

## Learning Forward Foundation's equity journey



BY JANICE BRADLEY, DEB RADI, AND AMY COLTON

**T**he Learning Forward Foundation board is shifting its thinking and language about *equity*. Instead of talking about equity as a noun, we are moving toward a commitment to *acting equitably*.

Due to a convergence of events in 2020 and Learning Forward's formal equity and antiracism responses, we embraced the opportunity to discover how to design professional learning for equitable outcomes and build our capacity and that of the learning leaders we learn with and support.

Fulfilling the Learning Forward Foundation vision and mission requires us to examine our policies, procedures, and practices. Our goal is to develop and apply an equity lens to our work of making grants and scholarships and supporting the recipients through their growth.

The first step is to learn more about our own values, beliefs, and biases. That takes emotional investment, intentional learning, and the development of critical consciousness.

The board members recognize that engaging in equity work requires an emotional investment from each of us as we move toward reconciliation with our own histories and those of our ancestors.

Our values and beliefs are shaped by our families and the systems that we have been raised in coupled with our experiences in community. We need to harvest those experiences to gain a

deeper understanding of who we are and how we came to be who we are.

Each of us comes to this equity work in different ways. When we gather to listen and be open to each other's histories and stories, we have the potential to connect emotionally and examine our own thoughts and feelings in response to what we hear and learn. We need to learn what we cannot see — our own biases, our cultural perspectives, and positioning — to see beyond the boundaries of culture and individual experience.

Knowing we could not accomplish inner learning on our own, the board established a community of practice to further our inquiry. We drew on Learning Forward's equity statement and practices of high-quality professional learning. We invested resources and time to engage with external thought partners.

To deepen our understanding of the roots of inequity, we became "readers as learners" through book study sessions using *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, *Caste*, and *The Inconvenient Indian*. These books have engaged our hearts and minds toward an awareness of where we've been and where we need to go.

We are working to develop an awareness and curiosity about systems of power and privilege and our own places within them. Ongoing examination of the everyday realities

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of systemic oppression and inequitable social conditions are a prerequisite to taking action.

As we continue to develop our awareness, we will be positioned to take collective action to transform the foundation's policies, practices, and structures so that our work is equitable and contributes to equity in schools.

We look forward to sharing our next steps and the impact on the ongoing work of the foundation in the coming months.

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