



Tailored Learning:



Defining and Identifying
Personalized Success for
North Carolina's Students

WELCOME TO THE LAB!

March 23, 2026

SAS Institute | Cary, NC

From Conversation to Action: Why Tailored Learning, Why Now?



Brenda Berg

President &. CEO, BEST NC

**NORTH CAROLINA
EDUCATION
INNOVATION**

LAB

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NCPFP

STRONG LEADERS = STRONG SCHOOLS

 ADVANCED
TEACHING ROLES

TEACH
NC.ORG

NC  STRIDE

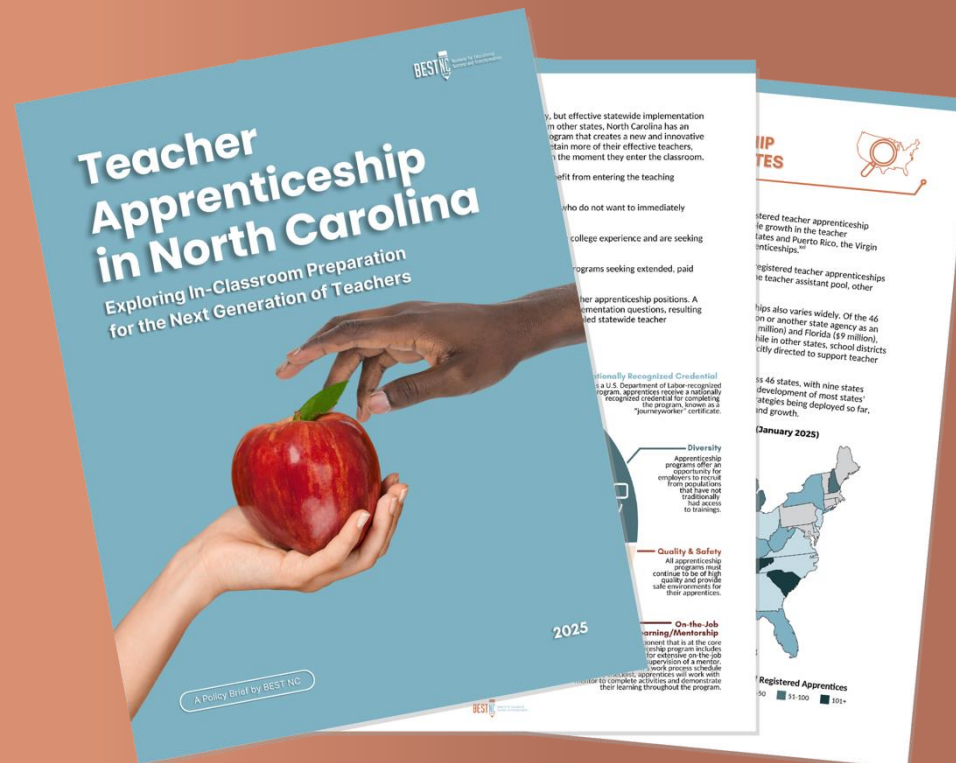
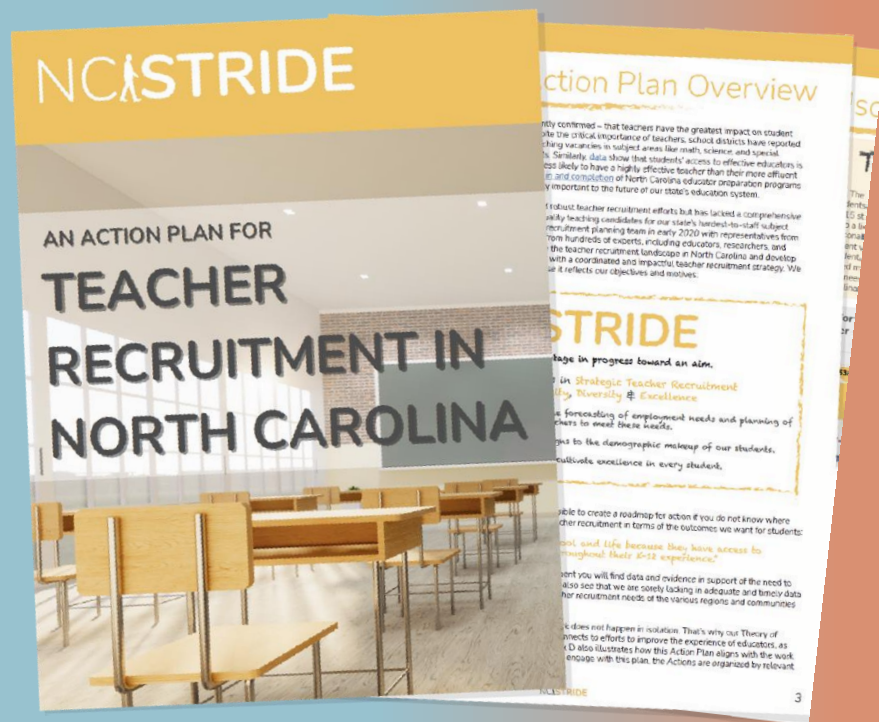
Download the Action Plan



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Download the Policy Brief



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TeachReadyNC

A Bold New Teacher Apprenticeship Initiative



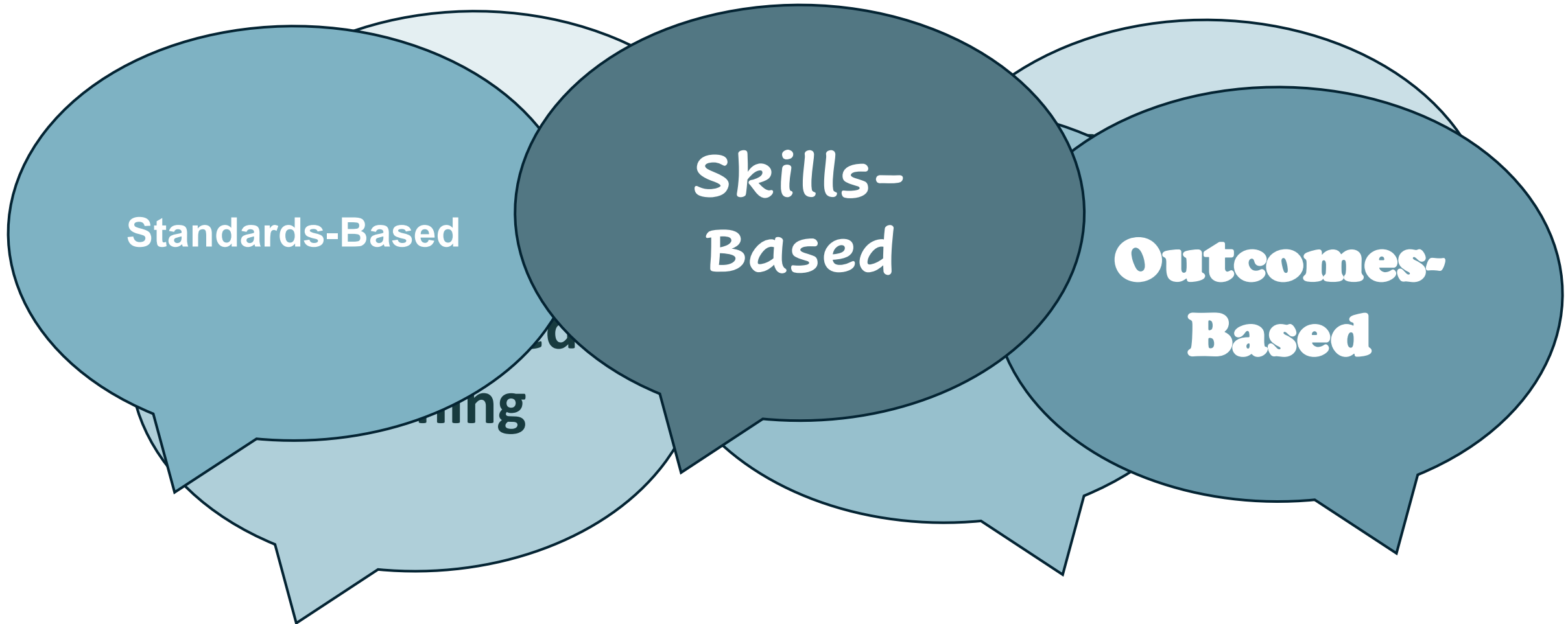


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What Is Tailored Learning?



What Is Tailored Learning?



Tailored Learning













**Where Each
Students Is**



**Where Everyone
Is Going**



**The Barriers
In the Way**

The Current System is Built on Averages

- Age-based grade levels
- Standard pacing guides
- Uniform semester timelines
- Credits earned via time, not mastery

**STUDENTS DO NOT LEARN
AT THE SAME PACE**

Things to Consider

Are "College-Ready Standards" the Right Bar?

In our research, we've used a college and career readiness against which we assessed practices.

We believe that bar is the what students should be able to do. Standards are not curricular example, identify an explicit

When Isaac walks across the stage to collect his high school diploma, with his family cheering him on, it will not be an accomplishment he takes for granted.

THE OPPORTUNITY MYTH

What Students Can Show Us About How School Is Letting Them Down –and How to Fix It

3-5 Grade Levels Within a Single Classroom

JOHNS HOPKINS SCHOOL OF EDUCATION | Institute for Education Policy

Automatic Enrollment in Advanced Courses: A Bipartisan Approach to Excellence and Equity in K-12 Schools
Jonathan A. Plucker, Brenda Berg, and Heena Kuwayama¹

Automatic enrollment is a straightforward education reform that facilitates both educational excellence and equity in K-12 schools. By automatically placing highly qualified students in advanced coursework, this low-cost, bi-partisan strategy creates opportunities for high achievement for all students, with low-income, rural and small town, and underrepresented minority students especially appearing to benefit.

Many high-performing students are not receiving advanced learning opportunities, even when there is clear evidence that they are ready to learn at higher levels (Gleason et al., 2017). This is especially true for low-income, rural, Hispanic, Black, and Native American students. Recent research shows there are many such students, leading to a chronic underchallenging of many of our brightest children (Peters et al., 2019). As a result, these students are less likely to excel academically and be ready for post-secondary education and the workforce.

In response to this problem, the strategy of "automatic enrollment" was developed. Also known as auto-, mandatory, or opt-out enrollment, the concept is straightforward: Students who perform at advanced levels in their classes are automatically enrolled in advanced courses for the following academic year. Auto-enrollment can be implemented in many ways, but the basic mechanism is not complicated: If a student shows evidence they are working at an advanced level, they are subsequently provided with advanced learning opportunities.

As obvious as this sounds, it is not the reality for many American students. Access to challenging coursework is often optional or even discouraged – if the student's school even offers advanced courses in a particular subject.

Although direct evidence of positive learning outcomes is needed, auto-enrollment has considerable theoretical support from research on acceleration, equity, and universal screening. A handful of districts and states are considering or have recently created auto-enrollment policies, but

over than those for 8th, 10th, lower rates in 6th and 7th grade lets offer advanced courses to middle school grade level. Possible reasons, for instance, in rural schools, there may be very could access these courses, ing to staff, especially in the consistently elevated

is may be result of several 75 choosing to focus at

having passed its automatic enrollment law with unanimous legislative support in 2018.

he state's experience is also consistent to national states about advanced enrollment – which seeks excellence and equity the opportunity – stands in sharp contrast. School districts around the country that are reducing or even eliminating access to advanced math are the same of equity (see [Ludwin, 2023](#) and [Ludwin, 2023](#)). North Carolina's an

on Prior Year Grade

78 88

2022-2023 2023-2024

Sources: NC DPI, 2022, 2023

Significant Increases in Enrollment When Readiness for Rigor is Determined Objectively

¹Jonathan Plucker is Professor of Education at Johns Hopkins University, where Heena Kuwayama is a graduate student in Education Policy. Brenda Berg is President and CEO of BEST NC. The authors are grateful for the input of Sneha Shah-Coltrane, Beth Cross, & Stephanie Cyrus of the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, Christopher Ashley Benner at the Institute for Education Policy, and David Steiner at the Institute for Education Policy.

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Lessons from Other States

- **2009:** Only a handful of states providing flexibility around demonstrating proficiency.
- **2012:** Nearly two dozen states have proposed policy to expand the definitions and requirements around demonstrated proficiency.
- **2019:** All 50 states have some form of enabling policy, with 17 categorized as “Advanced,” 14 as “Developing,” and 18 as “Emerging.”

Lessons from Other States

StateofCBE.org



Recent Efforts in North Carolina



**NC STATE
UNIVERSITY**



NORTH CAROLINA
DIGITAL
LEARNING INITIATIVE

North Carolina Department of
PUBLIC INSTRUCTION



spark
NC



**2 Second
Mile**

Missed COVID-era Opportunities

COVID-19 disrupted schooling at an unprecedented scale. In North Carolina:

- Students experienced interrupted in-person learning.
- Achievement gaps in math and reading widened.
- Chronic absenteeism increased dramatically and have not returned to pre-pandemic levels.

But alongside disruption, North Carolina had an unprecedented opportunity:

- Federal relief funds totaling billions of dollars.
- Temporary flexibility in seat-time requirements.
- Rapid innovation in instructional delivery methods.

Missed COVID-Era Opportunities



Instead of redesigning around mastery, flexible pacing, and diagnostic precision, solutions focused on remediation within the current time-based structure.

Missed COVID-Era Opportunities



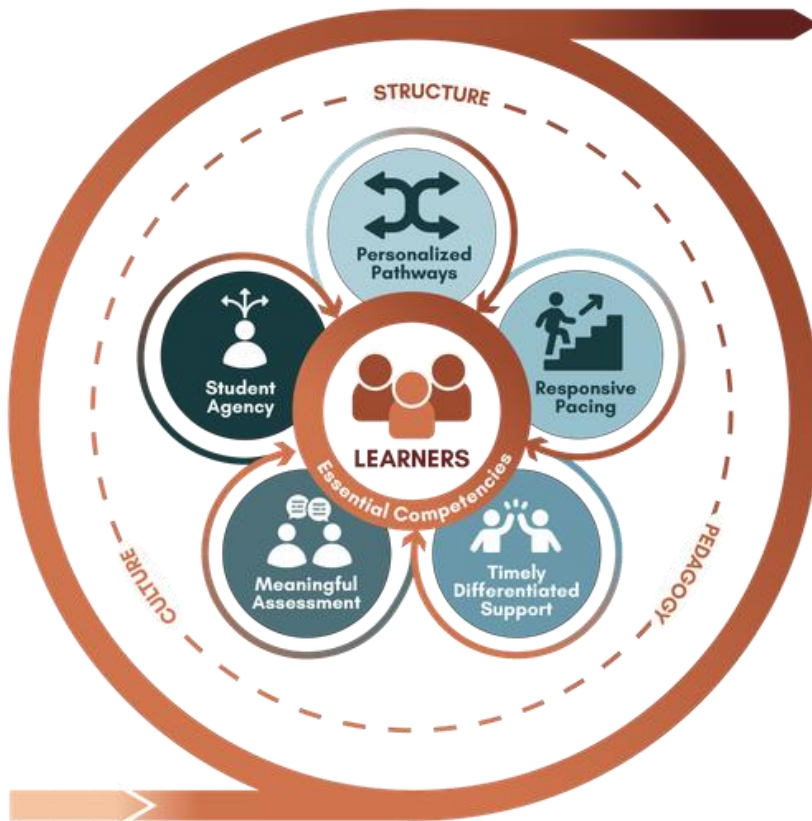
Instead of redesigning around mastery, flexible pacing, and diagnostic precision, solutions focused on remediation within the current **time-based structure**.

What Do We Mean By Tailored Learning?

What Tailored Learning Is Not:

- Flexible pacing with no mastery thresholds
- Replacing instruction with technology
- Lowering standards
- Isolated grading reform

What Do We Mean By Tailored Learning?



- Personalized pathways for students
- Responsive pacing
- Timely differentiated support
- Meaningful and actionable assessments
- Student ownership and agency

North Carolina is Uniquely Positioned

North Carolina in 2026:

- Discussions around math standards and rigor are active.
- Advanced coursework access is expanding.
- Career and Technical Education participation has reached record levels.
- Postsecondary attainment goals demand that more students graduate ready for college and careers.

**“When you have
clarity of intention,
the universe conspires
to make it happen.”**

Ralph Waldo Emerson



At the 2026 Innovation Lab...

OUR GOALS:

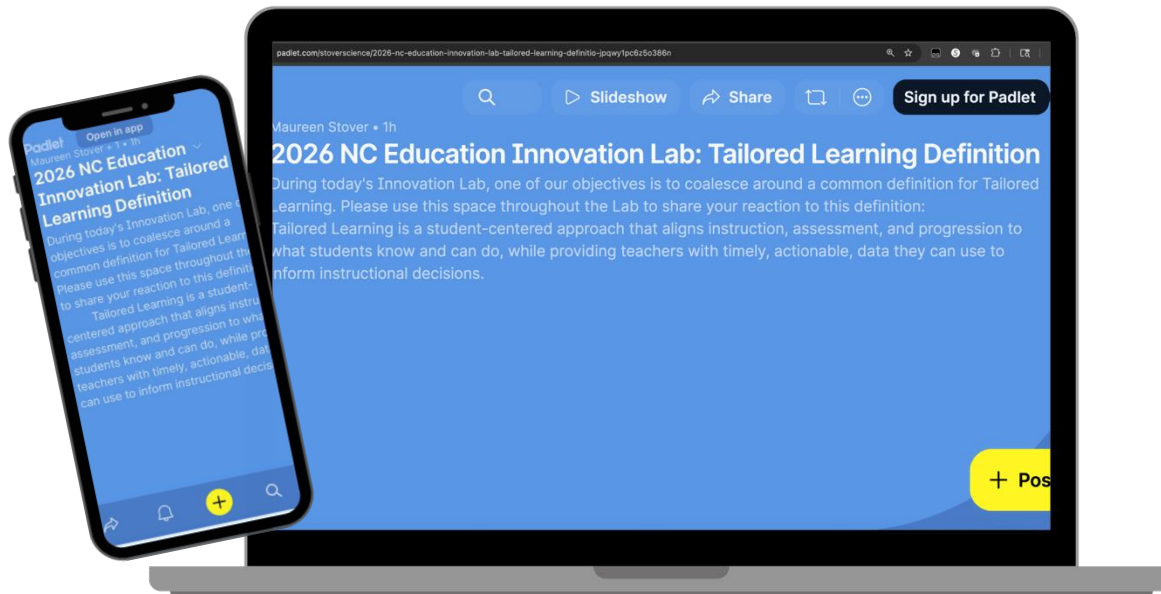
- ✓ Land on a shared definition of tailored learning.
- ✓ Identify the policy and system conditions required to make it real.
- ✓ Explore how assessment and accountability serve as enablers — not barriers — to personalized rigor.
- ✓ Clarify how initiatives like auto-enrollment in advanced coursework depend on reliable measures of readiness.

SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE:

- ✓ Shared language.
- ✓ Clear guardrails.
- ✓ Agreement on what tailored learning is — and what it is not.

At the 2026 Innovation Lab...

Tailored Learning Definition Activity:



At the 2026 Innovation Lab...

Tailored Learning Definition Activity:

“**Tailored Learning** is a student-centered approach that **aligns instruction, assessment, and progression to what students know and can do**, while providing teachers with **timely, actionable, data** they can use to **inform instructional decisions.**”



We Are Going to Imagine a System Where:



**Mastery
Matters More
Than Seat Time**



**Assessment
Informs
Opportunity**



**Rigor
Expands
Access**



**Students Are
Challenged and
Supported**

Innovation Lab 2026 Planning Team



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Innovation Lab Digital Program



<https://BESTNC.org/NCEdLab26>

Innovation Lab Norms

Be present. We will minimize distractions and stay focused on meeting Innovation Lab goals.

Participate. We will fully engage with Innovation Lab content and activities, especially the breakout sessions and surveys.

Support productive collaboration. We will use a “Yes, and...” mindset to build on each other’s ideas and to address challenges as they arise.

Share airtime equitably. We will listen actively and invite the contribution of all members.

Ensure a safe space. We welcome new ideas, even those that may make us uncomfortable. We will not share or post on social media any participant statements or questions.

Have grace. We will be professional and supportive of each other in our work together.



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