ACTION
FOR RACIAL EQUITY

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How educators can respond to anti-Asian racism.
By Tomoko Wakabayashi, Gabrielle Lai, Tzu-Fen Chang, and Sunah Hyun

I SAY

Gustavo Balderas

Superintendent of the Edmonds School District in Washington and the 2020 National Superintendent of the Year

"Equity is an often-overused term lately, [but] to me, equity means intentionality. And [that means] providing access, opportunity, and inclusion for all kids. … That's removing barriers and developing systems for removing those barriers."

Source: www.youtube.com/watch?v=0VEIu4W3P40

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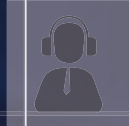
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SPARKING DIALOGUE THAT LEADS TO ACTION

Changing perceptions and beliefs is important and fundamental work, but it is not enough. Now is a time for going further, for taking action.

Equity is a focus in every issue of *The Learning Professional* and in all of Learning Forward's work. In recognition of the urgency of this work, in 2021 we are devoting two full issues to how educators can leverage professional learning to achieve equity for all students, starting with this issue on Action for Racial Equity.

Since the publication of *The Learning Professional's* 2018 issue on equity — one of the most widely read in our publication's history — a lot has changed and not enough has changed. Bias, discrimination, and racism are as entrenched as ever. The COVID-19 pandemic has shined a spotlight on structural inequities in health, safety, and education, while video documentation of police brutality and hate crimes have made longstanding patterns of racist violence more widely visible than ever. Public conversations about racism and increasing protests against police brutality present opportunities to make change and act boldly — if we seize them.

Like many organizations, Learning Forward has stated our commitment to antiracism. And we recognize that statements are not enough — they must be backed by action. In addition to taking action in our organization, in our revised Standards for Professional Learning, and in our professional services, we also aim to elevate the actions of other organizations, systems, and individuals to inform and inspire our readers.

We decided to focus this issue on the theme of action because changing perceptions and beliefs is important and fundamental work, but it is not enough. We encourage readers to revisit our past publications to engage in that fundamental work, and to keep going. Now is a time for going further, for taking action.

No one can do this work alone. We are honored and humbled to produce this issue in partnership with guest editor Tanji Reed Marshall of the Education Trust. A passionate and wise scholar, educator, and communicator, she has brought a wealth of knowledge and insight to this collection of articles and continues to build our consciousness.

There is so much important equity work to do, and so much transformative work already occurring, that we cannot possibly feature all of it in one issue. With this set of articles, we have aimed to elevate diverse voices and initiatives, but this issue is not a definitive set of perspectives or resources. It is a place to dive in, from which to dig deeper.

Our December issue, on the topic of Leadership for Equity, will be another opportunity for deep engagement. We urge our readers to continue learning about equity from our other issues of *The Learning Professional*, additional Learning Forward and Education Trust work, and the many excellent resources available from other organizations and experts.

A note about terminology: *The Learning Professional* follows the style guidelines from the Associated Press, but we honor authors' choices about terminology with regard to race and ethnicity. For example, some articles in this and other issues use the term African American while others use Black, and we usually capitalize the terms Black and Brown, but, in some cases, authors have requested to follow a different convention.

It is our hope that these articles will spark dialogue that leads to action. In the coming months, Learning Forward will facilitate webinars and social media conversations based on the issues raised here, build on them in our virtual annual conference, and continually seek and provide opportunities for engagement and growth. Be sure to subscribe to our email list and follow us on social media — @LearningForward and using our new hashtag #TheLearningPro — to join us. ■
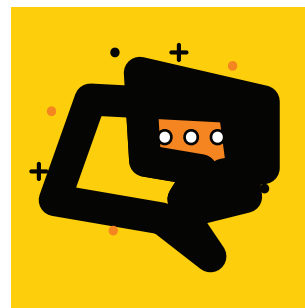
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About our style and word usage

The Learning Professional follows the guidelines set forth in the AP Stylebook. However, we defer to authors' preferences for terminology and capitalization with regard to race. We reserve the right to exclude any terms we consider to convey insult or harm.

VOICES

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING'S ROLE IN EQUITY WORK

"**W**e have a clear role to play in building educators' capacity to recognize and realize the imperative of equity. Professional learning can equip educators with knowledge and strategies to engage in self-examination, recognize and eliminate bias in instructional practices and interactions, implement rigorous and culturally relevant instructional materials for all students, and differentiate instruction to ensure every student's success."

"Equity is front and center in revised standards," p. **8**

Frederick Brown and Tracy Crow

EQUITY IS FRONT AND CENTER IN REVISED STANDARDS

At Learning Forward, we believe that all educators and education sectors must commit to doing their part to build equity and dismantle racism, classism, homophobia, misogyny, and other forms of prejudice. As an organization focused on professional learning as a key lever for school improvement, we have a clear role to play in building educators' capacity to recognize and realize the imperative of equity.

Professional learning can equip educators with knowledge and strategies to engage in self-examination, recognize and eliminate bias in instructional practices and interactions, implement rigorous and culturally relevant instructional materials for all students, and differentiate instruction to ensure every student's success.

Through these and other pathways, professional learning can ensure high-quality teaching for every student, thereby eliminating gaps in access and opportunity. It can also equip educators to transform policies at all levels to shape antiracist learning systems for adults and students alike.

To fulfill its potential and achieve equity, we believe that professional learning must be guided by key principles grounded in research and informed by practice. We embody these principles through the Standards for Professional Learning. The standards, first introduced in 1995, have evolved over time in response to field needs and new research.

We are committed to and intentional about revising the standards on an ongoing basis. Our current revision process will result in a fourth edition of the standards to be released in 2022. As Learning Forward revises the Standards for Professional Learning, ensuring professional learning builds and achieves equity is an essential goal.

Equity has always been embedded in the very notion of Standards for Professional Learning and in the standards themselves. In the 2001 edition, Learning Forward (then called NSDC) included a specific standard for equity:

Staff development that improves the learning of all students prepares educators to understand and appreciate all students, create safe, orderly, and supportive learning environments, and hold high expectations for their academic achievement.

In our rationale for this Equity standard, we wrote that professional learning related to establishing safe classroom environments and holding high expectations is particularly important

Equity has always been embedded in the very notion of Standards for Professional Learning and in the standards themselves.

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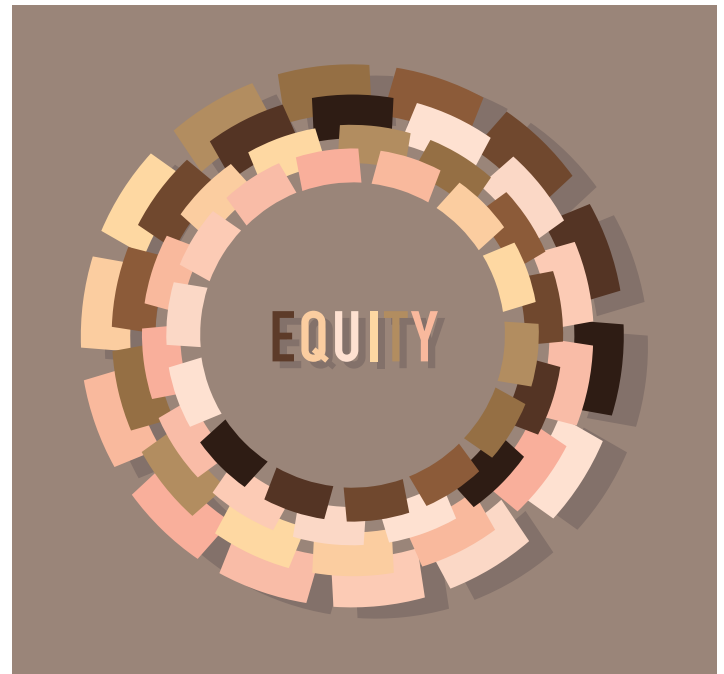
when educators are teaching students whose backgrounds are different from their own.

In the 2011 revision of the Standards for Professional Learning, we took a different approach to equity. In the introduction, we argued that the new common stem for each standard confirms the link between educator practice and results for students. Every standard begins with the phrase *"Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students … ."*

The use of "all" was intentional to elevate the significance of ensuring the success of every student, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, exceptionality, language, socioeconomic condition, culture, or sexual orientation. We hoped to convey that equity must pervade each and every standard, and we feared that creating a separate equity standard would signify that equity is a consideration apart from, rather than central to, all other aspects of professional learning.

We learned, however, that by removing the equity standard, many educators did not see equity represented with enough specificity. In the intervening years, we've recognized the need for more explicit conversations about equity, especially but not limited to race, throughout the conceptualization, design, implementation, and evaluation of effective professional learning systems.

In the revision of Standards for Professional Learning currently in process, equity is front and center. There are now three equity standards, one in each of three sections that guide the content or substance of professional learning, the process for how

Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning are just one aspect of how we elevate professional learning as a means to advance equitable outcomes. But because they are threaded through everything we do, they play a powerful role in all of our work.

professional learning is designed and sustained for impact, and the context or conditions for effective professional learning.

The Equity Practices standard outlines what educators need to know and be able to do to achieve equity outcomes with students. This standard encompasses the learning educators embrace to fully understand their students' backgrounds, identities, and experiences, and the impact of those factors on their learning.

The Equity Practices standard also covers culturally relevant education practices and embracing aspects of student identity to make learning relevant for each student. Finally, this standard explores the importance of educators learning to deepen their relationships with students, families, communities, and community partners.

The Equity Drivers standard supports embedding equity in the design and process of all professional learning experiences. It specifies that learning experiences should be designed to encourage educators' reflection on race, class, and other identity markers and stimulate shifts in assumptions, beliefs, and practices. The standard

also emphasizes the importance of building educators' capacity to work productively with colleagues with different backgrounds, viewpoints, and experiences.

The Equity Foundations standard focuses on how educators create the soil in which an equitable system can grow. Professional learning should address how to establish a vision for rigorous and inclusive learning for all, create structures to sustain equitable access and opportunities for each learner, and sustain a culture that prioritizes high expectations, continuous engagement, and successful outcomes for adult and student learning.

Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning are just one aspect of how we elevate professional learning as a means to advance equitable outcomes. But because they are threaded through everything we do, they play a powerful role in all of our work. As we continue on our journey to equity and antiracism, we remember — and we encourage other organizations to remember — that this work is complex and never-ending.

We all have blind spots when it comes to this work. Even when we think we're addressing all the critical factors of equity, we know we will uncover blind spots that keep us from fully addressing racism and other barriers to equity that educators, students, and communities face daily.

As a learning organization, we are always in a cycle of continuous learning, and we are committed to addressing those blind spots with humility and transparency. We encourage others to do the same. ■

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING GROUNDS EQUITY WORK IN CHICAGO

Maurice Swinney is chief equity officer in Chicago Public Schools and a member of *The Learning Professional* advisory board.

You have worked for equity your whole career. What's unique about the role of a chief equity officer that drove you to your current position?

I was a neighborhood school principal, a teacher, and an instructional coach. I knew firsthand what my students deserved and were capable of and how some policies and lack of resources got in the way. I also wanted to bring people who didn't normally have a seat to the table.

The role of chief equity officer became very intriguing to me because it was designed to mitigate and correct historical injustices and racialized outcomes for student groups who are furthest from opportunity, meaning their social and academic outcomes are furthest from the goal the district is trying to meet. The role is designed to call out disparities associated with race, gender identity or expression, social, and other life factors that have been used to predict outcomes.

With this role, I could help co-design what transformation would look like under the CEO, Dr. Janice K. Jackson, who is deeply committed to promoting and advancing equity, including racial equity, throughout the system. I report directly to her, which allows a direct line of communication for the equity office team to share our perspectives and expertise. It also allows me to function across the organization, collaborating with leaders working to advance equity in policy, finance, student supports, and other areas.

Why is it important to have a team that is dedicated to building equity?

Without a team, I believe an equity officer is set up to be a performative talking head who has no power to deeply influence work across a district. Having a team situates people, time, and money to implement what the district says it values. Also, a leader can't be in all spaces at once and can't get all of the work done. I work with a data strategist, policy strategist, achievement specialist, director of professional learning, officer manager, and a host of college interns and fellows. This team allows our office to connect with many different people and find multiple ways to mitigate inequity and injustice.

How have you embedded professional learning in the office of equity?

I've always been invested in professional learning. I've been connected with Learning Forward since it was the National Staff Development Council and had an opportunity to weigh in on the current federal definition for professional learning. I prioritize professional learning in my role because a huge part of equity work is about hearts and minds. We have to learn continuously and together; otherwise, we are perpetuating the cycles of "do as I say, not as I do."

The learning I lead and engage in with Chicago Public Schools colleagues takes into account

> **I prioritize professional learning in my role because a huge part of equity work is about hearts and minds. We have to learn continuously and together.**

RESOURCES

- Chicago Public Schools Equity Framework: equity.cps.edu/equity-framework/download

- Chicago Public Schools Equity Toolkit: equity.cps.edu/

- Liberatory Thinking resources: equity.cps.edu/equity-framework/equity-lens/liberatory-thinking

history, current reality, research, storytelling, and processes that cause change. It emphasizes liberatory thinking, which centers on challenging personal and interpersonal beliefs, ideas, and practices that perpetuate racism and stifle progress toward justice and liberation for all.

What is the CPS Equity Framework and what role does it play?

To do this work in such a large district, we knew we had to have an equity stance, guidance, and resources. The CPS Equity Framework grounds all of these and can serve as the equity voice in a room where no one else is present. The framework helps to demystify what equity means and provides tools to help us act on the principles we say we value.

We also created a CPS Equity Toolkit to share stories and provide tools to support ongoing learning and implementation. We've also created professional learning focused on liberatory thinking for school leaders and facilitated professional learning for different offices and departments within the district. The district is now rolling out our Skyline Curriculum Equity Initiative to support schools with implementing culturally responsive instruction and practices.

What advice do you have for other districts who want to establish or bolster an office of equity?

Put your money where your mouth is. Provide a budget for a team that includes an equity officer who reports to the superintendent or the CEO. Collect data and allow the equity team access to data. Help the team form

partnerships with community-based organizations and research partners who can help to uplift the work. Provide executive coaching to the leader to create a safe space for discussing challenges. It's also important to cultivate equity champions throughout the system. Develop a racial equity task force or steering committee that helps to understand the multiple perspectives needed to advance change, and commit to hiring people who lead with a racial equity lens.

There are many challenges to doing this work. What do you want people to be aware of and prepared to address?

We must elevate healing and cultivate joy within schools and communities. That includes recognizing

and thanking school faculty and staff for the hours and efforts they put in. Schools are some of the only places where hundreds of people come together hundreds of days at a time to have thousands of interactions; the only other places are prisons and nursing homes.

As we recover from the pandemic, it would harm us if we rush back to traditional lessons and assessments and fail to center ourselves in relationships with other people. We also have to lift the voice of students, asking them what should school be like. When we go to the doctor, restaurants, and clothing stores, they ask us about our needs. That same collectivist approach is needed in schools. We have to heal together in order to be together in order to learn together. ∎

WE ARE AT A MAJOR DECISION POINT AS WE REOPEN SCHOOLS

T his summer is a time to reimagine and realize a commitment to schools that are safe, welcoming, and inclusive for the identities of each student in our care. As we plan to reopen schools, we must begin with the imperative that students deserve our best, even when we have squeezed out what feels like the very last drop of what we have to give.

Reopening school buildings presents educators with complex considerations. How do we approach physical distancing, mask mandates, worldwide illness, and a global racial reckoning while attending to the social, emotional, cognitive, and mental health needs of students and staff? And how do we do so in ways that are mindful of the trauma experienced?

When schools closed, we had so much unfinished business, especially for black, brown, and indigenous students. Schools had not ensured that adults at every level of the system understand their role to nurture liberating environments for the success and identity safety of all students. For example, schools had not addressed the disproportionate rates of discipline referrals for, nor the underenrollment of, black, brown, and indigenous students in advanced-level courses.

To meet the needs of all students as we reopen schools, educators need to enact a collective disruption of the typical way of schooling and commit to creating liberating spaces that recognize the humanity and brilliance of the students in our care. We have a duty to understand the power and privilege we wield to help or hinder a student's identity development. We have a duty to create spaces that attend to the social, emotional, cognitive, and mental health needs, as well as academic needs, of all students, regardless of race.

We are at a major decision point as we reopen schools — a fork in the road to educating our future. This future depends on students of all races (white, black, brown, indigenous, Asian American Pacific Islander, and other) and backgrounds coexisting in society. One route is backed up for miles with detours of zero tolerance schooling, policing of black and brown bodies, and policies and

practices that demand compliance fueling the school to prison pipeline. It focuses on compliance in the hallways, test-taking strategies, acceleration for learning loss, drill-and-kill instruction. That route upholds the status quo and fails black, brown, and indigenous students.

The other route recognizes the mental, social, and emotional health needs of adults and students and creates welcoming school spaces for everyone, spaces that honor students' identities and unique gifts.

The rhetoric in education policy spaces is focused on learning loss. Within that rhetoric exist stereotypical assumptions that low-income students and students of color lack skills. I offer for your consideration that students have also lost the socialization of schooling with their peers, the joy of laughing and joking, the strength of being in community.

For too long, schools have denied these opportunities to students of color, opting for policies to control their bodies and enact a false dichotomy between academic and social emotional skill development.

Educators need to commit to creating liberating spaces that recognize the humanity and brilliance of the students in our care.

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COACHES CORNER
Sharron Helmke

TO COACH FOR EQUITY, START BY LOOKING WITHIN

As coaches, we spend our days actively supporting the professional growth of others, but we're also tasked with modeling lifelong learning through our own continued inquiry and reflection. Nowhere is this more important than when it comes to antiracism. But knowing where or how to start can feel overwhelming.

In my own journey as a white educator and coach, I learned the only place I could start this work with integrity was with myself. By engaging in deep — and sometimes painful — self-inquiry and reflection, I've undertaken an ongoing journey of personal change. So when I contemplated what I could offer on the topic of antiracism, I realized I needed to forgo writing about how we coach others and instead focus on how I might encourage and support you to engage in your own personal learning journey in pursuit of antiracism and racial equity. To paraphrase Gandhi, we can't lead the change we want to see without being the change we want to see.

Making changes within ourselves requires acknowledging our starting places — and the often uncomfortable reality that we're not where we want to be. Like many of you, I spent years in public education with the intention of extending the benefits of education to every child, but gradually I realized that even as I aimed to be part of the solution, I was still part of the problem.

For me, the turning point came the day I sat in a deserted hallway on lunch duty and saw a group of Black girls walking toward me, their loud laughter echoing down the hallway. I rose to confront them, already preparing to have a disciplinary conversation. Luckily, I stopped myself when I realized they weren't disturbing anyone and there was no cause to intervene. But no longer could I tell myself that Black students' disproportionate discipline rates and alienation from the educational system was the fault of others.

Realizing this left me feeling vulnerable. I wasn't where I wanted to be, and I wasn't living up to my own expectations. It was an uncomfortable place to be, both then and now. Yet I share this story because vulnerability is a key part of recognizing how we need to broaden our perspectives, challenge our beliefs, and ultimately change our actions. As coaches, we ask teachers to do this work every time they engage in a coaching conversation with us. To ask this of others, we must be prepared to demand it of ourselves.

In the years since that lunch duty, the blinders of my role in educational inequity have been slipping, and, as they do, I'm forced to acknowledge my own role in perpetuating this inequity. I've come to recognize the many books I've read, data I've studied, and strategies I've implemented weren't enough because they were the wrong starting place. I had to start with me.

After that episode at lunch duty, the lessons toward increased awareness came quickly — and they haven't stopped. There was the day I cleared a book room of high-interest, low-readability books and realized these were the only books with covers showing young adults of color. There

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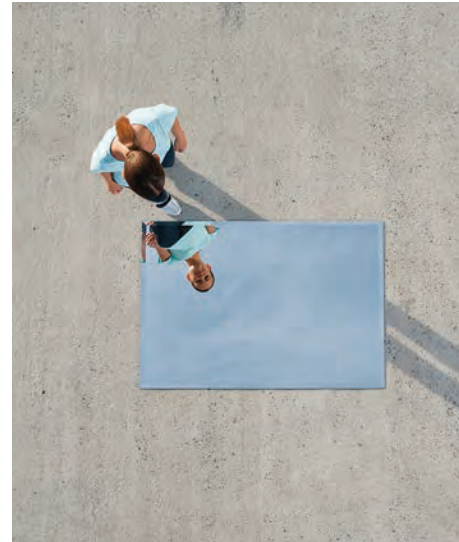
> **Making changes within ourselves requires acknowledging our starting places — and the often uncomfortable reality that we're not where we want to be.**

Sharron Helmke is a Gestalt and ICF certified professional coach. She's a senior consultant for Learning Forward, facilitator of the Mentor and Coaching Academies, and co-facilitator of Learning Forward's virtual coaching class *Powerful Communication Skills for Coaches.*

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I implore you: Do not open schools to focus on compliance. Do open schools with an eye toward transformation with smiles on your faces, good mornings and hellos, opportunities for dialogue to build meaning with adults and peers, discipline as a teachable moment centered on co-creating trusting relationships and understanding rather than as a means of punishment. Students deserve to build relationships with adults who prioritize community building and coaching, adults who have their best interests at heart.

This disruption and commitment to creating liberating spaces necessitates a selfless and critically self-reflective approach to working in service of the students in our care. I encourage you to consider the the following part of my definition of antiracism in education:

Antiracist educators are conscious and aware of their personal bias, their worldview, and how they are privileged or marginalized racially. An educator is antiracist when they actively disrupt systemic racism and inequities from their own sphere of influence and partner with other antiracist educators to enact collective disruption of institutional racism and systemic inequities (Ward, 2020).

It also necessitates a commitment to ongoing learning, to seeing school reopening as an adaptive challenge worthy of a plan-do-study-act approach, in which we continually analyze and reflect on our work and adjust to make improvements. Without this commitment, we risk getting stuck in the hindrances of red tape, powerless task forces, and high-level teams that meet for months and take no action. This commitment taps the will of educators committed to co-creating liberating schools and workplaces.

Which route will you choose to reopen schools? The predictable zero tolerance, compliance route that leads to status quo and more stress or the transformative route that welcomes students and co-creates supportive, nurturing classroom and school environments? As a mother of black boys, I need you to consider what's at stake — for my children and yours.

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Ward, A.M. (2020, July 11). *Why #AntiRacistEd shouldn't be gentrified: Reason 7: Because whiteness is real.* preview.mailerlite.com/d9g4w6 ■

Continued from p. 13

was the moment I was confronted by two students who had given essentially the same answer on a test, but the Latino student had received partial credit and the white student full credit. These are just a few of the moments that serve to remind me that I still have work to do within myself.

It's incredibly painful to see myself in the profiles of white privilege and bias in education I read about, but the alternative is to continue perpetuating the kind of damage I firmly believe no child should ever have to suffer — and an alternative none of us should accept. Refusing to look at our own actions and examine our own bias is more than just tacit acceptance. It's active participation.

The good news is this work is fully within our own locus of control. Many of us who want to improve equity for students of color often feel stymied by lack of clarity from leaders and concerned about difficult conversations that potentially could damage relationships. Nevertheless, we can find respite in knowing that personal change is perhaps the only kind of change we can meaningfully undertake.

As coaches, we can't start by telling others what they're doing wrong or how to "do" equity better. Nor can we support others in understanding their blind spots until we learn to recognize and address our own. Here are some of the ways I continually attempt to gain insight into my blind spots:

- When I feel an urge to act, especially if that urge seems to arise almost automatically, I take a deliberate pause and turn my attention inward, searching for my intention. Often, I find I need to look beyond the first answer to find one that feels wholly honest.
- I pay attention to the spaces I enter, and I notice when I find myself in the minority. How do I feel and respond in such situations? Have I assumed a right to belong, to speak, to know?
- Understanding that how I show up with others directly affects how they respond to me, I ask myself: In what ways do I show up differently when interacting with people of other races? What feelings accompany those differences in behavior?
- I notice how I approach students of color and respond to their questions and mistakes. Are my expectations for students of color as high as the expectations I hold for other students, and most importantly, do I communicate those expectations through my time, attention, and support to the same extent I do with white students? If not, what excuses do I use to justify the differences, and how do I feel when I'm honest with myself about that?

As you ask yourself these questions, curiosity and honesty will allow you to identify patterns. Only when you're aware of your blind spots and prejudices can you work to change the outcomes that follow from them. ■

THE MORAL UNIVERSE WON'T BUDGE UNLESS WE MOVE IT

"[T]he arc of the moral universe is long but it bends toward justice."

—*Martin Luther King Jr.*

Coaches, like everyone in our educational organizations, can and should analyze their schools for evidence of structural racism and then fight for change until the system changes.

D o you agree with King's often-quoted statement? In light of the heartbreaking and racist events I see in the news almost daily, I can't say I'm sure. What I do believe, however, is that the moral universe will not budge unless people act in ways that move it toward justice — people like you and me, people like instructional coaches.

As change leaders, instructional coaches are perfectly positioned to move their organizations forward. Coaches, like everyone in our educational organizations, can and should analyze their schools for evidence of structural racism and then fight for change until the system changes.

Coaches can raise awareness of prejudice by first learning about their own biases (Eberhardt, 2019; Project Implicit, 2011) and then partnering with others in coaching cycles that surface implicit bias. Also, coaches can advocate for justice by distinguishing between two kinds of power: *power over* and *power with*.

Power over is coercive power used to keep students in line. Teachers with a *power over* orientation communicate to students that they must do what they are told because they do not have power. In contrast, *power with* is authentic power that grows out of real relationships *with* students. Teachers who have a *power with* orientation demonstrate empathy, build connections, and respect their students (Knight, 2013).

Microaggressions are an especially pernicious form of *power over* (Sue, 2010). Microaggressions are brief, intentional or unintentional, common forms of abuse directed at groups or individuals. In the classroom, microaggressions can include "calling on and validating one gender, class, race of students while ignoring other students, singling students out in class because of their background, or setting low expectations for particular groups" (Portman et al., n.d.).

The "micro" morpheme might lead people to think that microaggressions are trivial. Nothing could be further from the truth. As Ibram X. Kendi writes, a "persistent daily low hum of racist abuse is not minor. … Abuse accurately describes the action and its effects on people: distress, anger, worry, depression, anxiety, pain, fatigue, and suicide" (Kendi, 2019, p. 47).

Coaches can promote *power with* by partnering with teachers to help them replace microaggressions with what I refer to as microaffirmations. These are actions and words that communicate that we see the dignity, value, and humanity of others. Microaffirmations include giving someone our full attention, authentic affirmative words, and paraphrasing what others say in ways that communicate that we have deeply heard what they have said.
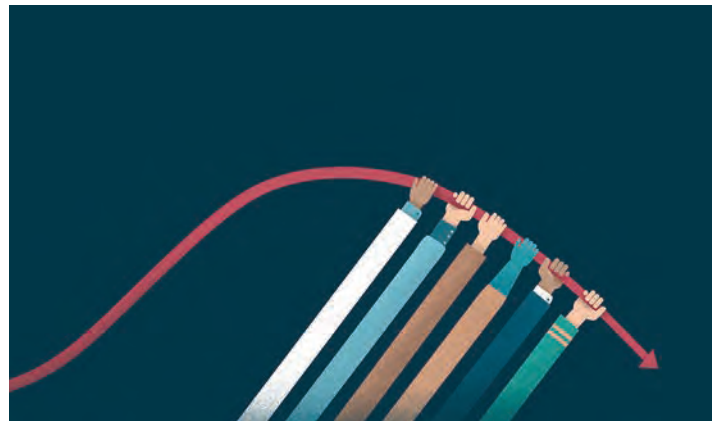
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Coaches can help teachers decrease microaggressions and increase microaffirmations by conducting an interaction analysis: recording lessons so that teachers can look at each of their interactions to determine whether they build connection or disconnection.

Coaches can empower teachers to take this analysis further by giving teachers a list of reflection questions to consider as they watch each interaction, including such questions as: Did I give my students my full attention when they were talking? Did I affirm students when they contributed to classroom discussion? Did I refrain from interrupting students? Did I avoid sarcasm, singling students out, power-tripping, or other actions that communicate a lack of respect? Did I communicate the same degree of respect to all students (Knight, 2013)?

Will the arc of the moral universe bend toward justice? I hope so. Today, though, we can do many things to make it much more likely that King's predictions will come true in our schools. By partnering with teachers to promote *power with*, we can make a difference. Maybe we won't change the whole universe. But we can change ourselves, and, in so doing, we can change others. If enough of us do that, our universe will move toward justice.

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Coming in August: Jim Knight will explore how the inside-out approach, described in the February issue, applies to schoolwide change. ■
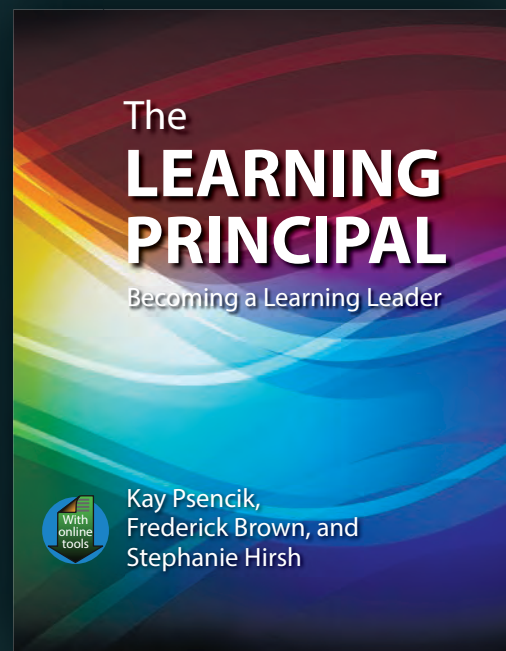
RESEARCH

PUT DATA TO WORK FOR EQUITY

"**O**ne of the roles of professional learning for equity is to contextualize national and regional research with local data collected at the district, school, classroom, and student levels. Another is to help educators understand how to use that knowledge in responsive ways."

— *"Data inform our progress toward equity,"* p. **18**

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DATA INFORM OUR PROGRESS TOWARD EQUITY

Acting to dismantle structural racial inequities begins with identifying and clearly naming the challenges we face. Data play a powerful role in this process. Several recent publications synthesize data sources, research findings, and expert recommendations to inform and guide equity improvement efforts. They can make a sizable contribution to our understanding of where we are, why we need to make change, and how far we need to go to ensure access to opportunity for all students.

UNDERSTANDING INEQUITIES

One of these syntheses is a five-part *Statement of the Evidence* volume produced by the Society for Research in Child Development in September 2020. It includes two-page summaries of research on students from each of five demographic groups — American Indian and Alaska Native, Asian American, Black, Latinx, and LGBTQ+ — in the era of COVID-19. The briefs highlight longstanding inequities and the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on marginalized communities. They also summarize evidence-based practices and policies for improving equitable teaching and learning for marginalized students.

These briefs can inform professional learning about how to reach each student in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis. Taken as a set, the briefs make a case for investing in professional learning about bias reduction, understanding racial trauma and the history of underresourced communities and students, culturally responsive instruction that is based on knowledge and understanding of students' backgrounds and needs, and building engaged and interactive relationships, as well addressing social and emotional issues exacerbated by COVID-19 and improving weaknesses in remote instruction that disproportionately impact marginalized students.

> **Each brief's discussion of the research about learning challenges among student groups can provide content for professional learning tailored to local context and needs.**

In addition, each brief's discussion of the research about learning challenges among student groups can provide content for professional learning tailored to local context and needs. The specific focus of the learning could range from strengthening understanding among educators about the model minority myth that negatively impacts Asian American students' support-seeking behaviors, to the impact that recent race-related traumas and social isolation have had on Black Americans, to the fact that Latinx families report higher food insecurities than the national average.

These data could also be useful in helping educators understand their students' cultures and home lives. For example, many educators would benefit from knowing that Asian Americans experienced the largest percentage increase in unemployment rates across racial groups from February to June 2020. In addition, anti-Asian sentiments related to the association of COVID-19 with China can negatively impact students' mental health, an especially challenging reality given that Asian Americans are less likely than non-Hispanic white Americans to seek mental health support. Professional learning about recognizing mental health concerns and connecting to school-based mental health programs and community health care providers could therefore be beneficial.

Along those same lines, many educators will benefit from knowing that, as of July 2020, up

to 40% of COVID-19 cases in New Mexico were among American Indian people, despite the fact that American Indians are only 9% of the population in that state. These findings suggest that a large percentage of American Indian students have been directly touched by COVID-19 and may have experienced trauma that impacts their social, emotional, and academic well-being. Black students may be affected by the fact that unemployment related to COVID-19 has disproportionately impacted their home lives.

The briefs highlight the need for professional learning that increases educators' understanding of how to use this type of information about students' contexts to meet their academic and social-emotional needs, whether through in-person learning, remote learning, or connecting with other services and the larger community. For example, the brief focused on LGBTQ+ students notes the importance of educators developing respectful and affirming relationships and interactions with these (and all) students, as well as advocating for inclusive policies and practices.

It is important to note, however, that while educators should be aware of and informed by trend data, they should be careful to avoid making assumptions or sweeping generalizations about individual students based on that data. One of the roles of professional learning for equity is to contextualize national and regional research with local data collected at the district, school, classroom, and student levels.

Another is to help educators understand how to use that knowledge in responsive ways. For instance, knowing that 84% of Latinx caregivers have jobs that do not allow them to work remotely can help educators in Latinx communities make sure they have plenty of school and community support available for students during remote learning. But educators should

never assume a student has no parental support.

Similarly, a high percentage of Latinx caregivers are English learners; that means schools should make translation services available but not assume that parents don't speak English. Students of similar backgrounds don't all live in the same contexts, but the data suggests that there are particular challenges to pay attention to in thinking about successful engagement and learning.

Examining and discussing similarities and differences among groups of students reminds us that no racial or ethnic group is a monolith. Considering how students may be experiencing points of intersectionality can impact the instructional and social-emotional supports they need.

MONITORING EQUITY

While the Society for Research in Child Development evidence briefs highlight existing data about inequities for specific marginalized groups of students, a consensus report from the American Educational Research Association and the National Academies provides a framework of indicators that educators can use to monitor equity in their own systems. *Monitoring Educational Equity* recommends ways for districts to measure both access to learning opportunities and progress toward student outcomes. The goal is to provide a comparable set of indicators that decision-makers can use to benchmark within and across systems and collaboratively measure progress.

The framework recommends 16 indicators across seven domains:

- Kindergarten readiness;
- K-12 learning and engagement;
- Educational attainment;
- Extent of racial, ethnic, and economic segregation;
- Equitable access to high-quality learning programs;
- Equitable access to high-quality curricula and instruction; and
- Equitable access to supportive school and classroom

LEARN MORE

The framework for monitoring equity was featured in a panel discussion at the May 2021 AERA Annual Conference. The video can be found at: **bit.ly/3fx5eAa.**

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environments.

Within these domains, specific indicators are supported and anchored in well-established and emerging research, with some indicators requiring additional study and development to be considered appropriate to a large scale.

Included are engagement in schooling, access to and performance in rigorous coursework, disciplinary policies, emotional climate in the classroom, access to mental and physical health screenings, and other indicators. For each indicator, the researchers recommend specific research measures for collecting data. They also acknowledge the need to incorporate additional local data to provide contextually relevant information and inform tailored interventions and responses.

It is important to note that these are measures of the equity of the system, not of individual students or educators. They are designed for decision-makers to examine patterns that span sites and contexts, with the researchers calling for indicators to be monitored across a system as well as for research about where alternative practices are happening effectively.

The researchers acknowledge that qualitative research such as case studies will add nuance and complexity to what we can learn from large-scale research, especially with regard to nonacademic supports.

This framework of equity indicators is exciting because it spans a range of measures that represent the complexities of inputs and decisions required to create an equitable system and because it is designed to be applicable for practitioners and policymakers

balancing rigor and usefulness. There is an accompanying guidebook to facilitate its use.

It also calls for the resources needed to help policymakers implement and use the framework. The report includes recommendations for policymakers at the federal, state, and district levels as well as for a research agenda to support additional study.

ALIGNMENT TO STANDARDS FOR PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

These rich equity research resources are in alignment with the Standards for Professional Learning in several ways. The specific data about inequities impacting diverse student populations in the Society for Research in Child Development *Statement of the Evidence* briefs provides **Data** to inform professional learning design and implementation. These data briefs could also provide content for professional learning study and discussion. The centering of student outcomes and their connection to school inputs in the *Monitoring Educational Equity* framework is consistent with the **Outcomes** standard.

Looking across standards, Society for Research in Child Development, American Educational Research Association, and National Academies recognize the importance of a coherent set of goals and indicators across a system, much like the standards do for professional learning measures and goals.

In addition, the equity resources engage with the complexities of improving an entire system by focusing on shared targets for improvement, much like the resources aligned to the standards. The revised Standards for Professional Learning, to be released in 2022, will include additional information and guidance related to the conditions, drivers, and practices that lead to equity and how professional learning is a critical lever for addressing inequities across and throughout a system. ■

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DATA POINTS

81,000 ASSISTANT PRINCIPALS WORK IN U.S. SCHOOLS

Over the last 25 years, the prevalence of U.S. schools with assistant principals has grown from one-third to one-half, but those leaders tend to be underused and underresearched, according to a report sponsored by the Wallace Foundation.

The report finds that the assistant principalship appears to be an increasingly common stepping-stone to the principalship — about three-quarters of principals have served as assistant principals compared with about half 25 years ago — but there was no evidence that experience in the former role improves performance in the latter. That may be partly explained by a finding that assistant principals' roles and responsibilities are very diverse and often poorly defined.

The report finds untapped potential and room for improvement in both the role and composition of the assistant principal workforce. Although people of color make up a higher percentage of assistant principals (24%) than other roles, they are less likely than white educators to become principals, suggesting a breakdown in the pipeline. An upcoming issue of *The Learning Professional* will examine in more depth the findings of the report.
bit.ly/3bA2BMR

47 STATES HAVE GROW-YOUR-OWN TEACHER PROGRAMS

Grow-your-own teacher programs build connections among school districts, higher education institutions, and community agencies to recruit and train high school students, paraeducators, and community members to become

teachers in their own communities.

These programs are increasingly popular as a way to address teacher shortages, increase teacher diversity, and improve connections between schools and their communities. New America conducted a 50-state scan of grow-your-own programs. The report finds that most states (47 plus D.C.) have at least one program, but they use a wide range of definitions and approaches. Nine states have more than five types of programs.

Most programs target or are operated at the district level, with high school students the most popular recruitment target, often through career and technical education. State funding for these programs is rare, occurring in only 20 states.
bit.ly/33N69XP

11 STATES OR FEWER PRIORITIZE TEACHER DIVERSITY AND EQUITY

The Education Trust rated state policies and practices in five categories to examine how well U.S. states prioritize teacher diversity and equity. The researchers created a color-coded map for each category to document where states and the country are and where they need to go to get to equity. The categories in which states most often met criteria were setting clear goals for diversifying the workforce and using intentional recruitment strategies for

educators of color (11 states each).

Less commonly, seven states met criteria for two categories of investing in teacher preparation programs and making educator diversity data visible and actionable. Only three states met criteria for efforts to retain educators of color by improving working conditions and providing opportunities for growth.
bit.ly/33QqD1M

20 PERCENTAGE POINT INCREASE IN TEACHERS CONSIDERING LEAVING

The EdWeek Research Center surveyed a nationally representative sample of 700 teachers and 300 school leaders in March 2021 to understand why teachers are considering or deciding to leave the profession during the pandemic.

When asked how likely they are to leave in the next two years, 54% said somewhat or very likely, whereas only 34% said they would have answered that way before the pandemic. Not surprisingly, 84% of teachers said teaching is more stressful than before the pandemic.

When asked what would make them more likely to stay, about 70% of teachers pointed to higher salaries and 43% said reducing administrative burdens such as paperwork, meetings, and hall duty. "Love for students" topped the list of reasons teachers decide to stay.
bit.ly/3hEyV4K

FOCUS

ACTION FOR RACIAL EQUITY
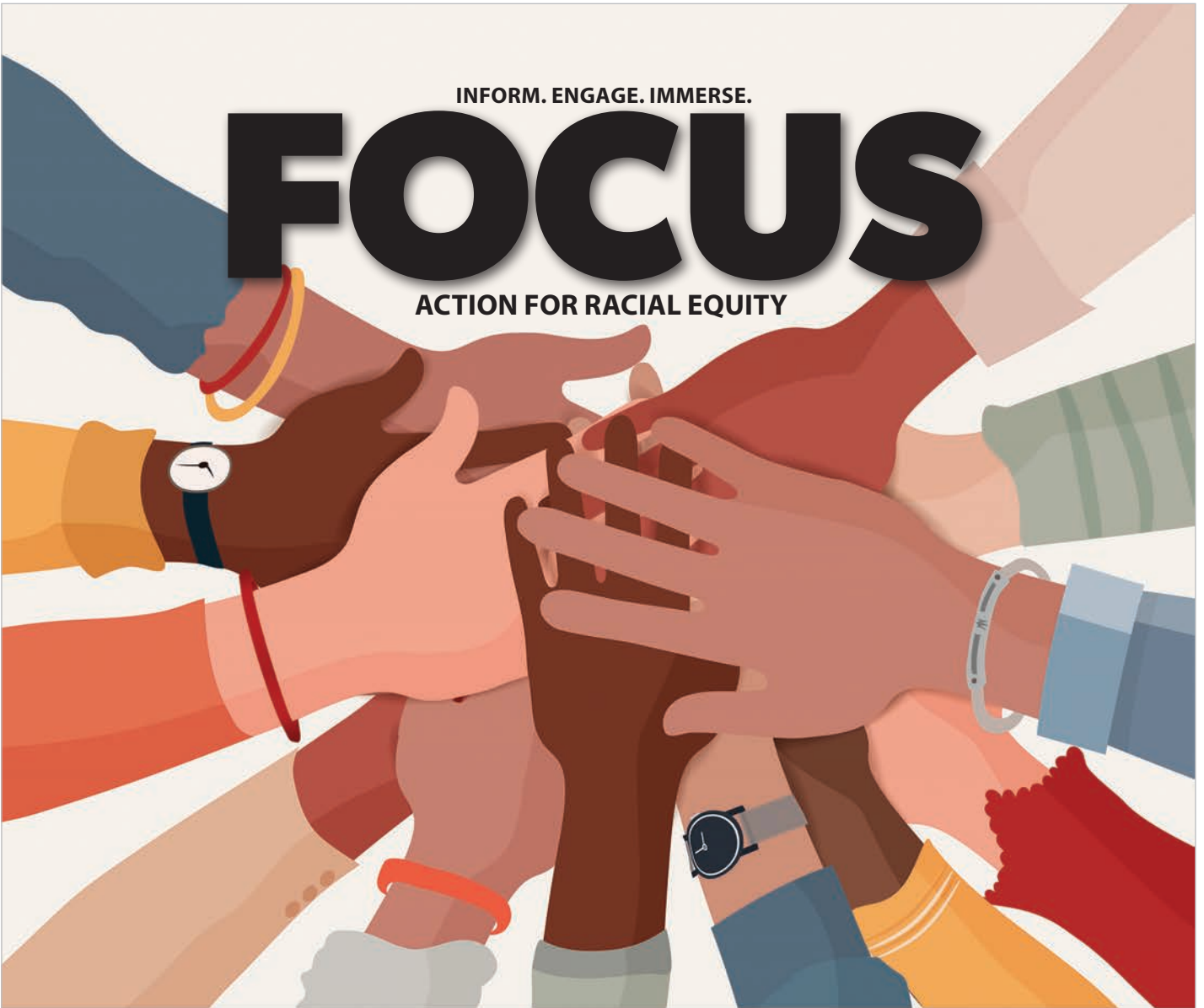
AT ISSUE: RACIAL EQUITY IN SCHOOLS

For this complex and urgently needed issue of *The Learning Professional,* Learning Forward invited Tanji Reed Marshall, at right, of the Education Trust to serve as guest editor. Marshall brings a wealth of expertise about racial equity in schools, literacy instruction for traditionally underserved students, and educator preparation and development in the service of excellence for all students.

She and *The Learning Professional* team have curated a set of Focus articles that take an unflinching look at racial inequity in schools, raise important questions and provocations, and urge educators at all levels to take action on behalf of marginalized students. This section's articles lead the way to action, demonstrating how teachers, leaders, policymakers, and others can make real change in schools.

Marshall will also partner with us on our upcoming issue on Leadership for Equity, to be published in December 2021.

A path toward racial equity

BY TANJI REED MARSHALL

K-12 education is that rare thing in the United States open to everyone. But, while states and districts have language around excellence for all, inequities persist, particularly along racial lines.

Test score outcomes continue to be disparate between races. Districts continue to face uneven funding with so-called urban districts receiving less than their so-called suburban counterparts (Morgan & Amerikaner, 2018). Students with diagnosed disabilities, those whose families are experiencing measures of economic distress, and those adding English to their language repertoire continue to experience school differently than their white, wealthier peers.

Such inequities were firmly in place and widely accepted before the COVID-19 pandemic, but once schools were forced to switch to remote learning, these inequities exploded, taking center stage in conversations across the country. There seemed to be endless discussions about the digital divide, and people began to realize that school was the primary source of nutrition for many students. The pandemic turned the world and our schools upside down.

In the midst of dealing with the effects of the pandemic, we once again came face-to-face with

our ongoing challenge of being a country where justice and liberty are ideals that don't just live on a page. As many Americans got a first-row seat at policing gone awry, the country had to ask itself who we are versus who we purport to be.

Our nation began to fray at the seams as protests rocked cities across the country in challenge to ongoing racial strife. We had to make a decision. Would we allow the murder of yet another Black man at the hands of police finally make way for the types of reform needed to get to equal treatment under the law? Or would we once again feel the outrage only to revert to our places of comfort? Teachers were asked to help their students navigate the difficult waters while they themselves had to find space to address what might have seemed unthinkable.

Given all we've faced over the last year, the editors could have chosen many angles around which to focus a discussion about equity in this issue of *The Learning Professional*. We chose to center racial equity because, when other factors are held constant, race continues to be the leading cause of disparate educational and life outcomes that persist in our society.

Biased and racist perceptions continue to be a major driving factor in these disparities. One study on racial bias among teachers revealed teachers are as biased against Black students as society is against Black people in general (Starck et al., 2020). Such revelations are troubling because most teachers are likely to say they see and treat all students

the same and they hold high expectations for all their students. Unfortunately, evidence suggests this isn't the case.

In 2018, TNTP released *The Opportunity Myth,* which showed that 82% of teachers surveyed believed in the need for rigorous academic standards for all students, while only 44% of those same teachers believed the students they teach could do the work required by rigorous standards.

The TNTP study also revealed stark differences in access to grade-level assignments between students of color and their white peers: 4 in 10 classes where the majority of students were people of color did not have access to grade-level assignments, compared to 1 in 10 classes where a majority of students were white.

TNTP's most recent report, released in partnership with Zearn (2021), reveals that students of color, especially Black students, are more likely to receive remediation in math than their white counterparts — even where there is evidence the Black student mastered the content. These ongoing belief disparities rest at the core of why we feel the need to center actions to disrupt racial inequity.

Throughout this issue's Focus section, you will hear from scholars and practitioners whose work provides insight into how authentic action can make change in what too often seems like intractable racial inequities. They provide a way forward in thinking critically about where we have been, where we need to go, and how we might become a nation whose education system

embodies the ideals we hold dear, not just for those of privilege, but every student from every background.

With the recent passage of the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, we stand on the precipice of possibility. We have the opportunity to put our money and actions where we have for so long put our mouths. It's past time to go beyond lip service and take authentic action to achieve educational equity.

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Black boys and policing

Rethinking the community helpers curriculum
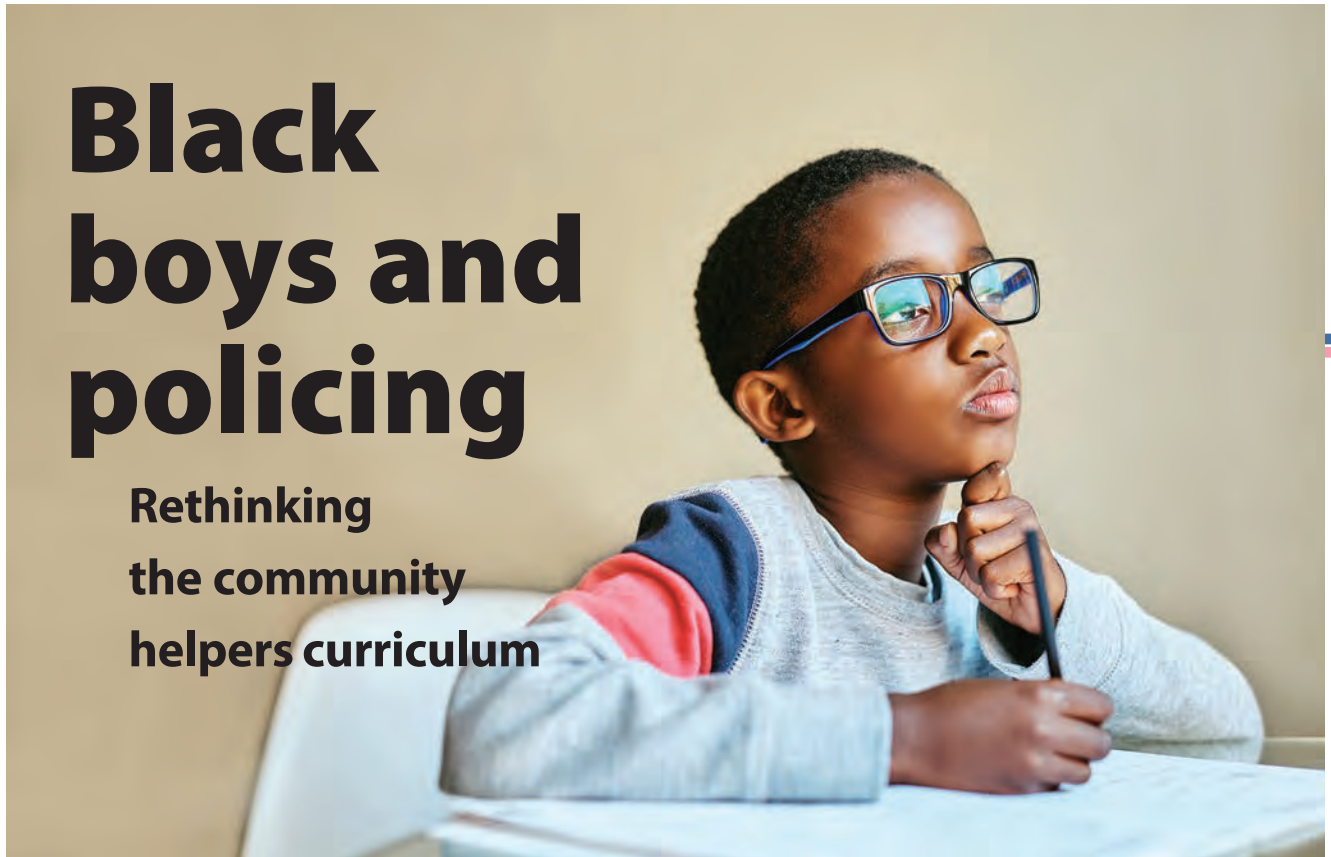
BY BRIAN L. WRIGHT

"When I grow up, I want to be a Supreme Court judge. When people say, 'Your Honor, he did rob the bank,' I will say, 'Be seated.' And if he doesn't, I will tell the guard to take him out. Then I will beat my hammer on the desk. Then [everybody] will be quiet."
— *George Perry Floyd Jr., writing as a 2nd grader during a Black History Month activity (Espinoza, n.d.)*

It is a tragic irony that George Floyd Jr., once a brilliant Black boy with dreams to serve on the highest court in the U.S., would grow up to be murdered by a white law enforcement officer who pressed his knee needlessly against Floyd's neck for 8 minutes and 46 seconds.

What did young George Floyd learn about the justice system? What do young Black boys today learn in school about their relationship to the police and courts? The way educators frame the justice system and Black boys' relationships to it matter. But too often, educators are unaware of the messages they send, even in the earliest years of school.

In this article, I consider and challenge a familiar curriculum unit that introduces children in the early grades (pre-K-3) to "community helpers." Standard early childhood education social studies curricula are organized by thematic units that might include family, nature, and typically, community helpers, usually defined as anyone who works to help the community. The overall aim of the unit is to expose young children to how they can be active, responsible, and conscientious members of their community.

Based on these teachings, many children develop aspirations to become sanitation workers, bus drivers, police officers, judges, and other community helpers. I imagine this is what 8-year-old George Floyd had in mind when he wrote in his essay, perhaps inspired by the first African American to serve on the United States Supreme Court, Justice Thurgood Marshall.

And yet, for Black children, boys in particular, personal experience directly and indirectly contradicts the claims of well-meaning teachers that community helpers are friends who are there to protect and serve. Sadly, children may have firsthand experience of a family member murdered by police, or they may have witnessed these traumatic occurrences in media coverage that (re)traumatizes Black bodies and communities.

Rethinking this part of the curriculum can be an early and effective start to making all of our curriculum and pedagogy more culturally responsive and humanizing for Black children.

In the face of a seemingly endless stream of murders of Black boys and men by police officers, how do Black boys reconcile this contradiction? Given the long-standing mistrust and alienation between Black communities and the police, a curriculum unit that many early childhood educators consider essential for children to know and understand can also become a source of trauma for Black boys.

This is just one example of how curriculum violence is an often-unexamined way schools reproduce systemic and structural racism and discrimination in the lives of nonwhite children, especially Black boys. Rethinking this part of the curriculum can be an early and effective start to making all of our curriculum and pedagogy more culturally responsive and humanizing for Black children.

This article is written in memory of the late George Floyd (46 years old), Trayvon Martin (17 years old), Tamir Rice (12 years old), Daunte Wright (20 years old), and the countless other Black boys and men whose lives were taken from them at the hands of security guards, self-appointed vigilantes, and police officers (Wright, 2021). My focus on Black boys and men is not intended to diminish the experiences, perspectives, and realities of criminalizing Black girls and women in schools and society (see *Pushout: The Criminalization of Black Girls in Schools* by Monique W. Morris), but rather to shine a light on the especially perilous

— and even deadly — position of Black boys in schools and society and ways we can begin to change that injustice in the earliest years of school.

TRAUMA IN THE CURRICULUM

Despite efforts to make curriculum *anti-bias* (Derman-Sparks, 1989, 2008; York, 2016), *anti-racist* (Kendi, 2019), *culturally relevant* (Gay, 2010), *culturally responsive* (Ladson-Billings, 2009), *culturally sustaining* (Paris & Alim, 2017), and *multicultural* (Banks, 2014; Ramsey, 2015) whiteness and white ideologies continue to pervade the ways schools plan curriculum, deliver instruction, and manage (or mismanage) the multicultural and multiethnic classroom climate (Johnson, 2019).

When educators lack the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to infuse the curriculum with readings, activities, and assignments that challenge, nuance, and position and challenge students of color — Black boys in particular — in positive and affirming ways, they (wittingly and perhaps unwittingly), can (re)traumatize these children in disorienting and damaging ways.

Research on adverse childhood experiences has focused on trauma in children's and families' lives *outside* of school, but there is little to no attention paid to how schools exacerbate and even cause racial trauma in the lives of Black students. Some examples are overt, like when several Wisconsin

teachers asked students how they would "punish a slave" (Gostanian & Madani, 2021) and a California teacher engaged in a racist rant about one of her Black male students and his "poor" parenting (Obregon, 2021).

Others are deeply entrenched in policies, like rigid behavioral rules (e.g. walking in a straight line, no talking in the hallways) and disciplinary policies (e.g. zero-tolerance policies) that target students of color, Black boys in particular, who are marginalized in the larger society (Ford & Wright, 2021). Still others are unexamined aspects of the curriculum, like the community helpers unit.

RETHINK AND REIMAGINE

When thoughtful consideration is given to these factors, it is necessary to rethink and reimagine the community helpers curriculum, explicitly concerning the policing of Black and Brown bodies and their communities. We should start by asking: Who are Black boys' community helpers and who are not? This is vital in a climate in which Black boys feel watched and unwelcome in schools and society.

In general, and specifically in the community helpers curriculum units, children are taught that police officers help prevent crimes and make sure people in the community follow the rules and laws to ensure they are safe. But is this true for all Black communities, and Black boys in particular? Black people are 2.5 times

more likely to be arrested than whites (Henning & Davis, 2017), and decades of data show that racial disparity begins for Black males when they are boys of school age.

Black boys are policed far more frequently than white boys in their communities, stores, schools, homes, and on social media, often for what many contend are inconsequential reasons like playing loud music and running.

The U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights reports that, while Black children make up only 19% of preschool enrollment, they represent 47% of preschool children receiving one or more out-of-school suspensions. In contrast, white children represent 41% of preschool enrollment but only 28% of suspensions (Wright, 2019).

Black boys are also seen in schools and by society as more culpable for their actions and less innocent than their peers of other races (Wright, 2018; Wright, 2019). They are viewed as "bad boys" and "troublemakers," suspected and dehumanized first before schools and society see their humanity.

STEPS FOR EDUCATORS

Given the reality of policing in Black communities, how can educators teach about community helpers in honest, sensitive, and respectful ways without doing more harm than good? More importantly, how can educators use this unit and others to cultivate the hopes, dreams, and aspirations of Black boys in the face of systemic and structural inequalities? The answers to these questions lie in the actions educators take.

One such action is for teachers to educate themselves about "the talk" Black families must have with their children to prepare them for police interactions, advising them how to avoid confrontations with police and how to act if they are stopped. Black families engage their children in "the talk" out of fear, given the unrelenting surveillance and the presumption of criminality by law enforcement early in

the lives of Black children. Sadly, Black families must begin this discussion with their children as early as 5 and 6 years old because of the practice of "adultification" (adults seeing Black boys as older and less innocent than their white peers).

Educators should also understand and acknowledge the interactions Black boys and men have with the police, the results of which frequently include severe injuries or even death. If the community helpers curriculum unit — and others — are to be culturally responsive, relevant, sustaining, and responsible, the controversy surrounding policing in communities of color cannot be ignored.

Educators should anticipate that children are likely to hear about police incidents from family members, the news, and their communities, and therefore will need developmentally appropriate ways to talk about their feelings. These conversations and discussions must be honest, sensitive, and respectful to avoid (re) traumatization of Black boys.

Children's books like *Not My Idea: A Book About Whiteness*, written and illustrated by Anastasia Higginbotham, *For Beautiful Black Boys Who Believe In a Better World*, written by Michael W. Waters and illustrated by Keisha Morris, and *Something Happened in Our Town: A Child's Story About Racial Injustice,* written by Marianne Celano, Marietta Collins, and Ann Hazzard and illustrated by Jennifer Zivoin, can help educators in beginning the conversation about police brutality of Black boys and men in their communities.

Teaching children about the world in which they actually live, including the responsibility that comes with being a community helper in diverse communities, must begin in the early grades. Educators must ask children what they know about the world, specifically about community helpers. This open-ended approach is vital for counteracting a narrative that characterizes our community helpers from an idyllic perspective that dismisses racism as

a thing of the past. That perspective — intentionally or unwittingly — downplays the need for the continuation of race, diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice work and activism.

Discussions in the curriculum about police officers as community helpers from a perspective that accentuates only the positives void of the documented systemic and structural changes that must occur concerning policing and Black communities limits opportunities to explore ways to change the current practice of policing. Moreover, educators must engage children in a balanced discussion about the role of police officers, the benefits, and the reality that sometimes police interactions do not occur as they should, resulting in serious injuries.

BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

Dialogue about community helpers and Black boys must include what Bryan Stevenson (2014) described as "getting proximate to suffering." By this, he means the ability to come close to others who suffer from and experience racism and injustice. He asserts that if individuals are willing to come close to such matters, they can potentially enact change.

This is important for teachers, but change must also happen at the community level. I argue that it is necessary for community helpers in general, police officers in particular, to get proximate. When community helpers live outside of the communities in which they serve, they must get to know the people within these communities from a strengths-based and asset-based perspective.

Efforts to build positive relationships with Black communities and, by extension, Black boys from a distance limit police officers' ability to nuance communities' strengths and needs. They must get close enough to humanize and reimagine the people they have been charged to protect and serve. When police officers are trained to get proximate with the communities they serve, perhaps their attitudes and

beliefs about Black communities will allow them to understand the people they are trying to protect and serve more deeply.

Black boys need community helpers, police officers in particular, who can say, "I see you, I hear you, I am you." This level of humanizing and honesty is vital if Black boys are to know and trust their community.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

The murders of George Floyd Jr., Daunte Wright, and others are tragic examples that there is still much work to do regarding matters of systemic and structural racism and discrimination in schools and society. Black boys must see a different kind of policing, one that values Black lives like all other lives.

This valuing begins by recognizing the fear that Black boys have of the police, rooted in a long history in which white communities are served and protected and communities of color, Black communities in particular, are policed and underserved. Black boys must feel *welcomed*, not *watched*, if they are to realize their promise, potential, and possibilities.

Welcoming, nurturing, and honoring Black boys' potential must start in the earliest years. These actions are essential to advancing the goals of equity in early childhood and beyond that have been advocated by many educators and organizations (e.g., NAEYC, 2019). Altering the community helpers unit in the curriculum is a good starting place, but it isn't enough.

Educators must be intentional about building caring and equitable learning environments that not only develop literacy, numeracy, and social-emotional development, but focus in a consistent and systemic way on racial equity. They must humanize and reimagine Black boys. To create these equitable spaces and teach effectively within them from a stance of developmentally appropriate and equitable practice, early childhood educators must be equipped to address bias and racism throughout the curriculum and the school and

have sophisticated pedagogical practices that include anti-bias and anti-racist practices.

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4 Practices for leaders to build equity

BY KIFFANY PRIDE

The COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the longstanding pattern of lower scholastic performance among marginalized groups of students negatively impacted by poverty, disability, and race (Kuhfeld et al., 2020; NCES, 2020). This gap in achievement demands that all of us question whether we are paying enough attention to educational equity in our schools and systems. Education leaders, in particular, have a responsibility to ensure equity for each student. Without

intentional efforts, we are part of the problem and not the solution.

As assistant commissioner of learning services in the Arkansas Department of Education, I believe that state leaders have a unique and important role to play in advocating for students and creating equity. We can help schools make systemic changes. That starts with establishing what equity is.

The perception among educators and citizens continues to be that practices around equal rights equate to provisions related to equity. But

equity is not about creating uniform opportunities for all; it is about creating conditions in schools to reduce disparities that may result from poverty, race, or disability (Peurach et al., 2019).

As schools experience a shift to a more diverse body of students, many equity leaders question the "evenhanded" approach in schools and point out that we must meet different students' needs differently to guarantee that all students graduate prepared for college or career (Noguera, 2001).

In Arkansas, the unknown impact of COVID-19 on student learning

In Arkansas, the unknown impact of COVID-19 on student learning created a heightened sense of urgency to confront inequities. Over the last year, the state department of education has engaged in four essential practices for building equity.

created a heightened sense of urgency to confront inequities. We believe that the pandemic should not deter us but further compel us to address equity courageously and systematically with resolute actions for the benefit of each student. Over the last year, the state department of education has engaged in four essential practices for building equity described here.

① USE DATA TO UNDERSTAND STUDENT LEARNING PATTERNS.

Establishing a process to examine the current reality of student achievement is a critical step to ensure equity. Many educators recognize the value of data, but the challenge is to create consistent practices for examining data and using the results.

To understand where we need to make changes to teaching, we need to look at data at the microlevel to identify trends in the performance of subgroups and individuals. For example, when our state looked at foundational literacy skills in early elementary school — a factor strongly associated with students' long-term learning trajectories — we discovered a startling pattern. Kindergarteners from all backgrounds typically started in the average range, but over the K-2 experience, the trend

in performance for student groups varied tremendously.

Overall, we saw significant gaps in achievement and growth for our students in poverty and an even wider gap for our ethnic groups. African American students and English learners tended to have erratic trajectories. Though alarming, this data created heightened awareness that we were achieving our intended results for some students, but not for all.

To facilitate this kind of data dive, state leaders for math, literacy, and science engaged in professional learning about how to analyze state-level data and draw conclusions about achievement patterns and needs. They also engage in ongoing professional learning and coaching about building students' foundational skills through equitable practices. This allows them to support regional specialists in learning to align data results, equitable practices, and strategic plans.

② DEFINE WHAT IT MEANS TO HAVE AN EQUITABLE SYSTEM.

Educators often struggle to define equity clearly and consistently. This creates confusion, disconnection among efforts, and even suspicion and distrust about the work and makes it difficult to

create a safe atmosphere to do the right work. If the goal is to ensure that each student is ready for a career and college, then we must clearly state our goals and align our efforts so that each learner can reach his or her fullest potential.

In Arkansas, we formalized a process for state leaders to collectively define equity. We involved multiple stakeholder groups and engaged a national education partner to guide the process and facilitate a conversation across six agencies under the department of education.

Aligning our definition of equity helped us establish the expectation that the equity lens would be applied systemically across each agency. As each agency develops a strategic plan to change the trajectory of outcomes for underserved populations, the equity lens will be at the foreground of planning, even as each agency determines how that lens will be used and what equitable practices will be applied in its work.

One of our goals is to ensure that the equity lens is applied in classrooms serving children with different learning needs. Applying inclusive practices in general education classrooms is an ongoing focus of study for state and regional leaders. We have engaged in inclusive principal leadership work

through the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO, 2020), and we also support regional professional learning and coaching efforts focused on inclusion.

For example, we implemented a pilot project in four elementary schools representing different regions of the state focused on ensuring that students with Individualized Education Plans and other struggling learners have meaningful access to core instruction and established systems of intervention.

Though in the first year of implementation, the principals and teachers have reported encouraging anecdotal data reflective of cultural changes involving general and special education teachers planning together on a regular basis, and increases in skill attainment for students. Also, there are signposts of success such as students exiting from special education services. This is one of many pilots that we will continue to implement to systematize practices that foster equity.

③ DEVELOP A STATEWIDE COMMITMENT TO EVIDENCE-BASED INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES.

To create equity, we need systems to guide and support equitable classroom instruction. We need pathways for implementation at the classroom level and processes for consistently examining qualitative and quantitative data to determine if those practices are happening and if student learning targets are being met.

In Arkansas, we have created a network of curriculum leaders, and we are providing collective professional learning in evidence-based instructional practices and tools to support each learner.

The state's network is the Teaching and Learning Collaborative. Its main participants are curriculum leaders in school districts. The emphasis, in this school year, has been on effective teaching in every classroom because we know that effective teaching directly

links to effective learning (DuFour & Marzano, 2011). The state has a systematic process to identify and implement evidence-based strategies that are student-focused and supported by research, and we are providing opportunities to district and school leaders to influence instructional practices in classrooms. Districts have developed or are in the process of collaboratively developing instructional snapshots that delineate schools' instructional models.

To further promote systemic practices around equity, we are endorsing high-leverage practices. Beyond specifying instructional strategies, it is essential to build knowledge, provide resources for professional learning, and establish job-embedded supports to ensure the application of high-leverage practices (McLeskey, 2019).

Accordingly, we have held monthly professional learning for state specialists and bimonthly regional professional learning for content specialists to increase the depth of understanding about high-leverage practices, and we developed study guides for specialists to use in hosting collaborative learning sessions in schools and districts.

We are near the completion of the first year of state and regional training. The next step will include defining implementation efforts in regions and establishing clear metrics by which to establish the realization of high-leverage practices being implemented in classrooms.

④ INCREASE DIVERSITY IN THE EDUCATOR WORKFORCE.

Recruitment and retention of a diverse group of educators is also critical to achieving equity. One way we are addressing this goal is through the state's Office of Educator Effectiveness and Licensure. The state established the Grow Your Own Initiative to address teacher shortages in geographical areas where there are larger populations of diverse students and simultaneously

reduces barriers to obtaining licensure for would-be educators of color and from low-income backgrounds.

Barriers to certification include but are not limited to obtaining the required bachelor's degree and passing the certification assessments. The Grow Your Own initiative also builds pathways to support local residents with the aspiration to be educators with resources to help with entrance in educator prep programs and supports mentoring to follow through with licensure requirements.

Though early, we are seeing in multiple districts that a diverse group of aspiring educators have gained licensure and committed to working in the local school district to support teaching and learning.

CREATING CONNECTIONS

Addressing the disparities in education has many layers and will mean establishing a systemic process to speak to the inequities and build progressive practices to meet the needs of each student. This takes collaboration across levels.

In Arkansas, the state government has largely established and orchestrated policy and practices in schools, but school districts and their leaders are the heart of implementation (McGuinn, 2015). Beyond policy-driven initiatives, state leaders must take an active role in leading schools to meet the expectations outlined in the Every Student Succeeds Act for students to demonstrate grade-level achievement and growth each year. As a state leader, I believe this is one of my professional and ethical duties, and I advocate for equitable practices in schools for the advantage of each and every student.

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Practical tools
for improving equity
and dismantling racism in schools

BY LEE TEITEL AND MARY ANTÓN
WITH SAMUEL ETIENNE, ELIZA LOYOLA, AND ANDREA STEELE

Racial equity is a deep-seated value for principals Andrea Steele of Tucson, Arizona, Samuel Etienne of Elizabeth, New Jersey, and Eliza Loyola of Austin, Texas. As they strive to fulfill these values in their schools, each of these principals has found valuable tools and approaches, as well as a supportive virtual network, as they engaged in an equity improvement process developed at the Reimagining Integration: Diverse and Equitable Schools (RIDES) Project

Samuel Etienne

Eliza Loyola

Andrea Steele

at the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

The goal of the RIDES Project is to disrupt systemic inequity in America's schools by building individual and team capacity to tackle race and

racism. Central to that has been the development of a carefully structured Equity Improvement Cycle that guides and supports equity teams in schools, districts, and charter management organizations with improvement tools, practices, and examples that promote diversity, equity, and true integration.

Author Mary Antón worked with RIDES when she was a school principal and later as a RIDES coach; Lee Teitel was the founding director of RIDES and co-creator (with Darnisa Amante-

TOOL 1: QUICK SELF-ASSESSMENT ON THE ABCDs		
Use the chart below to assess how important you think this <u>should be</u> in your school, with 1 being low importance and 4 being high importance. Then assess how well you think your school is doing in reaching that outcome, using this key: 1 = unclear or not started; 2 = beginning or small pockets; 3 = fairly regularly; 4 = solid, part of our practice		
Purpose	**Your sense of how important this should be** 1 = low, 4 = high	**To what extent do you think your school is reaching this outcome?** Add notes that support your assessment
Desegregation: getting the diverse bodies in the building		
Excellent **Academic** outcomes for all		
Belongingness for all		
Commitment to understand and dismantle racism		
Appreciation for **Diversity**		

Jackson) of the Equity Improvement Cycle. We have engaged in Equity Improvement Cycle work with more than 70 schools or districts — some that came to Harvard to learn to use the cycle, dozens more that we and our colleagues have supported as independent consultants, and still others we are beginning to work with through the newly formed nonprofit Schools Transforming.

Our experiences point to powerful ways that dismantling institutional racism in schools requires five interconnected components:

- **Vision:** Being clear and transparently public about why you are doing this work is essential for engaging stakeholders, tuning your processes, and supporting people through the long marathon of equity improvement.

- **Personal and team equity culture:** Mindset shifts and deep personal learning about racism, privilege, and power need to be dynamically interwoven at the individual, team, and school or system level.

- **Improvement processes:** Improvement science, data cycles, and other processes are necessary. They draw on data, provide analytic tools, and support development of plans and their thoughtful implementation.

- **Shared ownership:** Broad engagement across stakeholders is powerful when it is through shared ownership, not compliance. Whenever possible, the work should be done *with* students, not to them or for them.

- **Connectedness:** Deep equity

improvement takes place when it is done systemically — linking what happens in classrooms, hallways, administrative offices, and the community to each other and to deep belief structures about ideological and institutional racism held by all.

Each of these components by itself is necessary, but not sufficient. It is in the presence of all five that genuine sustainable work gets done. To bring the pieces together and work as a professional learning accelerator, we recommend a sixth component:

- **Networking across schools:** Equity work can be challenging, isolating, and hard to sustain. Participating in communities of practice with counterparts in other settings helps school and district leaders get ideas, support, accountability

partners, and more as they work to implement all five of these approaches.

In this article, we elaborate on each of these approaches and provide examples of how to apply them, drawing on the experiences of Steele, Etienne, and Loyola — principals who are one, two, and three years, respectively, into their engagement with the equity improvement process developed by us and our colleagues at RIDES.

We also provide sample tools that can be used to put these equity actions into practice. These are just a few of the dozens of assessments, curated articles and books, webinars, and how-to videos we have created (see box on p. 39).

VISION
TOOL 1, p. 34

In too many settings, vision statements and the goals on which they are built are vague and ill-defined ("We want equitable outcomes for all students") or overly narrow ("We want to close the achievement gap."). Often, they are developed, owned, and understood only by a handful of people at the top of the organization.

To help schools and districts develop and implement visions that are clearly defined and broadly owned, the approach we developed at RIDES offers guidance on implementing the ABCDs: providing high-level **A**cademics and fostering a sense of **B**elongingness for all students, demonstrating a **C**ommitment to understand and dismantle racism, and helping students develop an appreciation of **D**iversity.

The Equity Improvement Cycle we use asks sites to assess the extent to which they prioritize the ABCDs and how well they are achieving them. We also ask them to use this reflection as they fashion vision statements to motivate systemwide equity work, maintain focus on it, and hold themselves accountable for it.

Andrea Steele, principal of Cragin Elementary in Tucson, Arizona, knows that a school vision is important and that how you get to it and who owns it matter more. In her first year as a principal (2018-19), she remembers that as the district was ramping up its equity work, it asked each school to review its vision. Attending the RIDES Institute at Harvard, she and her team learned about the ABCDs and worked to formulate a specific equity-focused vision.

Knowing that the process mattered as much as the product, she waited until the end of the first year to formulate the vision so that she and her team could build on what they were learning from students about their need for Belongingness. "That was a very powerful way to build a vision," Steele says. "There are other textbook ways of doing it, by administrators, creating committees, but doing it this way, almost using a full improvement cycle to drive it — that's the way I always want to create a mission and vision."

PERSONAL AND TEAM EQUITY CULTURE
TOOL 2, below

Equity teams (and ultimately schools and systems) have to have common definitions and purposes, explore individual and collective implicit biases, and develop sufficient relational trust to start and sustain deep equity work. Without doing conscious and explicit work on this, school teams will mirror the difficulties that people in this country have in talking about race, racism, and equity, making it virtually impossible to work together to address inequity. This can lead to participants of color on equity teams feeling marginalized and afraid to fully speak up — they don't want to be seen as "the angry black woman" — because of the undiscussed issues of white fragility. Or white participants take over to become "saviors" or retreat and remain silent for fear of being called racist.

TOOL 2: QUICK SELF-ASSESSMENT ON THE PERSONAL AND TEAM EQUITY CULTURE IN YOUR EQUITY TEAM AND SCHOOL (OR SYSTEM)

Use this key: 1 = unclear or not started; 2 = beginning or small pockets; 3 = fairly regularly; 4 = solid, part of our practice

To what extent have you …	… within your equity team?				… within your school (or system)?			
A Developed a clearly communicated and common WHY for doing racial equity work.	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
B Created common definitions of what you mean by racial equity in your schools.	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
C Taken a hard look at your own (individual and collective) biases and triggers.	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
D Forged enough relational trust to talk honestly about all of the above and try things out and give each other honest feedback.	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4

TOOL 3: QUICK SELF-ASSESSMENT ON CURRENT EQUITY IMPROVEMENT PROCESSES

Using the Equity Improvement Cycle developed at RIDES at right (for more information, see **rides.gse.harvard.edu/equity-improvement-cycle**) as a guide, fill out the chart with these quick ratings to assess where you think you are (current), and where you want to be (preferred) on each step:

1 = Do not think of it, or do not know how to.

2 = Do this sometimes or not very well.

3 = Do this well and consistently.

Equity Improvement Cycle

INITIAL AND CONTINUED DEVELOPMENT OF A PERSONAL AND TEAM EQUITY CULTURE

1. Talk honestly about inclusion and create a vision of equity in a specific area.

2. Collect data to see how current reality compares to the vision.

3. Diagnose underlying causes of any gaps between vision and reality.

4. Plan one or more initiatives that systemically address gaps.

5. Act: Implement specific initiatives with support and accountability.

6. Reflect: Assess impact and processes of work and plan next improvement cycle.

Step	Current			Preferred		
Personal and team equity culture (relational trust, common language, etc.)	1	2	3	1	2	3
Clear and shared vision of equity in specific area	1	2	3	1	2	3
Collection of data to see how reality and vision match	1	2	3	1	2	3
Diagnosis of gaps to look at underlying root causes	1	2	3	1	2	3
Action planning (with systemic approach)	1	2	3	1	2	3
Implementation with support and accountability	1	2	3	1	2	3
Reflection on process and plan next improvement cycle	1	2	3	1	2	3

Eliza Loyola, principal of the Menchaca PK-5 in Austin, Texas, brought her team to a virtual clinic offered by RIDES in August 2020 and noted immediately the power of stories in helping develop relational trust on her team: "We spent time at the clinic telling our stories about race. Afterward we spent two months in our weekly meetings, sharing our stories of race, racism, and childhood experiences. I think that that has been tremendously valuable in helping to build trust among our team and building understanding about other life experiences. You can talk about the importance of understanding other people's experiences, but it only works if you put in the time to do it."

IMPROVEMENT PROCESSES
TOOL 3, above

Systemic improvement toward equity is hard because many schools and systems do not have robust improvement processes that use data thoughtfully and deliberately and that help educators diagnose patterns, generate solutions, and then implement, assess, and refine them. Equity improvement is especially challenging when teams have not developed clarity, relational trust, and other hallmarks of personal and team

equity culture because team members will not talk honestly and clearly with one another.

At RIDES, we approached this by building a six-step recurring, structured Equity Improvement Cycle that centers personal and team equity culture with both an initial and a recurrent focus. Beginning with an articulated vision for a specific equity focus area (Step 1), the Equity Improvement Cycle guides participants to (2) collect relevant data to identify gaps between vision and current reality and (3) analyze those data to understand what the root causes of those gaps may be, before going on to (4) planning, (5) implementing, and

(6) reflecting on progress and planning the next cycle.

The principals make clear that progress around the cycle is not always steady — there are zigzags and recursive minicycles, but they find the general movement and its structure useful in developing and maintaining momentum. Sam Etienne, principal of Winfield Scott School #2 in Elizabeth, New Jersey, has been engaged with the Equity Improvement Cycle developed at RIDES since November 2019. He is passionate about several aspects of the cycle: the use of data ("The data don't lie," he says), the engagement of students ("The process lets us hear what the students have to say"), and the longer-term cyclical nature of it ("We can't do this just to check off a box. This is multigenerational work").

He offers a specific example of how the district recently used data from a recent survey of students his district uses as part of its partnership with Panorama Education, a company that helps districts survey students, staff, and families on issues like sense of belonging or social emotional learning. In addition to the standard survey questions, Panorama and RIDES staff developed a new bank of questions about how well the students think the school has facilitated them talking about race and equity.

The district discovered that some of the lowest student ratings of the entire survey were in response to these questions. Prior experience with the Equity Improvement Cycle meant that the school knew exactly how it needed to use those data to make change. "Looking at the cycle, we are creating small focus groups with students and with teachers to look at the data," Etienne said.

Etienne also uses the structure of the Equity Improvement Cycle to help his staff stay intentional when the temptation to be reactive threatens to take them off track. "They say, 'What are we going to do? What's the action?' " he says, "And I say: Let's follow the process. Let's look at what the students have to say."

TOOL 4: QUICK STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT AND OWNERSHIP SELF-ASSESSMENT

Take a minute to think about who played what roles in the last equity improvement initiative in your own setting (current) and what you would prefer.
Use the following to indicate depth of involvement:
- **A** = actively engaged, involved in planning, understood what and why doing it
- **P** = passive participant, recipient of efforts, with little or no understanding of why
- **D** = disconnected, left out, uninformed

Who	Current			Preferred		
Central office	A	P	D	A	P	D
Other administrators	A	P	D	A	P	D
Principals	A	P	D	A	P	D
Teachers	A	P	D	A	P	D
Other staff	A	P	D	A	P	D
Parents and/or community members	A	P	D	A	P	D
Students	A	P	D	A	P	D

SHARED OWNERSHIP
TOOL 4, above

Even with a clear vision, personal and team equity culture, and strong improvement processes, schools and systems routinely leave key stakeholders out. Students are often the passive recipients of equity improvement efforts, and parents are left out altogether.

To counter this, RIDES shares examples of intensive improvement processes that fully engage students as equal partners with the adults. As Principal Etienne notes, "We know that when it comes from the students, it has a bigger impact."

The RIDES approach asks teams to list the stakeholders in their settings and rate their participation in the equity improvement work as actively engaged, passive recipients, and disconnected and to redesign efforts to be more inclusive.

In addition to engaging a different, expanded set of stakeholders, it is important to engage stakeholders differently — to move from compliance or the use of hierarchical authority to engagement and ownership. Etienne describes how powerful a simple. intervention of having a weekly coffee hour with the teaching staff has been to combat the isolation and lack of connection during the pandemic. He found that as teachers got more comfortable, they started volunteering more, taking ownership of some of the innovations they needed to put into place for online learning, and speeded up the transfer of ideas.

He now has teachers taking primary responsibility for professional learning. "This lateral work — this work where teachers are learning from other teachers as part of the team — is much more powerful. We have all the answers that we need in the people that we have. We as leaders need to figure out how to make that work." He adds that as a Black principal with a mostly white faculty, he finds that this shared ownership is especially important.

TOOL 5: QUICK SELF-ASSESSMENT ON THE SYSTEMIC NATURE OF YOUR EQUITY IMPROVEMENT PROCESSES

Use the graphic of the Systemic Improvement Map developed at RIDES at right, along with the maxim that you cannot work on diversity and equity without consciously dismantling beliefs about racism at the individual, interpersonal, institutional, and ideological levels.

Think of a recent equity improvement initiative at your site and use an X to show what connections you made to each systemic lever, then use the column on the right to indicate what else you could have done to make a stronger connection among those levers.

RIDES Systemic Improvement Map

Family and community engagement

Student

Leadership

THE CLASSROOM Courageous challenging culturally connected

Culture

Teacher

Content

Systems and structures
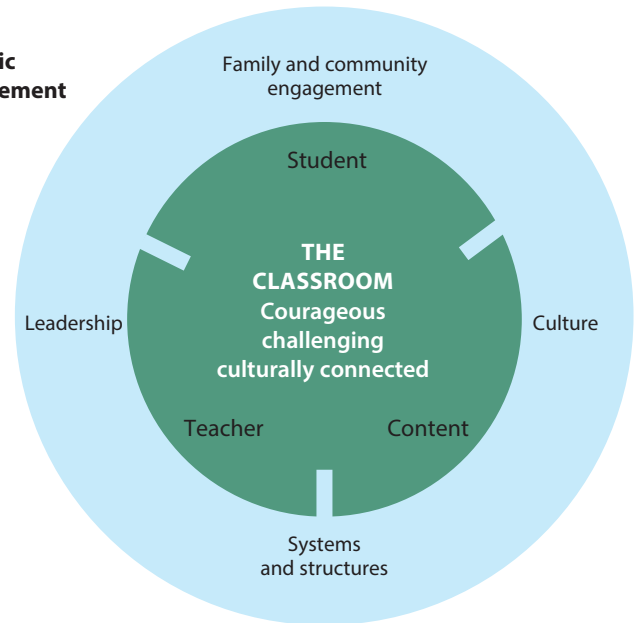
Systemic levers	What connections we made (x)	What we could connect to
Students		
Teachers		
Content		
Leadership		
Culture		
Systems and structures		
Families		
Overall beliefs about individual, interpersonal, institutional, and ideological racism		

CONNECTEDNESS
TOOL 5, above

We find it all too common that educators look for silver bullets— single solutions to complex interrelated challenges. For example, schools will adopt an externally prepared culturally relevant curriculum without helping teachers explore their implicit biases or how their own lack of education and understanding about race and racism affect their interactions with students. Or, when asked, districts can produce a long list of the efforts they have made in the last two years to focus on equity, but those efforts are isolated and don't reinforce each other.

We addressed this challenge by developing a Systemic Improvement Map that highlights the connections that need to be made throughout the system and to the larger set of beliefs about individual, interpersonal, institutional, and ideological racism, and provides tools to help equity teams assess this.

Even as all three principals have made progress in building the internal connections among initiatives within their schools, each recognizes the

importance of connections across the district and aims to have an influence on the other schools and larger systems in which they work. Principal Steele is proud of the way her school built a strong culture from the original "travel team" — the term she uses to describe the small group that got to travel to Harvard — to the rest of the school and feels frustrated by not being able to expand to the district. "If we want to make true systemic change that will manifest in my campus, we have to see it happening at the district level."

NETWORKING ACROSS SCHOOLS

Networking serves as a powerful accelerant of race and equity work, including the five components described in this article, in many ways. The ability to exchange ideas with other schools and school leaders reinforces each of the five approaches while providing a safety net of ideas and resources to allow principals and their teams to stand strong in the face of opposition to the work. In these virtual networks, we see both accelerated development of the team as a "we" and camaraderie among teams that provides for deepened collaboration and accountability. Individual learning magnifies as team members catch the excitement across schools.

The network is particularly powerful

ACCESS TO THESE TOOLS AND OTHER RESOURCES

More information about the tools and processes in this article can be found at **SchoolsTransforming.org**. Schools Transforming is a new nonprofit organization founded to continue providing direct support to schools and districts when RIDES's grant funding comes to a close in June 2021. In addition, the tools and archived information about RIDES will be available at rides.gse. harvard.edu through June 2022. Note that as a matter of Harvard policy, the continued use and development of these tools at SchoolsTransforming.org do not constitute an endorsement of the nonprofit on the part of Harvard University or the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

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for principals, as it helps them move from isolation to connectedness. Etienne says, "I get outside the bubble of my town. ... (Y)ou no longer have this lonely road. You see other agents moving the work along. … (I)t puts gasoline into the fire to move this work forward." When situations get messy, when there is pushback, he notes, "You have RIDES and your networks in your pocket."

MOVING BEYOND TALK

With a strong network to support the five components, school equity leaders in many different roles become clearer about who they are and where they stand and become more vocal and confident in taking on the challenges of equity work. They are able to maintain patience and calm in the face of opposition and stand up for the core

value of equity. Most of all, the base of knowledge and support helps them model this courage for others in their community and move beyond talk to take action — and that is vital for the whole community.

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4 practices for leaders to build equity

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Professional learning and equity directors work hand-in-hand

BY CAITLIN AHERN AND JOHNNY COLE

In the Lexington Public Schools, outside of Boston, Massachusetts, we pride ourselves on being innovative. One of our core values encourages us to "embrace your revolutionary spirit," harkening back to Lexington's historic role in the American Revolution.

Two years ago, we demonstrated that spirit by creating a director of equity role. Positions like this hadn't previously existed in many districts like ours — small, suburban, well-resourced, high-performing, historically white, and recently diversifying.

We developed the role in part to respond to equity issues that had long existed but were rising in our community's awareness, like the trend of educators making disproportionate special education referrals and exclusionary disciplinary practices for Black students. But we also recognized we needed help dismantling the larger systems of oppression that have operated within our public schools for generations.

As important as the director of equity role would be for our district, we knew that the work of antiracism could not rest on the shoulders of one person. Building educators' knowledge and capacity takes broad commitment and partnership from other leaders and departments, especially professional learning.

Fortunately, for many years, the district has embraced a comprehensive professional learning program serving all faculty and staff. Cultural competency and other variations on diversity, equity, and inclusion topics had long been a part of the program, providing a good starting point. The director of professional learning was well positioned to engage in a partnership with the newly hired director of equity to co-develop a program that supported teachers, administrators, and support staff in becoming culturally responsive, antiracist educators.

While the partnership is relatively new, we have learned so much in a short period of time. In this article, we will share how we have learned to establish shared responsibility, differentiate learning to serve everyone, break down barriers between departments, and embed equity in everything we do.

Of course, these efforts are very much a work in progress — we have significant work still to do. Too many students are still being disadvantaged by our policies, practices, and procedures, and, at times, it can be overwhelming to fathom the amount of systemic change needed in a field where, historically, change comes too slowly, if at all. However, we have found that we can build educators' capacity to achieve equity through professional learning, and that strong, agile partnerships are critical to that work.

ESTABLISH SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

One important understanding we established early in our partnership is that the director of equity is not the facilitator of all diversity, equity, and inclusion professional learning. This was something we addressed in our first meeting together as we worked to delineate how our two roles would complement each other.

Caitlin Ahern: "As the director of professional learning, I had worked hard to increase the amount and types of diversity, equity, and inclusion professional learning we offered and was nervous I was going to be expected to hand that entire part of my job over to this new role. I knew my colleague, Johnny, was coming in with a wealth of experience leading diversity, equity, and inclusion professional learning for districts throughout the region, and it made sense to me he would want to continue that work."

Johnny Cole: "As the director of equity and student supports, I knew right away this role was growing quickly, and I couldn't commit to leading all of our professional learning while simultaneously tackling the practices producing disparate outcomes in discipline, hiring, grading, and more. Furthermore, it wasn't my role to be the only expert in diversity, equity, and inclusion; I should be helping the entire district build capacity in leading the work."

Another early decision was that the director of equity would be a member of the professional learning committee, a districtwide, diverse team of educators and administrators who advise on the professional learning program. We collaborate constantly on ideas and visions for our diversity, equity, and inclusion professional learning, and the work of facilitating our many
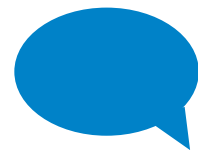
Caitlin Ahern:
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"Newer staff are entering the profession more racially literate, likely as cultural proficiency and antiracist work become more commonplace in teacher preparation programs."

diversity, equity, and inclusion offerings is distributed among a combination of external providers, building and district leaders, and, increasingly, educators who have taken on informal leadership roles in this area.

DIFFERENTIATE LEARNING TO REACH EVERYONE

Diversity, equity, and inclusion professional learning cannot be one size fits all, and it cannot be a one-and-done event. If we simply offered a course in cultural competency here and a workshop in responding to microaggressions there, we would do little to make real, systemic progress toward equity. One of the most meaningful aspects of a coordinated approach is differentiation.

We have learned the importance of differentiating based on identity. Too often, professional learning focuses on socially dominant groups; for example, racial equity work is often centered on white educators and work about gender identity is often centered on cisgender staff. In Lexington, we're working to provide differentiated full-group learning experiences, as well as focused opportunities for affinity groups organized by shared racial identity.

In department or faculty meetings, we encourage leaders to preview content that will focus on issues of identity such as race and provide voluntary affinity spaces for folks who identify with historically marginalized and silenced groups. This is coupled with targeted professional learning for those same marginalized groups, such as a course in leadership and a summer book study, both reserved for educators of color.

Since well-meaning educators can cause trauma for colleagues with uninformed ideas and opinions, leaders need to be strategic about when to provide these affinity spaces for learning and when to bring their community together for heterogeneous learning.

Cole: "As an educator of color myself, I've always been acutely aware of the way white folks have typically been socialized to ignore their racial identity and are often entering professional learning experiences focused on racial equity in a nascent state. While this entry point makes sense for folks just awakening to their journey moving toward social justice, this ignores the needs of many staff of color, most of whom are fully aware of the ways in which racial oppression

WHAT IS AN AFFINITY GROUP?

Affinity groups are spaces where individuals who share a common identity can come together for collaboration and support. They are usually organized on the basis of unchangeable aspects of identity, such as race, ethnicity, national origin, gender, sexuality, language, ability status, family structure, etc. Affinity groups are most often useful for people whose identities have been historically silenced or marginalized, as oppression can result in feelings of isolation in typical workplace and educational environments.

School-based affinity groups are often designated as safe spaces for participants to share how their identity impacts their role in the educational setting, as well as to work toward a common mission or goal connected to that identity. The absence of individuals who identify differently is often what creates this sense of safety for group members.

has manifested at the micro and macro levels in schools. Worst of all, this continues to marginalize an already marginalized demographic in our schools."

In addition to providing differentiated approaches to professional learning based on identity traits, we are working to build layers to reflect the different levels of experience our faculty and staff bring to the work. A systemic commitment to equity means supporting learning at all levels and roles of the system and for people at all places on the continuum of racial awareness.

There are many in our district who are striving toward the goal of being an antiracist educator, staff who have taken advantage of every professional learning opportunity we have offered over the last several years. To keep everyone learning and moving forward, we have expanded our offerings to include more advanced courses, as well as helping support pathways to leadership through school-based equity teams and by recruiting facilitators from this group for districtwide workshops and book clubs.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, some of our staff are reluctant learners — just as with

any professional learning initiative. They might not agree we should be focusing our attention on issues of equity, or they believe this is simply the latest administrative fad. For these educators, mandatory professional learning opportunities must be coupled with consistent messaging and actions from leadership.

We have created districtwide professional learning on diversity, equity, and inclusion that all faculty and staff have participated in, and each school in the district has done diversity, equity, and inclusion work with their own staff. Additionally, in a recent contract negotiation, we were able to add a mandatory course into the educator induction program.

We are also working hard to ensure our supervisors reflect on diversity, equity, and inclusion. Evaluators — right up to and including the superintendent and school committee — should be comfortable asking those they supervise, "What are you doing that is antiracist?" If the answer is "I don't know," those supervisors should be prepared to support them, and we should be prepared to provide targeted professional learning so that the answer is different the next time.

To do this, we've provided focused learning for administrators. They must lead by example, and sometimes that means admitting that they are learning, too. Modeling that growth mindset when it comes to our equity work is sometimes the most powerful thing leaders can do to inspire their staff.

All of these strands of professional learning across levels are connected so we are ensuring that every new hire will have a foundational introduction to the work, and all staff, including veteran staff and leaders, are seeing that our focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion is being woven into every part of our professional growth and reflection.

Ahern: "In the 'good problem to have' category, we are finding more and more that newer staff are entering the profession more racially literate, likely as cultural proficiency and antiracist work become more commonplace in teacher preparation programs. Some of these educators have been allowed to waive the diversity, equity, and inclusion course requirement in our induction program, though it is a goal of ours in the district to build capacity to move beyond waiving the requirement to approving educators to substitute more advanced courses instead."

BREAK DOWN BARRIERS BETWEEN DEPARTMENTS

Dismantling the long-existing systems of inequity in our schools requires far more partnerships that go beyond the directors of professional learning and equity. Public schools are often siloed by department, and through that segregation these interlocking systems of oppression thrive. We have to dismantle that segregation. As two department directors, we sustain relationships with every department across the system, always in service of our students.

Cole: "I work closely with my counterparts in other departments, like the director of special education, to identify the root causes of our disproportionate referral rates for Black students and the director of human resources to build hiring processes that are antiracist and lead us to attract and hire more diverse employees."

Ahern: "By partnering with Johnny and other district leaders, I create professional learning that promotes equity work with other departments. To amplify the work with special education, we offer courses that increase general educators' capacity for providing differentiated instruction and Tier 1 and 2 supports for all learners. To improve our hiring and retention rates for staff of color, I provide targeted learning opportunities for supervisors and evaluators, as well as the affinity-based professional learning options mentioned previously."

We're seeing signs of success from these partnerships. For example, in our first year of implementing new learning opportunities for hiring and recruitment staff, one-third of our new teacher and administrator candidates identified as people of color and/or Hispanic/Latinx. As a next step, we must turn our attention to retention as we grow the diversity in our staff.

Part of this commitment is creating spaces of support for those staff who come from historically marginalized and underrepresented groups, especially those groups that continue to have limited access to sociopolitical equity in our schools and beyond.

In partnership with the human resources office, we have begun to create some of this support in the form of affinity groups, where staff members who share a common identity can come together for collaboration and support and decide if, when, and how to communicate concerns to ally groups.

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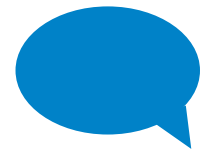
Caitlin Ahern:
"By partnering with Johnny and other district leaders, I create professional learning that promotes equity work with other departments."

EMBED EQUITY IN EVERYTHING WE DO

It's not enough to have lots of diversity, equity, and inclusion programming for our staff if we don't make a commitment to equity throughout our work. We don't want equity to be something that educators think about at certain times and in certain situations. To address the risk, we are moving toward having topics of diversity, equity, and inclusion be a part of every professional learning course we offer, instead of as a stand-alone category.

We have also broadened our scope to offer these learning opportunities to nonteaching staff. Our schools cannot function and equity cannot thrive without committed administrative assistants, teaching aides, and custodial staff.

These staff have significant interactions with children and families on a daily basis. But traditionally they have not had the chance or expectation to engage in professional learning with our certified teaching staff and administrators.

In our district, we have included them in systemwide learning, and we have offered professional learning tailored to their roles. Although

we often run into logistical hurdles (most often around the fact that teaching staff have paid professional learning time built into the contract, while most support staff do not), we remain committed to ensuring their learning grows alongside those leading classrooms and buildings.

Of course, professional learning alone will not create all the changes we need to make in our schools. Our curriculum, instructional materials, pedagogy, and policies need to be culturally responsive and inclusive. The district is working to make change in these areas, too. For example, our curriculum review process, which includes researching, implementing, and piloting programs over a several-year cycle, now includes an explicit anti-bias approach.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

We are still learning and growing, with a lot of work to do and a pace that still feels too slow. But we are seeing signs of progress. Equity teams are sharing work across buildings, small lunch groups and book clubs are coming together across the district, and a growing number of teacher leaders who are committed to cultural proficiency has enabled us to provide

large-scale diversity, equity, and inclusion professional learning by facilitating small group debrief sessions.

We are now able to leverage what was previously segmented between buildings and departments into a more coordinated effort across the district.

The arrival of the pandemic, and the subsequent revisioning of teaching and learning over the last year, shifted some of our plans. But we have pushed ahead, knowing this would demonstrate the priority of equity even — and especially — in this unique teaching and learning environment.

With each step that brings us closer to greater equity for all members of our community, we recognize that our approach to professional learning will inevitably shift again. This commitment to continuously adapting our approach will reinforce for everyone in the district that embracing equity is truly lifelong learning.

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Observing lessons and providing feedback to increase teaching effectiveness

"My ancestors' work has helped me get ready for this challenge," says Casey Sovo, a Bureau of Indian Education program administrator in northern North Dakota.

'Let's get ready to work even harder' for Indigenous students

BY CASEY SOVO AS TOLD TO JILL HARRISON BERG

We all carry a level of responsibility in today's world, and mine is education. My ancestors' work has helped me get ready for this challenge. This is not the first pandemic Indigenous people have survived. It's important for us to not lose sight of the fact that there are many people who came before us and made us who we are today. I try to always impress this upon my staff and my students. It's our responsibility to make sure we're here tomorrow and in the future.

Since September 2019, I have served as an education program administrator supporting Bureau of Indian Education schools in northern North Dakota, near the Canadian border. I previously served in a similar role in New Mexico. I am jointly responsible for ensuring quality education for Indigenous students in

six schools on the Turtle Mountain reservation: one preschool, two K-8 schools, one K-5 school, one 6-8 school, and one 9-12 school.

There were so many times this past school year when people around me were falling apart, feeling beaten down due to COVID-19. My first commitment is to listen fully and take it all in without trying to fix it. Then, in my role as an administrator, I reflect on what I can do. I try to look at everything that is in our control and use it for our benefit. This pandemic has been challenging, but I am reminded of a saying attributed to Sir Winston Churchill: "Never let a good crisis go to waste."

Historically, the Bureau of Indian Education — like many education departments — was focused on operating schools and less focused on quality, especially before 2001. New accountability from No Child Left Behind, though compliance-driven at first, later led to new practices, new programs, and new initiatives. For a long time, the bureau and the state Department of Public Instruction paid little attention to these schools in the region where I work or to the fact that only about 35% of students scored proficient or advanced on annual tests. There seemed to be people in the community who were happy with that.

OPPORTUNITY AND CRISIS

Within weeks of school building closings in spring 2020, it became clear to many educators that the fear and isolation experienced by students and educators would force changes to schooling in ways that will reverberate for a long time to come. Many of us were particularly concerned about students and communities of color that were already marginalized.

In my conversations with education leaders, I began asking: If change is inevitable, what can we do to ensure the change is for the better, especially for the students who haven't been well-served by schools? I wanted to learn how equity-minded education leaders are using this crisis as an opportunity to establish structures and create a culture that supports all students to get what they need to thrive.

Jill Harrison Berg

Among these inspiring conversations were several with Casey Sovo, a member of the Comanche Nation, 20-year educator, and Bureau of Indian Education program administrator in northern North Dakota. In our discussions, he made a strong case that now is the time for growing accomplished teachers by strengthening partnerships, making space for peer-led professional learning, and other strategies. He shared why these efforts are vital for Indigenous communities and how he is encouraging them in schools on the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians reservation. These are excerpts from our conversations.

— Jill Harrison Berg

This pandemic provided us with an opportunity to shake off malaise and complacency and realize something is wrong with our education system. The majority of these kids should be proficient; it's what we adults are not yet doing that prevents proficiency. We have to do a better job, so I turned to my team and said: Let's get ready to work even harder.

POSSIBILITIES THROUGH PARTNERSHIP

The pandemic has forced my school district to think outside of its boundaries. We must think about the community, the tribe, and the region as sources of strength. We must remove longstanding barriers in order to strengthen trust.

The Belcourt School District #7, which serves the Turtle Mountain reservation, is cooperatively managed by the federal Bureau of Indian Education system and the state's Department of Public Instruction. In the past, the relationship between these agencies was cordial but not productive. As a result, it became easy for everyone to blame each other for failing to make gains or improve attendance.

When I arrived — and especially

after the pandemic began heating up — I realized we had to change this and build real partnerships. I started by collaborating with my partner on the state side, superintendent Michelle Thomas, a Chippewa educator from the Turtle Mountain reservation, who was appointed in March 2020. We agreed that our students need us to be partners and that we would share information, co-plan, and together developed trust with our community.

Building partnerships with tribal leadership was also critically important. Our schools are on Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians land, and all of our students and administrators, and about 90% of our teachers, come from the Turtle Mountain reservation. We need this community to guide our actions, especially because of the acute risks the pandemic has posed to them. Native Americans are already health compromised: We have high rates of diabetes and obesity, limited access to health care, and other risks related to living in very rural, isolated environments.

Many of our students live in multigenerational homes, so there was a risk they would increase COVID-19 exposure among elders. Elders are particularly important in our culture. It is part of our understanding of who we are as Indigenous people that when we lose an elder, we are losing language and culture that may not have been transmitted to the younger generations yet.

It was therefore essential for us to get leaders and families' input on the many decisions we had to make in responding to the pandemic. If they were going to tell us, "No face-to-face schooling," then we were going to follow that. To facilitate these conversations, we increased our monthly meetings with tribal leadership to every two to three weeks, which provided an opportunity to develop a relationship with trust. Now we're in a good spot: The community knows we care. They know we are concerned about their children's education and their safety.

> **When teachers build capacity collaboratively, they are able to be more vulnerable, take more risks to apply the learning, and, when they hit roadblocks, they have on-site support from those peers.**

BUILDING CAPACITY COLLABORATIVELY

We also needed to build a new relationship with teachers. We framed the pandemic as an opportunity for teachers to shine. We said: We will provide you with all of the resources and support you need to do your job in this difficult environment, and we're not going to blame you when you fail. We will help you understand that failure and move through those difficulties and lift you up so you can be successful. But we can't lose this year, we can't lose this class, and we can't lose this generation of kids.

Professional learning is always important, but it was especially important this past year. I believe the best professional learning comes from within. We have a lot of knowledge in our staff. We just need to provide time for them to share it and apply it, and sometimes we have to lift up those people on staff who can do it. The pandemic provided the opportunity to do that.

In June 2020, when we told teachers that we'd be in distance learning in the fall, there was some initial resistance. To get everyone ready for the shift, we organized peer-led professional learning. In one instance, a paraprofessional led a series on Google Classroom. His teaching partner told me, "I was brand new to Google Classroom, but I had to learn how to do it, and he was amazing! He walked me through it, helped me understand it, answered all my questions, and I felt like, after those five days, I would not fall apart when school started." Now, almost a year later, another teacher told me, "The most meaningful and impactful thing we did was the week of Google Classroom training that was led by our in-building peers."

Teachers' peer learning extended beyond our scheduled professional development days. After vaccinations were complete in February, teachers and students came to school through the hybrid model for the first time since the start of the pandemic. Teachers had a deep need to collaborate, in real time, in real space, face-to-face with their colleagues. We developed a new routine to commit a half-day Friday for planning and collaboration among teachers. This time is not for the principal's staff meetings. It is time for teachers to work together, to really puzzle through the difficulties they're having, and to look together at data to improve teaching and learning.

When teachers build capacity collaboratively, they are able to be more vulnerable, take more risks to apply the learning, and, when they hit roadblocks, they have on-site support from those peers. It is more than just buy-in. It is knowing your colleagues actually care about you as a professional and a person.

GROWING ACCOMPLISHED TEACHERS THROUGH NBPTS

Accomplished teaching is significant for our kids because they are typically two or three grade levels behind on average in any grade level. As Native Americans, we don't have widespread access to Head Start or preschool, and we live in very rural communities where there isn't a public library and there is limited access to books at home. When you think about the barriers to an

inner-city child's readiness for school, take it and multiply it times two or three.

One promising avenue for ensuring excellent, accomplished teachers is through the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS). Research shows having a National Board Certified Teacher for one year can lead to three additional months of growth in student learning on average in one school year. In my previous role in New Mexico, I helped establish a six-year initiative that supported 98 teachers — 71 of whom work in the Bureau of Indian Education system — to achieve NBPTS certification.

I encourage Turtle Mountain teachers, counselors, librarians, and principals to begin the certification process with me — I've started the board certification process as a candidate myself. I'm starting the first component now and will continue with the remaining three portfolio components over the next two years. In addition, I'm hopeful that some of the 65 National Board Certified Teachers in North Dakota can support us and that the Bureau-born National Board Certified Teachers who have been working with candidates in Arizona and New Mexico will be willing to provide virtual support from across state lines.

While the Bureau of Indian Education initiative is ending, the pandemic brings new incentives to continue pursuing board certification, as well as new funding through the CARES Act and the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund. The pandemic has forced us all to reconsider how we teach and what strategies and skills would be necessary to be effective. Having a National Board Certified Teacher could make all the difference in the world when it comes to equity in our district. Our academic need is way bigger and more diverse than students beyond the reservation. Who can address this better than a National Board Certified Teacher, who has already demonstrated the ability to differentiate, intervene, reflect, and engage?

MAKING DREAMS FOR THE FUTURE A REALITY

When I was ready for the possibility of a career change, I said to the creator, "Take me to a place where the district wants to work together, where schools want to be aligned." I have been given exactly what I asked for and I am where I need to be for right now: ready and able to support my principals, assistant principals, teachers, and paraprofessionals to get the professional development, support, and direction

they have been craving to improve students' learning and lives.

I want the best for our students, including the best teachers. Although the pandemic has been devastating for our community in many ways, it has also opened new windows of possibility to achieve educational excellence. It has increased the sense of urgency to make change, provided the motivation for collaboration, and created new funding streams. These put us in a position to really make a difference together over the next five years. What does this district need? Infrastructure, buildings, arts, music, science, sports, language instruction? Let's dream it so we can build it!

Our ancestors gave us bravery and courage to do the right thing and seize these opportunities. The mission statement of this district is: "Dedicated to excellence in education." It took the COVID-19 pandemic for us to actually begin to live that.

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The revolutionary act of teaching Black children superbly

BY SHARIF EL-MEKKI

James Baldwin, in his "Talk to Teachers," describes effective teaching as a revolutionary act. At the Center for Black Educator Development, the organization I founded and lead, we have doubled down and built on Baldwin's iconic description. We believe that to teach Black children *superbly* is a revolutionary act. In service of that goal, we prepare educators to instill in Black children a positive sense of their own racial identity and, in so doing, equip them with the literacy, numeracy, and myriad social-emotional skills they will need to be lifelong leaders and activists in the revolutionary work of advancing equity in all its forms.

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We believe that increasing teacher diversity is the essential lever for building a more just and high-quality public education system. This work is urgent, because there can be no social and racial justice without educational justice. Our nation's centuries-long racist legacy of structural disadvantage, and the daily toll that disadvantage takes on our families and children, makes our work a moral imperative.

Our charge at the Center for Black Educator Development is twofold. We work to strengthen the pipeline of Black and Brown teachers and, at the same time, equip the teachers of today and tomorrow with the cultural humility and understanding to effectively teach Black and Brown children.

THE FOUNDATION OF OUR WORK: TEACHER DIVERSITY AND CULTURAL COMPETENCE

Multiple rigorous studies have demonstrated the value of teacher diversity (Camera, 2018). Simply put, when Black students have Black teachers, they do better in school. When they have one Black teacher by 3rd grade, they're 13% more likely to enroll in college. With two Black teachers in the mix early on, that stat jumps to 32%. For Black boys from low-income households, their on-time high school graduation rate soars by almost 40% (Underwood, 2019).

Unfortunately, Black teachers only make up 7% of the teacher workforce. Teachers who identify as Black men make up less than 2% of the workforce. In fact, the majority of students never have a Black teacher at all from kindergarten to 12th grade. Nationally, our teaching corps is nearly 80% white.

But we do not simply have a dearth of Black and Brown teachers, we have an utter failure to prepare all teachers to teach Black and Brown children (El-Mekki, 2019). More than seven in 10 graduates from our teachers colleges say they feel unprepared to teach in urban settings. More than six in 10 say they feel unprepared to teach culturally diverse students (Jordan et al., 2018). Both our initial teacher education institutions and on-the-job professional learning are largely failing to provide teachers with the skills they need to deliver equitable, high-quality education to Black and Brown students.

FREEDOM SCHOOLS LITERACY ACADEMY

Our center's Freedom Schools Literacy Academy is a five-week program that simultaneously nurtures young Black and Brown scholars and teacher apprentices who will one day lead their own classrooms. It is grounded in research that shows Black and Brown children learn best when positive racial identity is deeply embedded in the pedagogical framework and curriculum. Identity is not separate and apart from teaching, but indeed essential for the high-quality teaching of Black and Brown children. The program integrates the best practices of the Children's Defense Fund and Philadelphia Freedom Schools with a culturally responsive, affirming, and sustaining early literacy curriculum.

Rising 1st-, 2nd-, and 3rd-grade scholars are taught by Black college-aged teaching interns who are in turn supported by Black high school-aged apprentices. For seven intensive weeks, five of which are spent providing literacy instruction to our young scholars, these high-potential college and high school students gain real teaching experience, pedagogical understandings, and tools designed to inspire and encourage their future career in education.

Steeped in Black culture, history, and pedagogy, our work provides the aspiring teachers and students alike with the ethical foundation built on the Freedom Schools tradition, which we believe has particular relevance for the teaching profession writ large. Its essential tenets include:

- We lean and stand on the shoulders of giants. By knowing and deeply understanding our intellectual genealogy as Black servant leaders, we empower ourselves and our students.
- Our work in education is

to train our replacements. By viewing the work in this way, how we think about our obligation to our students (and our community), our accountability to them and each other, is transformed.

- We lift as we climb. This tenet creates an intergenerational approach and feeds the pipeline of future educators. As today's teachers and our apprentices see that just as someone has poured themselves into me, I, too, must pour my soul and life's work into those who follow me.

Our interns and apprentices participate in action research, engage in dynamic lectures and lessons, and receive mentoring and coaching from master teachers, including experts like Greg Carr from Howard University. Apprentices develop their lessons for scholars in a collaborative way, unlike the isolated way that is typical in schools, and they are recorded and discussed together. They polish their lesson plans in a community and record and discuss their teaching practice in public, supportive ways.

The results speak for themselves. Our interns and apprentices all report increased knowledge of Black history and pedagogy as well as greater confidence in speaking out against injustice. Fully 96% of participants reported an increased interest in pursuing a career in teaching and *all* participants reported an increased interest in teaching Black children. By the end of this summer, we will have taught almost 200 high school and college teacher apprentices.

Most encouraging, we are seeing that empowering teachers in this way benefits their students as well. Last year alone, our 104 participating scholars (in grades 1 through 3) showed the following:

- Increased positive views of themselves, their communities, and their racial identities;
- Statistically significant gains in targeted vocabulary *and* reading

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- **Bristol, T. (2014).** *Black men of the classroom: A policy brief of how Boston Public Schools can recruit and retain Black male teachers.* schottfoundation.org/sites/default/files/TravisBristol-PolicyBrief-BlackMaleTeachers.pdf

- **Carver-Thomas, D. (April 2018).** *Diversifying the teaching profession: How to recruit and retain teachers of color.* Learning Policy Institute.

- **Center for Black Educator Development. (n.d.).** *Academies.* www.thecenterblacked.org/academies

- **Gershenson, S., Hart, C.M.D., Lindsay, C.A., & Papageorge, N.W. (2017).** *The long-run impacts of same-race teachers.* IZA Institute of Labor Economics. www.iza.org/publications/dp/10630

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comprehension;

- Reading skills jumped more than three word-reading levels, on average, which amounts to a 70% improvement in word reading;
- Scholars working on more advanced reading skills read nearly 21 more words per minute on average upon completing the program. That's more than 240% better than the average rate gain for 1st and 2nd graders over a four-week period.
- Scholars grew on average from the 41st percentile to the 60th percentile in oral reading fluency based on national grade-level norms in just four weeks.

EDUCATIONAL JUSTICE WORKSHOPS

The Center engages both aspiring and veteran educators in educational justice professional learning to help them build the skills and mindsets to lead with cultural humility, cultural fluency, and self-reflection. We base this work on Culturally Relevant Competencies (Skills) we adopted and adapted from New America's national survey of promising practices

(Muñiz, 2019), as well as Black pedagogy and scholarship from leaders such as Muhammad Khalifa, Gholdy Muhammad, Gloria Ladson-Billings, Carter G. Woodson, and Asa Hilliard. We incorporate concepts such as cultural competence, critical consciousness, moral courage, healing-centered practices, and racial uplift.

In the professional learning sessions, we use a mix of instructional presentation, dynamic discussion, practice, and real-time feedback loops. Sessions are built to meet the unique needs of participants, their context, and the communities they serve. We address topics that include Reflecting on One's Cultural Lens & Individual Cultural Identity; Drawing on Students' Culture to Inform Curriculum and Instruction; Bringing Real-World Issues Into the Classroom; Collaborating With Families and the Local Community; Understanding the Tenets and Nuance of Micro-Aggression(s); and more.

COLLABORATION WITH TEACHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

Greater collaboration between teacher preparation programs and schools serving Black and Brown children is also essential. As I have written elsewhere, our teachers colleges

are frustratingly slow to evolve and our teacher effectiveness and retention rates in our most challenged schools are evidence of their failure (El-Mekki, 2021). Black and Brown education and child development experts remain largely invisible in our schools of education. Dewey, Skinner, Mann, and Montessori must be supplemented with the likes of Septima Clark, Carter G. Woodson, Amos N. Wilson, Mary McLeod Bethune, Nannie Helen Burroughs, Marva Collings, and Jawanza Kunjufu. How can we expect our teachers to know and nurture the minds of Black and Brown children when they know nothing of great Black and Brown minds?

The center is working with several teacher preparation programs and school systems to set shared goals and establish a sense of accountability to Black and Brown communities. Doing so can raise the bar and create alignment between the curriculum that aspiring teachers receive in teacher preparation, the professional learning teachers engage in once on the job, and the teaching they practice in classrooms with Black and Brown children.

This body of work, like our Freedom Schools Literacy Academies, is simultaneously improving teaching today and building the pipeline of culturally responsive and competent teachers for tomorrow. It is challenging but ultimately rewarding work for us and our partners.

In the Freedom Schools tradition, adults, mentors, and teachers are expected to train their replacements. We approach this work as Black educator hall of famer Mary Church Terrell did, "lifting as we climb" (Ishak, 2021). We believe that to increase the number of Black teachers, we need to carefully design, bolster, and reinforce a national Black teacher pipeline. We intend to begin this work in 10 cities over the next decade. The center aims to build 10 comprehensive Black Teacher Pipeline consortiums in 10 cities by 2035, contributing 21,000 Black teachers into the pipeline and 9,100 into the workforce.

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Taken together, this work provides a foundation for better, more culturally informed teaching for not just Black and Brown teachers, but all educators. Our Freedom Schools Literacy Academies provide a model of teacher development that can be replicated. Our work with currently serving teachers is having a profound impact on their attitudes, competencies, and pedagogical capacity. Our work to remake teacher preparation programs helps teachers have the cultural fluency and humility to teach Black and Brown students and serve their communities (National Council on Teacher Quality, n.d.). All of this work is making a difference as it yields ever more of that radical activity of superbly teaching Black and Brown children.

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To dismantle racism, make teacher education more inclusive

BY BRANDON WHITE AND AMY RUDAT

America's legacy of racism is insidious in teacher education. The systems that determine who becomes a teacher, how one becomes a teacher, what teachers learn, and what history and content they don't learn have been polluted by the codependency between our societal rules and our internal beliefs.

Discriminatory policies and practices create biased beliefs, behaviors, and attitudes among those who stand to benefit from them, thereby reinforcing the policies and practices. Perhaps most insidiously, this process often occurs outside of conscious awareness, creating a societal pattern that, over time, becomes a legacy in and outside of education.

The word *curriculum* (Latin origin) describes the process of racing on a track or running a course. If we are to understand and address the inequities of teacher education today, it is critical to examine the track, or *curriculum*, on which teacher education has been running since the United States' formation.

Just as teachers must deconstruct, reconstruct, and construct traditional academic curriculum for students to achieve equitable outcomes (Ladson-Billings, 2006), the overt and concealed curriculum of teacher education must involve a process of deconstruction,

reconstruction, and construction of the new if we are to decisively improve the educational outcomes for more than half of the student population in the United States.

In this article, we review the following critical actions for each part of this process:

1. The curriculum of teacher education, including recruitment, education, and retention, needs to be first **deconstructed**, or taken apart and examined by professionals, as a cultural artifact to illuminate its role in the apartheid-like United States education system.

2. Professionals invested in the education system must **reconstruct** their roles and identities within the system to appropriately re-engineer it.
3. Using new roles, identities, and patterns of behavior and thought, professionals can **construct** a revised teacher education system inclusive of teachers from all walks of life who are prepared to teach all students.

DECONSTRUCTION:
UNDERSTANDING THE ROOTS OF OPPRESSION

The teaching profession in the United States has deep roots in excluding and assaulting students of color that date back to the inception of public education. From the anti-literacy laws practiced against enslaved Africans to the Native American boarding schools designed to "kill the Indian, save the man," to the segregated Chinese and Japanese language schools during the late 1800s and early 1900s, racism informed who was taught, how they were taught, and who did the teaching.

Despite the hostile intentions of this exclusion, this model produced segregated enclaves where educators of color taught their respective communities and students thrived. These educators used their own pedagogical heritages, preparing their communities to navigate and dismantle the racism they often encountered.

This tradition has continued in some ways and some places and is a hallmark of the culturally responsive teaching we often speak of today. According to education researcher Vanessa Siddle Walker, these heritages of educators of color are what secretly fueled the fight against segregation, leading up to the landmark Brown v. Board decisions that declared "separate inherently unequal" (Anderson, 2018).

However, there was an inevitable backlash to desegregation that resulted in new ways to segregate that capitalized on loopholes. These included but were not limited to white flight from desegregated city schools to predominantly white suburbs and private schools, gifted and talented programs whose biased entrance criteria favored white students, and tracking

that was ostensibly but not actually based on ability (Ladson-Billings, 2004).

At the same time, new programs brought students of color into historically white schools with white teachers, but did not include a reciprocal relationship with historically Black schools. As a result, thousands of educators of color who had taught students of color in segregated communities lost their jobs despite an increase of available teaching jobs in the wake of Brown v. Board of Education (Goldstein, 2015).

Essentially, the backlash against Brown v. Board of Education turned into an affirmative action program for white teachers to teach all children without having to change beliefs or pedagogy that was so ingrained in the racism of segregation. The United States education system lost the originators of a culturally relevant pedagogy that pushed for students and the United States to be better.

Our education system has not recovered from this decimation of teachers of color. As the numbers of educators of color decreased, so did

the opportunities for students of color to see themselves in a profession that was once revered and honored in their community. Students of color became less interested in entering a profession derisive of them, which accelerated the erasure of many teacher candidates of color.

Young people of color not only see a lack of educators who look like them, they witness the invisible taxes paid by the small number of educators of color they do see (Dixon & Griffin, 2021). Educators of color are often used for their multilingualism but not their instructional capacities. They are pushed into disciplining children but not teaching them.

They deal with micro and macro aggressions from white colleagues but cannot discuss them (Delpit, 2006). They have to wrestle with the pressure of a white-centric system to avoid becoming the very teacher that they may have despised growing up. This surely reveals to students of color that education is a harsh profession that may not be desirable, obtainable, or sustainable.

When those who manage to remain curious about becoming a teacher enter higher learning programs for K-12 education, they experience programs that are dominated by white students and faculty members (TNTP, 2020). When they complete these programs, fewer prospective educators of color pass certification exams (Barnum, 2017) due to factors like cost, language barriers, and lack of exposure to high-quality educational opportunities. All of these patterns can be traced back to the strategic elimination of, and a self-perpetuated culling of, educators of color, which is a legacy inherited from a racist operating system that began well before Brown v. Board of Education.

It is important to gather a community of learners to explore these living legacies of white dominant culture in the mainstream education profession. A good place to start is to discuss key readings such as those listed in the sidebar on p. 57. A valuable next step in formalizing that community is to conduct an equity audit of your education program or system, strategize, and identify the best entry point to make change.

RECONSTRUCTION:
REFLECTING AND REPOSITIONING ROLES

Once these truths about our inequity-based education system are exposed, teacher educators and teacher candidates must reflect on how they have benefited or suffered from this system and "reconstruct" their beliefs about and positions within the work they have committed to. "Reconstructing" involves identifying your role in maintaining racist living legacies and deciding how to reposition yourself to interrupt those legacies.

For example, if you are a white educator who attended predominantly white K-12 schools, graduated from a majority white teaching program, and procured a teaching job with a mostly white instructional staff in a school where students are predominantly not white, consider these questions as you pursue reconstruction:

- In what ways are you influenced to inadvertently perpetuate the legacies that you deconstructed?
- How can you maneuver in a way to counter the negative racial elements of that legacy?
- Do you see and treat your students as potential educators?
- Do you speak out against and circumvent culturally marginalizing content, policies, and collegial conversations?
- How do your beliefs, mindsets, and attitudes inform your answers?

These are the same questions that education professors, teacher preparation leaders, and certification staff should be asking to begin reconstructing their roles and identities to better serve educational diversity, justice, and equity.

If you are an educator of color who managed to get through the broken pipeline, but you still deal with the "educational survival complex" (Love, 2020) of navigating isolation and pressures to commit the same oppressive practices that you may have had to survive as a student, consider these questions as you pursue reconstruction:

- In what ways are you influenced to inadvertently perpetuate the legacies that you deconstructed?
- How do you ensure internalized racism doesn't inform choices encouraged by the racist factors in your current environment?
- What from your training needs to be unlearned about how we educate marginalized children?
- What instructional and relational approaches can you take to allow students to see themselves in you?
- What support systems exist or need to be established to prevent the siloing and isolation of educators of color like yourself?

These reflections, which will vary based on your sociopolitical and cultural dispositions, are important to make and courageously embrace if educators in all parts of America's education system are to re-engineer themselves from being vessels through which educational apartheid flows to being canal locks that redirect the system to champion diverse instructors (Gorski & Dalton, 2020).

CONSTRUCTION:
BUILDING NEW STRUCTURES AND PRACTICES

"Reconstructed" mindsets and identities can become the foundation for "construction" of renovated policies, practices, and institution and birthing a new system grounded in a symbiosis of anti-racist policies, practices, and institutions. Leveraging the new understandings of the positions we hold can empower us to build new inclusive patterns of behavior and structures of power, whether we are science teachers, certification program leaders, or school principals, or higher education faculty. These could include the construction of:

- Commitments and actions to

change K-12 school curriculum and instruction to include positive images of students of color and nurture positive self-image;

- Partnerships between districts and colleges in support of grow-your-own teacher programs (Aguilar, 2021);
- Scholarships for students of color who want to become teachers;
- Financial aid and tutoring services to promote certification test success rates;
- Organizations for educators of color to collect and expand resources and support for themselves and the field (Center for Black Educator Development, 2021);
- Committees and leaders who change teacher preparation curriculum and instruction to incorporate work and leadership from education theorists of color; and
- Policies that promote the retention of teachers of color (TNTP, 2020).

ADDRESSING OUR RECENT PAST FOR A MORE JUST FUTURE

With an increasingly diversifying yet segregated student body and a teacher population that continues to be overwhelmingly white (Meckler & Rabinowitz, 2019), we run the risk of leaving many new teachers unprepared to establish environments conducive to authentic learning and engagement for all students.

If we want to produce teacher candidates representative of America's school population who have the content and pedagogical knowledge to educate students through meaningful, engaging, and affirming grade-level instruction, then it is critical we dive into a process of deconstructing our education system's racist past and present, reconstruct our professional identities based on the personal implications of those findings, and begin constructing

KEY READINGS ABOUT SEGREGATION AND THE TEACHING PROFESSION

- *Teacher Wars: A History of America's Most Embattled Profession* by Dana Goldstein
- *Who Decides Who Becomes a Teacher? Schools of Education as Sites of Resistance* by Julie Gorlewski and Eve Tuck
- *Latino Education in the United States: A Narrated History from 1513 to 2000* by Victoria Maria MacDonald
- *The Lost Education of Horace Tate* by Vanessa Siddle Walker
- *Silent Covenants: Brown v. Board of Education and the Unfulfilled Hopes of Education Reform* by Derrick Bell

new systems, structures, and patterns of belief and behavior to create a new educational environment — one that's more inclusive, successful, and just.

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Student talk in science class

LEADS THE WAY TO EQUITY IN DETROIT

BY KRISTIE FORD AND KENDRA WELLING-RILEY

The pursuit of racial equity in public education has a long history in the United States. For example, in the 1780s, 14 Black parents in Boston petitioned the Massachusetts Commonwealth's legislature to give their children access to newly formed public schools (Hill, 1981). Since then, Black people, and people of color more broadly, have led heroic efforts for equal access, racial integration, fair school funding, and language equity in public

schools.

Although that initial petition was denied, the ongoing work has resulted in enormous changes in our public education system, from desegregation of public schools to dedicated federal funding for schools with low-income families and multilingual students (Stanford University, n.d.).

Yet, despite decades of progress, racial inequities are a persistent, even paralyzing, presence in American public schools. The No Child Left Behind era

saw noticeable increases in test scores across all student groups, but outcome differences by race remained pronounced (Smith & Brazer, 2016). Stubborn patterns of inequity in graduation rates, grades, test scores, disciplinary actions, and access to extra- and co-curricular activities still plague our schools (The Education Trust, 2017).

These patterns exist across urban, suburban, and rural schools, and even within schools. Outcomes are sometimes so disparate that white

and Black students, for instance, can experience the same school in completely different ways.

Inequities persist across all content areas, but are particularly entrenched in STEM subjects (UNCF, n.d.). The Detroit Public Schools Community District's Office of Science, where we serve as executive director and training and support coordinator, is striving to change that. With our colleagues, we aim to address some of the root causes of racial disparities endemic to science classrooms and across the curricular spectrum by focusing our teacher professional learning on instructional practices that engage students. Specifically, we're focusing our teacher professional learning on student talk in our science classes and whether students of all backgrounds contribute to discussions.

Before addressing the specific interconnections among science talk, equity, and instructional practice, we provide a brief overview of the research on student talk and then connect it to our core mission of racial equity in science instruction.

EQUITY IN STUDENT TALK MATTERS

Decades of research link student talk to student learning through intra- and interpersonal channels. At the intrapersonal level, talk helps students process information (Fisher, Rothenberg, & Frey, 2008). Talk is a mode of sense-making, a means of creating connections between and among facts and concepts, and a manner of reasoning and problem solving.

From the perspective of the brain, when students are talking they are moving ideas, whether simple or complex, from working memory to long-term memory. This results in higher retention of new concepts, supports development of scientific vocabulary and meaning, and improves student capacity to understand larger systems such as the water cycle, the food web, or organism growth and development, which is why Science Talk is a key evidence-based practice supported by the Next Generation Science Standards (San Diego County Office of Education, n.d.).

Student talk also strengthens learning through interpersonal dynamics with teachers and peers. For example, through checks for understanding, in which students articulate their thinking, teachers can discover what their students know and refine instruction in real time to meet student learning needs (Fisher & Frey, 2015). By talking with peers, students can discover how others answer problems, build on each other's ideas or perspectives, and strengthen associations between concepts (Eberly Center, n.d.).

Student talk also helps with developing a vital skill for adulthood: Articulating ideas in sequential, logical, and persuasive ways. Developing the capacity to communicate accurately and scientifically is essential to progressing in STEM beyond high school. Apart from STEM, learning how to express ideas, take risks in sharing perspectives publicly, and collaborate with peers has enormous social, cognitive, and economic value over time and is therefore central to high-quality education (SINC, 2017).

Because student talk drives student learning, discrepancies in who has the opportunity to talk have enormous implications for racial equity in our classrooms. In groundbreaking equity research, Elizabeth Cohen and Rachel Lotan designed an intervention that created more equal opportunities to speak within a heterogeneous classroom. In these classrooms, the supposed "achievement gap" between various student subgroups disappeared (Cohen & Lotan, 1997).

Later research reinforced this key finding, showing that English learners benefit the most from talking in class but often get the fewest opportunities to speak (Ho, 2005). Equity of student voice also has connections to disciplinary disproportionality with research showing that the more opportunities teachers give students to respond, the

fewer classroom disruptions occur (Sutherland et al., 2003). Changing who gets opportunities to speak in our classrooms is an important goal to advance more equitable learning opportunities.

BUILDING EQUITABLE TALK

This rich history of research on student talk and equity guides our pedagogy in the Detroit district's Office of Science and has guided teacher professional learning over the past two years. Our professional learning emphasizes standards in practice, sets clear expectations of teachers and students, supports engaging instruction, and builds a reflective culture, with an eye toward equity.

Standards in practice: Teachers often tell us that written academic standards can be vague, subjective, intangible, and impractical. Our job is to help teachers put standards into practice. For example, the Michigan Science Standards, inspired by the Next Generation Science Standards, expect students to engage in authentic scientific work as they build fundamental science knowledge and connect to concepts across curricula. So we developed interactive, practice-oriented professional learning that helps teachers bring scientific discussion, thinking, and inquiry to life for all students.

We ask teachers to reflect on the standards: How will you know students are engaged in the kind of work that addresses the science standards? What is your evidence? Teachers want more students offering hypotheses for scientific phenomena, engaging in experiments, reasoning through problems, and exchanging ideas with each other — all of which show up in class as more student discourse.

Teachers then work collaboratively to create questions, prompts, and lesson plans that generate meaningful student discourse the next day. Teachers readily see standards in practice when their students are engaged in deep discussions and debates about science-based concepts, facts, and systems. A

shift in practice from lecture to inquiry equitably supports our students of color.

Expectations: Setting expectations for student talk takes two forms here in Detroit: expectations of teachers from district and school leaders and expectations of students from teachers. We administrators try to set clear and consistent expectations for student talk as an instructional imperative among science teachers. We are constantly reviewing curricula, lesson plans, and instructional materials for alignment to this instructional imperative and to ensure that students from all backgrounds have opportunities to talk.

For example, we look to implement curricula that anchor lessons in inquiry about scientific phenomena, we review lesson plans with teachers to plan for student talk with open-ended, authentic questions, and we provide posters with student talk scaffolds for students to refer to during classroom discussions. In observations requested by teachers, we look for the teacher's essential questions for her particular lesson, her probing of student thinking, and her facilitation of student sense-making.

But more importantly, we know our teachers must have expectations that their students are capable of learning through discourse. This is critical for equitable outcomes among students of color, students with disabilities, and English learners. Teachers have to believe in the power, agency, and resiliency of their students as they puzzle through understanding with greater depths of knowledge, which is often captured by student discourse. In short, we want to help shift teacher mindsets from getting through content to understanding how students grow their skills and knowledge to become adept STEM thinkers.

Our professional learning experiences achieve this by expanding teachers' pedagogical content knowledge. Starting from what they already know about content, we challenge teachers to imagine ways they could learn more about their students' lived experiences

to then find ways to connect content to students' lives in a way that establishes relevance. We zero in on teaching techniques such as asking questions and brief (three-minute) debates in which anyone can engage.

These discussion techniques activate prior knowledge and get students oriented toward thinking about the next steps the teacher will take with content. Using relevant research, we help teachers formulate questions and prompts that take students gradually and with scaffolding into more complex depths of knowledge. Teachers subsequently look at evidence from their teaching, often with the help of a coach, to explore the effects of their modified and new strategies.

Instruction: Of course, standards and expectations don't matter if they don't translate to instruction. We have to change how we teach if we want to change who learns in our classrooms. Therefore, we provide teachers with monthly virtual professional learning options on instructional themes of their choice.

Popular topics among our science educators have included "Questioning Technique — Essential Questions," "Relationships, Relevance, and Rigor in Science," and "Lesson Planning for Equitable Engagement." The goal is to give teachers choice and agency to address their own immediate learning needs in alignment with our district's standards.

Reflective culture: Perhaps most important, we seek to build a reflective culture of continuous improvement among our science teachers through the analysis of classroom data with a particular eye toward racial equity. Detroit science teachers are piloting TeachFX, an app for teachers that automatically measures their teacher talk time compared to student talk time, questioning techniques, use of think time, equity of voice, lesson design, and more.

By using voice artificial intelligence

to analyze discourse patterns and surface teaching insights from a teacher's class, the app can support teachers whenever they want feedback personalized to their own instruction and private to them. Administrators cannot access the data for evaluative purposes, so teachers can try new instructional strategies and reflect on objective data without fear of being punished.

This private and readily accessible source of data pairs well with more subjective and periodic forms of feedback that instructional leaders commonly provide. Teachers can triangulate data from TeachFX, student work, live coaching feedback, and summative assessments to calibrate their own instruction and learn from peer educators.

With teacher privacy protected, we can look across aggregated and anonymized data to visualize equity of voice, even in online classes — a great benefit during remote learning this past year. By anonymously analyzing discourse patterns by student group, grade level, and content area among volunteer teachers, we can see where we need to better support teachers to make science talk more equitable.

MORE TALK, MORE ACTION

We've been pleased with the early results of our efforts. Over 300 teachers have used the TeachFX app or attended our professional learning workshops to examine their practice through the lens of student talk and equity of voice.

Among the piloting TeachFX teachers, we saw a 45% increase in student talk in classrooms where over 90% of students are Black or Brown. That growth didn't come easily. In professional learning workshops, teachers described being shocked by their data at first, but then they decided to take a few more risks, redesign some of their lessons, rethink some of their questions, remember to use their "think time," and encourage every student to get involved in the discussion.

Teachers are giving high marks for the ways in which the sessions allow teachers to strengthen their teaching skills by reflecting on objective TeachFX data from their classrooms. Numerical ratings on a battery of satisfaction and learning questions average 9.0 or higher on a 10-point scale. Comments are equally positive. As one master teacher reacted after a professional learning session spent reflecting on her data, "The very first time I used TeachFX, I was amazed at the amount of time I was talking."

Reflecting after a questioning technique session, another teacher said, "I like the idea of building on questions from one to another to add depth to the classroom discussion and the engagement of the students." Teachers tell us they now have a better understanding of the science standards, and they're developing and sharing with each other the pedagogical content knowledge they need to deeply engage students in learning.

We still have much work yet to do and many challenges to overcome, especially while we work to help students' families struggling with basic needs exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Yet we all agree that high-quality public education — an education that elevates equity and student talk in the classroom — is a powerful vehicle to empower learners and change mindsets about what our students are capable of and how they can impact their world. We're excited to build on this emerging success going forward.

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An educator's guide to equity for Asian American and Pacific Islander people

BY VIRGINIA NGUYEN AND STACY YUNG

Take a moment to reflect on your knowledge of Asian American and Pacific Islander people and their contributions to history. Can you list three or more famous Asian American and Pacific Islander people and their contributions? Now, can you list three more? Compare that to your knowledge of white men. Most of us can list six famous white men and their contributions far more easily.

Asian Americans are the fastest-growing American population (Budiman & Ruiz, 2021), covering more than 20 ethnicities and 20 million citizens. Yet their contributions to the U.S. and the world are often left out of school curricula and cultural consciousness. Asian American and Pacific Islander people commonly report feeling invisible and considered perpetual foreigners in the United States. Where does that leave us in efforts to build educational equity and in educators' commitment to antiracism?

As Asian American women and history teachers, we feel a responsibility to advocate for our community by helping educators improve representation of Asian American and Pacific Islander people and fight racism against the community. This need has never felt more urgent in the wake of the murders of eight people in Atlanta, Georgia, six of whom — Xiaojie Tan, Daoyou Feng, Hyun Jung Grant, Suncha Kim, Soon Chung Park, and Yong Ae Yue — were of Asian descent. This horrific incidence of violence brought attention to the anti-Asian hate the Asian American and Pacific Islander

community has been facing since the start of COVID-19.

In response, we began hosting #STOPAAPIHATE Educator workshops, sharing lesson plans, and creating resources to empower educators with tools to create diverse, equitable, and inclusive communities that build allyship and challenge stereotypes about Asian American and Pacific Islander people.

UNDERSTANDING ASIAN AMERICAN AND PACIFIC ISLANDER EXPERIENCES

Asian American and Pacific Islander people are often called the "model minority," declared exemplars of upward mobility in American society. In fact, we are diverse people with diverse cultures, histories, and experiences. This model minority myth has been used to drive a wedge between Asian American and Pacific Islander people and other marginalized communities, but like many of our fellow Black, Indigenous, and People of Color, we face challenges that include discriminatory hiring practices, high poverty rates, mental illness, abuse, and lack of resources and power. We are only given access to white spaces and allowed proximity to whiteness when it is convenient and beneficial to the white-dominated status quo.

Also like members of other minoritized groups, we face racism. In recent decades, racism and discrimination against the Asian American and Pacific Islander community have mostly surfaced as daily microaggressions. Yellow peril, model minority myth, perpetual foreigner, these are a few of the harmful stereotypes that come up in our daily interactions.

Now, though, we also fear verbal and physical assaults. Since March 2020, when COVID-19 became news in the United States, anti-Asian racism and violent attacks have spiked an alarming 150% (Center for the Study of Hate & Extremism, 2021). Amid a year that has a list of ongoing loss and sadness, we face hate crimes, racial slurs, and jokes about the "kung flu" or "China virus." In May, President Biden signed a bill addressing the proliferation of assaults and other violent crimes against Asian Americans, but there is much more work to do.

The murders in Atlanta and the shooting at an Indianapolis, Indiana, FedEx facility that killed members of the Sikh community were just some of the examples of violence and racism. We have experienced verbal attacks ourselves. Members of our community commonly express fear, sadness, anger, rage, loneliness, trauma, and depression.

We know that our students are experiencing these feelings and traumas. As teachers in a district with almost 50% Asian Pacific Islander Desi American student population (Education Data Partnership, 2021), our advocacy has resonated with many. Inspired by our participation in a town hall-style discussion about anti-Asian hate in Irvine, California, students have felt compelled to share with us their experiences as Asian American and Pacific Islander students.

For example, in early May, two high school students shared their experience of being Asian American students in an almost two-hour long interview. The interview started with the question, "What is it like to be an Asian American and Pacific Islander

student?" Both students said that they had never been asked to talk about their identity. They talked about feeling invisible, scared, facing racism, and wanting to be seen as more than the stereotype of being good at math or being associated with the Vietnam War.

After the conversation, one of the students immediately emailed, "I feel so full inside. My chest is bursting with energy. I feel so, so heard and seen. I am so excited — I went downstairs and spilled my juice because my hands were shaking so much."

They expressed appreciation for the conversation and declared it one of their most meaningful experiences as students. It left them feeling inspired and empowered to do more for their Asian American and Pacific Islander community and other minoritized people. This interview moved us as well.

It was disappointing to hear they were facing similar struggles we had when we were kids. They rarely learned about Asian American and Pacific Islander history, they faced the challenge of being considered the "model minority", and they yearned for more Asian American and Pacific Islander stories in their schooling. It was also powerful hearing these two young women reflecting on their experiences and building community together.

LEARN AND TEACH ABOUT THE COMMUNITY

In our work, we encourage educators to teach about Asian American and Pacific Islander history. Represent our history and stories in your curriculum alongside others in America, including our stories of racism. Since as early as the 1800s, Asian Americans have faced hate and
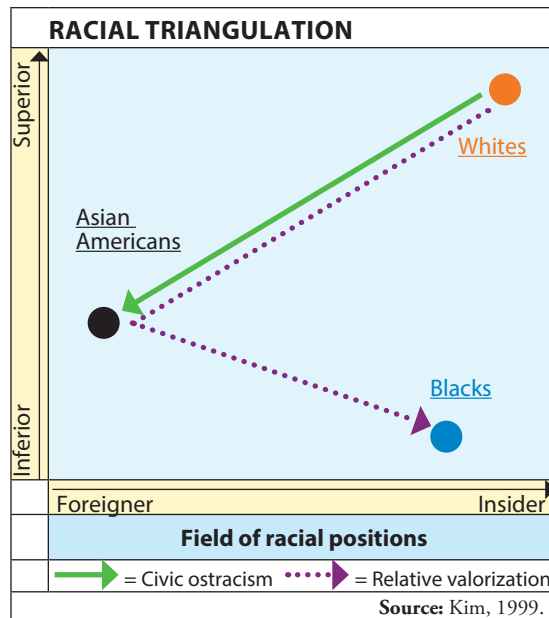
violence, including examples like the Rock Springs massacre in 1885, the 1886 Seattle riots, the mass lynching of 19 Chinese immigrants in 1871 in Los Angeles, California, and the 1982 killing of Vincent Chin in Highland Park, Michigan.

Our students must be taught this history alongside the history of violence against the Black community, Latinx community, Indigenous peoples, women, and LGTBQ+ communities. This inclusive teaching will help combat the way that white supremacy divides Asian American and Pacific Islander people from other marginalized communities of Black people, Indigenous people, and other people of color.

According to Claire Kim's (1999) racial triangulation theory, Asians are viewed differently than both whites and Blacks along two different dimensions. On the "relative valorization" dimension, Asians are viewed as superior to Blacks but inferior to whites. On the "civic ostracism" dimensions, they are viewed as outsiders, whereas Blacks are viewed as insiders. (See figure above.) These superior-yet-inferior stereotypes help to fuel the "model minority" myth (Xu & Lee, 2013), and they also divide Asians from Black people and other marginalized groups, limiting the potential for solidarity.

The history of Asian American and Pacific Islander people should be taught as part of the wider story of racism in America. One example of what we do in our history classes is how we teach the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. The xenophobia experienced by Chinese immigrants in the 1800s is taught alongside U.S. immigration policy today. Learners are assigned primary sources of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and current immigration policies to examine.

Learners examine these sources and respond to open-ended questions such as "What do you see, think, wonder?" This invites learners to make

RACIAL TRIANGULATION

Asian Americans

Whites

Blacks

Superior

Inferior

Foreigner   Insider

Field of racial positions

→ = Civic ostracism   ▸▸▸ = Relative valorization

Source: Kim, 1999.

observations, make connections, and ask questions. Opportunities such as these connect the lived experiences of multiple marginalized communities into a shared experience that can help unite us. The goal is to acknowledge the shared humanity in us all.

Of course, educating about Asian American and Pacific Islander history and experience should not only center on experiences where Asians and Asian Americans are victims. It should also include joy. Highlighting Asian American and Pacific Islander achievements builds deeper understanding and centers on contributions.

One resource for doing so is our *Little People, Big Dreams* book proposal lesson plan. This lesson is adaptable for grades 3 and up. Teachers assign students a project in which they research the contributions of Asian American and Pacific Islander people and write a book proposal. We use the book series *Little People, Big Dreams,* in which young children discover the lives of outstanding people, artists, scientists, activists, etc., as the model for our end product.

Together, learners explore Asian American and Pacific Islander achievements and contributions, choose an Asian American and Pacific Islander

person to become an expert on, and write a convincing book proposal for their book.

For example, learners might be introduced to Patsy Mink, the first Asian American woman elected to Congress who later sought a presidential nomination (Alexander, n.d.), and Dr. Feng-Shan Ho, who saved Jews in Austria by issuing visas to fleeing Jews against the orders of his superiors (Jewish Virtual Library, n.d.).

This lesson has flexibility with where the teacher would like to take it. It can end with learners sharing their book proposals in small groups and having fellow learners provide feedback. Some teachers may be inspired to have the students take the next step and create their book, ending with a book fair in which learners can present, teach, and learn about the contributions of Asian American and Pacific Islander people. The lesson can also be expanded to include other outstanding people from minoritized communities and their contributions.

Here are some other ways we recommend learning and teaching about the Asian American and Pacific Islander community:

- Host a community viewing and discussion of Asian Americans streaming on PBS: www.pbs.org/show/asian-americans/
- Invite your school or district community (educators and families) to read and discuss one or a combination of the following Asian American and Pacific Islander community experiences:
- Amanda Nguyen's interview on NowThisNews: www.youtube.com/watch?v=TijyKX30VAA
- *We Are Not a Stereotype: Breaking Down Asian Pacific American Bias:* smithsonianapa.org/learn/not-a-stereotype/
- "The long history of U.S. racism against Asian Americans,

from 'yellow peril' to 'model minority' to the 'Chinese virus' ": theconversation.com/the-long-history-of-us-racism-against-asian-americans-from-yellow-peril-to-model-minority-to-the-chinese-virus-135793
- "America's long history of scapegoating its Asian citizens": www.nationalgeographic.com/history/article/asian-american-racism-covid
- "The Atlanta shootings fit into a long legacy of Anti-Asian violence in America": time.com/5947723/atlanta-shootings-anti-asian-violence-america/
• Download unit and lesson plans, books, articles, videos, podcasts, and other resources about the Asian American history and experience from our website: linktr.ee/edu_to_empower

EMPOWER THE COMMUNITY

Create opportunities and encourage your Asian American and Pacific Islander community to speak their truth. Invite all community members to learn from the lived experiences of Asian American and Pacific Islander family, friends, classmates, and educators. Demand representation to break the common stereotype of Asian American and Pacific Islander people being invisible, unworthy of attention, and not having leadership capacity.

• Send a letter to your district, school, grade-level, or subject team. Find a template to get you started at: linktr.ee/edu_to_empower
• Invite Asian American and Pacific Islander community members to a community meeting dedicated to sharing their experiences, hopes, and wishes for the school or district.
• Examine the school curriculum and look for opportunities to engage students in Asian American and Pacific Islander

history, art, and culture. Highlight Asian American and Pacific Islander contributions and achievements: www.zinnedproject.org/materials/asian-americans-and-moments-in-peoples-history/
• Create leadership development programs targeted towards Asian American and Pacific Islander people at all levels: student, educator, parent.
• Include Asian American and Pacific Islander experiences in your antiracism and diversity, equity, and inclusion professional learning.

COMMIT TO ANTIRACISM

As K-12 educators, you have the power to shape the definition of American. Through who and what you teach, our students form an understanding of America and what it is. You can make changes in your classrooms, schools, and districts to include the Asian American and Pacific Islander community's history and lived experiences.

Let us not repeat the mistakes of the past. We end our call to action with the following quote from the inspiring Grace Lee Boggs: "You cannot change any society unless you take responsibility for it, unless you see yourself as belonging to it and responsible for changing it" (Harewood & Keefer, 2009).

Continue to learn and reflect on how best to serve the Asian American and Pacific Islander community. The following resources are an ongoing curated collection of lived experiences of Asian American and Pacific Islander people and ways in which to support the community. Find more resources at linktr.ee/edu_to_empower.

• Resources that highlight the history and experiences of the Asian American and Pacific Islander community as well as unit plans and lessons for teachers: wakelet. com/@edu_to_empower

• Anti-Asian Violence Resources: anti-asianviolenceresources.carrd.co/
• "Mari Matsuda: Critical Race Theory is not Anti-Asian": reappropriate.co/2021/03/mari-matsuda-critical-race-theory-is-not-anti-asian/

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Reading list rewrite

THE PURSUIT OF EQUITY RESHAPES THE ENGLISH CURRICULUM

BY AIMEE VOLK

"I understand diverse books are important. But where do the classics fit into all of this?" asked a participant in a recent professional learning session I attended about making curriculum more culturally relevant. The presenter, literacy expert Donalyn Miller, responded, "Classics to whom? Who decides something is a classic?"

Fireworks began going off in my brain. Miller's question prompted me, a district curriculum coordinator

supporting English teachers, to wonder: What is the purpose for requiring all students to read a specific text? Do the same texts need to be read in every classroom to ensure equity for all learners in a particular grade level or course? When does this help and when does it hinder equity?

Those are the kinds of questions my district, West Fargo (North Dakota) Public Schools, has been grappling with as we implement our secondary English language arts curriculum with the goals of purpose, equity, and relevance for all learners.

SURVEYING THE LAND: Where do we begin?

Over the last several years, the West Fargo district came to realize its English language arts resources needed an overhaul. The books we were reading and the discussions we were having were not reflective of our student body.

Three years ago, the school district received a literacy grant to improve literacy instructional practices and diversify curriculum resources to better support our disadvantaged population of learners. The grant included funds for professional learning, classroom

resources, and a secondary curriculum coordinator position to support teachers in serving students equitably within the core English language arts courses at the secondary level.

We curated our own resources to be flexible and responsive to students' needs while ensuring rigor and development of critical thinking skills. We knew this would require a deep commitment to vetting and selecting the right texts and materials.

Our district is committed to implementing "guaranteed and viable curriculum" (Marzano, 2003). Guaranteed means students will engage in the same essential learning regardless of teacher or school. Viable means teacher teams have vetted the curriculum to ensure it covers essential learning outcomes within a specific time frame, such as a quarter.

We worked with teams of teachers to develop scope, sequence,

Do the same texts need to be read in every classroom to ensure equity for all learners in a particular grade level or course? When does this help and when does it hinder equity?

and proficiency scale of the essential learning outcomes for each quarter, developed from North Dakota's state standards. This is what we refer to as our curriculum. It defines our purpose: what we want students to know and be able to do.

Together with teachers, we selected and aligned resources, including texts and other reading materials. This set of resources is akin to what many districts call curriculum. Teachers can then choose the resources that best match

their students' academic and social-emotional needs to ensure students reach proficiency within our agreed-upon essential (priority) standards.

This means that teachers make data-informed decisions about students' next steps in learning and incorporate a variety of evidence-based instructional strategies to help all students reach proficiency for each of the identified essential standards. Because our team has vetted the reading levels and content of these resources, teachers can be confident they are both rigorous and relevant.

PAVING THE WAY: Building trust

As we developed the curriculum and resources, we leaned into some difficult, yet exciting, conversations. Dialogue with our community had revealed students historically had little choice in the texts they read and had

been disengaged from the required texts. We had also learned there were limited texts available for teachers.

As we tackled the need for a different approach, we began asking: What do we want students to know and be able to do? What evidence-based instructional strategies are we implementing? Why do we choose to use specific resources and not others?

These discussions were full of emotion. Some educators spoke passionately about including more relevant and diverse texts and offering more student choice. Others felt their current instructional practices and beliefs were being challenged.

These conversations helped me realize I needed to slow down and build trust. I engaged in my own professional learning about building trust, then infused nuggets of my learnings, wonderings, and questions into our team's dialogue as a way to gently encourage personal reflection. I knew I needed to embed Coyle's (2018) skills of building safety, sharing vulnerability, and establishing purpose.

One strategy I found helpful was to tap into teachers' own experiences of falling in love with reading. My goal was to build connections with teachers and get them into the mindset of how to reach their students and cultivate their love of reading. Turning again to literacy expert Donalyn Miller, I shared questions she often asks: Who are you as a reader? What is your reading life story?

Many English teachers said they were always readers. However, others said they had been nonreaders until a certain book or experience ignited their reading life. Yet others had never thought about who they were as a reader and were intrigued by this question. Educators began to reflect on how their reading life impacted their personal beliefs about reading, teaching reading, how they infuse reading and specific literature into their courses. Importantly, they began to think about how they work to cultivate students' reading lives.

Soon, our discussion paralleled Rudine Sims Bishop's (1990) explanation of reading as windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors. We acknowledged the importance of students seeing themselves in or identifying with a main character or experience (mirror). We wanted learners to get a glimpse into others' experiences and perspectives (windows). And we wanted students to walk through a sliding glass door while reading, as if to actually take part in the experience within a story.

PRODUCTIVE STRUGGLE

From there, we worked to develop common understandings of terms such as culture and diversity, drawing on the work of Boyko et al. (2016). Understanding the differences among these concepts helped establish consistency and lay the foundation for the next steps of our work.

Next, we focused on the components that needed to be present in the books we chose. We looked to the work of Muhammad (2020), whose framework recommends educators embed identity development, skill development, intellectual development, and criticality. Using that framework, we realized many of our courses focused more on skill development than the other components.

We set out to change that. We explored types of reading and the purposes of each. We examined how to support learners in building self-efficacy, agency, and identity through various text types.

We also explored strategies about how we, as educators, can shift from the holder of knowledge to a facilitator of learning to ensure learners not only show proficiency in essential skills, but as Muhammad (2020) emphasizes, know who they are, who others say they are, and whom they desire to be; use mental capacities to better understand and critique the world; and work toward justice and social transformation.

We provided multiple opportunities for students to develop this knowledge by using different types of texts for different purposes. It is our goal that, with all of these access points to books, students will be able to create reading connections and increase their literacy skills while coming to know the joy of reading. The tiers of books are as follows:

- An **anchor text** is a core text that teachers and students refer to throughout the year. It should help students learn and develop critical thinking, discussion, and reflection skills, and should build shared experiences among the classroom community.
- A **mentor text** is similar but focused on teaching about the author's craft. To choose an anchor or mentor text, we work to find texts that are engaging, diverse, relevant, and offer diverse perspectives, but all students in a class read the same one.
- **Book club books** allow students to practice and apply the skills that were taught with the anchor text. Here we offer students more choice in the texts, which represent different perspectives, experiences, reading levels, and formats. They are selected to be grade appropriate for both reading level and social and emotional development.
- **Classroom library books** have even more diverse topics, experiences, perspectives, and reading levels. Classroom libraries increase student accesses to texts, develop the joy of reading, and create a classroom culture of reading.
- **The media center** offers students an even a wider range of topics, reading levels, perspectives, and experiences. Here, students have the opportunity to learn more about self-selected topics, other's experiences, and themselves.

While we do our best to offer

students windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors with authentic, relevant texts, not all stakeholders agree on what is appropriate for each grade level.

I encourage teacher teams to partner with media specialists, who are excellent resources for finding relevant and rigorous texts.

I also recommend that, when teachers choose a book or other resource (such as video or image), they provide a rationale for that choice. That is useful for multiple reasons: It can be used to address a question or concern in the future, provide helpful information for new staff, and help us ensure that we are choosing texts that are both relevant and rigorous.

PATCHING THE POTHOLES

Teachers have been passionate about this work and eager to incorporate more relevant and diverse texts to add to our district resources. Still, there has been much debate about the importance of whole class reading, teaching the classics, and how to ensure that our texts are complex enough.

As we have implemented more current and relevant texts for our students, we have also received concerns from parents about topics addressed in some texts. I have been asked: "Is this a social studies class or an English class?" "What standards are you teaching?" "Why are you teaching politics?"

As we continue our work, we must continue to address these issues and educate all stakeholders about why and how we are changing our more traditional instructional model to include more diverse and responsive resources. We also need to help prepare teachers to talk with parents about these topics and have other difficult but important conversations. This is important, yet sensitive, work.

When I receive a concern from a stakeholder, I often explain that English language arts teachers support learners to build reading and writing skills, gain knowledge from various content, and develop critical understandings of themselves, their community, and

the world (adapted from Muhammad, 2020).

Then, I cite specific state standards for skills such as analyzing multiple sources, author's point of view and purpose; author's interpretations, biases, diverse perspectives; credibility; clarify, verify, or challenge ideas and conclusions; and promote divergent and creative perspectives.

I have found that it is also important to reaffirm to stakeholders that teachers present information from various sources to ensure multiple perspectives are heard and remind them that teachers do not share their own personal beliefs. Finally, I offer to provide an alternative text choice, if that is the parent's wish.

PAVING THE WAY:
Celebrating milestones

As we began implementing more relevant, diverse texts and giving teachers and students choice in their reading, teachers began reaching out to me to share the impact of these culturally relevant texts in English courses. Here are some of their comments.

From a high school English teacher: "The kids are *loving* [the new books]. I have received such good feedback from the kids about how relatable the characters are, the setting is actually in our time period, that the books read like a movie. Many kids are saying, 'I'm actually reading it because I want to!' One student said this was the first time reading a book that represented her culture."

From an 8th grade English teacher: "A few weeks ago, a student told me he didn't read and had never enjoyed a book. I told him my goal this year was to find him a book he would enjoy. I handed him *Hey, Kiddo*, one of the new books you worked hard to add to our classroom library collection. Today, he finished it and said he really enjoyed it. He said it was the first book he actually finished reading since around the 3rd grade! I was beyond excited and started cheering!"

From a 6th grade English teacher: "When I was working with a student today … he told me that this is the first time he ever finished reading a book for school. Then he asked me what we were reading next in literature circles! Thank you for supporting all of our work with books — we are making a difference for our students!"

We have only scratched the surface of embedding relevant, diverse books into our courses, and it is already evident that students are more engaged in reading and are developing self-efficacy and agency, all of which positively impact student achievement and social and emotional learning. But the work is not done. Next, following the work of Muhammad (2020), we plan to dig deeper into the work of improving all students' literacy skills through developing identity, critical skills, intellectual development, and criticality.

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EQUITY TOOLS AND RESOURCES

EXPLORE A SELECTION OF EQUITY TOOLS AND RESOURCES FROM LEARNING FORWARD,
THE EDUCATION TRUST, AND OUR PARTNERS.

STATE AND DISTRICT PLANNER

essa.learningforward.org/

This tool kit offers a five-stage planning framework to design professional learning systems that lead to improved teaching and learning for all students. Created by Learning Forward to support state education agencies and school districts in making strategic decisions about leveraging their funding for ambitious and equitable outcomes.

PLANNING TOOL FOR ADVANCING EQUITY THROUGH PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

learningforward.org/journal/october-2018-vol-39-no-5/advancing-equity/

In the October 2018 issue of *The Learning Professional,* Jill Harrison Berg and Sonia Caus Gleason described a three-part equity framework of examining beliefs, practices, and systems. They created this accompanying tool to help educators think about both the content of professional learning and the contexts. It includes reflection questions and prompts for planning next steps.

WEBINARS

learningforward.org/webinars/

Learning Forward has hosted dozens of practical webinars to respond to educators' immediate needs over the past 15 months, with several focused specifically on equity topics. Members have full access to the archive. Each webinar features inspiring practitioners and thought leaders and includes links to practical resources for further exploration. Equity topics include equipping educators with antiracist strategies, recruiting and retaining educators of color, and culturally responsive education in an online world.

THOUGHT LEADER PODCASTS

podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/mypd-unplugged/id1345000344

The office of curriculum, instruction, and professional development at Long Beach Unified School District has created myPD Unplugged, a series of podcasts with facilitation guides designed to help educators build a deeper understanding of multicultural education, equity, and social justice pedagogy. Learning Forward collaborates with Long Beach to share this resource.

Recent podcasts showcase such leaders as Val Brown talking about stories as equity data, Sal Khan on leveraging technology to bridge equity gaps, Gholdy Muhammad on an equity framework for culturally and historically responsive literacy, and many more.

BEYOND MONEY

www.educationresourceequity.org/

The right combination of resources matters for creating more equitable learning for each student. The Alliance for Resource Equity, a partnership of Education Resource Strategies and the Education Trust, offers tools and a framework of 10 dimensions of equity to help educators build learning access and opportunity for all.

EDUCATOR DIVERSITY DATA

edtrust.org/educator-diversity

An interactive map from the Education Trust offers data at a glance to show whether and how each state in the U.S. uses policy efforts to build and maintain a diverse educator workforce.

FUNDING EQUITY TOOL

edtrust.org/map/

With the State of Funding Equity Data Tool from the Education Trust, users can get detailed data on funding patterns in each state by clicking on the map. National data can be seen in the accompanying *Funding Gaps 2018* brief.

LITERACY ASSIGNMENTS ANALYSIS

edtrust.org/resource/advanced-coursework-tool/

The Assignments Analysis Tool from the Education Trust allows educators to see how a variety of learning activities rate according to the Literacy Assignments Analysis Framework to determine if students have rigorous and equitable learning opportunities. Assignments are drawn from middle school grades and subjects that were collected from schools with different student demographics.

UPDATES

EQUITY THOUGHT LEADER PODCAST SERIES

Learning Forward is a supporting sponsor of the Equity Thought Leader Podcast Series from myPD Unplugged, a production of the office of curriculum, instruction, and professional development at Long Beach Unified School District.

Each week's podcast is equity-focused to help educators build a deeper understanding of multicultural education, equity, and social justice pedagogy. Podcasts in this series include discussions with local and national leaders in the field and facilitation guides that allow listeners to extend their thinking and engage in ongoing conversations and meaning making.

Visit myPD Unplugged at: **podcasts.com/mypd-unplugged-ada79e545**

UPDATES

LEARNING FORWARD RECEIVES OHIO NETWORKS GRANT

Learning Forward was awarded a 17-month grant from the Ohio Department of Education to co-design and build the Networked Learning Community for RemotEDx, a portfolio of remote, hybrid, and blended education programs and practices.

Learning Forward will facilitate a statewide community of practice to connect RemotEDx stakeholders and share best practices to advance remote education and successful implementation. Learning Forward will also lead a networked improvement community with multiple districts working in continuous learning cycles centered on a shared remote learning problem of practice. Learning from the district teams will help inform the services and resources provided by RemotEDx.

In addition, Learning Forward will co-design the RemotEDx Professional Learning Academy, offering expert professional learning content as well as a built-in mechanism for sharing lessons learned and promising practices.

The RemotEDx Networked Learning Community is made possible through funding from the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act, also known as the CARES Act. If your state or district would like to talk with Learning Forward about setting up a similar initiative, contact chief policy officer Melinda George (melinda.george@learningforward.org).

Welcome to Machel Mills-Miles

Machel Mills-Miles is Learning Forward's new vice president, standards implementation and outreach. Mills-Miles will contribute to the conceptualization and development of tools and resources to support the use of revised Standards for Professional Learning. The first phase of the standards suite of materials will be released next year.

Mills-Miles formerly served as senior learning strategist at BloomBoard, facilitating the use of microcredentials to support professional learning plans in district, state, and regional contexts. Previously, she worked at the Tennessee Department of Education to lead a statewide pilot for microcredentials within an overall professional learning systems project, serving as a partner to external organizations.

She also played a key role in Tennessee's Diversity Innovation Grant, Human Capital Network, Teacher Leader Network, New Teacher Induction Framework, and Professional Learning Systems Framework. In each project, she worked to ensure alignment with Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning.

Machel Mills-Miles

Mills-Miles worked in Metro Nashville Public Schools as district lead coach for literacy, supporting more than 120 coaches districtwide, and earlier as instructional/literacy coach in direct support of teachers. She began her education career as an English language arts teacher.

Mills-Miles holds degrees in cognitive science from Northwestern University and teaching and learning in urban schools from Vanderbilt University.

ORDER COPIES OF THIS ISSUE FOR YOUR COLLEAGUES

The Learning Professional is a popular tool for reflection, discussion, and collaboration. If you'd like to order extra copies of this issue to share with your colleagues or use in a professional learning community, visit Learning Forward's online bookstore to place your order:

learningforward.org/store/journals

2021 VIRTUAL CONFERENCE

Learning Forward's 2021 Virtual Conference, to be held Dec. 5-7, will double the number of preconference and concurrent sessions from 2020, bringing 20 preconference and 80 concurrent sessions for even more of the great content that you have come to expect from Learning Forward.

VIRTUAL learningforward 2021 ANNUAL CONFERENCE DEC. 5-7, 2021

While session selection is still underway, the preconference sessions are set. Preconference sessions offer a four-hour deep dive into critical topics. As a Learning Forward subscriber, you get special access to see the preconference sessions before anyone else.

Preconference presenters include Thomas Guskey, Marcia Tate, Michael Fullan, Zaretta Hammond, Nancy Frey, Doug Fisher, Joellen Killion, and Jim Knight.

Visit **conference.learningforward.org** to see the latest updates.

New Jersey affiliate features *The Learning Professional* in 'chat and chew'

Learning Forward New Jersey started an initiative in March to engage educators across the state in dialogue and new learning. Thirty educators participated in the "New Learning Chat and Chew," an evening session where they were encouraged to bring a snack and join the conversation.

The dual objective was to engage leaders in a discussion of useful and timely topics while looking closely at a current topic from *The Learning Professional.* Before the event, participants read the interview with Jal Mehta titled "Crisis creates opportunity. Will we seize it?" from the February issue of the magazine. This article was chosen to encourage a conversation on planning to open schools while using the learning of the past year.

To facilitate this Zoom meet, the affiliate created a protocol to promote collaboration and dialogue among school and district administrators, teacher leaders, higher education, consultants, and educators from additional educational organizations.

The session opened with a networking breakout, where participants answered the question, "What is one teaching tool you hope educators hold onto after COVID-19?" That was followed by a welcome segment, a small-group discussion breakout with a guiding document, and, finally, a full-group discussion and parting resources.

Participant feedback was positive. Many said they had not been this engaged in other Zoom events and were re-energized to plan for the future. Based on this feedback, the affiliate planned another Chat and Chew based on the article "Coaches shape early learning and beyond" from the April issue.

Want to share your affiliate's initiatives and updates with readers? Email suzanne.bouffard@ learningforward.org.
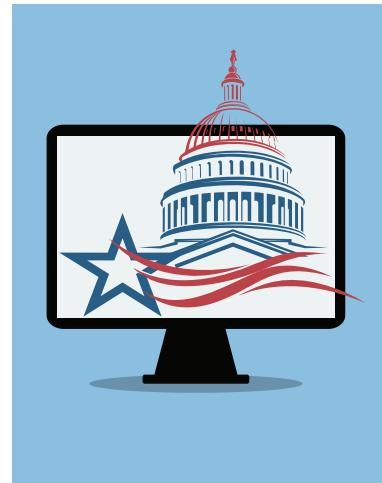
LEARNING FORWARD IMPLEMENTS NEW ADVOCACY TOOLS

Being an advocate just got easier. Learning Forward has invested in an online advocacy tool called Voter Voice. Voter Voice allows education advocates to reach out to members of Congress at the click of a button online or on your phone. No need to look up your legislators — Voter Voice does it for you.

As the fiscal year 2022 appropriations process gets underway, Learning Forward will be calling on every educator to be an advocate in this upcoming appropriations cycle.

While American Rescue Plan Act funds are making an immediate impact, ongoing professional learning needs are increasing. Educators need ongoing and consistent support through Title IIA to budget and implement effective professional learning.

We will ask every educator to call on Congress to increase funding for Title IIA. Watch for advocacy emails from Learning Forward, and try out Voter Voice to see how easy it is to make your voice heard.

FEATURED SOCIAL MEDIA POST

NEW HASHTAG
We're introducing a new hashtag to make it easier to engage with *The Learning Professional* on Twitter. Follow us at **#The Learning Pro** and share your comments, feedback, and ideas.

Stephanie Hirsh @HirshLF • Apr 21

Compiling SEL resources -- reminded of this great one. **#LearnFwdTLP** infographic to understand the #SEL needs of students. learningforward.org/?p=71853 via @LearningForward

66% **64%**

Get connected | Learning Forward
Infographic shows how much students want and need communication from educators.

Learning Forward Foundation models equity commitment

BY DEB RADI, AMY COLTON, AND JANICE BRADLEY

The Learning Forward Foundation recognizes that fulfilling our vision and mission requires us to examine our policies, procedures, practices, and structures with an equity lens. As we shared in the April 2021 issue of *The Learning Professional,* the first step in this process is examining our values, beliefs, and biases. The next step is building a collective space for action, starting at our board table.

As learning leaders, it is our responsibility to create and model professional learning spaces that are open, authentic, trusting, and caring, where all voices will be listened to and heard. We strive to create opportunities for dialogue so we can unpack who we are and who we aspire to be in kinship with each other.

Educator Nel Noddings (2005) reminds us that caring for one another "does not mean that I will always approve of what the other wants, nor does it mean that I will never try to lead him or her to a better set of values, but I must take into account the feelings and desires that are actually there and respond as positively as my values and capacities allow" (p. 2).

As a board, we are intentionally creating a learning environment that nurtures and strengthens each and every person's meaningful engagement and learning. We aim to cultivate equity of voice and expect all board members to do so as they attend meetings and retreats, engage in fundraising for scholarships and grants, and support grantees through touchpoint conversations.

We use three intentional strategies during virtual board meetings to ensure equity of voice.

First, the meeting facilitator restates each idea shared by participants after all ideas are on the table so that all ideas are equally considered. When doing so, the facilitator focuses on the ideas, not who is saying them or how the idea is communicated through body language and tone. For example, the facilitator might say, "We have three suggestions for allocating funds this year. First, wait until next year. Second, fund one project. Third, consider developing and funding a new project."

Second, participants move into breakout rooms of three to four participants for a more intimate space to share one's voice.

Third, the facilitator poses a question or discussion point and calls on each person one at a time to "play or pass" so that everyone has a chance to share their voice, thinking, and opinions.

Within this safe learning space, we believe we are well-positioned to take collective action to address the inequities of our policies, practices, and structures. We are working to develop consensus around a common definition of equity and a theory of action to influence our board operations, grants, and scholarships.

In the process, we are ensuring that whatever we develop aligns with both Learning Forward's equity statement and the equity standards in Learning Forward's draft revised Standards for Professional Learning.

We hope that by following along with us on our journey, you will be inspired to act within your own learning spaces toward an equitable future for all.

Learn more about the Learning Forward Foundation at **foundation.learningforward.org**.

REFERENCE

Noddings, N. (2005). Caring in education. *The encyclopedia of informal education.* www.infed.org/biblio/noddings_caring_in_education.htm

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Deb Radi (dradi@mymts.net) is chair-elect and vice chair, governance for the Learning Forward Foundation and university secretary at Université de Saint-Boniface. Amy Colton (acolton2@gmail.com) is vice chair, research and support for the Learning Forward Foundation, executive director of Learning Forward Michigan, and a senior consultant for Learning Forward. Janice Bradley (janice.bradley@utah.edu) is chair of the Learning Forward Foundation and assistant director, professional learning at the Utah Education Policy Center at the University of Utah.

ABOUT LEARNING FORWARD

Learning Forward shows you how to plan, implement, and measure high-quality professional learning so you and your team can achieve success with your system, your school, and your students.

We are the only professional association devoted exclusively to those who work in educator professional learning. We help our members effect positive and lasting change to achieve equity and excellence in teaching and learning.

THROUGH THE LENS

OF LEARNING FORWARD'S STANDARDS FOR PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

LEARNING FORWARD'S **STANDARDS FOR PROFESSIONAL LEARNING**

Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students ...

Learning Communities

… occurs within learning communities committed to continuous improvement, collective responsibility, and goal alignment.

Leadership

… requires skillful leaders who develop capacity, advocate, and create support systems for professional learning.

Resources

… requires prioritizing, monitoring, and coordinating resources for educator learning.

Data

… uses a variety of sources and types of student, educator, and system data to plan, assess, and evaluate professional learning.

Learning Designs

… integrates theories, research, and models of human learning to achieve its intended outcomes.

Implementation

… applies research on change and sustains support for implementation of professional learning for long-term change.

Outcomes

… aligns its outcomes with educator performance and student curriculum standards.

Many of the articles in this issue of *The Learning Professional* demonstrate Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning in action. Use this tool to deepen your understanding of the standards and strategies for implementing them.

Ways you might use this tool include:

- Discuss the questions in a professional learning community;
- Share one or more articles from the issue with your staff and facilitate a conversation; and
- Do a self-assessment of what you have learned from this issue.

STANDARD: LEARNING COMMUNITIES **IN ACTION** Learning networks for equity and antiracism can take many forms, including within-district collaborations (see Ahern and Cole, p. 40), cross-district networks (see Teitel and Anton, p. 33), and state collaboratives (see Pride, p. 30).	**TO CONSIDER** • What learning networks are available to you at local, regional, state, or broader levels to deepen your equity work? Or what steps could you take to start one? _____ _____ _____ • What do you hope to get out of engaging in an equity-focused learning network? _____ _____ _____ _____
STANDARD: RESOURCES **IN ACTION** Equity statements and initiatives without human, financial, and other resources amount to empty promises. Articles throughout this issue describe the elements and supports needed for professional learning to engage educators in deep and ongoing exploration of equity data, implicit bias, anti-racist practices, and other equity practices.	**TO CONSIDER** • Maurice Swinney says that chief equity officers need teams to "implement what the district says it values" and "deeply influence work across a district" (p. 10). Who is your core equity team and what resources can they leverage to build equity systemwide? _____ _____ _____ _____ • High-quality, culturally responsive curriculum and instructional materials are essential resources for achieving equity. Aimee Volk (p. 66), Brian Wright (p. 26), and Virginia Nguyen and Stacy Yung (p. 62) share recommendations for revisiting and reshaping curricula. To what extent have you examined the cultural responsiveness of your curricula and materials, and what will be your next steps? _____ _____ _____ _____

Learn more about Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning at
www.learningforward.org/standards-for-professional-learning.

An artful approach to dialogue

Byron Kim's artwork "Synecdoche" is a set of more than 400 panels, each painted a unique shade to match the skin tones of strangers, friends, and relatives. The full work is part of the collection at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. In 1998, Kim created a set of 20 panels (shown here) for the Blanton Museum at The University of Texas at Austin with the participation of strangers he met on campus.

In 2017, the museum, the Austin Independent School District, and community organizations collaborated to produce *Free to Be Me: Exploring Identity*, a discussion guide for "Synecdoche." Educators can use it to facilitate student discussion about the artwork and the issues of race and identity it raises. The guide could be adapted to the ages and needs of different students or adults.

The following reflection questions, which were co-written by *The Learning Professional* columnist Angela Ward, are excerpted from the guide. You can find the full downloadable guide at **blantonmuseum.org/freetobeme**.

Byron Kim, *Synecdoche*, 1998, Oil on wax on twenty panels, 10 x 8 in., Blanton Museum of Art, The University of Texas at Austin, Michener Acquisitions Fund, 1998

LOOK

- Examine the artwork. What might it show? What is the artist's message?

- What colors do you see and which one is most like your own unique skin color?

- What do you like most about your own beautiful skin color?

TALK WITH A PEER

- Why is it important to notice our differences and our similarities?

- How might it feel to be identified by your skin color alone?

- How might this artwork be empowering?

Free to Be Me was created through a collaboration among the Blanton Museum of Art, the Austin Independent School District's Office of Cultural Proficiency & Inclusiveness, and the Anti-Defamation League's No Place for Hate initiative. This resource is one in a series featuring a work of art from the museum selected to foster important conversations and inspire students to act. For more resources, visit **blantonmuseum.org/PK12resources**.
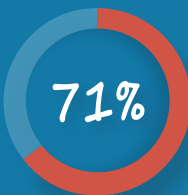
The Power to Protect

Children from Deadly Diseases

EDUCATORS

are part of a team to help parents and caregivers to understand the urgency, and to remind them to schedule their children's immunizations today!

Millions of children and adolescents are behind on critical immunizations that will keep them safe and allow for a return to in-person learning. **Vaccines are free for those who need them and can't afford them.**

40%

Missed childhood vaccines (non-flu) since Feb. 2020. That is **11 million doses** for illnesses like **measles, rubella, whooping cough, and more.**

71%

Drop in healthcare visits for 7- to 17-year-olds, ages when critical vaccines like **Tdap, HPV, and meningitis** are given.

Learn more at
www.getvaxfacts.org