a learner mindset.
- **Purpose and Confidence**: Connecting learning to life, discovering strengths, and realizing potential.
- **Agency**: Empowering students to take ownership of their learning.

Often, education focuses solely on foundational skills, overlooking how deep learning strengthens these skills by giving students a real purpose to master them. And the best way to bring deeper learning to life? **Project-based learning.**

At Rock by Rock, we've seen how microschools transform outcomes by combining deep learning with purposeful projects. Our *Rock Your Microschool Blueprint* offers a framework to create student-centered programs that build foundational skills, engage students in project-based learning, and maximize the potential of a multi-age classroom.

Together, let's reignite curiosity, inspire purpose, and prepare students to lead thriving lives. Let's champion this new way forward—for our kids, our schools, and the future.

Warm regards,

Jeff
Co-Founder, Rock by Rock

# Shaping MEANINGFUL Experiences

Microschools have the power to redefine education—embracing the flexibility to meet students where they are and creating spaces where learning is personalized, meaningful, and deeply connected to the real world. In multi-age, multi-ability classrooms, challenges become opportunities to build collaboration, creativity, and a culture of growth.

The Rock by Rock blueprint is designed to help you answer the big questions about your microschool's design:

**How do I meet the needs of all students in a mixed-age, mixed-ability classroom?**

**How can I provide individualized support while fostering collaboration and community?**

**What's the best way to balance foundational academic skills with creativity and deeper learning experiences?**

This blueprint isn't a one-size-fits-all guide—it's a resource to help founders dream, plan, and build. Each component—projects, core academics, enrichment, community meetings, goal teams, dream teams, and showcases—works together to create a holistic approach to education that brings deeper learning to life. By integrating foundational skills, fostering creativity, and building strong connections, this model provides a framework for meaningful learning experiences that prepare students for real-world challenges while celebrating their unique strengths. Use this blueprint as a starting point, adapting it to reflect the vision and values of your microschool. Let it guide you in designing a space where students not only learn but thrive.

# DEEPER Learning Aims

We know that deeper learning that prepares students to thrive in life means expanding the outcomes beyond reading and math standards. In our fast changing world core skills like reading, writing and math matter, but alone they are not enough. Now more than ever, students need a chance to apply those core skills to deep learning where they engage in critical thinking, problem solving, curiosity and creativity. That requires going deep, challenging kids to grapple, create and think. Deep learning is not only more memorable but also more engaging and empowering. In fact, when kids engage in deep learning they can grow both core academics and life habits more effectively than when they are taught in isolation. At Rock by Rock, we focus on fostering learning that emerges from the intersection of four key outcomes, creating a holistic approach that drives meaningful growth and success.

## THE STUDENT SUCCESS FRAMEWORK

# Community and Belonging

Students flourish in environments where they feel connected and valued. By prioritizing collaboration, inclusion, and shared purpose, education fosters relationships that build trust and mutual respect. Having a shared purpose and shared ownership over the community help all kids feel committed to ensuring everyone in the community thrives. From group projects to school-wide showcases, these experiences create a sense of belonging that helps students feel supported and inspired to reach their potential.

**Examples:**

- **Collaboration**
- **Recognizing perspectives**
- **Building relationships**
- **Shared goals**
- **Shared rituals**
- **Peer feedback**

# Purpose and Sense of Self

When students understand their strengths, passions, and values, they gain a sense of purpose that drives their learning and their lives. Reflection and goal-setting help students connect their daily efforts to their broader aspirations, giving meaning to their work. By aligning their learning with what truly matters to them, students are more motivated and engaged in their educational journey. This focus on purpose builds confidence and a sense of direction, empowering students to take ownership of their education and their futures.

**Examples:**

- **Passions & Purpose: Awareness of passions and interests**
- **Strengths: Awareness of strengths and areas of growth**
- **Emotions: Awareness of emotional impact on self and others**

# Strong Academics & Transferable Skills

Education must focus on core skills in reading and math while preparing students for life beyond school. Mastery of literacy and numeracy builds a foundation for analyzing information, solving problems, and communicating effectively. Project-based learning takes this foundation further, applying reading and math skills in meaningful, real-world contexts. Whether analyzing data to design solutions or using persuasive writing to advocate for change, students connect their learning to action and see how these critical skills make a difference.

**Examples:**

- **Reading + Math Growth**
- **Science and Social Studies knowledge & skills**
- **Defining problems**
- **Creating solutions & arguments**
- **Communicating effectively**

# Life Habits

Success in school and life is about more than academics. Students thrive when they cultivate essential habits like curiosity, creativity, empathy, courage, impact awareness, kinship, and a learner mindset. These habits help them ask thoughtful questions, collaborate with others, persist through challenges, and understand their role in the broader world. By fostering these traits, education becomes a journey of self-discovery and growth, preparing students to adapt and lead in an ever-changing environment.

**Examples:**

- **Creativity**
- **Curiosity**
- **Empathy**
- **Kinship**
- **Impact Awareness**
- **Courage**

# The Rock by Rock MODEL

The Rock by Rock model uses project-based learning as the foundation to achieve the four key student outcomes. Each component connects back to projects, equipping students to apply their skills to meaningful challenges.

## CORE ACADEMICS

*"Mastering reading, writing, and math skills makes me feel confident when applying them to my projects. These core skills give me the tools I need to tackle challenges and explore new ideas."*

## ENRICHMENT

*"Enrichment helps me uncover my strengths and apply them to enhance my projects. It also allows me to explore new interests and connect them to my learning."*

## PROJECTS

***"Projects make learning exciting because I get to solve real-world problems and see how what I learn can make a difference."***

## CONNECTION AND REFLECTION

*"Community Meetings, Goal Teams, and Dream Teams help me collaborate with others, share my progress, and stay accountable to my goals."*

## SHOWCASE

*"Showcasing my work helps me feel proud of what I've learned and excited to share it with others. It also inspires me to keep growing and take on new challenges."*

## AUTHENTIC ASSESSMENT

DEEPER LEARNING PORTFOLIO

***"My deeper learning portfolio helps me see how much I've grown. It lets me show my progress in reading and math, but also the creative and meaningful work I've done in projects."***

# PROJECTS

Project-based learning is at the heart of Rock by Rock's microschool model, making education relevant through real-world challenges. Students take on purposeful missions linking their learning to global issues, career skills, and personal growth. Projects also encourage the development of life habits such as curiosity and a learner mindset, equipping students with skills to navigate challenges effectively. These interdisciplinary tasks spark creativity, build problem-solving abilities, and encourage collaboration. Dedicated PBL time allows students to dive into meaningful work—like designing awareness campaigns through podcasts or weather reports—that integrates research, data analysis, and communication skills.

***"Projects make learning exciting because I get to solve real-world problems and see how what I learn can make a difference."***

# PROJECTS

**Meet the needs of mixed-age & mixed-ability classrooms by:**

- **Providing Flexible Grouping Opportunities:** Encourage collaboration by pairing older and younger students to learn from and support each other within projects.
- **Offering Scaffolded Tasks:** Assign tasks and activities tailored to students' individual abilities and goals ensuring everyone contributes meaningfully and receives the supports they need.

**Provide individualized support & collaboration by:**

- **Creating Personalized Roles in Projects:** Assign students tasks that match their strengths and goals while fostering teamwork and shared accountability.
- **Holding Regular Check-ins:** Use one-on-one or small group sessions to provide feedback, address challenges, and celebrate progress during project work.

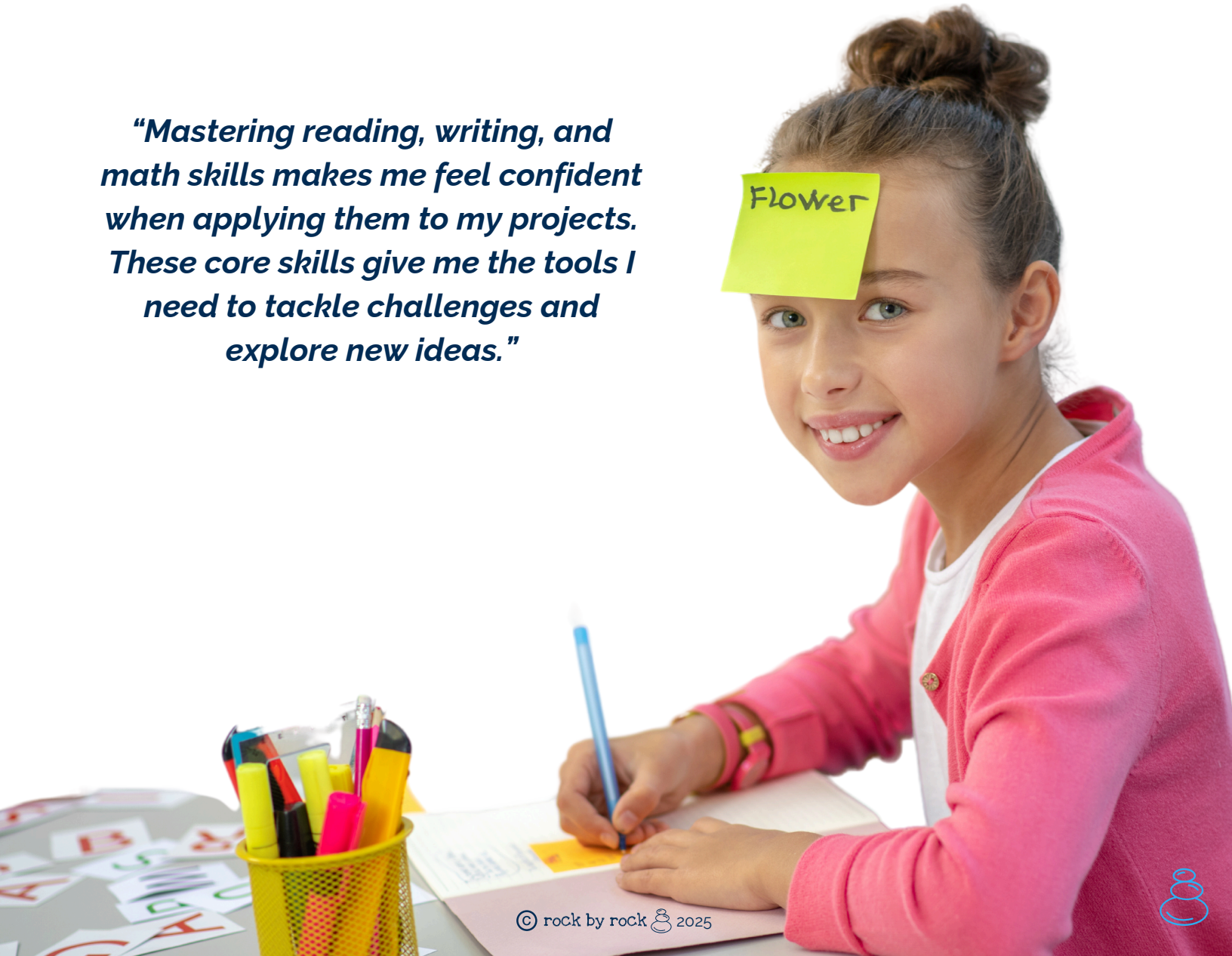
**Balance skills & creativity by:**

- **Embedding Core Academics in Projects:** Design tasks where reading, writing, and math skills are naturally applied to creative, real-world challenges.
- **Incorporating Hands-On Activities:** Engage students with tactile, creative tasks like building models or designing campaigns that apply academic knowledge in innovative ways.

# CORE ACADEMICS

Building strong foundations in reading, writing, and math is essential for student success and is a cornerstone of the Rock by Rock microschool model. These core academic skills are the building blocks students need to access deeper learning and apply their knowledge to meaningful, real-world challenges. By integrating these core academics into the heart of project-based learning, students not only master essential skills but also discover their relevance in solving problems, expressing ideas, and thriving in a collaborative community.

***"Mastering reading, writing, and math skills makes me feel confident when applying them to my projects. These core skills give me the tools I need to tackle challenges and explore new ideas."***



# CORE ACADEMICS

**Meet the needs of mixed-age & mixed-ability classrooms by:**

- **Providing Flexible Grouping Opportunities:** Group students by skill level or learning needs rather than age for targeted instruction and peer collaboration.
- **Using Differentiated Instruction:** Tailor activities and materials to individual skill levels, ensuring all students are appropriately challenged and supported.

**Provide individualized support & collaboration by:**

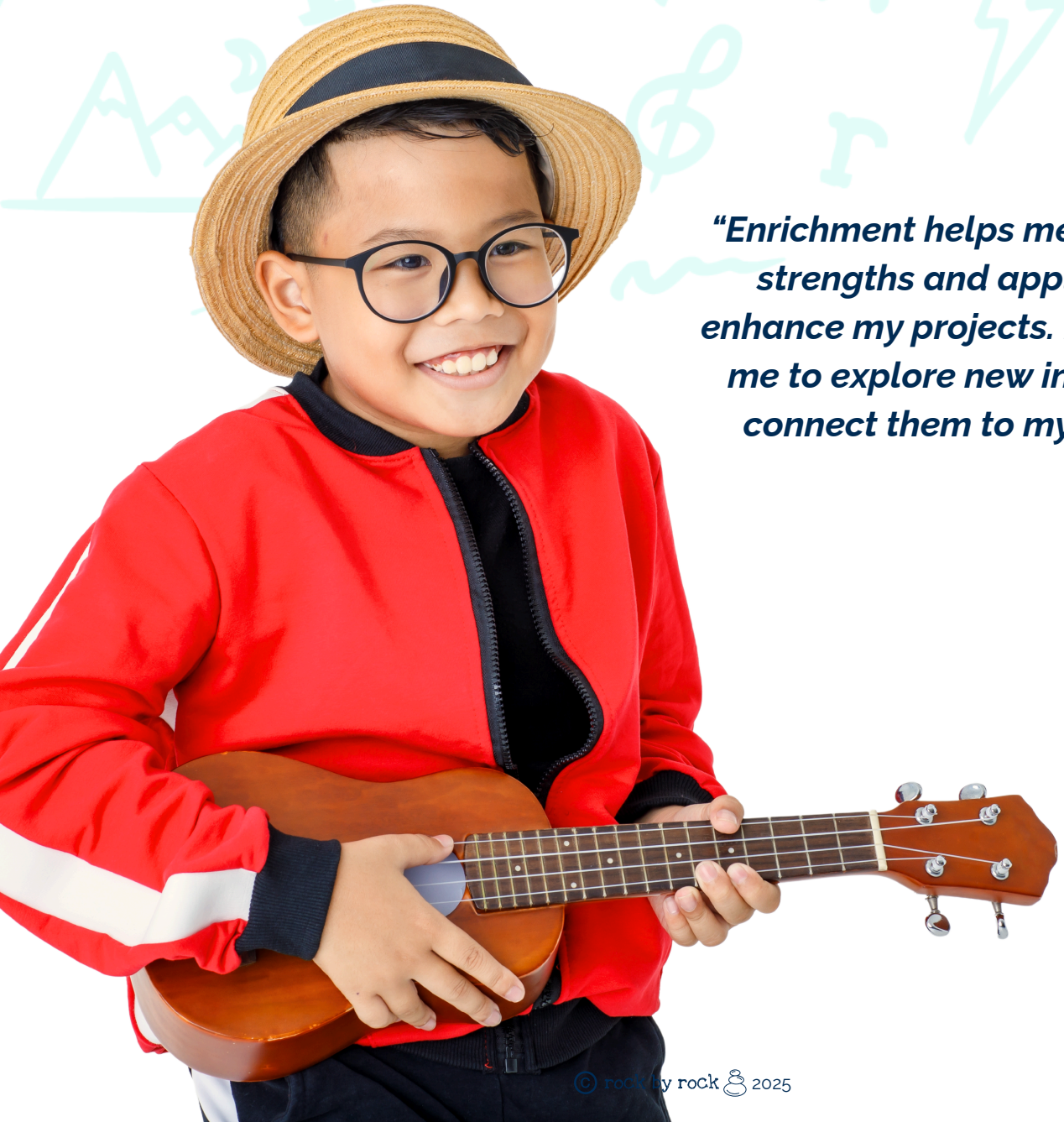
- **Using Small Group Instruction:** Focused teacher-led sessions address specific learning needs in reading, writing, or math with individualized feedback.
- **Incorporating Adaptive Learning Tools:** Programs like *i-Ready* offer personalized lessons, allowing students to work independently while teachers provide targeted support.

**Balance skills & creativity by:**

- **Integrating Hands-On Activities:** Encourage students to apply core academic skills like math or writing in creative tasks, such as designing presentations or crafting stories.
- **Blending Skills with Project Work:** Embed foundational academics into projects, like budgeting for a sustainability initiative or writing persuasive essays, to link learning with exploration and innovation.

# ENRICHMENT

Enrichment opportunities in the Rock by Rock microschool model enhance project-based learning by helping students explore new skills and interests while connecting their passions to real-world challenges. Activities like coding, art, and physical education allow students to build confidence and creativity, supporting their growth within and beyond projects. These experiences, including workshops with community members or field trips, inspire curiosity and deepen students' engagement with meaningful, hands-on learning.



***"Enrichment helps me uncover my strengths and apply them to enhance my projects. It also allows me to explore new interests and connect them to my learning."***

# ENRICHMENT

**Meet the needs of mixed-age & mixed-ability classrooms by:**

- **Offering Flexible Participation Opportunities**: Design activities with multiple entry points, allowing all students to engage at their level while contributing meaningfully.
- **Encouraging Cross-Age Collaboration**: Facilitate group work where older students mentor younger peers in activities like music or science, fostering community and shared learning.

**Provide individualized support & collaboration by:**

- **Creating Personalized Enrichment Paths:** Let students choose activities that align with their interests and strengths, like coding or physical education, promoting growth and peer collaboration.
- **Hosting Community-Led Workshops**: Invite experts or parents to lead sessions on diverse topics, offering unique perspectives and shared learning opportunities.

**Balance skills & creativity by:**

- **Engaging in Hands-On Exploration**: Activities like theater or model-building combine creativity with practical applications, such as writing scripts or measuring dimensions.
- **Connecting to Ongoing Projects**: Link enrichment activities to interdisciplinary projects, integrating academic skills and creative thinking for deeper learning.

# Showcase

Showcases aligned with projects are central to the Rock by Rock microschool model, celebrating student achievements and strengthening community connections. They provide students opportunities to present their learning, reflect on growth, and take pride in accomplishments. By involving families and community members, showcases foster relationships, make learning visible, and build argumentation and communication skills.

***"Showcasing my work helps me feel proud of what I've learned and excited to share it with others. It also inspires me to keep growing and take on new challenges."***

# Showcase

**Meet the needs of mixed-age & mixed-ability classrooms by:**

- **Encouraging Peer Collaboration:** Showcase presentations allow students of varying abilities to work together, with older or more advanced students mentoring younger peers to enhance their learning.
- **Empowering Individual Goal Setting:** Students use rubrics and reflections to set goals for projects, ensuring their work aligns with interests and learning needs while fostering self-directed growth.

**Provide individualized support & collaboration by:**

- **Facilitating Reflection and Feedback:** Students use rubrics and reflections during showcases to assess their progress and collaborate with peers and families to set future goals.
- **Highlighting Unique Strengths:** Showcases are designed to celebrate individual achievements within a group context, building both personal confidence and a sense of community.

**Balance skills & creativity by:**

- **Incorporating Student Choice:** Students select project topics or how to demonstrate learning, enabling personalized and meaningful expressions of understanding.
- **Blending Academic Skills with Artistic Expression:** Activities combine foundational skills like research with creative outputs like art or storytelling, connecting knowledge to real-world applications.

# CONNECTION & REFLECTION

Daily community meetings, Weekly Goal Teams, and Quarterly Dream Team meetings all work together to help students reach their project goals, grow academically, and stay connected to their bigger dreams. Daily community meetings build a sense of belonging and shared purpose through team-building, celebrations, and problem-solving, creating a supportive space where students can build relationships and practice empathy. Weekly Goal Teams give students a chance to set personal goals, reflect on their progress, and celebrate wins with peers and teachers, helping them stay accountable, focused, and in charge of their learning. These sessions not only focus on academic goals but also help students reflect on and set intentions for building life habits, such as creativity and kinship. Quarterly Dream Team meetings bring students, families, and teachers together for student-led reflections that highlight growth, set new goals, and strengthen the connection between home and school. Together, these practices create a balance of connection and reflection that keeps students inspired and on track.

***"Community Meetings, Goal Teams, and Dream Teams help me collaborate with others, share my progress, and stay accountable to my goals."***

# CONNECTION & REFLECTION

**Meet the needs of mixed-age & mixed-ability classrooms by:**

- **Fostering Inclusive Environments:** By encouraging collaboration among different ages and abilities, students learn from each other's strengths, creating a rich learning community.

**Provide individualized support & collaboration by:**

- **Strengthening Relationships:** By connecting students with teachers and peers who support their unique needs, we cultivate a supportive network that encourages growth.
- **Tailoring Support Through Goal Teams:** Weekly Goal Teams provide a space for students to set personal goals and receive feedback from peers and teachers, ensuring individualized attention while fostering accountability and collaboration.

**Balance skills & creativity by:**

- **Empowering Goal-Oriented Reflection:** Using rubrics and self-reflections, students set goals across academics, projects, enrichment, and life habits, fostering ownership and supporting deeper learning.
- **Integrating Personal and Shared Goals:** Quarterly Dream Team meetings connect academic growth with creative expression, blending personal achievements with meaningful, community-driven goals.

# DEEPER LEARNING PORTFOLIOS

Portfolios are at the heart of our model, serving as the primary way students demonstrate their progress and growth over time. These dynamic tools allow students to showcase their achievements in foundational areas like reading and math, while also highlighting more holistic work, particularly writing and projects completed during project-based learning. Portfolios celebrate the full spectrum of student learning, blending academic growth with creativity and real-world application. Portfolio-driven deep learning is centered on empowering students in three essential ways:

- **Awareness:** Students are encouraged to recognize their strengths and identify areas for growth, fostering a clear understanding of their personal learning journey.
- **Reflection:** Through guided self-assessment and feedback from caring adults, students reflect on their progress, evaluating what they've accomplished and setting goals for the future.
- **Growth Opportunities:** Portfolios provide students with the chance to revisit, refine, and practice skills in areas where they need improvement, ensuring continuous learning and mastery.

# modes of ASSESSMENT

## DIAGNOSTIC ASSESSMENTS (PRE-PROJECT)

**"Diagnostic assessments help me see where I am starting and what I need to work on. It's like a map that shows me what skills to focus on next."**

Diagnostic assessments help teachers understand where students are in reading, writing, and math. These tools identify strengths and areas for growth, so instruction can be tailored to meet individual needs. Portfolios can include starting points like math assessments, reading benchmarks, or writing samples, creating a snapshot of where students begin their learning journeys.

## FORMATIVE ASSESSMENTS (DURING-PROJECT)

**"Formative assessments let me see how much I'm growing. Reflecting on my work and getting feedback from others helps me improve and stay on track with my goals."**

Formative assessments track progress as students grow academically and build life habits. Tools like rubrics, self-reflections, and teacher feedback keep students engaged and help adjust instruction along the way. Portfolios can showcase drafts, reflections, and feedback, giving a clear view of how far a student has come and where they're headed next.

## SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENTS (POST-PROJECT)

**"Summative assessments let me show what I've learned and how I can use it. Sharing my final projects helps me feel proud of how far I've come."**

Summative assessments look at how well students have mastered skills and applied them in real-world contexts. Rock by Rock rubrics and reflections measure outcomes like collaboration, academic skills, and communication. Portfolios enhance this process by including final projects, essays, and presentations, paired with reflections that show what students achieved and how they grew.

# Ways to SCHEDULE

Microschools have the flexibility to create dynamic schedules tailored to their unique communities. Whether students attend five days a week or follow a hybrid schedule, such as three days in-person, microschools can balance core academics, project-based learning, and enrichment while fostering a sense of community. Below are two example schedules designed to accommodate diverse needs while incorporating the core components of the Rock by Rock Microschool Model.

## Sample Schedule 1

| Time | Activity |
|---|---|
| 8:30-8:45 | **Community Meeting**: Team-building activities, celebrations, and setting the day's intentions. |
| 8:45-9:45 | **Core Academics: Math and Reading:** Rotating small groups with instruction while others work independently. |
| 9:45-10:15 | **Morning Break**: Free play, snack, or quiet time to reset for the next part of the day. |
| 10:15-11:30 | **Project-Based Learning**: Independent or collaborative work on interdisciplinary Rock by Rock projects. |
| 11:30-12:15 | **Lunch and Free Time**: Social time, outdoor play, and time to recharge. |
| 12:15-1:00 | **Enrichment**: Activities such as yoga, coding, or field trips to local museums or parks. |
| 1:00-1:45 | **Core Academics: Writing**: Focused instruction on skills like sentence structure. |
| 1:45-2:30 | **Flexible Block**: Time for assessments, portfolio work, or showcase preparation. |
| 2:30-3:00 | **Closing Circle**: Reflect on the day and set intentions for tomorrow. |

## Sample Schedule 2

| Time | Activity |
|---|---|
| 8:30-8:45 | **Community Meeting**: Team-building activities, celebrations, and setting the day's intentions. |
| 8:45-10:15 | **Core Academics: Math, Reading, and Writing:** Rotating groups focus on foundational skills while others work independently. |
| 10:15-10:30 | **Morning Break**: Free play, snack, or quiet time to reset for the next part of the day. |
| 10:30-10:50 | **PBL Connection Time**: Teacher-led session to connect morning academics to project-based learning tasks. |
| 10:50-12:15 | **Project-Based Learning**: Independent or collaborative work on interdisciplinary Rock by Rock projects. |
| 12:15-1:00 | **Lunch and Free Time**: Social time, outdoor play, and time to recharge. |
| 1:00-2:00 | **Enrichment**: Activities such as art or physical education. Students can also continue research related to PBL topics. |
| 2:00-2:45 | **Flexible Block**: Time for assessments, portfolio work, or showcase preparation. |

# YOUR journey starts now

Your journey as a microschool founder begins with a powerful vision, and the Rock by Rock Microschool Model is here to support you every step of the way. By combining a focus on community, personalized academics, project-based learning, and authentic assessments, this model provides the building blocks for creating a school that inspires students to learn and grow.

But we know founding a microschool isn't easy. That's why Rock by Rock offers a range of resources to meet your unique needs. From 1-on-1 coaching calls to toolkits, webinars, and even a podcast, we're here to help you navigate the challenges and opportunities of starting your school. Together, we can create learning environments where students thrive—not just academically, but in every aspect of their lives.

## LET'S BUILD SOMETHING EXTRAORDINARY TOGETHER!

# Want support bringing deeper learning to life—igniting engagement and saving time?


## Try Rock by Rock for FREE for one month.

Our easy-to-use content platform has dozens of highly engaging, flexible, immersive projects designed to help empower your K-5 learners and spark their thirst for discovery.  Each fully planned project combes fun interactive lessons with hands-on materials and activities, guest experts, virtual field trips, and more.

Our topics range from endangered species to food insecurity, recycling to gaming, extreme weather to exploring space. Designed with flexibility in mind, Rock by Rock projects work in any/all contexts—from whole-class, small- group and self directed, to classroom, hybrid, virtual and asynchronous—easily integrating into existing programs.

**Learn more at rockbyrock.com**

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