The Place-Based Education model connects learning with the ecological, cultural, and economic context and community that surround it to increase student engagement, boost academic outcomes, and impact communities.

| OVERVIEW |

Place-based education (PBE) is anytime, anywhere learning that leverages the power of place and connects learners to communities and the world around them. Teton Science Schools’ Place Network defines “place” as the ecological, cultural, and economic aspects that make up a community. Research in PBE indicates that a student’s sense of self, motivation to learn, and community engagement are enhanced through meaningful interactions with immediate physical and cultural environments. This is because students learn best when they are able to situate their learning in a relevant context. The Place Network brings Teton Science Schools’ innovative teaching practices, enduring relationships, integrated curriculum, and global awareness to students and teachers anywhere in the world.

The PBE model reaches over 4000 students and 100 educators in 21 schools in rural communities across the country and worldwide, in such places as Bhutan, where students experience greater engagement, academic outcomes, and sense of belonging. The Place Network offers a variety of resources and supports, including cohort learning communities, one-on-one coaching and consulting, professional development, and resource toolkits to schools interested in implementing the PBE model. ➤ Teton Science Schools Place Network Overview
**What Makes This Model Innovative?**

- **Relevance**
  Students have meaningful interactions with their immediate physical and cultural environments, making learning relevant and enhancing a student’s sense of self, motivation to learn, and community engagement.

- **Customization**
  PBE is learner-centered and personalized. It leverages the power of place, not just technology, to allow students to progress at a pace and in a way that maximizes their own learning.

- **Anytime, Anywhere Learning**
  PBE expands the definition of a classroom to include community experts, experiences, and places, reinforcing the belief that learning can happen anytime, anywhere with teachers, community members, and other important figures in a young person’s life all playing important roles.

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## DESIGN

### Goals
PBE aims to increase levels of engagement, boost academic outcomes, and impact communities, both short- and long-term.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Engagement</th>
<th>Students are more engaged owing to increased interest in the curriculum. Long term, students believe that they have the skills and resources to accomplish goals and build agency.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic Outcomes</td>
<td>Student learning increases owing to increased relevance of curriculum, which is engaging and connected to the community. This contributes to advancing equity by ensuring all students have access to the social capital and tools to make a difference.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Community Impact</td>
<td>Students understand self and community at a higher level, thus positively impacting the community at all scales. This ultimately leads to students becoming engaged citizens and seeing themselves as part of a thriving and vibrant community.</td>
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Experiences
In PBE, the learner is at the center, engagement matters, and relevance is crucial. PBE is rooted in the six principles of a place-based approach. These principles underpin and permeate all experiences. ➤An Inside Look at Teton Science Schools  ➤What is Place-Based Education?

Local to Global Context
With local to global context, local learning serves as a model for understanding global challenges, opportunities, and connections. This is rooted in the idea that “our local actions and decisions [are] inextricably connected with a broader global context. A global ethic is based on a respect for human rights and self-determination that transcend specific local, national, or regional agendas. This perspective involves an openness toward divergent cultural experiences and diverse ways of knowing and experiencing” (Facing the Future, 2019).

The model (right) shows how understanding “place” begins with understanding self. This begins with encouraging students to reflect on and better understand themselves and their role in the community. Definitions of place then expand to schools, community, nation, and the world. By adhering to this concentric-rings model, learners continue to experience relevance as the scale moves farther and farther “out.” Places can be interpreted through economic, sociopolitical, and ecological lenses as students move from local to global—allowing for deeper transfer, application, and understanding of content and skills. ➤Local to Global Context Summary

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Learner-Centered

When learning is learner-centered, learning is personally relevant to students and enables student agency. This allows students to influence their learning through sharing their interests and making choices about their learning. Students choose what and how they will learn, as well as how they will assess their own learning. Curriculum and projects develop from the interests, skills, needs, and experiences of the students. The teacher provides students with multiple avenues through which to engage in learning and demonstrate their understanding. The teacher serves as a guide or facilitator to learning. 📩 Learner-Centered Summary

Inquiry-Based

Inquiry-based instruction is a student-centered approach that triggers curiosity. Learning is grounded in students observing, formulating relevant questions, making predictions, and collecting data to understand the world through ecological, cultural, and economic lenses. Data collection is then used to refine relevant questions and predictions. 📩 Inquiry-Based Summary

Design Thinking

Design thinking provides a systematic approach for students to problem solve and make meaningful impact in communities through the curriculum, and consists of four discrete steps: Define, Generate, Create, and Evaluate. Design thinking can start with service learning projects in school, where students are given a problem and constraints, then come to a solution and take action to improve their community. Design thinking can progress, giving students greater ownership of the process. 📩 Design Thinking Summary

- **Define**: Define the challenge or opportunity to be addressed. Core tools include: listen and empathize, capture findings, take a stand with a point of view, and create an opportunity statement (also called a driving question in project-based learning).
- **Generate**: Generate multiple solutions to address the opportunity statement. Core tools include: sorting and clumping, storyboards.
- **Create**: Build a usable prototype to allow your audience to experience your first solution. It should be at the minimum viable product level.
- **Evaluate**: Test your solution with the user(s). What did you learn? Return to Define, Generate, or Create based on what you learned.
Community as Classroom

Community as classroom expands the definition of the classroom beyond the four walls to include community experts, experiences, and places. Community as classroom can be carried out in three venues for learning:

- Bringing the community into the classroom through guest speakers and content;
- Bringing the students into the community on learning journeys;
- Simply going outside the classroom to do something you could have just done inside.

These venues develop strong relationships between students and their community. Breaking down barriers between the classroom and community enhances students’ appreciation for the natural world, as well as their interest in engaging in improving both community vitality and environmental quality. Emphasizing hands-on learning grounded in community increases academic achievement, develops stronger student commitment to community, and encourages the development of active, contributing citizens.  

Interdisciplinary Approach

With an interdisciplinary approach the curriculum matches the real world, where traditional subject area content, skills, and dispositions are taught through an integrated, interdisciplinary, and frequently, project-based approach where all learners are accountable and challenged. There is authentic integration of subject domains, as students learn and apply skills from multiple domains in projects that solve a genuine community need, problem, or opportunity. Lastly, teachers work together to support students across domains through instruction, coaching, and assessment.

Supporting Structures

The model can be integrated into a school’s existing overall model but will require shifts in instruction, culture, adult learning, and community partnerships.

Teaching and learning must be personalized, project-based, driven by student inquiry, and grounded in the six place-based principles.

Implementing the PBE model is supported by using projects as a primary modality for learning. Projects provide the context for design thinking, inquiry, interdisciplinary learning, and exploring one’s community locally and globally. Projects are driven by student interests, and needs unfold by traveling into the field, leveraging community experts or families, designing and iterating, and making the world a better place. Project-based learning
INSTRUCTION, & ASSESSMENT

enables collaboration around relevant, complex, and impactful learning experiences. ➤ Student Projects ➤ Project-Based Learning Summary ➤ Student Project Hub

In addition, learning should be personalized by giving students voice and choice and allowing students to progress at a pace and in a way that maximizes learning and promotes agency. Assessments link learning goals with learning experiences in meaningful and empowering ways that allow students to advance upon proficiency, independent of age, time spent, or grade level within system constraints regarding time and pacing.

PBE is curriculum agnostic. The principles and strategies can be used to enhance and adapt any existing curriculum. For example, The Mountain Academy Upper School team adapted a place-based unit over multiple years to integrate more disciplines and more place-based principles. ➤ Building a Place-Based Unit

School culture must be intentionally built around community values.

Community values are the foundation of daily intentional culture and guide strategy and decision making long-term. Each learning community has a unique set of values to shape a positive and inclusive culture. Because culture is set by community values, this should look different across each school community. Read an example of how Teton helped build intentional culture in Punakha, Bhutan ➤ Intentional Culture.

School Community & Culture

Social-emotional skills and character traits and leadership building are also prioritized. Students collaborate together to learn about what’s interesting and relevant to them and build greater connection to community, each other, and personal agency. Students’ development of SEL skills are supported through program components such as goal-setting, advisory, and learner profiles.

Adult learning must be aligned to and modeled after the type of learning experiences they seek to create for students.

There is often a disconnect between the learning experiences educators receive and those they seek to create for students. Teacher preparation and professional learning can be aligned to—and modeled after—the types of deeper learning environments they also seek to create for students. Teton uses five key principles for project-based learning preparation and professional development:

1. Place-based and job embedded: just-in-time, learn by doing;
2. Blended: online and face-to-face;
3. Personalized: individualized course of study;

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4. Competency-based: show what you know, progress on mastery;

Teton supports the professional development of teachers to aid in the implementation of PBE through an intentional scaffolded progression: (1) inquire into place, (2) identify challenges, (3) revise & implement curriculum, (4) build student ownership & skills, (5) collaborate with peers through an interdisciplinary approach, and (6) measure outcomes & successes.

Place-Based Professional Learning Guide

**Schedules must block time for interdisciplinary, place-based projects.**

The schedule does not need to be modified in a particular way to enable placed-based learning. However, protected time in the schedule for interdisciplinary, place-based projects is essential.

At Mountain Academy, the schedule includes core blocks for literacy and math in the morning. Then the afternoon includes time for interdisciplinary projects where student interests drive their application of learning from across subject areas in authentic, relevant project-based learning.

Sample Schedule

**Teaching and learning must extend beyond the four walls of the classroom and include the community and community members.**

Each stakeholder—learners, parents, educators, graduate students, or community members—has an essential role in positively impacting local places and making PBE come to life. Communities serve as learning ecosystems for the school, where local and regional experts, experiences, and places are part of the expanded definition of a classroom. Schools build reciprocal relationships to impact the community and enable immersive student learning.

**Place-based education must be tied to the place learning is happening in, but this can be any place.**

PBE can happen anywhere—not only outside—because it centers *place*, not just *venue*. The key is to make place—meaning the ecological, economic, and cultural conditions in a specific context—highly relevant to what the students are learning and experiencing.

Space & Facilities

While learning does happen in the traditional classroom, it is often extended to other spaces such as the outdoors, community organizations and spaces, at home, online, and more. For example, students may go
outside for a reader’s workshop lesson, or to spend a day visiting a local bike shop, or an entire course—like Farm and Garden—may take place outside. [5 Places Where Placed-Based Learning is Possible]

While a key emphasis of PBE is to extend learning outside the classroom, it’s also important to consider the design of the classroom itself. The physical space of the classroom can, and should, be designed to be a more learner-centered environment. [Designing Learner-Centered Environments]

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**IMPLEMENTATION**

**Supports Offered**
The Teton Science Schools’ Place Network offers the following supports to help you implement their model.

**Place Network Partnership**

*Cost Associated*

As Place Network partners, rural schools and districts have the opportunity to immerse themselves in a multi-year, place-based, professional development experience. This includes on-site school visits, virtual workshops, shared online learning communities, sample curriculum, and leadership engagement. [Place Network Brochure]

- School build + launch: Partnership with new school teams to design, build, and launch a Place Network School. Tools and structures are in place for an accelerated launch.
- School transformation: Partnership with existing schools to implement the Place Network School model. Virtual consulting, tools, structures, and on-site coaching and strategy sessions support implementation.

**Resources**

*Free*

Teton Science Schools and The Place Network share a plethora of resources to learn more about and implement place-based learning, from their white papers to their blog.

**Express Interest**

Access Now

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Reach

21 Schools in Network
4000+ Students
100+ Educators
100% Rural

Impact

PBE students are more engaged owing to increased interest in the curriculum.
- 3rd-5th graders are in the 80th percentile nationally in school engagement (using Panorama’s 2 million student database). 6th-12th graders showed a 2% point increase in school engagement in 2020-21 over 2019-20.

Learning increases owing to increased relevance of curriculum, which is engaging and connected to the community.
- All schools in The Place Network are performing at or above the district mean in math and science proficiency.
- All but one Place Network school is performing at or above the district mean in ELA proficiency.

PBE allows students to understand self and community at a higher level, positively impacting the community at all scales.
- School Belonging results for 3rd-5th graders (fall 2020) were in the 90th percentile nationally. In addition, all surveyed constructs with national norms were in the 60th-80th percentile nationally.
- 6th-12th graders showed gains in School Safety, School Climate, and School Engagement (improvement over the 2019-20 school year, surveyed before the COVID-19 pandemic).
- School Safety results for 6th-12th graders (fall 2020) were in the 90th percentile.

Students in PBE make gains beyond academics—they also show gains in social emotional skills.
- 3rd-5th graders showed growth on three out of four SEL constructs in 2020-21 (Social Awareness, Growth Mindset, and Self-efficacy, no change in Self-Management). In addition, all surveyed constructs were in the 60th-80th percentile nationally.
- 6th-12th graders showed gains in Self-Management and Social Awareness (improvement over the 2019-20 school year, surveyed before the COVID-19 pandemic).
Our work with TSS and the Place Network has benefited our teachers and students greatly... One class is in the process of converting a large section of their school yard to prairie. This was an unused piece of land that the district was just paying to be mowed. They interviewed and surveyed stakeholders, brought in experts and proposed a plan to district leaders. This is a multiyear project, and students are devoted to it. At the end of year 1 they talked with the teaching team they would have next year and asked them to allow them to continue their work on their prairie project the following year. They planted the seed for their prairie this year. When they graduate from this school next year they should have a prairie growing... [Students] talk about how school is different and it is better. That is powerful and it gives me joy to know that our younger students think this is just what school is.

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RESOURCES

Teton Science Schools Place Network
An Overview of Teton Science Schools Place Network, which supports schools communities to re-imagine rural futures.

What is Place-Based Education and Why Does it Matter?
An overview of Place-Based Education and its benefits.

An Inside Look at Teton Science Schools
An overview of Teton Science Schools Place-Based Education Model, which inspires curiosity, engagement and leadership.

Local to Global Context
Learner-Centered
Inquiry-Based
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<td>Project Based Learning at University Charter School, a Place Network Partner</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Project Based Learning" /> Project Based Learning An overview of project-based learning in place-based education.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student Project Hub</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Student Project" /> A hub of example place-based projects across various grade levels.</td>
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<td>Building a Place-Based Unit That Checks All of the Boxes</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Building a Place-Based Unit" /> A blog post about how the Mountain Academy team adapted a place-based unit over multiple years to integrate more disciplines and more place-based principles.</td>
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<td>Quick Start Guide to Place-Based Professional Learning</td>
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**Sample Schedule**
A sample schedule from Mountain Academy, which includes core blocks for literacy and math and dedicated time for interdisciplinary projects.

**5 Places Where Place-Based Learning is Possible**
A blog post with ideas for where place-based learning can happen, to help get you started.

**Designing Learner-Centered Classrooms Environments**
A blog post on how and why to design classrooms to be a more learner-centered environment.

**Quick Start Guide to Place-Based Education**
A guide to get started with implementing place-based education.

**Readiness Assessment**
This community reflection and leadership evaluation helps schools to determine their readiness to adopt the model.

**Place Network Brochure**
A brochure about the Place Network including their case for change, an overview of PBE, and partnership commitments.