Leading
FOR EQUITY

**Build leadership at every level —
state (p. 26), district (p. 30, p. 33),
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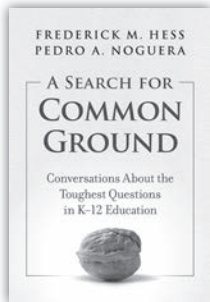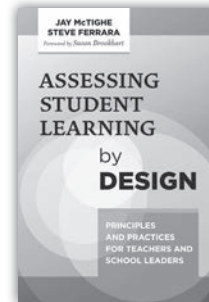
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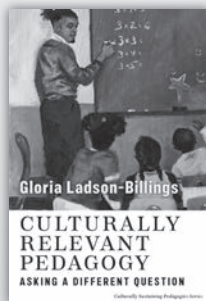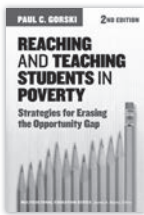
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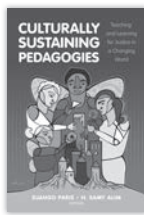Oct. 2021 / 192 pages
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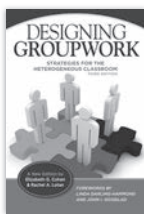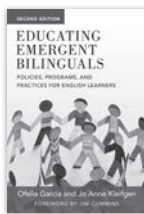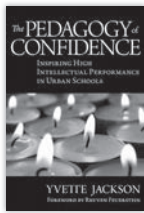
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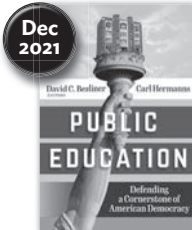
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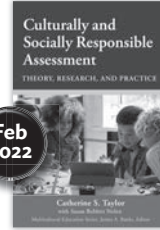Theory, Research, and Practice
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in this issue ...

in this issue ...

I SAY

Mara Rodríguez

Director of educator success at Curriculum Associates

"Unfinished learning is a better description of our circumstances for the past year [than learning loss] … . When something is lost, control over it is often no longer in your hands. However, when something is unfinished, it suggests a project that's not yet complete but can be. Assured of the end results, we're able to focus on how we can move closer to finished learning."

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EQUITY IS AN ONGOING JOURNEY THAT CHALLENGES US ALL

When guest editor Tanji Reed Marshall and I began working on this year's equity spotlight issues (which include the June 2021 issue on Action for Racial Equity), we didn't know that conversations about educational equity would take center stage during school board meetings and in mass media. But we did know that standing up for every child's right to learn and thrive has always taken commitment, courage, and leadership. That's why we decided to dedicate this issue to the topic of leading for equity.

Equity doesn't live in a policy document or in a one-off training. It lives in the people who make it a priority every day. It is embodied in their attitudes and daily actions. As Principal Baruti Kafele says in his online exclusive interview, "Equity isn't what you do; it's who you are."

Because achieving equity is an ongoing journey, and one that challenges us all, it takes leadership from the top, experts in this issue and elsewhere tell us. System-level leaders set priorities, model their expectations, allocate resources, and monitor progress (p. 26).

But equity takes leadership at every other level, too. School leaders, coaches, teachers, professional learning designers, and community organizations can all be leaders for equity, and they must be, because it takes all of us working toward the common goal of ensuring that every child gets what he, she, or they need to succeed. So whether or not you have leadership in your title, this issue is for you. Whether you have been talking about equity for years or are just starting on your journey, we know everyone needs support on their professional learning path.

In this issue, you'll find strategies for building buy-in among your community (p. 33), cultivating equity mindsets (p. 22), recruiting and retaining a diverse staff (p. 36), examining curricula for cultural responsiveness and representation (p. 53), incorporating equity and inclusion into your SMART goals (p. 66), and much more.

You don't want to miss this issue's online exclusives (learningforward.org/journal/leading-for-equity/). Baruti Kafele talks about the unique roles principals and assistant principals play in building commitment to equity among their staff. Jamila Dugan writes about overcoming barriers to systems change. And Lynne Scott from the International City/County Management Association shares lessons from a network of equity officers in local government that can inform the work of school districts' chief equity officers.

This issue — and Learning Forward's work as a whole — have benefitted enormously from the input and support of Tanji Reed Marshall of the Education Trust. We are grateful to her for engaging in the kind of collaboration and shared learning that we aim to build in the field and for embodying the Standards for Professional Learning.

As 2021 comes to a close, we want to thank the three columnists who have contributed to this year's Voices section. Jim Knight's wisdom about ongoing professional growth, Angela Ward's guidance about antiracism, and Sharron Helmke's advice about coaching have been timely and invaluable in a year that has been tumultuous for educators.

If you haven't read all of their columns, I encourage you to check out the archived versions on our website. And I assure you that all three of them will continue to contribute to *The Learning Professional* and other Learning Forward outlets in the future.

Stay tuned for the debut of our three new columnists in the February 2022 issue. That issue will also feature articles on how to foster collaboration and community in a divided world. As always, equity will be at the center.

We also want to thank you, our readers. Your passion and commitment, even in the most stressful of times, energize and sustain us, and we appreciate hearing that we do the same for many of you. ∎

Whether you have been talking about equity for years or are just starting on your journey, we know everyone needs support on their professional learning path.

Suzanne Bouffard (suzanne.bouffard@ learningforward. org) is editor of *The Learning Professional.*

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.

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VOICES

'EQUITY BELONGS TO EVERYONE'

"One of one of the things that was absolutely critical for us [in Fort Wayne Community School District] is that everybody understand that equity belongs to everyone — even when we look at our human capital management, our classroom assistants, people we hired as bus drivers. They all went through the same conversations around equity that our teachers did and that our leaders did. So everyone, first of all, has to own it. But … it has to be unapologetically led from the top. You can't have an equity department without board and superintendent guidance. People have to understand that this is just the way we do business, and these concepts are infused in everything that we do."

— Wendy Robinson,
president of the Learning Forward
Board of Trustees and retired
superintendent
of Fort Wayne Community Schools
in Fort Wayne, Indiana,
Nov. 15, 2021

MY WORD OF THE YEAR IS 'TRANSFORMATION'

As we wrap up 2021 and look ahead to 2022, the word that is top of mind for me is *transformation*. Transformation involves disrupting and dismantling longstanding educational structures, policies, and systems that have perpetuated inequity and created barriers to success for too many students. We must support leaders at every level — who are experiencing some of the most stressful years of their careers — to make change possible and sustainable.

It is beyond time to break out of outmoded educational structures and traditions that have not led to substantive results, beyond time to change systems that were never designed to serve all children to their fullest potential.

Now is a unique window for change because recent disruptions to our usual way of working, along with emergency resources from public and private education funders, offer an opportunity to do things never done before.

This is why we made transformation the theme of the 2021 Learning Forward Virtual Annual Conference and a frame for much of our recent work, and why we must continue to work for and support transformation.

Despite generations of investments in educational improvement, huge inequities remain and gaps continue to grow in almost every domain. Tinkering around the edges is no longer acceptable.

Systemic change that leads to transformation in teaching and learning requires an intentional, multipronged approach. We can start by taking the following steps and making strategic investments.

First, a **strong vision and systemwide strategic plan** designed around the ultimate goal of improved and accelerated student achievement is fundamental. Such a plan should address current realities and also look to the future, with reflection and improvement cycles built in to allow for meeting unanticipated challenges.

Systemic professional learning should be at the core of forward-looking strategic plans so that all actors in the system develop the knowledge, skills, and mindsets they need to provide an outstanding education to every child. The newly revised Standards for Professional Learning, to be released in April 2022, will be an important asset in this work. They will include implementation tools and action guides to support the development of educators at many levels and in many roles.

Second, **we must invest in leaders**. Educational leaders today are working in a protracted period of crisis and under unprecedented levels of stress. We must provide them with the supports and resources they need to navigate crises, adapt to changing needs, share the load, and stay resilient.

In the October 2021 issue of *The Learning Professional*, which focused on the theme of leadership under pressure, we offered strategies and tools for preparing leaders for crisis, creating cultures of compassion, making critical investments in principal growth, and more. We were moved by the resonance of this issue in the field and are committed to continually addressing it.

Many field leaders have made the case for leadership development as a foundational lever in improving schools, and new research continues to accumulate about the power of leadership (e.g. Grissom et al., 2021). To transform education, we can't just use the same methods of professional learning and support that we've always used.

Recent work points to the need for more collaborative, inclusive, culturally responsive, and partnership-focused leadership development (Cuseo et al., 2021; Hannon & Mackay, 2021). Our

> **Now is a unique window for change because recent disruptions to our usual way of working, along with emergency resources from public and private education funders, offer an opportunity to do things never done before.**

Denise Glyn Borders is president/CEO of Learning Forward.

support must shift leaders' perspectives, power up expertise, cultivate deep understanding, and transform practice.

Third, all of this work must be grounded in **a solid commitment to equity,** including processes of rethinking, defining, and expanding the concept of equity and taking meaningful steps to put it into practice. This requires the examination of values, mindsets, and cultures — both in schools and more broadly — that have led to inequities of power and privilege and kept many students from achieving their potential.

Transforming schools will take a delicate balance of acting in a timely and decisive way while maintaining focus on the long-term horizon. We must neither drag our feet nor trip over them. Going slow to ultimately go fast can help ensure that we take every step needed on the long-term journey.

It can help us get all of the right voices at the table (including students, parents, and community members as well as educators at all levels), develop deep and lasting partnerships (with local communities, businesses,

universities, and beyond), and put the right measurements in place.

The OECD, an international economic organization with 38 member countries, recently urged education leaders to prepare for the unpredictable challenges of the future by "revisioning and transforming" some of our longstanding school structures and traditions (Fuster & Burns, 2020).

In a recent report, Andreas Schleicher, OECD director for education and skills, challenged us all to engage in long-term strategic thinking and consider possible alternate scenarios for education "to inspire, to dream, and to transform … to future-proof systems and stress-test against unexpected shocks" and to "move beyond complacency and easy solutions" by considering the tensions and paradoxes in our current systems that need to be addressed.

The journey of transformation will take time, patience, and intensive planning. But it can inspire passion, hope, and most importantly, progress — all of which our schools need now more than ever.

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ADDRESSING STUDENTS' HUMANITY IS AN EQUITY ISSUE

When the U.S. shut down during spring 2020, my youngest son was in 8th grade. He had no closure to his school year or his middle school career, and then he began high school from home.

This year, he started face to face coursework as a sophomore. My son and students like him lost a lot in that time between the end of 8th grade, when they were just entering their teen years, and 10th grade, when some have grown to their full height and others may be navigating adult responsibilities.

As an educator who centers the comfort of students, I know that some of the most difficult losses for students were the multiple opportunities in the school day to socialize with their peers, make mistakes and figure things out for themselves without adults hovering, navigate conflicts, and *just be*.

Because of that, we should have all expected the social, emotional, and behavioral struggles that are manifesting right now. We shouldn't be surprised by the surging mental health needs in schools. And we have to hold space for the reality that families, regardless of socioeconomic status, were not all in a space to attend to the social, emotional or mental health needs of their children over the past year and a half.

Yet, despite our students' predictable needs for extra social and emotional support, I see the system course correcting, going back to inequitable business as usual. Leaders are talking about "learning loss," a term similar to "summer slide," both reproducing a decades-old deficit narrative sure to assign historically margainalized students to segregated academic experiences.

When educators use or hear these terms, they are not thinking about straight-A students like my 10th grader, yet they are thinking about students who look like him. And they are, even if subconsciously, erasing their humanity.

Schools need an equity-focused professional learning plan that will center social, emotional, and mental health needs of students and staff as an essential part of learning. It should decenter achievement and test score attainment to focus on educator awareness, empathy, and skill development to acknowledge students as humans harmed by the current state of society and take action to meet their needs. Meeting those needs and addressing students' humanity is an equity issue.

Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning can guide this work. A longstanding resource for educators, the standards are currently undergoing revision. The updated version, which is expected to be released in spring 2022, will include three interrelated equity standards that are essential for educator planning, preparation, and developing processes to meet student needs (Brown & Crow, 2021).

> **Schools need an equity-focused professional learning plan that will center social, emotional, and mental health needs of students and staff as an essential part of learning.**

Angela M. Ward (angela@2ward equity.com, @2WardEquity) is founder and CEO of 2Ward Equity.

HOW TO COACH WHILE PERFORMING 'OTHER DUTIES AS ASSIGNED'

I'm hearing from coaches everywhere that they are feeling especially stressed and overwhelmed right now. It's not because of their coaching roles per se, but because of the "other duties as assigned" that are included in many coaches' job descriptions. If you are overloaded and questioning how much longer you can continue like this, you are not alone. You can get through this period with some straightforward strategies and support from your peers.

As schools grapple with teacher and substitute shortages, coaches are being called on to make up the difference between staffing needs and available educators. Many coaches are taking on duties from covering classes to serving as the class's teacher of record, from extra bus and recess duty to new committee assignments.

As master coach Heather Clifton pointed out to me recently, coaches are vulnerable to those "other duties as assigned" because they are not officially committed to a group of students waiting in a classroom yet they so clearly understand the needs of teachers and students and how to address them.

For the vast majority of coaches, this additional deployment into classrooms has not been accompanied by a shortened list of coaching responsibilities. It is truly *and* other duties, not *instead of*, so the work piles up.

How can you accommodate these increasing demands? Not by adding more things to each day's to-do list! Instead, take a strategic approach, carefully evaluating what is and is not possible, what items need to be prioritized, and, most importantly, how to manage others' expectations.

Here are some timely tips that experienced coaches have shared with me about navigating this challenging time:

Meet with your principal or supervisor to review expectations and ask for guidance in prioritizing work. Ensure that your supervisor understands the time-intensive items on your list, and then ask for his or her input in prioritizing those items, as well as input about which smaller to-do's can be shifted to others or temporarily put on hold. Being a good team player does not mean accepting more responsibilities without question; it means collaborating for the good of all involved.

Be transparent with teachers about your additional responsibilities and your priorities. Do so in a way that is informative and matter-of-fact, so they don't perceive it as complaining. Make your schedule more visible. If you have to shift the schedule of a coaching session, let the teacher know why. If you're a person who enjoys social media, consider tweeting or posting about your own learning and growth as a classroom teacher, recess monitor, or other new role.

Shift your coaching focus from individuals to teams. Or even better, shift to coaching

As schools grapple with teacher and substitute shortages, coaches are being called on to make up the difference between staffing needs and available educators.

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.*

team leaders. Empower team leaders to continue the work and processes you've established with the team and coach into developing their coaching and leadership skills.

Streamline your coaching. Create protocols and processes that lead to desired results and can be followed consistently even when you are not present to lead the work. Then trust people to follow them or adapt them as necessary.

Establish alternative sources of support for teachers, especially less experienced teachers. It might feel rewarding to be needed by the teachers you support, but there is a hefty price for such gratification. Instead, build a web of support for teachers by connecting them with peers and other support staff with complementary expertise. This has the added benefit of building lasting networks of collegial interactions that benefit students as well as teachers.

> As you juggle your many responsibilities right now, remember that flexibility is a key asset of effective coaches. One of our longstanding commitments is to be role models of how to learn and grow through challenges.

Set boundaries for your work and your time. If you've always been on call for your teachers, now is the time to define the kind of emergency for which a teacher should expect an immediate response from you. Clarify what constitutes a realistic immediate response. Define these for yourself and communicate them to teachers, and then consistently adhere to them. Changing habits (yours and others') takes time, but you've spent time helping teachers

become more intentional and reflective about their practice. Now you have an opportunity to give them space to practice that learning in a more independent way.

As you juggle your many responsibilities right now, remember that flexibility is a key asset of effective coaches. One of our longstanding commitments is to be role models of how to learn and grow through challenges.

You may secretly find yourself enjoying your new roles and tasks, especially working with students directly again. If so, you might feel a sense of divided loyalty or even guilt about that enjoyment. Don't worry about it. Relax and take it all in. Your heart is big enough to love more than one facet of your work, especially when you aren't overwhelmed and stressed by it all. ■

Continued from p. 10

The **Equity Practices standard** focuses on pedagogy to honor and address each student's needs. Professional learning that addresses equity practices helps educators focus attention to understanding students' lived experiences to build trusting relationships.

Learning to influence practice should help educators understand that the schools — and students — we left in March 2020 are not the same today. Society changed. People changed. The impacts of race, racism, and the blatant inequity that exists became clearer. Student agency blossomed into a mighty force that has to be reckoned with, not squashed, suppressed, or dehumanized.

The Equity Drivers standard focuses the learning designer on inspiring educators' critical self-reflection. Equity-centered professional learning requires a higher level of personal scrutiny than professional learning that is focused on

the delivery of academic content alone.

In my research, I have found that race-centered professional learning is most effective when the facilitators enter with the plan to understand and negotiate the emotional nature of race and understand that the application of learning is a long-term process for the facilitator and the participants (Ward, 2019).

This long-term process requires reflection. When that reflection is combined with academic and social and emotional content, the result is a beautiful combination of learning elements coming together to serve the equity needs of students, families, and staff.

The Equity Foundations standard requires the learning designer to base learning on the solid footing of an equitable vision for teaching and learning. Equity is rooted and grounded in the painful recognition that meeting all students' needs is not the current

standard. In fact, when the term "all" is used, it often erases the complexity of existing as a minoritized person in an inherently racist school system.

How will you apply these standards in your equity-centered professional learning this year? Start by designing your personal reflection time to make space for the planning necessary to do this work with attention to the beliefs, practices, and conditions to center students' needs during this stressful time.

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WHEN TIMES ARE TOUGH, SHOW COMPASSION

Jim Knight (jim@instructional coaching.com) is senior partner of the Instructional Coaching Group and a research associate at the University of Kansas Center for Research on Learning.

The twin hardships of COVID-19 and political polarization are wearing down even the most resilient among us. Unfortunately, at a time when people really need us to show compassion, some of us are finding it harder and harder to be compassionate.

Compassion, as Sara Schairer (2019) has explained, is different from both sympathy and empathy. "Sympathy," Schairer writes, "means you can understand what the person is feeling," whereas empathy means "you feel what a person is feeling." Finally, compassion means that you are "willing to relieve the suffering of another." In short:

- Sympathy = understanding.
- Empathy = understanding + feeling.
- Compassion = understanding + feeling + action.

As I've reflected on Schairer's definitions and my own attempts to be more compassionate during these challenging times, I've come up with two things I can do to try to be more compassionate.

Choose affirmation over moralistic judgment.

One thing that can interfere with the ability to be compassionate is moralistic judgment. As Margaret Wheatley (2009) has written, "It's not our differences that divide us. It's our judgments about each other that do" (p. 47).

When we moralistically judge others, we move beyond simply looking at reality and add negative thoughts or words about others' character or competence. Moralistic judgment, at its core, means expressing contempt ("I can't

believe they talk, teach, parent, or simply act like that!"). Not surprisingly, it is difficult to feel contempt and be compassionate at the same time.

The opposite of moralistic judgment is affirmation, noticing the good in others as opposed to only noticing the bad. When we affirm others, we see their strengths and, at the same time, hold up a mirror for them so they can also see their strengths.

I can start to be less judgmental by considering what I truly believe: Do I want to separate myself from others (as being judgmental always does), or do I want to connect with others? If I believe in our common humanity, I want to connect with others and, therefore, need to try my best to affirm rather than moralistically judge others.

Choose gratitude over resentment.

Feelings of resentment also make it hard to be compassionate. We resent others when we think they are getting more or are being treated better than we are. Feelings of resentment are especially common when resources are limited or times are uncertain, as is the case today.

I learned about overcoming resentment some time ago when my wife, Jenny, had a terrible case of food poisoning. After I rushed her to the hospital and watched the medical team give her intensive emergency treatment, I started to worry that the poison in her system was so toxic that it could be fatal.

In that moment, when I thought I might lose my life partner, all the petty resentments I'd ever felt toward her disappeared instantaneously. All I felt was gratitude for her and an overwhelming awareness that I didn't want to lose her.

For me, this awareness of gratitude is the way to reduce resentment. Gratitude helps me see the resentments that are superficial. Resentment, after all, is believing I didn't get what I deserved. Gratitude, on the other hand, is noticing the many great gifts I receive from the people I know. As such, gratitude is the antidote to resentment.

In conclusion, let me add three final points. First, seeing the good in others

Deep change takes deep work. Becoming more grateful and more affirmative is a lifetime journey. I know this from personal experience. I won't become a new person overnight, but I can take one small step toward being more affirmative and more grateful, one step closer to being the compassionate person my friends, colleagues, and loved ones need.

can reduce moralistic judgment, and being grateful can reduce resentment, but that doesn't mean we should ignore unjust actions or abuse. For example, we need to fight against (not affirm) systemic racism, sexism, and all forms of dehumanizing action by people and systems, and we need to confront (not excuse) those who dehumanize us.

Second, showing compassion for others is difficult if we don't feel compassion for ourselves. As Kristin Neff (2012) has explained, we are often harder on ourselves than we would ever be on anyone else. To be compassionate toward others, we need to start with ourselves. That is, we should "treat ourselves," Neff writes, "with the same kindness, caring, and compassion we would show to a good friend" (p. 6).

Third, deep change takes deep work. Becoming more grateful and more affirmative is a lifetime journey. I know this from personal experience. I won't become a new person overnight, but I can take one small step toward being more affirmative and more grateful, one step closer to being the compassionate person my friends, colleagues, and loved ones need.

Taking that one step won't completely change me, but it might help me be more compassionate, and, on any given day, that might be all that someone needs.

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RESEARCH

HOW TO CREATE AFFIRMING SCHOOL CULTURES

Teach Plus and the Center for Black Educator Development recently summarized findings from focus groups with 105 Black teachers in 12 U.S. states about how to create affirming school cultures. The researchers uncovered five conditions that teachers said are critical for affirming Black educators' identities:

1. Schools should recruit, support, and retain a diverse school faculty.

2. School leaders should take the lead in fostering an inclusive school culture.

3. Curriculum should be culturally responsive and, when it is not, schools should support teachers to make it more inclusive.

4. Professional learning for all teachers should be equity-focused, and schools and districts should provide Black teachers access to mentoring and affinity groups to support their personal growth.

5. Schools should authentically implement their diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts.

For more information, read the full report, *To Be Who We Are: Black Teachers on Creating Affirming School Cultures,* at **teachplus.org/sites/default/ files/downloads/teach_plus_cbed_ tobewhoweare.pdf.**

RESTORATIVE PRACTICES BENEFIT BOTH TEACHERS AND STUDENTS

▶ **THE STUDY**
Augustine, C.H., Engberg, J., Grimm, G.E., Lee, E., Wang, E.L., Christianson, K., & Joseph, A.A. (2018). *Can restorative practices improve school climate and curb suspensions? An evaluation of the impact of restorative practices in a mid-sized urban school district.* RAND Corporation. www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR2840.html

Elizabeth Foster (elizabeth.foster@learningforward.org) is vice president, research & standards at Learning Forward. In each issue of *The Learning Professional,* Foster explores recent research to help practitioners understand the impact of particular professional learning practices on student outcomes.

As awareness has grown about the harmful effects of exclusionary discipline, especially on the Black and Brown students who are disproportionately suspended and expelled, so, too, has interest in alternative approaches to discipline. Restorative practices are becoming more common in schools across the U.S. and in other countries.

Restorative practices focus on building or repairing relationships to address or preempt conflict. They are based on the idea that when young people come to understand how they have caused harm and collaborate with others to find a solution for repairing the harm, they learn to behave differently while strengthening their connection to the community rather than becoming ostracized from it.

Quantitative research on restorative justice approaches is relatively new and still emerging. Understanding the findings that exist is important and timely, as schools grapple with how to address an increase in challenging classroom behaviors and dynamics while students readjust to in-person learning after more than a year of pandemic-driven stress and trauma.

Researchers at the RAND Corporation conducted one of the first randomized controlled trial studies of the impact of restorative practices on classroom and school climates and suspension rates by studying the implementation of a program in the Pittsburgh (Pennsylvania) Public Schools in years 2015-16 and 2016-17. The authors studied a program called the

SaferSanerSchools Whole-School Change program, which was part of an initiative called Pursuing Equitable and Restorative Communities.

The researchers found that implementation resulted in positive effects, including improvement in overall school climates (as rated by teachers), reduced suspension rates, and reduced disparities in suspension rates between African American and white students and between low- and higher-income students. Professional learning leaders can glean insights from this initiative, which included support and ongoing professional learning.

BACKGROUND

Previous research has found that suspending students can hinder their learning and harm their chances of long-term success, despite its intent to refocus and redirect them away from problematic behavior.

In the short term, students serving suspension lose valuable learning time with teachers and peers, and those losses compound over time. In the longer term, students with a history of suspension are at higher risk of dropping out, even when the suspensions result from minor infractions like tardiness, absences, and disrespect.

These findings would be concerning on their own, but research has shown that African

American students are suspended at higher rates than white students, often receiving longer punishments for the same infractions.

The equity issues raised by these patterns are numerous, and scholars point to suspension as a key factor in the preschool-to-prison pipeline. Restorative practices have been highlighted as a possible alternative, one that might even improve student behavior overall, reducing the need for suspensions.

THE PROGRAM

The research took place in the Pittsburgh Public School District, which implemented the Pursuing Equitable and Restorative Communities model to reduce disparities in suspension rates, address safety concerns in school buildings, and avoid the potential widespread negative impacts of exclusionary disciplinary practices.

The program is a whole-school model, meaning that all school staff learn how to implement the key features of the program, which include practices to establish or restore communication, build community, and facilitate students to either take responsibility for their actions or describe the impact of others' actions on them.

The program also emphasizes that, although those who commit harm are expected to apologize, do some type of service work, or even ultimately serve suspension if warranted, the community separates the "deed" from the "doer." Students are held accountable for their actions and punished appropriately, but the school community does not break relationship with the student who committed the offense.

Restorative practices have been highlighted as a possible alternative that might improve student behavior overall, reducing the need for suspensions.

The study compared schools involved in the two-year program with schools engaged in typical practices for the school without any intervention. Educators in treatment schools engaged in professional learning about and received support in implementing restorative practices throughout the two years of the initiative. This support included:

- Four days of professional learning provided by the organization that developed the program (two of which were optional);
- Accompanying books, videos, and other materials;
- Principal coaching sessions with an external program coach, conducted twice a year;
- Monthly meetings of each school's restorative leadership team with the external consultant;
- Monthly professional learning groups for all school staff; and
- Additional support as needed, such as supplementary materials and individualized coaching.

METHODOLOGY

The researchers sought to answer these questions:

1. How was the restorative practices program implemented and what challenged or facilitated use of restorative practices?
2. What were the impacts of the restorative practices program?
3. How likely is it that use of the restorative practices will be sustained?

Researchers looked at 44 schools, 22 treatment and 22 control. They collected implementation data over two years, including observations of trainings, surveys of treatment school staff, observations of restorative practices in four case study schools, and interviews of school, district, and staff from the external organization.

They focused their analyses on outcomes at the student level (suspensions, arrests, attendance, mobility, and achievement), the teacher level (composite teaching performance, value added, and student ratings of their teachers), and the school level (teacher ratings of teaching and learning conditions).

FINDINGS

Almost all treatment-school staff developed some understanding of restorative practices over the two-year implementation, especially in the second year. Most reported that they often or always used restorative practices, including affective statements, proactive circles, impromptu conferences, or responsive circles.

Educators who participated in professional learning groups, received coaching from external consultants, or received support from the school leader were more likely to use the practices, as were those who reported that they understood the essential elements of restorative practices. The biggest reported barrier to implementation was time.

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According to teachers, the program improved the overall school climate. Specifically, teachers in the treatment schools provided higher ratings of conduct management, teacher leadership, school leadership, and overall teaching and learning conditions in their schools than teachers in control schools. Educators in the treatment schools were also significantly more likely to feel they work in a safe environment and reported that they had stronger relationships with students because of restorative practices.

Students in treatment schools gave their schools lower school climate ratings than students in control schools, particularly on measures of teachers' classroom management. However, further analyses revealed that this finding was driven largely by classes where teachers reported very low implementation levels of restorative practice or simply didn't return their surveys.

Program implementation reduced both the number of days students were suspended and the number of suspensions. Days lost to suspension declined by 36% in the treatment schools, which meant more days for learning and less disruption to the planned schedule and cadence of schoolwork.

In addition, suspension rates of African American students and those from low-income families went down in treatment schools, shrinking the disparities in suspension rates between African American and white students and between low- and higher-income students. Suspension rates also decreased for female students, although not for male students.

The reduction in suspensions was not universal. Suspension rates remained steady for grades 6-8 and for students with individualized education plans. The rates of violence incidence and weapons violations did not change significantly.

Scores on standardized tests of math and reading did not improve over the two years of the initiative and declined among some groups of students. As the researchers point out, the program was not designed to improve academic achievement. Furthermore, standardized test scores are distal outcomes relative to a school-level intervention such as the one tested here.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In addition to suggesting that restorative practices can have beneficial impacts for teachers and students, the study offers insight into how to implement such practices effectively. The researchers made several recommendations for building capacity among educators for instituting and sustaining restorative practices:

1. Given the constraints on teachers' time, emphasize restorative practices that can be woven into the school day.
2. Ensure that school leaders understand and can model restorative practices by engaging them in mandatory professional learning, providing books and other materials, and coaching on restorative practices.
3. Establish a mechanism for school staff to meet at least once a month as a professional learning community on restorative practices.
4. Ensure that leaders at the district level can coordinate this work.
5. Set and update clear expectations regarding the use of restorative practices.
6. Implement data collection systems to collect accurate information on all types of behavioral incidents and remedies.

IMPLICATIONS

Professional learning was a key component of the restorative practices intervention, and the study findings underscore much of what we know about effective professional learning: It must be embedded in the day-to-day work of educators, sustained over time, and focused on developing knowledge and building skills and practices that address a particular problem of practice.

The program that was tested incorporated multiple sources of support — principal coaching, collaborative leadership teams, and individualized support as needed, which likely contributed to a strong initial implementation that improved over time.

At a time when issues of equity can seem abstract or theoretical, this implementation study offers evidence that there are specific practices, introduced and achieved through aligned professional learning, that can result in an improved culture of support for students.

The full published report includes detailed descriptions of the program and the findings — including the calculations about how much learning time can be gained from reclaiming the suspension days that could be used to advocate for investing in such a program — as well as helpful guidance for district and school leaders.

Several **Standards for Professional Learning** are evident in the findings of this research study, including the **Learning Designs standard**, which describes how professional learning that strengthens understanding and develops knowledge and practices (in this case restorative practices) leads to improved outcomes.

We also see many aspects of the **Implementation standard** in the research findings that speak to the impact of sustained, embedded, interconnected support structures for an initiative or change process.

As with many professional learning studies, educators reported that the biggest barrier to implementation was time, highlighting the need for policymakers and those leading implementation to attend to the **Resources standard** to help guide their decisions about allocations of funding, time, and human capital. ■

DATA POINTS

500,000 FEWER EDUCATORS IN THE WORKFORCE

Employment in the education sector has decreased in recent months, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Since February 2020, employment at local education entities has decreased by 310,000 people and at state education entities by 194,000. The declines are particularly marked from August to September, with 144,000 fewer people employed by local education entities and 17,000 fewer employed at the state level, which may reflect pandemic disruptions to "seasonal buildup and layoff patterns." The reasons for the declines in education employment were not addressed in the data.
bit.ly/3FXglbG

8 TIMES AS MANY VACANCIES FOR SPECIAL ED TEACHERS

In a working paper published by the Center for Education Data and Research at the University of Washington, researchers Dan Goldhaber and Trevor Gratz reported on educator shortages in Washington State. They analyzed job postings on school district websites for about three-quarters of districts in the state, which serve over 98% of Washington students. The total number of open positions were highest for substitute teachers, paraeducators, and special education teachers. When they examined vacancy rates (the number of total positions in the district versus open positions), they found that the need for special education teachers was especially high, with about eight postings for special education teachers for every one posting for other teachers. Overall, vacancy rates were higher in high-poverty schools and rural areas.
bit.ly/3D3jFWd

91% OF SCHOOL COUNSELORS REQUEST PROFESSIONAL LEARNING ON SEL

According to a survey of school counselors conducted by the American School Counselor Association and ACT, 63% said they have engaged in at least a moderate amount of professional learning. But the overwhelming majority wanted more professional learning opportunities, especially in social and emotional learning. Encouragingly, a large majority of counselors rated both teachers and administrators to be supportive of their work promoting students' SEL. The report's authors recommend districts and schools offer collaborative learning for teachers and counselors so that everyone can infuse SEL throughout the teaching and learning experience.
bit.ly/3pkff8S

32 COUNTRIES MEASURED EFFICACY FROM PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

According to a large international study, teacher professional learning is associated with higher levels of teacher self-efficacy, particularly when the professional learning uses job-embedded strategies such as coaching or mentoring, teacher networks, and action research. The study used data from the Teaching and Learning International Survey and found that the positive results held across most of the 32 countries and regions studied. In contrast, more

passive and less intensive forms of professional learning were associated with self-efficacy in only a few countries.
bit.ly/31hS5av

6 POLICY LEVERS SUPPORT PRINCIPALS

In a research review published by The Wallace Foundation, Paul Manna examined how the nexus of local and state policy can establish systems that support the development of effective principals. He identified six policy levers that state-level leaders can use to support district and local leaders as they work to develop comprehensive "principal pipelines." The six levers are: setting principal leader standards, recruiting aspiring principals into the profession, approving and overseeing principal preparation programs, licensing new and veteran principals, supporting principals' growth with professional development, and evaluating principals.
bit.ly/3xHkMKq

2X MORE POSITIVE OUTCOMES

Heather Hill and Anna Erickson examined whether the outcomes of educational interventions can be partially explained by implementation fidelity — that is, how closely teachers adhere to the design of the intervention and the guidelines for implementing it. Looking across randomized controlled trials of curriculum and professional development programs, they found that programs were more than twice as likely to yield positive outcomes for students when teachers were rated as having moderate or high fidelity to the program. There was no meaningful difference between moderate and high fidelity, but interventions where teachers had low fidelity averaged 24% fewer positive outcomes.
bit.ly/3lHzMmP

FOCUS

LEADING FOR EQUITY

LEADING FOR EQUITY AT EVERY LEVEL

Everyone can be a leader for equity, and every level of the education system can be a lever for change. This issue's Focus articles, which were curated in partnership with guest editor Tanji Reed Marshall, look at what it means to be an equity leader at the school, district, and state levels. They also examine how these levels can complement and support one another.

As Nancy Gutiérrez writes (p. 22), "I have come to realize that there is no one right path [to leading for equity]; we need a range of leadership approaches within a system working together to navigate the push and pull and to maneuver through the nuance, the politics, and the emotions … [But] we have also seen that across all leadership types and approaches, there are common threads we must all weave in the service of culturally responsive leadership."

Walking a tightrope

or catapulting from a cannon?

IT TAKES BOTH TO CREATE CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE SCHOOLS
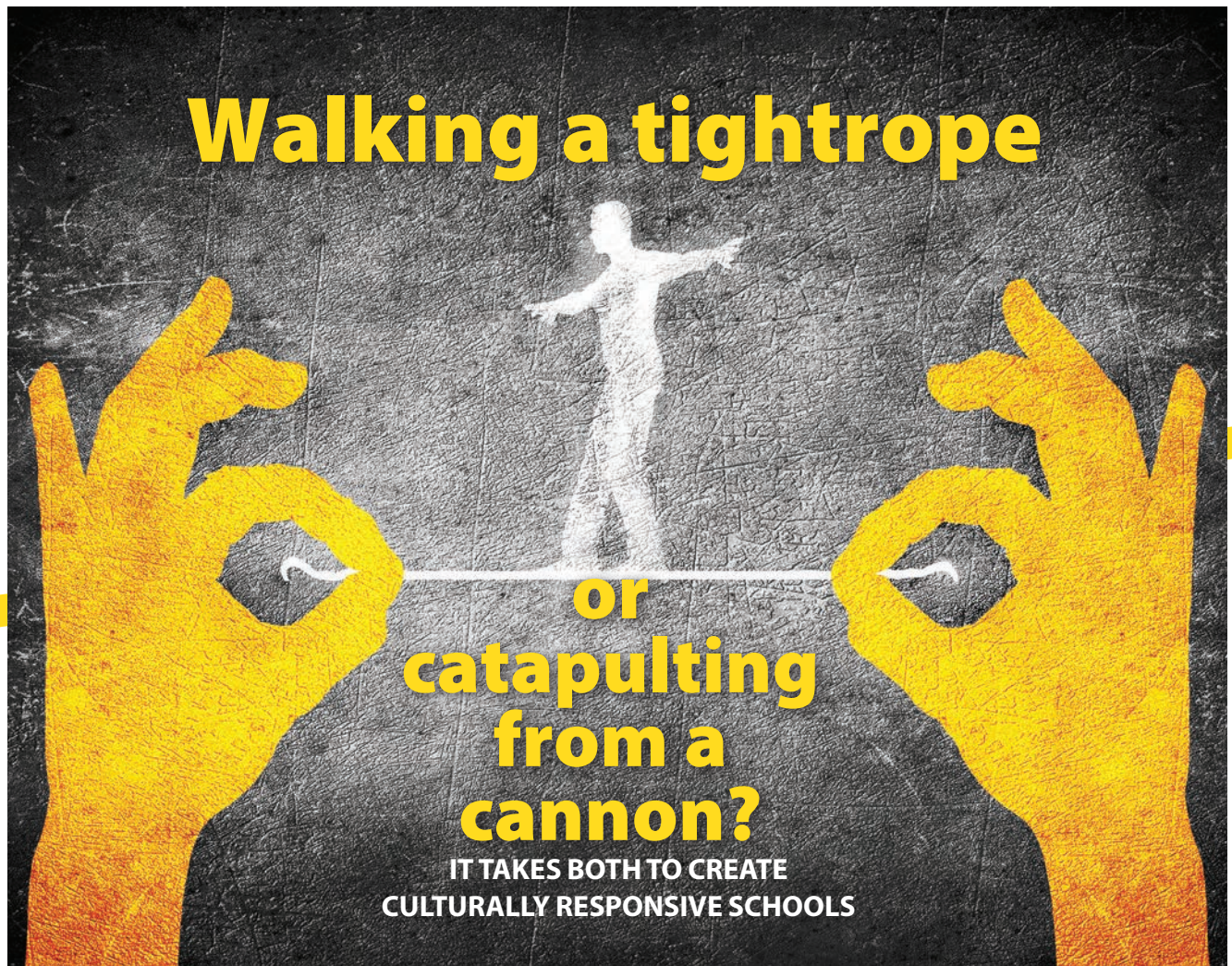
BY NANCY B. GUTIÉRREZ

James Lovelace's 8th-grade English classroom was not like the other classes in the middle school where he taught in East San Jose, California.

His students sat in a circle, Socratic seminar style, and discussed poetry. They dissected the lyrics to songs like Tracy Chapman's "Fast Car." His students wrote essays about what it meant to be themselves, to be young people of color growing up in a vibrant Latinx community that also faced its share of challenges. They debated issues of family and life choices that came up when reading *The Pearl* and *To Kill a Mockingbird.*

As a new teacher, he saw that most of his colleagues had been teaching the same material in the same way for 20-plus years — and many of their students, year after year, were struggling. In department meetings, his colleagues would shoot down his ideas for different ways to engage students, sending him home in tears of frustration. But he kept at it.

Over time, his principal saw the impact he was having on his students and came to his defense, supporting his ideas at staff meetings and with parents who questioned Lovelace's methods. His students' test scores and overall performance jumped.

One student in particular, whom the other teachers had given up on and labeled a troublemaker, flourished in Lovelace's classroom, finding her voice in class discussions and in the essays Lovelace encouraged her to write.

It was not easy, but Lovelace's determination to be bold, to stay the course of what he knew was right in the face of pushback, had a tremendous impact on every young person who

On any given day, leaders find themselves caught between staff and families who are pro-mask and anti-mask, between those who are eager for their schools to address inequities and create a more inclusive school culture and those who see "equity" as a threat to the inclusion of their own child or a distortion of American history.

set foot in his classroom. I know that because I was that young troublemaker who found her voice that year. It was in his classroom that I learned that it was OK to have different opinions and come together to debate them. He taught me that it was OK to question the world around me. In no uncertain terms, Lovelace changed my life.

Today, as our country reckons with racial injustice amidst an ongoing pandemic, there are Lovelaces at all levels — in classrooms, principal's offices, and central district offices — asking questions like: Am I being bold enough? Or am I too cautious? Am I putting my job at risk by doing what I believe is right and necessary? What approach is most courageous, sustainable, and strategic for centering my students and families in this moment, when they need me most?

Aiming to create culturally responsive systems, many wonder whether they should be carefully walking a tightrope of competing expectations and beliefs or catapulting themselves from a cannon to call attention to inequity. These questions are only heightened by the intensely politicized climate we live in today.

On any given day, leaders find themselves caught between staff and families who are pro-mask and anti-mask, between those who are eager for their schools to address inequities and create a more inclusive school culture and those who see "equity" as a threat

to the inclusion of their own child or a distortion of American history.

It takes courage, stamina, and strategy to effectively serve every child in a district. We have all seen leaders risk — and sometimes lose — their jobs and sacrifice their personal well-being to advance collective work. And we all know leaders who practice tempered radicalism, carefully and intentionally managing resistance within their schools, districts, and communities, sometimes achieving great success and sometimes feeling great frustration (Meyerson, 2004). What now? What is the right path forward to achieving equity for all?

I have come to realize that there is no one right path. We need a range of leadership approaches within a system working together to navigate the push and pull and maneuver through the nuance, the politics, and the emotions of working toward equity and culturally responsive education.

At The Leadership Academy, we have seen leaders help move the needle on culturally responsive leadership in different ways — working from within to change a human resources policy that increases the pool of teacher candidates of color or skillfully facilitating public conversations that encourage community stakeholders to share how they experience their schools.

Our efforts to support and develop more than 10,000 education leaders across 37 states over the last 18 years,

from large urban systems to small rural districts, have shown us the impact different approaches can have on young people.

We have also seen that across all leadership types and approaches, there are common threads we must all weave in the service of culturally responsive leadership: deeply understanding the lived experiences of students and staff, and lifting up and embedding those experiences across schools and systems every day.

The Leadership Academy's Equity Leadership Dispositions offers leaders a road map for strategically developing culturally responsive leadership practices. This set of six dispositions can be organized under three categories: explore mindsets, assess systems, and change conversations.

EQUITY LEADERSHIP DISPOSITIONS

These dispositions and habits can help leaders manage environments rife with issues of distrust, political sensitivities, resistance, conflict, and distress. They can help leaders determine how they will build collective action while remaining keenly aware of shifting authorizing environments like a change in school board membership or increased concern about critical race theory in classrooms that could require changes in leadership approach. They can help leaders determine whether they should be walking a tightrope

or catapulting from a cannon in their efforts to build a more culturally responsive school or system.

Explore mindsets

Culturally responsive leadership starts with self-reflection. Our personal beliefs and biases — both conscious and unconscious — determine how we see the world, other people, and ourselves; they affect our actions and how the systems we oversee are shaped and function.

If we don't closely examine our own identities and our roles in historically inequitable structures, we as leaders risk perpetuating and reproducing inequities in and outside of our school systems (Jones & Vagle, 2013; Brooks et al., 2007; Rigby & Tredway, 2015). Such critical self-reflection should be an ongoing, lifelong process.

To move culturally responsive work beyond yourself, to move toward making systemic change, it's important to then **model your beliefs**. You can do this by consistently naming equity as a driving force behind your leadership actions and decisions.

When you take a strong and vocal stance, you communicate the public value of equity across all practices and can establish a coherent and common purpose for members of your learning community (Rigby & Tredway, 2015). It's also essential to model vulnerability and emphasize that mistakes will be made when speaking about issues of equity, inclusion, and race. By doing this, you will help others overcome those fears and encourage them to take risks in exploring and sharing their own feelings (Sue et al., 2009).

In New York, NYC Department of Education Senior Deputy Chancellor Marisol Rosales is a role model for this, as she often shares her personal journey as an immigrant student and lifelong multilingual learner. She tells her team, principals, and students about what it was like to arrive in America from Chile at the age of 17 and how that has shaped her perspectives on education and how she leads.

Here are some reflection questions you can use to help you explore mindsets around equity:

- How has race intersected with your leadership journey?
- What is your personal vision and belief system around race and equity?
- How have you benefited from and leveraged your education to get where you are?
- How are your experiences different from or similar to those of the students you serve?
- How do you model vulnerability when talking about issues of equity, inclusion, and race?

Assess systems

You must understand where a system stands to know where it needs to go. Developing this understanding requires that you and your team ask questions and listen deeply, acting with cultural competence and responsiveness in all interactions, decision-making, and practice. That means gathering feedback from a diverse group of stakeholders — parents, students, staff, alums.

It's critical to partner with traditionally marginalized populations to center their needs and voices and to bring together stakeholders with different perspectives to find shared values and common entry points to the work. The stories community members share are so important for informing your decisions. They can provide legitimacy and support and make explicit the public value of the work.

For example, leaders in Des Moines Public Schools in Iowa held virtual town halls in the midst of the pandemic to ask questions like: What would it look like for students, families, and community to feel like they belong at Des Moines Public Schools? What does respect look like now between staff and students and how do you think it could be better? What about the district curriculum do you think prepares students for life now and after high school? How do you think

the curriculum could better reflect your ethnicity and culture and that of others within the school community? If Des Moines Public Schools wants to be an anti-racist district, what else do they need to be thinking about for the upcoming school year and into the future? District leaders used the feedback to begin making changes to their curriculum and create structures for better supporting school leaders of color.

Consider the following questions as you assess your system and its needs:

- Are the decisions you are making as a leader reflecting the needs and priorities of students and families? If so, how? If not, how do you need to change your decision-making process to better reflect the needs of different stakeholders?
- Ask your students how they feel in their classrooms. Are they engaged in their learning, and if not, why not?
- Do families feel welcome in their schools? Do your staff feel supported? Why or why not?
- In group discussions, are you paying close attention to which voices aren't being heard and inviting them to express their perspectives?

Change conversations

Equity work is complex, requiring fundamental structural changes and coordinated efforts. Confronting long-standing beliefs and practices requires a collaborative effort, where stakeholders engage in intentional conversations about who benefits from current policy and practice and who is being minoritized or disadvantaged (Klingner et al., 2005).

A key aspect of creating more socially just schools is empowering your team (Theoharris, 2010). You can purposefully build the capacity of others to identify and disrupt inequities in the school when you designate time and space for staff to examine their personal beliefs and collaborate to

change educational practice (Smith, 2005; Gordon & Ronder, 2016; Berg, 2018; Alvarez, 2019). Implement shared decision-making structures and develop a culture of trust and respect.

Consider the work of the St. Paul Public Schools in Minnesota several years ago. Under the leadership of then-Superintendent Valeria Silva, the district created a dozen "beacon schools" headed by leaders committed to moving equity work forward. The district equity team supported these schools with coaching, budgeting and operations assistance, and training for teachers and principals. The school leaders from these schools met regularly to share and learn from one another, and slowly they started identifying and changing practices that they realized were hurting kids.

For example, one school had had students with disabilities enter school each day through a back alley because it was the easiest place for the bus to drop them off. The district team asked the school leaders how they thought the students felt using that entrance when their peers arrived through the front door.

The school changed the practice so that those students entered through the main doors. In a short time, students' self-esteem improved significantly, as they shared in a video they recorded. The beacon schools saw learning improve, discipline incidents drop, and parents participating more in schools.

That is how you can then work as a team to confront and alter institutional biases of student marginalization, deficit-based schooling, and low expectations associated with minoritized populations, and ultimately create systems and structures to promote equity with a focus on minoritized populations.

These questions can help you ensure that you do this work in a systemic way:
- How are you establishing clarity and agreement with your team and community on a shared vision and plan of action?
- What are you doing to clearly define together what success looks like, and how it can be measured and build a community-wide commitment to equity and access?
- How are you ensuring that this work is not seen as an add-on but as a lens through which all decisions will be made?
- Are you creating opportunities for others to lead conversations around equity and receive critical feedback from friends? If so, how, and if not, how can you do that?

BEING STRATEGIC

Of course, in today's political climate, living those dispositions in ways that effectively lead to culturally responsive practice requires intentionality and strategy. A tool that has been helpful to me in my personal leadership journey and one that we at The Leadership Academy encourage leaders to lean on during this time is Harvard Kennedy School Professor Mark Moore's strategic triangle (Moore, 1997).

This framework hinges on what Moore calls "the authorizing environment," the formal and informal authority required to deliver public value. Whether a school board member, a superintendent, or a principal, culturally responsive leaders need to understand the context within which they are advancing their work to determine the most strategic entry points, road map, and intentional leadership moves. This way, changes are made by, with, and for your community.

Moore argues that within our authorizing environment, we have to simultaneously move three key levers to enact public good:
- Understand the *public value* of the changes you are seeking to make. *(Consider how Lovelace engaged his students in new ways that accelerated their learning.)*
- Identify the *sources of legitimacy and support* necessary to authorize the organization to take action and provide the resources necessary to sustain the effort to create that value. *(Lovelace's principal did this when he saw the impact Lovelace's culturally responsive teaching approach was having on students.)*
- Understand the *operational capabilities* that the organization will need to rely on or develop to deliver the desired results. *(Lovelace engaged in professional learning beyond what the district offered and used his own resources to develop the skills he needed to teach in new ways.)*

For an idea to be worth pursuing in the public sector, it has to be valuable, supportable by those in a position to authorize action and provide resources, and operationally doable.

MIX OF LEADERSHIP APPROACHES

It takes a system of leaders using a variety of courageous and strategic approaches to bring about large-scale, collective, and sustainable change. Working together, these leaders can ensure that students don't have to cross their fingers and hope they get a Lovelace because their schools will be full of culturally responsive educators and practices.

We can each do our part to create the conditions to shape this kind of learning experience for every single child. What kind of leader are you? How will you show up for your staff, students, and families? Will you walk a tightrope or catapult from a cannon in service of creating culturally sustainable systems? Whichever is right for you and your community, I urge you to come together with others to push this work forward.

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A culture of equity calls for leadership from the top

BY MONICA MINOR GANT

"We can, whenever and wherever we choose, successfully teach all children whose schooling is of interest to us … We already know more than we need to do that … and whether or not we do it must finally depend on how we feel about the fact that we haven't so far."

— *Edmonds, 1979*

More than 40 years ago, Ronald Edmonds made this indictment of schools that fail to teach all students, pointing out that "differences in student performance ... seem to be attributed to factors under the schools' control" (Edmonds, 1979).

He vehemently denounced the notion of family background as the primary cause of student performance because "such a belief has the effect of absolving educators of their professional responsibility to be instructionally effective." Instead, in his article, "Effective Schools for the Urban Poor," he holds schools responsible for the education — and miseducation — of the "least among us" (Edmonds, 1979).

Not enough has changed since Edmonds wrote those words. Although there are pockets of progress, equitable education is not yet widespread or systemic. In my work as a school leader and state leader, I have learned that to make systemic change, the organizational culture of schools must create the conditions necessary to ensure educational equity for all students.

Building a culture of equity requires ensuring that leaders and school staff have a shared vision for what educational equity means, what it looks like, and how to get there. It also

> **Building a culture of equity requires ensuring that leaders and school staff have a shared vision for what educational equity means, what it looks like, and how to get there. It also necessitates a willingness to hold people accountable to the vision and the work needed to make it a reality.**

necessitates a willingness to hold people accountable to the vision and the work needed to make it a reality. This takes a clear road map for achieving the consistent vision of equity across levels of the system.

The Delaware Department of Education is embracing this approach to building a systemic, statewide culture of equity. Our journey includes creating a statewide understanding of educational equity, applying that understanding to shape the work of each department, and mapping out the steps it will take to achieve the vision of equity.

LAYING THE GROUNDWORK

Culture is an overarching construct that influences behavior and comes from shared norms and values. It is shaped by how members of the organization perceive, think about, and feel about things — in this case, the educational opportunities available (or unavailable) to students of different backgrounds. An equity-centered culture is based on shared norms and values about equity across all levels of the system or organization.

In my work, I have found it helpful to draw on the three culture levels described by Schein (1992), which range from "the very tangible overt manifestations that one can see and feel to the deeply embedded, unconscious

... essence of culture." Those three levels are:

- **Artifacts:** Visible organizational structures and processes that are easy to observe but may not be easy to interpret;
- **Espoused values:** Strategies, goals, and philosophies; and
- **Basic underlying assumptions:** Unconscious, taken-for-granted beliefs, perceptions, thoughts, and feelings.

All of these levels are important for understanding education systems, but access to *underlying shared basic assumptions* is especially important for making systemic changes toward equity. This is why we are investing time and effort in surfacing, examining, and reconsidering the underlying assumptions we all hold about equity and the steps necessary to achieve it.

We started at the state leadership level by engaging in a facilitated process of personal introspection and reflection to access underlying individual beliefs. The team members involved at the initial stage included our state secretary, deputy secretary, and our associate secretaries of education.

Gathering this group together first was critical in setting the tone for and sending the message about the importance of engaging in this work from the top, to lay the groundwork for doing similar work with other members

of the state Department of Education.

Our first step was to provide a safe space to surface biases, perceptions, and misconceptions, both conscious and unconscious. Having protocols in place that allowed divergent voices to unapologetically speak their truth ensured that all voices were respected. Finding overlaps, intersections, and commonalities as well as contrary perspectives made the process feel messy but allowed all voices to be heard.

Other members of the Department of Education were then given the same opportunity to delve into their individual assumptions with an understanding of how those basic assumptions came to be barriers to creating a culturally responsive education.

Engaging in an unearthing experience similar to leadership's process provided members of the system with the agency to share their revelations in a secure space while leaders identified how this culture of shared norms and values would live and be evident across the department.

Once we examined beliefs and assumptions, leaders developed a clear definition for the system, which articulates our espoused values for equity. The process of defining equity was grounded in research and scholarship, drawing heavily on the work of Gloria Ladson-Billings,

which outlines three components of culturally relevant pedagogy: academic achievement, cultural competence, and sociopolitical consciousness.

We also connected these three components with the work of other researchers and scholars whose work addresses culturally appropriate (Au & Jordan, 1981), culturally congruent (Mohatt & Erickson, 1981), culturally responsive (Erickson & Mohatt, 1982), and culturally synchronous (Irvine, 1990) teaching.

We define culturally responsive education in Delaware as: **intentionally acknowledging and valuing the diversity, contributions, and experiences of every educator and learner by providing opportunities to see themselves and others in their learning, leading to academic achievement, cultural competence, and sociopolitical consciousness.** We are intentional about including both our students and educators in this definition because we cannot be truly responsive if we are only addressing one and not the other.

PUTTING THE DEFINITION INTO PRACTICE

To put the definition into practice and take steps toward transformation, we developed a multilevel plan to establish department-level priorities, goals, outcomes, activities, and resources needed.

Each team within our department developed its own plan to demonstrate how the team's work can evidence the department's definition. This allowed teams to determine how they could apply the organizational definition to the way in which they do their work.

Leaders then developed a way to monitor these plans and collect evidence of transformation in the collective behavior of the organization. This allows us to create and review *artifacts* of the equity culture we are working to create.

Our monitoring system addressed the following questions:

- **Priorities:** What will you focus on in your area? We challenged groups to choose three or fewer priorities to avoid committing to too many priorities.
- **Goals:** What do you hope your priorities will accomplish? We instructed groups to have no more than three goals for each priority.
- **Activities:** What activities are needed to achieve each goal for each priority?
- **Outcomes:** What are the intended outcomes for each priority? This portion provided the needed accountability because it gave leaders a way to measure the priorities.
- **Evidence:** What will be the evidence of success for each priority? This is where leaders were able to connect and align department-level work.
- **Resources:** What resources do you need to meet your priorities' goals? Asking this question allowed leaders to gain an understanding of what was needed to achieve the goals set by each department.

From here, departments were asked to seek alignment between and among their departments and other departments so they could better understand how the plans move the entire department toward the definition.

ANTICIPATING AND ADDRESSING CHALLENGES

We are proud of the progress we're making, but we consider ourselves to be still in the building stages of this work. Developing a systemwide equity culture requires patience and diligence. As we stay the course, we are also aware of potential challenges and pitfalls so that we are prepared to prevent and address them.

We are keenly aware that changes in leadership and staffing can deteriorate an otherwise stabilizing and predictable approach to systemic equity. Culture is deeply rooted in people and relationships, and the interaction and shared experiences that occur among the members provide opportunities for forming common assumptions and priorities, serving as a stabilizer (Schein, 1992).

An influx of new members without onboarding, a transition in leadership without explicit attention to culture, or a change in organizational priorities can all cause shifts that threaten progress. But the evolution of our teams can be an opportunity instead of a problem, as long as we are intentional about collaboration and professional learning.

The goal of stability does not mean that our work remains static. Quite the contrary, ongoing learning and development is essential for equity to be systemic and effective. We aim for our system to be a learning organization where all members are continually acquiring knowledge and skills and reflecting on both themselves and the system's structures and practices.

Organizational learning requires a structure, a community focus, and, above all, strong and supportive relationships (Kikoski & Kikoski, 2004). To do this, leaders must determine the learning needs of their staff and create the conditions, such as time, dedicated space, and the resources necessary to support their staff in their learning. Professional learning is an important priority for our system.

Even when processes and protocols are in place, threats to successful implementation arise when all members of the organization are not expected to fully engage. This work cannot be successful if it is only undertaken by one team. Otherwise, disjointed and inconsistent application will undermine the vision and steps toward progress.

Engaging all staff requires building and maintaining trust. If some members of the community do not understand the goals or distrust the organization's motives, they are unlikely to be on board with the work. And if there is a lack of follow-through, those who have made themselves vulnerable to the process can feel misled and betrayed, leading to cynicism and

disengagement. This is one of many reasons our leaders are committed to staying the course.

MAKING AN ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT

Making equity systemic requires an organizational commitment to building a sustainable culture based on mutual intentions and expectations about equity across the entire organization. This work is a journey, and, as leaders, we must respect that journey and ensure that our colleagues and staff understand that this work takes time, effort, and patience.

It's easy for individuals and teams to get off track on that journey unless there is a clear road map for how to achieve equity across many levels of the system. The Delaware Department of Education is taking intentional steps to pave the way. By building a system with shared basic *underlying assumptions* and commonly accepted *values* that lead to specific, purposeful actions documented through *artifacts*, we're moving toward systemic and sustainable equity.

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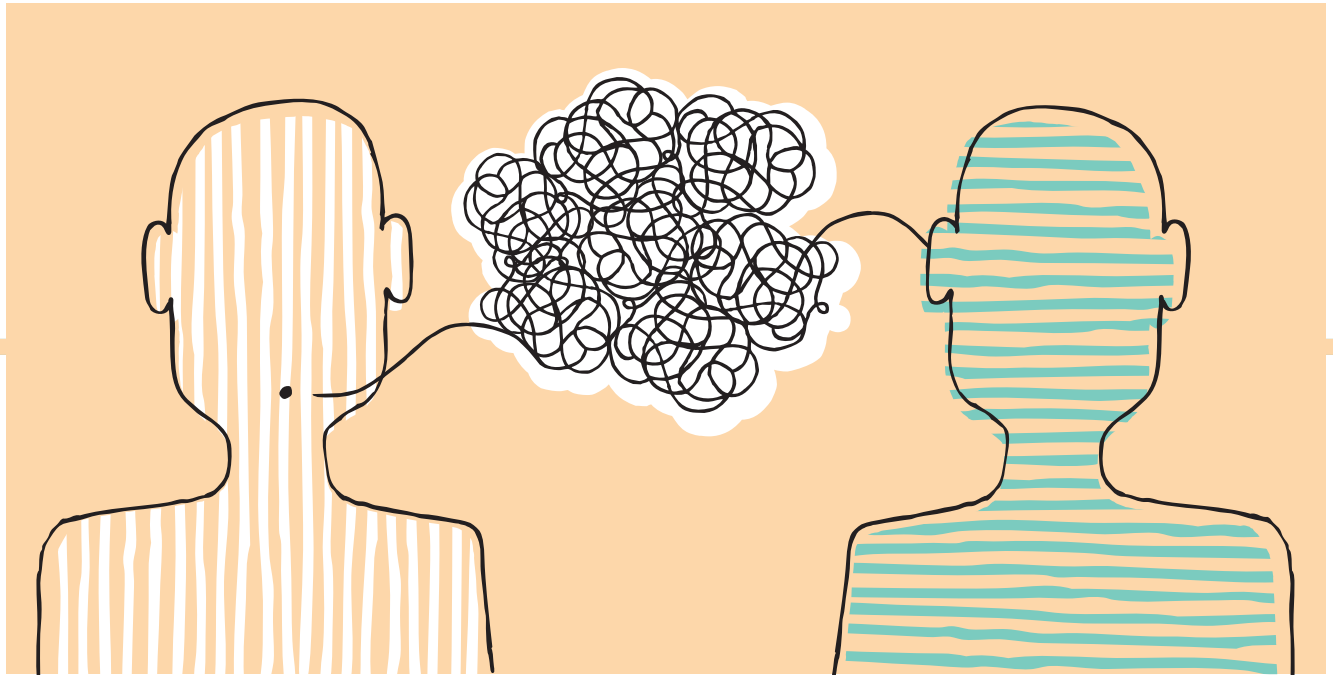
In Chicago, listening is the first step toward equity

BY MAURICE SWINNEY

When the Chicago Public Schools' Office of Equity was established in September 2018, our goal was to take a systemic approach to building equity so that every student would have access to a high-quality education, regardless of race, ZIP code, ability, or country of origin.

We knew that this goal could not be achieved through a series of stand-alone initiatives. Equity must be the core value that informs every decision we make, from capital improvements to curriculum design, and it requires

attention from every member of our staff, schools, and communities.

When I was asked to share our district's journey toward systemic equity in *The Learning Professional,* I initially thought I would focus on the rollout of the Chicago Public Schools' Equity Framework, the backbone of the Office of Equity's support to schools. It outlines a set of shared understandings, language, processes, and tools for supporting our students and communities, especially those most impacted by inequity.

But the work of making equity systemic in our district really began

before the framework was complete. And it did not begin with the implementation of an initiative or policy. It started with our team's behavior — how we showed up and how we listened. That story is one we want to tell as other districts begin their own equity journeys.

LOOKING INWARD

Equity work starts with us as individuals. It starts with us looking inward to understand our own — often unconscious — beliefs and biases that define how we show up in different spaces. To help us understand

C = CURIOUS. Withhold judgment and be in a space of inquiry. Be curious to gain a better understanding of an issue.

U = URGENCY. Work with a sense of urgency when championing the success of our students. We have to respond in a timely manner.

R = RESILIENCY. Acknowledge that this work can be difficult and requires resiliency.

V = VULNERABLE. Recognize that each of us may not know a solution, but we can be vulnerable to collectively learn and problem-solve together.

E = EMPATHY. Build connection. Show empathy across differences, with someone you think may not share your experiences.

ourselves, we have to begin by listening to others.

In Chicago Public Schools, we started with facilitated conversations among colleagues to understand each other and our shared goals before beginning the search for solutions. Then we committed to listening to our community.

Over the course of the Office of Equity's first nine months, my colleagues and I were in conversation with 5,000 district stakeholders — teachers, parents, and students. We wanted to hear about their experiences, needs, and wants, especially among those furthest from opportunity.

This meant asking the questions and holding space for them to respond honestly and sometimes with a lot of emotion. It meant hearing difficult things about people's lived experiences in our city and our schools. It meant our staff needed to cultivate and maintain a mindset that allowed them to listen to others' experiences and viewpoints without reacting. Only then could we integrate those learnings into the evolving framework in a way that would help transform students' lives in the future.

In the field, we call this kind of work liberatory thinking. Liberatory thinking involves looking inward to question and interrupt one's assumptions and beliefs about others and their capabilities. That process can then inform the actions we take

and opportunities we create for others. For example, it can help us develop goals and statements of purpose, build relationships in affinity and across difference, create safe and brave spaces for dialogue, and rethink the data we collect and how we use it.

Engaging in liberatory thinking is like the work a gardener does in the fall to ready the soil and plant bulbs to enjoy beautiful blooms in the spring. When we invest in the initial, personal work of liberatory thinking, we are laying the groundwork for advancing equity in the future. But when we choose not to do this initial work, any new policies or initiatives that we implement will not blossom because we haven't properly prepared our environment to be a place where equity can flourish.

SHIFTING MINDSETS

Beginning with ourselves and our colleagues can seem like a big shift in how we think about creating change in our schools, and it is. It requires a level of self-reflection and vulnerability that we, as educators, might not be used to providing.

It is essential for everyone working on equity to cultivate a disposition that enables them to keep their minds curious and reserve judgment. Part of being successful in equity work is being able to view situations from an objective, neutral point of view that sees and acknowledges but does not

judge. When we find ourselves making judgments, our minds are in a fixed state, and we are not open to different perspectives.

To help us establish such mindsets, we centered the Chicago Public Schools Equity Framework around something we call the equity curve. CURVE stands for five components we all need to establish to do this work well: curiosity, urgency, resiliency, vulnerability, and empathy. (See box above.)

The equity curve is a tool for holding space to reflect on one's disposition in a given moment. It helps us be not only reflective but also compassionate with ourselves and with

others, which is a necessary condition of equity work.

In practice, we use it as a norming device to help all of us show up in equity conversations in a way that is helpful, productive, and nonjudgmental. For example, we use it to guide reflection exercises and grounding conversations.

ESTABLISHING COMMON GOALS

Once we do the personal, inner work that prepares us to successfully engage in equity work, we can engage in designing the framework that will help us advance equity in our specific context. Our listening tour helped us understand the importance of rooting the Equity Framework in targeted universalism, an approach that establishes common goals for the whole community but distinct pathways to reaching those common goals for different groups with different needs, with particular focus on those who are furthest from opportunity (powell et al., 2019).

One of the strengths of targeted universalism is the way it brings a community together, focusing on ensuring that everyone gets what they need without appearing to cater to special interests or get mired in politics.

In Chicago Public Schools, the targeted universalism approach organizes the district around common outcome goals, and then once we understand, based on quantitative and qualitative data, where all students stand in relation to meeting the goals, we can begin to focus our work on short- and long-term targeted solutions that will help all students achieve the goal. We lead with the students who are furthest from reaching the goals. (See box above). Too often in education, we begin by developing policies or initiatives intended to solve very real and pressing issues, without fully acknowledging the social and cultural context that led to those conditions. Or, we may name aspects of the context without acknowledging the myriad ways they play out in ours and our students' lives.

A targeted universalism approach

TARGETED UNIVERSALISM IN CHICAGO PUBLIC SCHOOLS

To build equity, we must avoid a one-size-fits-all approach. Targeted universalism helps us establish common goals for all students with different pathways to help students with different needs reach those common goals. For example, a high school that sets a universal goal of 95% graduation for all students examines how student groups (based on race, gender, gender expression, economic disadvantage, or diverse learning needs) are positioned to reach that goal. Here are sample questions that can help us better understand what all students need to reach that goal. We consider intersectionalities, such as race and gender, in addressing these questions:

- What are the current graduation rates for each student group?
- What are the factors internal and external to the school that affect the experiences of different groups?
- What are the neighborhood assets and challenges where students live, and how might those affect their experiences inside or outside of school?
- What are the different conditions and resources necessary for each student group to thrive?
- What policies benefit or burden each student group?

Source: Chicago Public Schools. (n.d.). *Chicago Public Schools Equity Framework.* bit.ly/3CnzV42

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addresses those common challenges by calling for an ongoing process of collaborative inquiry to prioritize and understand equity challenges from multiple perspectives and then create solutions informed by those multiple perspectives.

STAYING THE COURSE

These steps of examining our own beliefs, listening to others, and establishing collective goals lay the foundation for us to take equity-centered actions. Those actions include, but are not limited to, directing resources equitably and designing fair policies and systems.

This work takes time. It is incremental, and it cannot be rushed to adhere to external timetables for measuring outcomes. Because making shifts toward equity is deeply rooted in school culture and climate, we must stop the familiar pendulum swing from one reform to the next. That pattern, which is all too common in schools, keeps us from making deep change. It also leads to fatigue and cynicism.

Doing the work of building equity is challenging and requires

us to maintain patience and grace. Perhaps the most challenging aspect of beginning equity work is being comfortable with not being told the answer. In fact, in many cases, it means being comfortable accepting that we might never know all the answers or that we will do much work and still have farther to go.

Living in this space can feel very uncomfortable, but it is an essential condition of equity work and fundamentally important for all of our students to be successful.

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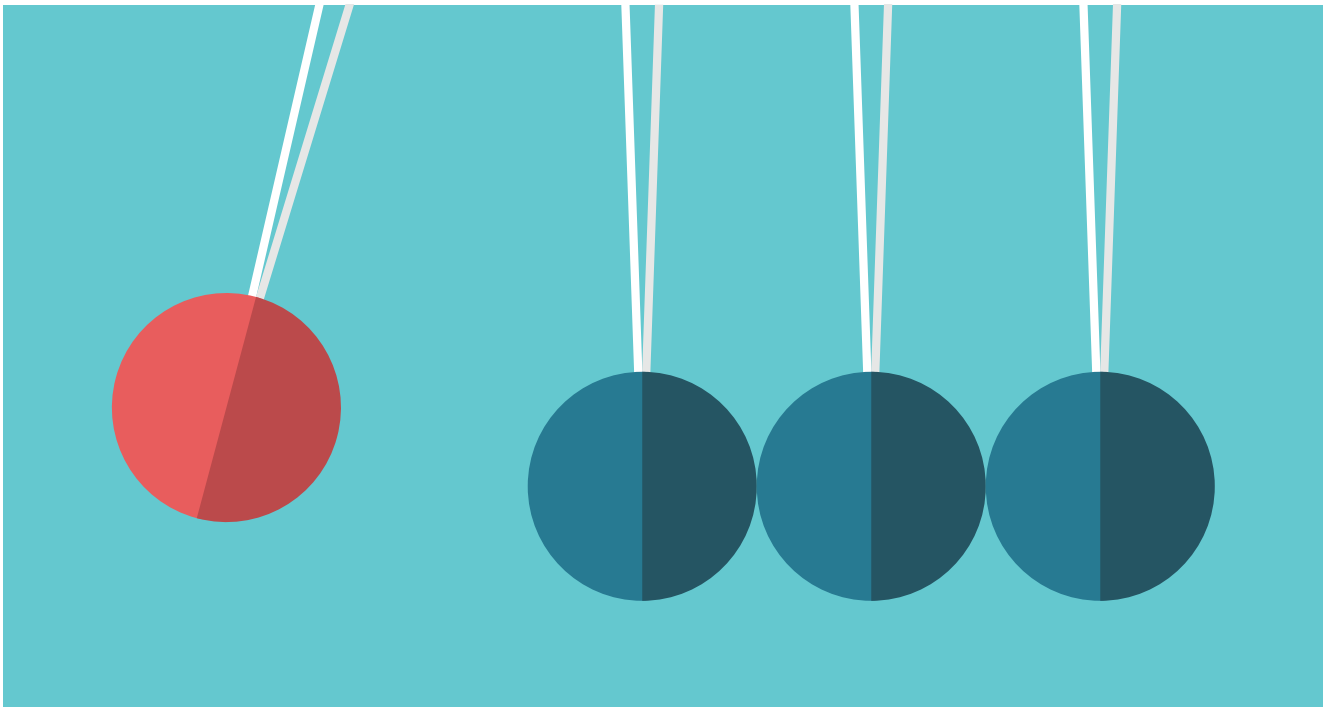
'Equity work is not a zero-sum game'

HOW ATLANTA'S CHIEF EQUITY OFFICER IS BUILDING SUPPORT FOR CHANGE

BY TAUHEEDAH BAKER-JONES
AS TOLD TO SUZANNE BOUFFARD

Tauheedah Baker-Jones is Atlanta Public Schools' first chief equity and social justice officer. She developed and now oversees the district's Center for Equity and Social Justice and the district's equity framework.

She shared some of her experiences and learnings, as well as reflections on how districts can enable equity officers to be successful, with *The Learning Professional.* Highlights of that conversation follow.

On being the district's first chief equity and social justice officer:

When I first started in this role, I encountered some resistance. To counter it, it was important to help people see that equity work is not a zero-sum game, and that this work is not about baiting, shaming, and guilt. All of us were born into this current system, none of us created it, and we all internalized and normalized it one way or another.

Although we had no hand in creating it, we do have ownership in making it better. In fact, we have a responsibility to hold ourselves

accountable for leaving the world better than it was when we got here. We owe that to those who did their part before us, and we owe it to our children. Our children deserve a better world and a better future.

To communicate that message, I had to spend a lot of time building trust. After George Floyd's murder and the reckoning that followed, I realized I needed to

Baker-Jones

galvanize and use the power of mass communication. So I worked with our communications department, and we spent several months developing a communications strategy for equity. We were intentional about defining shared vocabulary for what equity is and isn't, affirming our community's shared values and countering false narratives.

Investing that time and having conversations with people who were apprehensive is what has made it possible to do the work. It was important for me to keep top of mind that I must meet people where they are, not where I want them to be. That approach has helped me build some unlikely coalitions across lines of difference and build support for doing the important work of equity. It took a while to get here, but it has been worth it.

On the roles and responsibilities of the equity and social justice office:

When I was creating this office [the Center for Equity and Social Justice, which launched in 2021], I was very intentional in its design because I didn't want it to be seen as separate from the other core work of the district. Equity should be embedded in all of the district's operations. In fact, best practice advised against making a separate equity action plan — equity has to be at the center of the district's strategic plan.

With the support of our superintendent and board, I was able to structure the office in a unique way so that it serves as a support system, capacity builder, and accountability partner to the other divisions and departments within the system. The office was designed to have roles that directly touch every other part of the district.

For example, we have an executive director of equitable resource strategy, whose team works closely with the district's finance, operations, and talent divisions; an executive director of equitable learning environments, whose team collaborates with the academics

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SUPPORTING EQUITY LEADERS

1. Establish a clear **understanding of and commitment to equity goals,** and align your mission and policies with those goals.

2. **Allocate resources** for an equity officer and equity team as well as for their learning and development.

3. **Embed equity** in every department in the district, and empower the equity officer to build relationships across departments.

4. **Position the equity officer** as part of the senior leadership team, and give the officer voice and decision-making power.

5. Together with the equity officer, **build relationships with the community,** and communicate your equity vision and goals.

Source: Anderson, J. (2021). 5 ways to support equity leaders. *Usable Knowledge.* www.gse.harvard.edu/news/uk/21/06/five-ways-support-equity-leaders

and schools divisions; and a program director of equity strategy, whose team works with the district's strategy, performance, and communications teams to ensure the districtwide strategy is grounded in equity.

Included on these teams are coordinators of equity-focused professional learning, student supports, supplier diversity, and several equity data strategists. Data is an essential part of equity work because it illuminates what is actually happening. Without it, we can't substantiate that inequities are happening or that change is occurring.

Data also breaks down the ground of having to persuade folks that a phenomenon is occurring and instead focuses the dialogue on solutions. Our aim is to be data-informed and equity-guided, and our data strategists work with the district's data team to elevate key equity data points, in part through equity indexes that will be accessible to school and district leaders.

On cultivating equity mindsets:

I always say that, as systems leaders, we must go softer on people and harder on systems. As equity leaders, we sometimes focus heavily on people — helping them examine their implicit biases, develop their cultural competency, etc. While this work is important, we must keep top of mind that, as human beings, we are imperfectly perfect.

I've found that most educators value equity. In fact, I haven't met an educator who doesn't believe that all children deserve to be educated at a high level. However, we don't know what we don't know. We were born into these systems of inequity, and every single one of us has internalized the biases, conscious or unconscious, that come with it. The problems come when our unconscious biases don't align with our values and when we're unconsciously creating barriers to equity.

Even after receiving implicit bias training and becoming cognizant of our biases, we still must work every day to ensure that they aren't getting in the way of us showing up as our best selves. It's a daily practice, and we will undoubtedly make mistakes and experience setbacks. This is why grace is a core value of my equity work. We must extend grace to ourselves and to others, and we must recognize that the folks in the system are also products of the system.

This calls us to design systems and structures that act as safeguards against the unintended disparate impact of our biases. That's why, as an equity leader, I choose to go harder on systems. We must build systems of accountability that reinforce the imperative to center

equity in our work.

We have to build systems and structures that help people implement the change they want to see, and we must build systems and structures that ensure that our students thrive, not by accident, but by design.

On equity-centered professional learning:

Professional learning is an essential component of doing equity work. To redesign systems and structures that serve as guardrails for equity, we must train people on how to see the current system that is producing the outcomes we seek to change. That's why implicit bias training, and the like, are indeed important.

In addition, we must also provide our educators with the tools and protocols they need to pause and reflect on the equity considerations and impacts of their decision-making. Once developed, we must provide training on how to implement these tools with fidelity. This is important because these protocols provide the support our educators and leaders need in translating their intent for equity into action.

This takes partnerships and integration throughout the district. For example, our coordinator of equity-focused professional learning works closely with the human resources team to embed the tools and protocols we've developed and ensure that equity is infused in our hiring processes. We have also developed tools on how to engage families in a culturally responsive way and how to analyze policy and practice through the lens of equity.

We also adopted The Leadership Academy's equity leadership dispositions and created our own set of teacher equity dispositions. [Editor's note: For more on the equity leadership dispositions, see article that begins on p. 22.] At the same time, we are working with the professional learning team to help our existing staff develop the acumen for living these dispositions in their daily practice.

On chief equity officers' professional learning needs:

Chief equity officers need role-alike opportunities to learn from and support one another. The average tenure of a chief equity officer is 2½ years — that's the second-shortest tenure, behind superintendents. Chief equity officers also hold a highly political cabinet-level role. It's a stressful journey, and it's hard to maintain over time because it's emotionally taxing.

Some equity officers themselves may have been traumatized by the system and are not only reliving trauma as they engage in this work, but are still being subject to trauma in this highly politicized role. It can be a lot to deal with. Having the support of people who understand your experience and what you are going through is important for sustainability and retention.

We also need mentorship. This can be challenging because this is a relatively new role. But many people have been doing equity work for years, even if they weren't called equity officers. Finding them and connecting them with new equity officers is crucial. I have been lucky to find my own mentors who have helped me navigate

difficult situations and stand firm in the commitment to equity when internal and external challenges arise.

Of course, support from senior-level leadership and the school board level is extremely important. (See "Recommendations for supporting equity leaders" on p. 34.) In 2019, the Atlanta school board and the superintendent created an equity policy that mandated that the superintendent factor equity into everything he, she, or they do, from operations to finance to curriculum and beyond.

That was very forward thinking for a school board, and it opened the door for the work we are doing now. A lot of my colleagues in other districts are doing this work absent a legitimizing policy, and that makes the work extra challenging.

Lastly, chief equity officers need a repository of resources and information, and a role-specific organization that keeps us up- to-date on best practices, legislation, and opportunities specifically related to the work that we are doing.

Equity work can't be successful unless we are keeping a keen eye on the environment around us — the funding, policies, and legislation that affect your work. Then we zoom in on our own locus of control — the context and cultures of our own systems and structures. That's how we make systemic change.

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One district's path to a diverse staff

BY JEVELYN BONNER-REED

In North Carolina's Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools, we believe that employing a diverse staff is key to reaching all five of our overarching district goals: student achievement, equity and access, community engagement, human resources development, and climate and safety. Recruiting, retaining, and supporting educators of color is an important part of our human resources strategy and a key lever for addressing barriers to success for every student.

Representation matters. It matters that students of color see themselves reflected in the teachers, leaders, and support staff who are models and guides for learning and achievement. It also matters that white students see people different from them in those roles. This is why we are striving to have the demographics of the staff be proportionate to the demographics of the student population.

We are taking a comprehensive approach to having our student and staff population mirror each other. Using both short- and long-term strategies, we are working to build the whole educator pipeline, from middle school (when students typically begin thinking about future careers) through the principalship. Our efforts to recruit,
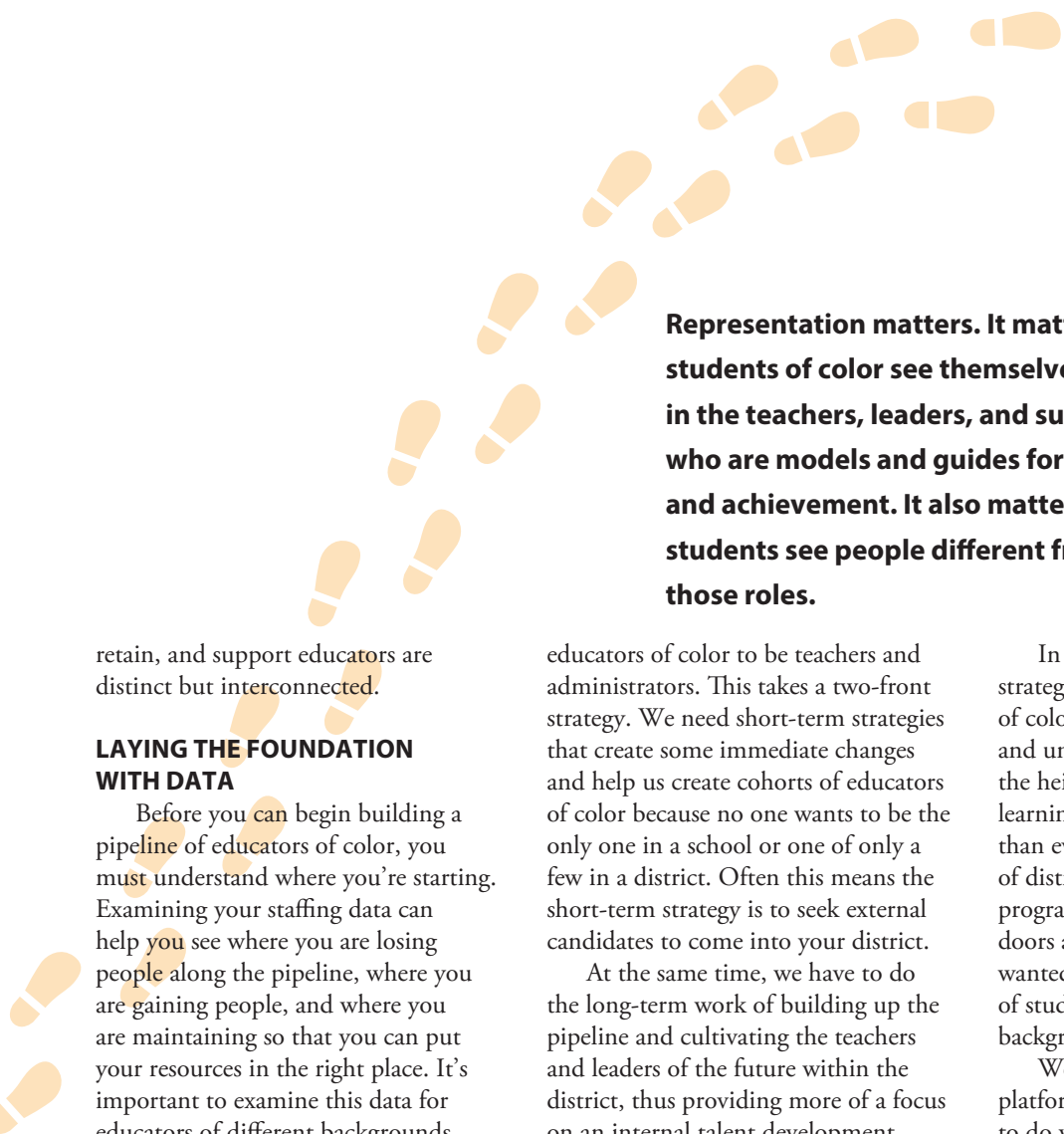
Representation matters. It matters that students of color see themselves reflected in the teachers, leaders, and support staff who are models and guides for learning and achievement. It also matters that white students see people different from them in those roles.

retain, and support educators are distinct but interconnected.

LAYING THE FOUNDATION WITH DATA

Before you can begin building a pipeline of educators of color, you must understand where you're starting. Examining your staffing data can help you see where you are losing people along the pipeline, where you are gaining people, and where you are maintaining so that you can put your resources in the right place. It's important to examine this data for educators of different backgrounds.

For example, you might find that you are losing Latinx educators at the college stage, so you would put more effort into collaborating with universities to increase their recruitment of Latinx students to take courses in the school of education. If you find that Black educators are hitting a ceiling at the assistant principal level, you might invest in figuring out why they aren't making it to the principalship and how you can change that trajectory. Or, you may find that you have gaps at every stage of the pipeline and need to invest some resources at every stage.

RECRUITING EDUCATORS OF COLOR

Diversifying the staff begins with intentionally recruiting more educators of color to be teachers and administrators. This takes a two-front strategy. We need short-term strategies that create some immediate changes and help us create cohorts of educators of color because no one wants to be the only one in a school or one of only a few in a district. Often this means the short-term strategy is to seek external candidates to come into your district.

At the same time, we have to do the long-term work of building up the pipeline and cultivating the teachers and leaders of the future within the district, thus providing more of a focus on an internal talent development strategy.

Short-term recruitment strategies

In the short term, we conduct targeted recruitment for both teachers and leaders. We are building relationships with schools of education at historically Black colleges and universities and Hispanic-serving institutions and recruiting teachers from their graduating classes.

We also look to our noncertified teaching staff (i.e. paraprofessionals), who are more likely to be people of color than certified teaching staff, and support them to become credentialed teachers. And we look both inside and outside our district to recruit talented principals and assistant principals of color.

In addition, we are intentional and strategic about placing student teachers of color, even during these stressful and unusual times. Last year, during the height of the pandemic and virtual learning, we had more student teachers than ever before. At a time when a lot of districts paused student teaching programs, we flung open our virtual doors and were explicit about saying we wanted to work with all different kinds of student teachers from all different backgrounds.

We trained them on our technology platforms and helped them learn how to do virtual teaching. We found that they not only did very well, but ended up supporting many of our credentialed teachers on how to use the technology platforms. It was an important lesson for us: Even in a crisis, don't give up on student teachers. Leverage them as current and future assets.

Leveraging assets is a core strategy of all our recruitment work. We involve educators and administrators of color in reaching out to, interviewing, and selecting new educators, especially those principals and assistant superintendents who are great at motivating people. We have to be careful not to ask too much of or overextend these leaders of color because, too often, educators of color are asked to go far above and beyond their typical job responsibilities.
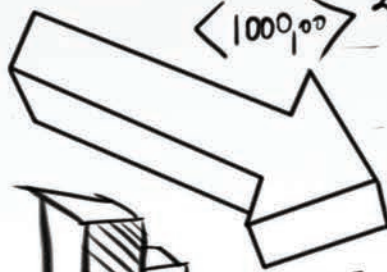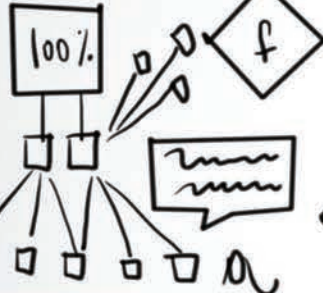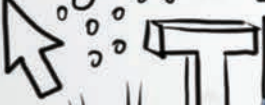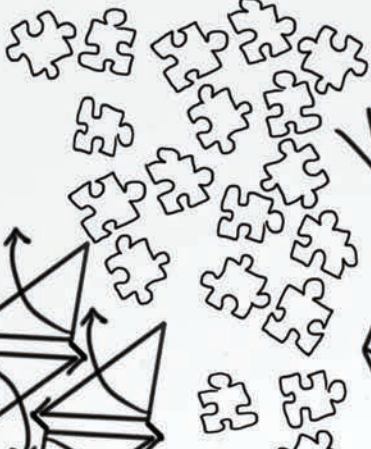
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Creating a culture of collective responsibility

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Observing lessons and providing feedback to increase teaching effectiveness

But unlike with some of the other duties they are unfairly assigned, such as serving as disciplinarians, many of the leaders of color we work with tell us that building a cadre of excellent educators of color is highly rewarding and even renewing. Even so, we are thoughtful about collaborating with leaders to create strategies that work for them, within their other responsibilities and in ways that are gratifying.

These efforts are beginning to pay off. For example, we have had some success with increasing the number of Latinx principals, assistant principals, and principal supervisors in our district, largely as a result of being targeted in our external recruitment. So far, most of these leaders have been women, so we are developing strategies for also attracting more Latino men.

Long-term recruitment strategies

To develop a more robust pipeline of educators of color, we need to attract more young people to the profession, and that work must start early — far earlier than most traditional teacher recruitment efforts.

In my previous district, we started with encouraging middle school students to consider careers in education. For example, we created what we called a precadet teacher program in one of our language immersion programs because we know that we need more multilingual teachers and the need will continue to grow as our student population continues to become more diverse. This program is designed to generate interest among young adolescents in a career in education.

At my current district, we have a teacher cadet program for high school students, which is overseen by a dedicated and long-serving teacher, Stephanie Wallace, who has been a mentor to many future educators. Many of her former cadets — a lot of whom are people of color — have come back to the district as teachers. We are always looking for ways to expand

and deepen this effort, and one of our current goals is to help find scholarship money for teacher cadets to attend college at schools of education.

At my previous district, scholarships were a part of the effort to support the development of future administrators. The district secured scholarships for Latinx teachers who were interested in becoming principals to attend administrator training programs. The number of our teachers entering assistant principal programs began to grow, and the district is now working to support high-potential assistant principals with the next steps on their journeys.

SUPPORTING AND RETAINING EDUCATORS OF COLOR

Of course, recruiting educators of color into the pipeline isn't enough. We need to work hard to support and retain them. Education is a stressful profession for everyone, but there are added pressures on teachers and leaders of color, especially in settings where they are in a distinct minority among the faculty. In addition to our universal strategies for supporting all of our educators and their career development, we also offer supports tailored to the needs of educators of color.

For example, we have recently entered into a partnership with the nonprofit organization Profound Gentlemen to provide extra support and community for Black male teachers. Black men make up a tiny fraction of teachers in American schools, yet research suggests they have a beneficial impact on Black male students. Profound Gentlemen provides tools, coaching, and other kinds of support to Black male teachers to help increase their satisfaction and retention in the profession.

We are also planning to partner with Men of Color in Educational Leadership, which focuses on providing networking and professional development for male leaders of color to lift up their voices and help create professional pathways.

In addition, Effie McMillan, executive director of equity, has recently led the launch of a local affiliate of the National Alliance of Black School Educators. This professional organization is dedicated to furthering the success of all students, but especially those of African descent, through educator professional learning, consulting, conferences, and other forms of support.

Any educator working toward Black students' success can be a part of the organization, but Black educators in particular find a community of peers who provide support, mentorship, and allyship.

HOLISTIC SUPPORT FOR EDUCATORS

As a human resources office, we see the staff in our district as assets to be developed for the benefit of all students. But we also value our educators for their own humanity, and we aim to support our educators holistically, especially in these stressful times.

In addition to policies that support our staff members' well-being, we believe this includes opportunities for ongoing professional learning and support. From our efforts to help paraprofessionals meet their long-term career goals to our participation in The Wallace Foundation's Principal Pipeline Initiative to nurture the next generation of school leaders, we aim to act on our belief that every educator is crucial to the journey of meeting every student's needs. Students need the wisdom and skill of our educators of color, and those educators need our care and support.

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To lead for equity, learn from teachers

BY JILL HARRISON BERG

Schools committed to equity are experimenting with creative and powerful ways for teachers to ensure all students receive what they need to learn in the classroom. Many of these efforts focus professional learning on strengthening the instructional core — teachers' knowledge of and relationships with students, teachers' deep and critical knowledge of the content, and the ways teachers make that content relevant to students.

These classroom-based efforts are necessary, yet insufficient, for advancing equity. A systems approach that addresses the contextual conditions required for instructional equity is also needed.

The consistency with which our schools produce inequitable results leads to one conclusion: Our schools are inequitable by design. Within these constraints, shifts in instruction can have only limited impact. Yet it isn't always clear what educational leaders — including principals and assistant principals, coaches and mentors, teacher leaders, and others whose roles are designed to influence the quality of instruction — need to learn or change to uproot inequity at the systems level.

The inequitable systems that cause us to underserve our students have been there so long that they have become part of the wallpaper. As products of schools that were not designed to educate all students ourselves, we can easily fall into the trap of blindly reproducing the systems we've experienced unless we are confronted with evidence that helps us to see what changes are needed.

In fact, in the same way that effective teachers examine evidence of students' learning to help them identify what it is their students need them to learn, effective leaders might examine

evidence of *teachers*' learning to help them identify what it is their teachers need *them* to learn and do — to create stronger contextual conditions for instructional equity.

When teachers' learning takes the form of collaborative inquiry, it produces a wealth of evidence and insight that not only helps teachers transform their teaching practice, but is also invaluable for identifying the school conditions needed to support that transformation. School leaders have much they can learn from teachers' collaborative inquiry if they are prepared to do so.

TEACHERS' COLLABORATIVE INQUIRY

Many forms of collaborative inquiry are underway in schools, though they are not always known by that name. Teachers engage in inquiry cycles when they:

- Work together to set and work toward shared professional goals as part of their evaluation cycle or their pursuit of National Board Certification;
- Hone their skill with a particular aspect of practice through instructional rounds or lesson study;
- Tune their teaching to be more responsive to students' specific needs via data inquiry cycles or sessions for looking at student work; or
- Critically compare their assessment of student work products to shared expectations for quality using conversation protocols.

Each of these efforts digs at the roots of an important and common threat to instructional equity (Berg, in press).

These are powerful learning experiences for the individuals involved. Unfortunately, the enduring impact that these efforts could have on students' learning is too often inadvertently stifled by unaligned conditions within the context.

For example, as teachers work together in professional learning to embed social and emotional learning components in their classrooms that help students feel safe and ready to learn, they may discover that students don't feel physically, emotionally, or intellectually safe beyond the classroom.

Teachers spend collaborative planning time examining their instructional materials for bias or considering how to better align their instruction with the science of learning so that students receive responsive and rigorous content and pedagogy, and, along the way, they recognize ways their efforts are set back by school- or district-mandated curricular materials or confined by bell schedules.

Teachers work to redesign curricular units in vertical teams to ensure students recognize the relevance of content to their lives, practice critical thinking, and share ownership of learning, yet doing so heightens their attention to ways district assessments and school grading policies communicate conflicting ideas to students and their families about what is valued.

In collaborative inquiry cycles such as these, teachers "commit their time and attention to helping one another **assess** the gap between the results their current practice produces and the results they wish to see. They lend their diverse perspectives to understanding this practice gap from every angle, tap their varied experiences or relevant research to propose a plan to close it, and **attempt** to put this plan into action while helping one another see both intended and unintended effects.

"Members then **analyze** results together, such that the process leads not only to closing the targeted gap but also to a deeper understanding of the changes and the conditions under which they are effective" (Berg, in press).

It's important not to stop there, but to extend the inquiry to consider organizational implications of these same results. In this way, collaborative inquiry can inform efforts to **adjust** the system so that it evolves in concert with and in support of classroom changes.

Given the time and energy invested in forms of collaborative inquiry, it should be recognized as more than an opportunity for teachers to deepen their own individual or collective practice. It should also be viewed as an opportunity to learn about organizational adjustments and leadership learning needed to support and sustain changes in instructional practice.

ARE LEADERS READY TO LEARN?

Since instructional transformation in the classroom cannot gain traction without parallel development of the school and district policies and structures that currently constrain them, it behooves equity-minded instructional leaders to take these three proactive steps to ensure teachers' inquiry-based professional learning experiences are maximized as catalysts for leaders' own and their schools' transformation.

1. **Develop a learning culture, starting with oneself.**

When teachers run up against roadblocks or speed bumps in their efforts to reach students, they tend to work around them, rather than act on sharing them as critical data needed to improve the school. Most schools do not have a culture that makes it easy or possible for teachers to share the insights they have about obstacles beyond their classrooms.

In some contexts, when teachers do suggest system changes, teachers fear they will be viewed as complainers passing the buck or looking for a way to avoid making necessary changes in their own classrooms. In others, there is no ready venue for such conversations. Teachers would have to find the time, space, and gumption for a difficult conversation. Since it's much easier not to do so, valuable information that leaders could use to advance equity is withheld.

Where leaders conduct themselves in ways that show they have a growth mindset — such as by talking about their own professional goals, sharing what they're learning, recognizing and tapping the expertise of others, and talking openly about their mistakes — and make this learning stance visible and contagious among the faculty, teachers will be more willing to speak up about the challenges they face, share their honest reflections about changes they feel are needed, and even help leaders identify what it is they need to learn.

2. Offer a leadership lens.

Teachers' own work in schools does not automatically build their familiarity with the key domains of leadership practice that are important for strong

	EQUITY IN CONTEXT

How might dimensions of the school context support or limit educators' classroom-based efforts for instructional equity? Results from teachers' inquiry cycles can help leaders identify which dimensions need a closer look and inform the focus of leaders' own reflection and action.

	Dimensions
Domain 1: Culture and climate supports	1A: Schoolwide expectations and agreements
	1B: Ownership, engagement, and collegiality
	1C: Physical, emotional, and intellectual safety
Domain 2: Teaching supports	2A: Curriculum
	2B: Instruction
	2C: Assessment, grading, and feedback
Domain 3: Learning supports	3A: Student supports and interventions
	3B: Extended learning opportunities
	3C: Student-teacher relationships
Domain 4: Structural supports	4A: Facilities
	4B: School schedule and programming
	4C: School partnerships
Domain 5: Professional capacity	5A: Professional learning resources
	5B: Hiring/personnel processes
	5C: Teacher collaboration
Domain 6: Leadership supports	6A: Principal leadership
	6B: Governance/school-level decision-making structure
	6C: Influence of family and community voice

Source: Berg, J.H. (in press). *Uprooting instructional inequity: The power of inquiry-based professional learning.* ASCD. Copyright by ASCD. Reprinted with permission.

teaching and learning. As such, as they wind down their cycles and approach the "adjust" phase, they may benefit from support as they look for clues about ways our systems are inequitable by design.

Research and practice throughout the past decade have produced several

frameworks that identify the contextual conditions needed in schools to support student learning (University of Chicago Consortium on School Research, n.d.; Massachusetts Consortium for Innovative Education Assessment, 2018; Quintero, 2017; Leithwood et al., 2019; Johnson et al., 2012; Blankstein et al., 2016). These frameworks have commonalities that can be described as 18 dimensions in six domains. (See table at left.)

The list represents a wide array of structures and policies that stand to support or limit teachers' work. As teachers reflect on their efforts to improve their practice through collaborative inquiry, this list can help them recognize ways the system may be working against their efforts and focus their attention on proposing adjustments informed by their cycles.

On their own, school leaders might be overwhelmed to look at this list and consider the challenge of deciding where to begin reforming their systems. Fortunately, they don't have to. Teachers' inquiry cycles will draw their attention to dimensions of the system that pose a present threat to desired instructional changes and help them identify what they need to learn and do to create more equitable systems.

3. Strengthen vertical communication routines.

Inquiry cycles do (or can) take many forms and occur in various venues in schools — from looking at data or student work in professional learning communities, to lesson study within content teams, to coaching or supervision cycles conducted during teachers' own planning periods. Without a deliberate

design to do so, lessons from these cycles won't necessarily be accessed as source material for leaders' learning.

Currently, most schools are not organized for the challenges teachers experience in their practice to be harnessed as intel about what leaders need to learn. School- and district-level decision-making often goes on without them and overlooks the potential of teachers as assets with invaluable inquiry-informed experience that is essential for informing improvement. A vertical communication routine that brings classroom teachers and instructional leaders together with enough frequency for candid conversation is needed.

Where schools have an instructional leadership team — for example, composed of representatives from each of the school's instructional teams, the principal, and any other instructional leaders — there is a ready-built platform for individuals and teams to share what they're learning from cycles of inquiry and to take action together.

A vertical team such as this represents a wide variety of experiences and perspectives in the school and will be well-suited for the work of innovating to design new structures and policies aligned with the ideals of equity. Since this work has implications for leaders' learning, a district leader might be included in these school-based vertical teams too.

Where an instructional leadership team does not exist or cannot easily be established, school leaders might prioritize time to check in with those engaged in inquiry to explore how their equity-focused efforts are unearthing clues that point to ways the system is working against them.

Instructional coaches might, for example, convene a reflection meeting after each cycle of peer observations; principals might invite teachers working on similar professional goals to a quarterly conversation about contextual conditions that support or limit them; and new teacher mentors might hold a monthly breakfast to glean novice

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TOOLS TO UPROOT INSTRUCTIONAL INEQUITY

Jill Harrison Berg's book *Uprooting Instructional Inequity: The Power of Inquiry-Based Professional Learning,* which will be released by ASCD in early 2022, guides readers in designing or retooling plans for inquiry-based professional learning so that they effectively interrogate the roots of inequities and engage in transformative learning for educators and students.

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teachers' perceptions of systems changes needed to help them do their work well: What school conditions facilitated your learning and changes in practice? What has gotten in the way?

LEARNING TOGETHER

Spurred on by the deep inequities witnessed and experienced during the events of the past two years, today's teachers are going to great lengths to strive for instructional equity in their own classrooms. They are redesigning curricula, broadening their instructional repertoires, assessing students in more authentic ways, and taking new approaches to know their students as people and as learners.

These changes, fueled by an equity-focused drive to ensure all students get what they need to learn, lie in direct conflict with systemic structures and policies created in the past with a narrower audience and a lower bar in mind. It's no wonder today's teachers are so exhausted — they are swimming upstream within a system that works against their efforts at instructional equity.

When teachers engage in action and reflection together through inquiry-based professional learning, they often learn as much about teaching and learning in their classrooms as they do about how contextual conditions get in the way of the changes they're seeking.

Instructional leaders can strategically capitalize on teachers' inquiry-based professional learning as an opportunity to help identify what they need to learn or change to uproot inequity at the systems level. By coordinating their learning in this way, teachers and leaders' complementary efforts to advance instructional equity can turn the tide.

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Equity at every level

A LEADER REFLECTS ON LEVERS FOR CHANGE

BY SONIA CAUS GLEASON

Learning how leaders advance equity and justice can inspire, give us mental models, and help us create our own road maps.

Eight years ago, Nancy Gerzon and I researched professional learning in high-poverty schools that were narrowing the achievement gap for every demographic, which resulted in the book *Growing Into Equity* (Corwin, 2013). One of the few U.S. high schools that fit our criteria was Social Justice Humanitas Academy in the Los Angeles Unified School District.

José Luis Navarro was the school's leader and a former California Teacher of the Year. He went on to serve as a local district support coordinator and has returned to school leadership at Birmingham Community Charter High School, where he is lead administrative director.

I recently spoke with Navarro about his journey as an equity leader and how he brings the perspectives of teacher, school leader, and central office leader to bear on his work. Highlights of our conversation have been edited for length.

Navarro

What's different about how you're pursuing equity now than when we met eight years ago?

Navarro: As a leader, I've always been a data guy focused on student achievement. But now the data I gather includes more about students

and teachers as humans. I've always valued social and emotional learning and incorporated teaching about social justice. In recent years, I've come to care even more about kindness and curiosity, and about mental health.

At this point, PTSD should not stand for post-traumatic stress disorder. It should be persistent traumatic stress disorder. Our kids and communities *are still* being traumatized by COVID-19, and many were in a state of trauma before it started. We need to learn to recognize and deal with this in schools. Providing support is a matter of equity.

People across social classes, races, and ethnicities can dismiss social-emotional issues as health or educational issues. You're supposed to just "tough it out." How do you handle that?

Navarro: Most people — immigrant, Black, white, people with less education — often don't believe mental health is a thing. So it can be hard even to get a baseline of how students are doing so that we can target support.

I do a mental health survey at school that asks kids about various things, including trauma, which is what's most interesting to me. It allows my school's psychiatric social workers to be proactive about helping students instead of waiting for a crisis. But there are challenges.

If I offer a social worker's support to a more affluent family, they see it as a support. If I offer that support to a more marginalized family, social workers often are associated with foster care, with children being taken from homes. Some parents won't let their kids take the survey because they are scared the government will take their kids away from them.

Institutional racism has led some in the Black community to distrust us as educators. The same can be true for immigrant families.

There can be a tug of war between people who believe in focusing on mental health and others who put that to the side to focus on accelerating academics to make up for learning loss. How do you think about it?

Navarro: You have to do both. These days, I'm emphasizing Maslow's hierarchy of needs. (See p. 49.) While many affluent students have struggles, they are not usually at the lowest tiers of Maslow, so they already have a head start.

That means schools in low-income areas, which can often have higher numbers of kids of color, are disproportionately burdened. But in any school, we need to help the students move up the levels of Maslow's pyramid so they are able to work their way up Bloom's taxonomy of learning.

The academic piece still matters. During quarantine, we were not virtually learning. We were crisis learning. That is different. Teachers did what they could. But now we need to be more intentional about meeting students' individual academic needs.

For example, having a 12th grader who is reading at a 3rd-grade level read *The Grapes of Wrath* is not offering them rigor. That's just too hard. But having a 12th grader who's reading at a 4th-grade level read *Lord of the Flies,* which is typically a 6th-grade book, that can be rigorous. They can do it if they have a lot of guidance, a lot of love, and a lot of support. But they have got to believe that they matter, you see them, and they are worthy.

In between working at two innovative, urban high schools, you had a stint in Los Angeles Unified School District's central office. What surprised you about that experience?

Navarro: There are some thoughtful, very intelligent problem-solvers in central office who did not necessarily know how to help school-level leaders, but wanted to. I noticed there were many allies-in-waiting.

So, I would just say, "Here's something I've tried, and here's the data to back it up." And I'd connect school leaders who were using great practices with other school leaders and with central office staff. This made it possible to get a lot done.

Central office had a lot of data. I could advise on identifying the most important information educators in schools need and how to organize it. For example, the district was working on developing usable, digital student data profiles. Using my principal's perspective, I was able to influence the IT engineers to make the platform something school leaders would use easily.

The challenge, to be very *Hamilton*-like, is getting "in the room where it happens." I had to earn that spot. The position was customized for me, as an administrator assigned to supporting the lowest-performing schools.

I was able to be nimble going back and forth to schools and central office, pointing out things people were doing right, and then sharing those practices among schools. It was so successful after one year that they asked me to share effective secondary school practices with 14 elementary schools.

Since the videotaping of George Floyd's murder, and the racial equity protests and organizing that followed, there's been a new impetus to talk more directly about race in many schools. What's your experience?

Navarro: Los Angeles Unified School District is really shifting to looking at things through a racial lens, even if some persons are holdouts. At Birmingham Charter, we brought in consultants to guide the 35 people on the instructional leadership team in a book club conversation on *So You Want to Talk About Race* by Ijeoma Oluo.

When we were planning the session, I thought I was walking on eggshells. Some white colleagues were really upset. They asked, "Why talk about race? It's not about race. I never think about my race." Some Black people, who never spoke up at meetings before, said things like, "That's the privilege talking. You never have to think about the color of your skin. I always have to." People were really uncomfortable talking about privilege at first. But I think we're coming around to it.

I think district leaders need to continue to force the conversation around privilege. Acknowledge it. Don't hide from it.

In a systems-change frame, you can attend to racial equity by working on systems, practices, and beliefs. How do you go about it?

Navarro: As an administrator, I work on actions first. You won't necessarily be able to change colleagues' feelings, but you can affect how they act toward students. If a teacher speaks sharply with some kids, you can help the teacher change his or her tone, even if you can't immediately make the teacher respect the kids.

At our school, we help teachers and students take positive actions together. For example, if a student is struggling in one area, we bring together all their teachers and hold a meeting with them and the student to provide support. They are called very important person (VIP) or student support and progress team sessions.

We ask each person, including the student, to respond to these questions: What is one positive attribute you see in the VIP? What is one positive change you want to see — not in the student, but in *their actions*? Everyone leaves really excited and hopeful.

As part of schoolwide change, we also use data. We want to know what students and staff are thinking. So, when someone charges into the office upset about something, saying that "everyone is upset," we can say, 'Well, we surveyed the staff, and 84% are OK with this."

Then we can start to build critical mass around some issues. Or, we find out from the data that we as leaders are totally wrong. We have to listen and admit that we are wrong. That's taking action, too.

What about beliefs? Changing them is core to systems change in the long run.

Navarro: This is slow and difficult, especially changing racist beliefs. There are very few times when you'll hear a white person directly say: "You Black people are lazy." It's much more nefarious and subtle.

At the same time, when you know someone personally, when teachers and students are more human to one another, we can break down racist attitudes and build empathy. One way is we're trying to develop *interest convergence.* I want the adults to see where their interests converge with student interests, where mainstream society's interests and the interests of the those on the margins converge.

Right now, many see the two groups as parallel, with teachers thinking of their jobs as imposing power upon the students. I think there can be a lot of *power with* students. If we work *with* the students, rather than *over* the students, we can get a lot more done.

And while we tell people they should have empathy, we often don't help people build it. Convening circles is one way we're trying: You sit in a circle of staff and students together. You pass around a talking piece. And with some ground rules and a commitment to building trust in place, you take up a topic where everyone has something to say.

The students see that the adults are human. The adults see that the students have the same needs that they do. And it brings you back to what psychologist Dr. Shefali Tsabary says, that kids only want to know three things: "Do you see me? Do I matter? Am I worthy?"

How else do you try to build community across racial and other differences?

Navarro: We're working on creating safe spaces where people can ask dumb questions and be safe. The topics we take on can be about race, or picking a new school leader, or vaccines, or something else. But they have to be issues that address differing values, and the questions have to be very clear. I think of them as laboratories of democracy.

These conversations encourage people to be brave and vulnerable. For example, one veteran teacher kept referring to African Americans as "Negros" during his class. A student approached the teacher saying, "That really offends me when you say that. Why are you using that?" The teacher tried to explain and then got defensive, but later leaned into the question. I'm really proud of him.

He reached out to an African American teacher and said, "I use this word but thought it was OK. Martin Luther King used it." The colleague responded: "If a person of color is offended, then it is offensive."

The colleague continued by explaining that it is OK if you're reading it in a document because there is historical context. But in the class where the teacher was showing a clip from the movie *Amistad* [about the slave trade from Africa to North America], using the term "Negros" was not appropriate. The people on those ships were Africans. He should have used that word.

It became an interesting conversation because there was this learning. That happened because the teacher was willing to ask the "dumb" question. But we often don't ask. Our school is doing a good job of creating spaces where people can ask questions.

What advice do you have for white educators about supporting their colleagues of color?

Navarro: First, just acknowledge that being white comes with privilege. Then use your privilege to support colleagues and students.

Bring kindness and curiosity. You don't know what your Latino colleagues are going through, or Black, or Filipino,

Maslow's hierarchy

Self-actualization: Morality, creativity, spontaneity, acceptance.

Self-esteem: Confidence, achievement, respect of others.

Love and belonging: Friendship, family, intimacy, sense of connection.

Safety and security: Health, employment, property, family, social stability.

Physiological needs: Breathing, food, water, shelter, clothing, sleep.

MASLOW FIRST, THEN BLOOM

Bloom's taxonomy

Create: Produce new or original work.

Evaluate: Justify a stand or decision.

Analyze: Draw connections among ideas.

Apply: Use information in new situations.

Understand: Explain ideas or concepts.

Remember: Recall facts and basic concepts.

Adapted from Maslow, 1943, & Armstrong, 2010.

or Armenian. So be curious. Ask. Be a learner. You can ask people of color, "What do you need from us?" Don't tell them what you think they need.

On the other side, we POC need to give our colleagues in the majority some grace. It is hard to ask someone on the margins to give people in the majority anything. But it is not about those in the majority, it is about our own worth. I do what I do not for them, but so that I am the man I want to be. I should respond with grace so that I'm the man worthy of my wife's love.

That said, I draw the line with people who say, "Racism is not real. Sexism is not real." It's real. Can we move on to trying to solve it now?

If we don't get to the truths of an issue, it's impossible to fully heal and move on. Are there truths that you think are still undiscussable?

Navarro: They all have to be fair game. We need to talk about it. We need to own it. As Brené Brown says, we have to be willing to be vulnerable in our conversations, even though thinking about vulnerability really freaks people out. We have to learn to talk about all of it in professional development.

For example, we have to be able to ask white teachers, "Why is it that if you see an African American kid, you become apprehensive?" We have to

question it when some educators say, "I'm not going to tell that Black boy to take off his hat because he'll come after me." He probably won't go after you any more than a white kid would. But fear of BIPOC students is definitely there, and we need to address it.

We have to challenge all teachers when they say they care for their students and they are anti-racist. What does care look like? How does anti-racism get enacted? Let's get concrete.

What's your advice on finding the right professional learning?

Navarro: If you have a problem that is a technical problem, a problem whose solution is known, get an expert to tell you what to do and how. But if you need to solve a problem that has many moving parts and many ways to approach it — one that is complex and complicated — find someone who will help you be a learner and who will help bring together the different people who can work on the problem.

And if we're the ones who can offer the answers, we can look to do it with a lot of grace. It's our job as leaders to listen to the people around us and make sure everyone's views are heard. As leaders, we're servants. We serve these students and help teachers serve our students.

Many educators are willing and

awesome, but some may be misguided on certain issues, and they just need information and support. We leaders need to bring out the best in our staff. And we need to help our teachers tend to Maslow's pyramid before we get to Bloom's *for their own growth,* not just their students. Before we talk about teachers teaching the Common Core, we need to ask them "Do you believe *you* matter?"

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One simple question can accelerate progress toward equity

BY KARIN CHENOWETH

For the past 15 years, I have been traveling to schools and districts that break the correlation between race and poverty on the one hand and academic achievement on the other. That is to say, they serve large percentages of children of color and children who live in poverty and their students score at or above where white, middle-class students do.

These schools and districts hold enormous lessons for any educators willing to seek them out and ask what I call the most powerful question in education: "Your kids are doing better than mine. What are you doing?"

This is the question that acknowledges the hard-won expertise of educators, many of whom are eager to share what they have learned so that others can benefit.

But it is important to understand that educators who ask that question — whether they are teachers, principals, superintendents, or even state commissioners — are benefiting from four things, all important.

A belief that all children can learn, and it is the responsibility of educators to figure out how to teach them. When students don't do well, it is easy to find reasons to deflect the

Schools and districts that break the correlation between race and poverty on the one hand and academic achievement on the other hold enormous lessons for any educators willing to seek them out and ask: "Your kids are doing better than mine. What are you doing?"

responsibility onto students and their families. "They don't try hard." "Their families don't help them." "They're not motivated." We'll leave aside the blatantly racist explanations some might use.

Educators in highly effective schools don't talk in this way. Instead, they say, "What more can we do to engage and motivate our students?" and "If our families are too stressed to provide homework/other help, what can we do to make sure students still get the benefits from homework/other?"

An ability to take a step back to assess results in an objective way. Education is such a personal field that this is difficult. Educators do what they do because they think they are doing the right thing. To be able to see that the students in another classroom, school, district, or state are doing better than your own requires developing professional distance and judgment and stamping out the natural defensiveness that comes when you are working hard and not getting the results you wanted.

The availability of publicly available, commonly agreed-upon information. At the classroom level, this might mean common formative grade-level assessments that teachers agree on and study together so that a teacher can say, "Hmmm. Only a few of my kids learned to convert fractions to decimals, but most of yours did. What did you do?"

At a school, district, or state level,

the information might consist of state assessment data, attendance data, suspension data, college-going data, or something else. This year, it might be COVID-19 transmission rates. But it is necessary to have commonly understood and public information that allows educators to, as British researcher Mel Ainscow says, expose and share expertise.

It is also necessary to be able to disaggregate the data by student group to look for patterns and address them. This is what it is to be "equity-centered." If all educators ever do is look at overall numbers, it is easy to miss issues. It might be easy to be complacent, for example, if 80% of students are proficient in a state where 75% are.

But if, when the data is broken apart, it appears that 90% of the girls but only 70% of the boys are proficient — well, there might be an issue with how boys are feeling in the school. And if it is broken down further and it turns out 80% of the Latino boys are proficient but only 60% of the African American boys are, there is another issue to figure out.

And then the investigation can begin. Are there particular teachers whose African American boys are doing better in the school or district? What can be learned from them?

A culture of trust. Too often in the field of education, the admission of failure is seen as a weakness rather than as a strength. If a kindergarten teacher

is going to point out that fewer of her students know their letters and sounds than those of her colleagues, she needs to know that her admission will be met with help, advice, and time to observe other classrooms rather than criticism and shame.

Such a culture of trust is not something that can be cultivated in an institution where everyone is off doing their own thing. It is only possible in an institution — whether it's a school or district — with common goals and a common way of talking about problems.

Each of the things listed above requires leadership to establish. Leadership to establish common goals, a common language, a culture of trust, and to find and manage time and information so that adults can meet together to expose expertise and visit other classrooms and schools to learn from it. When those things are in place, educators are able to lead enormous improvement.

Take, for example, Roland Smith, the former superintendent/principal of Lane, Oklahoma. He took the job in 2003, and he walked into a mountain of challenges. He was the fourth superintendent that year; the state claimed the district owed it money; the school bus dated from 1976; the parking lot was unpaved; and the electricity powering freezers holding hundreds of chicken parts had gone out a few days before he arrived.

After Smith spent a couple of years solving the obvious physical and financial needs of the district, he began to focus on the academic needs. A small, rural district, Lane had long been low-performing. Smith wanted to change that but wasn't sure how.

He studied the state data and found that Cottonwood, about 25 miles away, was scoring toward the top of the state and had very similar demographics to Lane's. Most of the students come from low-income homes and about 40% are Native American, mostly Choctaw. Smith called Cottonwood's superintendent, John Daniel, and asked him what he was doing to get such high scores.

Smith told me he was initially very skeptical of Cottonwood's success. He said that he challenged Daniel, telling him: "I think your teachers are cooking that test. Show me different." Smith says Daniel didn't get mad or raise his voice. He said to Smith, "Let's go for a walk."

Daniel said he is used to his fellow superintendents thinking that Cottonwood is cheating. His students are not the kind of students superintendents recognize as being high achievers. His response is always to invite them to visit Cottonwood. But those who visit don't always understand what they are seeing. "They roll their eyes a lot," is how Cottonwood's librarian Susan Eddings puts it.

Smith, however, took it all in. "My epiphany was to understand — from John Daniels — the importance of reading," he said.

On that walk, Daniel showed him Cottonwood's program for 3-year-olds, where children were learning nursery rhymes and songs and how to form letter sounds; the program for 4-year-olds, where children were learning to map sounds onto letters; kindergarten, where children were reading nine weeks into the school year; 1st grade, where children were reading stories and writing about them; and 2nd grade, where children wrote about the same topics from both a fiction and nonfiction perspective.

Daniel remembers what Smith said after that walk: "I've been doing it all wrong."

Smith, a former high school science teacher and principal, had not realized how critical the early years of education were and had not understood the importance of evidence-based reading instruction.

"He thought we were babysitters," says Priscilla Jackson, one of Lane's kindergarten teachers.

That visit was the beginning of Lane's improvement. Smith began sending teachers to Cottonwood, and they were able to see why Cottonwood's children recognized more sounds, knew more letters, understood more vocabulary, and had learned more background knowledge.

"They were open to share ideas, to share resources, to say you're doing a good job. They weren't judging," said Sharon Holcomb, assistant superintendent. "Whenever I went with teachers that was what I saw — they were just, 'Come with me and sit down right here and let me show you.' "

Lane applied for a grant and was able to hire a reading consultant to work with the teachers on how to teach phonemic awareness, phonics, and fluency. Smith and his teachers met for two hours or more every week to study their internal data to see whose classes were moving ahead and why, systematically exposing and learning from internal expertise and solving problems. And he continued to call on Daniel and send his teachers to learn from Cottonwood's teachers, thus learning from outside expertise. More of Lane's students learned how to read, and Lane's achievement on the state assessments slowly improved.

Years later, when Lane earned an "A" on the Oklahoma State Report Card, Smith told me, he held a party for the whole school in the gym where he played Cyndi Lauper's "True Colors." Children who, Smith said, lived in "abject poverty" were reading and achieving and heading for high school and college.

Saying that we need to expose and learn from expertise isn't a grand scheme of education reform, nor is it a promise of success. We've had plenty of schemes and promises in the last couple of decades, few of which have led to anything more than discouragement.

It is, however, an acknowledgement that there is expertise within the field of education and, if we systematically sought out and learned from that, we might make more progress than any expensive program adoption or "disruptive" organizational scheme.

But to seek out and learn from success we need in place those things listed earlier: professional judgment, publicly available data, and a culture of trust. And — perhaps most importantly — we have to jettison the idea that some kids will learn and some will not. All children are capable of learning, and it is the job of educators to figure out how to ensure they do.

To put those things in place, we need school and district leaders who understand how to structure schools and districts to help establish them.

We have known about the importance of school leadership for many years, ever since Ken Leithwood, Karen Seashore Louis, Stephen Anderson, and Kyla Wahlstrom published *How Leadership Influences Student Learning* in 2004 and the UChicago Consortium on School Research published *Organizing Schools for Improvement: Lessons From Chicago* in 2010. The evidence just keeps building —Jason Grissom, Anna Egalite, and Constance Lindsay just found, in *How Principals Affect Students and Schools: A Systematic Synthesis of Two Decades of Research,* that, if anything, the previous research understated the importance of principals on student learning.

Now that we know that the expertise of leaders is important, we need to be able to systematically expose it and learn from it.

To do that, educators need to be able to take a step back from what they

Honoring history, cultivating genius

Muhammad

A CONVERSATION
WITH GHOLDY
MUHAMMAD

BY TANJI REED MARSHALL AND SUZANNE BOUFFARD

Gholnecsar (Gholdy) Muhammad is a leading voice for equity, anti-racism, and culturally and historically responsive teaching. A former teacher and school district curriculum director, she now researches and consults with school, district, and state leaders to implement culturally and historically responsive teaching. Her framework of historically responsive literacy is outlined in her book, *Cultivating Genius* (Scholastic, 2020).

The historically responsive literacy framework examines teaching strategies

and structures that honor the histories, identities, and literary practices of all youth from diverse cultures, and especially those who have been traditionally underserved in schools.

The framework builds on other work on culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogies and is grounded in the history of Black literary societies, a rich source of education and intellectual pursuit led by Black scholars in the 19th century.

Muhammad looked to history to learn how these groups defined and shaped literacy — a term they used synonymously with education

— and wove key lessons into her recommendations for schools today. Those lessons include incorporating oral literacy, collaborative learning, interdisciplinarity, and social consciousness. She embeds them in a set of five educational pursuits: identity, criticality, intellect, skills, and joy.

This issue's editors, Tanji Reed Marshall and Suzanne Bouffard, spoke with Muhammad recently to learn more about how she is working with schools to embed those lessons and build equity through the historically responsive literacy framework. Excerpts of that conversation follow.

Your work calls for systemic change in order to achieve equity. Why is it important to approach the work systemically, and how do you do it?

I believe that schools and education systems reflect society. What we hold valuable, what we focus on, and how we structure schools reflects the humanity, or inhumanity, of society. So, if we're not addressing systems, it feels like we're doing "Band-Aid equity." It is key to examine the parts of the system that don't serve all students well.

We're always going to have limitations and feel incomplete until we get right as a country. But there are several structural parts of our education system that can be improved right away, even before those larger changes are made.

Your book outlines five pursuits that should be embedded in a historically and culturally responsive education. How can those pursuits be catalysts for systemic, actionable change?

The five pursuits are identity, skills, intellectualism, criticality, and joy. Most schools today are focused only on discrete skills and maybe some on intellectualism. But we need to go beyond just teaching skills. We need to honor and build students' humanity. To do that, there are five changes we need to make.

First, we need better learning goals. I don't like the word *standard*, because standard means we're learning this for school or for a test. Life goes on beyond the test. What if we had a new set of learning pursuits as a nation? Many people, including me, have rewritten learning standards to be more culturally responsive, but very few states have mandated them. If they did, if we had a new set of learning pursuits, imagine what we could do as a country.

Second, we need a full overhaul of assessments. Of the five pursuits, our schools typically assess skills only. Why don't we assess identity, joy, consciousness, or criticality? This is an easy solve as a nation with so much genius in it.

THE 5 PURSUITS OF HISTORICALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING

Muhammad identifies five pursuits, or learning goals, from the history of Black literary societies. These five pursuits guide Muhammad's framework of culturally and historically responsive teaching.

Identity: Teaching students to know themselves and others.

Skills: Teaching students the proficiencies needed across content areas.

Intellectualism: Teaching students new knowledge.

Criticality: Teaching students to understand and disrupt oppression (hurt, pain, and harm within self and the world).

Joy: Teaching students about the beauty and truth in humanity.

Source: Muhammad, G. (2021). 12 questions to ask when designing culturally and historically responsive curriculum. AMLE. www.amle.org/12-questions-to-ask-when-designing-culturally-and-historically-responsive-curriculum/

Third, the curriculum we adopt and mandate is disconscious. It was never written to address the histories, identities, literacies, or liberation of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color. So guess who we struggle most to serve? Black, Indigenous, and People of Color. It's like we get upset when students can't fit into a dress that was not designed for their bodies. We keep asking, "Why do we have these achievement gaps?," but when we use curricula that are not designed for children of color, you should expect to see those gaps.

Fourth, we need to improve teacher evaluation. We have states that have written out guidelines and handbooks on culturally responsive pedagogy, but they still maintain teacher evaluation frameworks that say nothing about

criticality or identity.

Fifth, we need to improve teacher education for both preservice and inservice teachers. Teacher education programs must center anti-racism and critical work. We must not continue to perpetuate disconscious teaching. Often, you can leave the program and get your license without teaching or designing curriculum around justice.

When it comes to inservice professional learning, it's growing, and it ebbs and flows, but we know teachers and leaders need more support to implement anti-racist and culturally responsive teaching when they're in the field than they're currently getting.

You mentioned curriculum and assessment. What specific steps should schools take to rethink their approaches?

It's up to leaders to select and use the right curriculum, and that requires asking the right questions. People don't put enough emphasis on the content writers when they are evaluating curricula. I've worked with many publishers, and I don't often see consciousness in the work. I don't even see a lot of people who look like me.

When I work with districts that are adopting curricula, I ask questions like, "Who wrote the curriculum? Have you met them? Have they been successful teachers of BIPOC people?" I also ask about their vision of equity. It's not just about having diverse readings. It's also about the learning objectives and what is being taught, measured, and assessed. Is the curriculum only teaching skills? If so, it's not culturally responsive.

I recommend asking publishers if they have completed a culturally responsive scorecard on the curriculum and if they have conducted focus groups with students who are reflective of your student body. I have also given publishers a rubric on how to rewrite curriculum for our kids.

With assessments, I start by asking, "What can we change?" We can't change state assessments, but we can change school benchmark assessments.

For example, we can focus on bringing student voice into our assessments. We can ask students, "Does school give you joy? When are you most joyful during the school day? When was math joyful?" But first we have to define joy. It's not just happiness; it's a fulfillment of truth and justice and beauty.

We have to do this work now. Our ancestors didn't just talk about change; they were doers of the word. They didn't wait. We can't wait.

This is comprehensive, long-term work. How do you build capacity for it throughout the system?

Start with leadership, especially the superintendent and the school board. How are they recruited and hired — what is required of them? We should require superintendents to teach a culturally responsive lesson plan before being hired. How can you lead in pedagogy if you don't teach it?

We also have to rethink how superintendents are evaluated. To keep your job, you should have to show evidence of culturally responsive leadership. No one at Apple or Google is going to keep their job if they're behind the times and they don't display evidence of advanced technology expertise. But, for some reason, our education leaders can keep their jobs when they are behind the times. I am not saying it is always easy, but it is certainly possible.

Then you do this same work with principals. You change how they are recruited, hired, and evaluated. I also work with leaders on how to make the changes. I teach leaders how to write mission and vision statements and make plans of action to follow through.

This is nothing new, but what's new about it is that we add things like equity, anti-racism, and culturally and historically responsive education. I teach them how to create and collect benchmarks and assessments of joy, criticality, and identity and to rethink how they assess skills and intellect.

Leaders have to create a culture and an environment for this among all their staff, so I also teach them how to lead and coach teachers, how to run a staff meeting, how to embody it in their speech and day-to-day work. Then we rewrite our documents, like our lesson and template documents. And in doing this, they must center love and joy.

What has the response been like from educators?

There have been three main responses: silence, head nods but no real action, and "we need this and we're going to do it." In some places, I am seeing the teachers union take this up and commit to it.

Leadership is a key factor. In districts that are most successful doing this work, superintendents show up to do the work. In one district I worked

with, which had about 40 schools, the superintendent showed up to every session, wrote curriculum with teachers, and created her own observation tool. It works when the leadership creates a tone and then holds others accountable to the expectations.

We all have to hold ourselves to those expectations and work on ourselves. As [education scholar] Yolanda Sealey-Ruiz says, we must engage in the archaeological exploration of self. We have to do that work before we can go further.

What other recommendations do you have for education leaders?

It's possible to make change right now, tomorrow. The U.S. Department of Education gave a lot of autonomy to states and districts. We must start making policies and adopt a model where teachers can be trained to teach in more responsive ways.

It's time for us to mandate justice for kids. We need to hold up humanity as much as we lift up the other things we hold valuable. This has been said by James Baldwin, Toni Morrison, and others. It's not new. But if we listen, if we start to do this more as a nation, we would see positive change for all.

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Gholdy Muhammad is associate professor of language and literacy at University of Illinois at Chicago. ■

One simple question can accelerate progress toward equity

are doing, cast a gimlet eye on the data, and say, "Your kids are doing better than mine. What are you doing?"

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For curriculum quality, cultural representation matters

BY TANJI REED MARSHALL

Curriculum is a critical force through which students receive the tacit message of their value in society. They learn which groups of people are valued and whose stories are worth learning. For too long, some students' and communities' stories have been deemed unworthy.

While some progress has been made, the curriculum students are forced to consume continues to evidence the sentiments of Carter G. Woodson, the father of Black History Week (now Black History Month) and a distinguished educator whose theories shaped many scholars of color who remain absent from the canon of educational research and practice.

In 1933, Woodson wrote: "If you can control a man's thinking you do not have to worry about his actions. When you determine what a man shall think you do not have to concern yourself about what he will do. If you make a man feel that he is inferior, you do not have to compel him to accept an inferior status, for he will seek it himself. If you make a man think that he is justly an outcast, you do not have to order him to the back door. He will go without being told; and if there is no back door, his very nature will demand one."

Students need opportunities to see themselves and others portrayed in texts in meaningful ways that challenge stereotypes and push them toward advanced levels of literacy.

Students of color have been relegated to the back door of the American education system since its inception centuries ago, and curriculum has been an instrument of that oppression. The ongoing absence of historical accuracy and fullness and the mis- and underrepresentation of people of color continue to demonstrate the degree to which we have not yet overcome.

We remain largely stuck in our ways, with many curricula continuing to tell a single story of American greatness while skirting over, lightly touching, or leaving out those who paid the price for this country to be what it is, at least on paper.

As this country continues to face ourselves in what is often an unpleasant mirror, what students are learning is paramount. Students need opportunities to learn about the dynamics of our past to ensure we become the country we so proudly say we are, but struggle to actually be.

Access to a robust curriculum can be one vehicle toward attaining our ideals — if that curriculum is one that is more than a conveyor belt of disconnected, decontextualized facts and figures or stories about people as singularly heroic when the truth

is far more complex and dynamic. Students need opportunities to see themselves and others portrayed in texts in meaningful ways that challenge stereotypes and push them toward advanced levels of literacy.

While as Alfred Tatum, a literacy expert who focuses on African American students, says, "every text belongs to every child," we must ensure a balanced representation across and within learning tools. Students must have experiences with texts being windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors (Bishop, 1990).

WHERE WE ARE NOW

Through the language and images in curriculum, students are able to gain knowledge about what it means to be an American. Unfortunately, far too much of what most curricula contains is a single story (Adichie, 2013) of American greatness without attending to the cost of such supposed greatness.

Students learn about our principles of freedom, liberty, and democracy for all; however, there is no guarantee they will learn such freedom came at the expense of Indigenous people's near-genocide or that it was withheld from Indigenous people until 1924, with the passage of the Indian Citizen Act.

They'll learn about voting rights for women, but are not guaranteed to learn that African American women were locked out of the conversation by the much-heralded women's suffragists such as Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Alice Paul.

Literary texts parade a steady diet of representational singularity in much the same way as history texts. While there has been progress from 2012, when character representations were first counted, by 2018, animals are still represented in texts at a higher percentage than any group except characters that could be identified as white (Dahlen, 2016, 2019).

In an unpublished study of over 1,000 texts deemed as high quality, the Education Trust found more than two-thirds were authored by individuals identified as white. In this same review, Ed Trust found that males were the predominant authors of text for all racial/ethnic groups except writers of Asian and Latinx descent.

The emphasis on texts being high-quality does not seem to consider such factors as the representation of writers and characters, which speaks to a limited definition on what makes texts high quality.

At the same time, dozens of state

legislatures across the country are taking steps to outlaw the discussion of race from classrooms under the guise of bans on so-called critical race theory. In many parts of the U.S., groups of white parents are rallying to protect the emotions of their children who, for the first time, might be learning the deep and dynamic — and unsettling — history of this country.

Yet they are not raising similar concerns about the emotions of students of color or students whose families are experiencing economic distress, uncertainty, homelessness, and a number of society's other ills, even though these students have long been made to feel uncomfortable in schools.

Now, these groups of parents and legislators have turned their sights to eradicating culturally responsive teaching and curriculum as well as social and emotional learning.

WHERE WE NEED TO GO

In this context, leaders have important decisions to make. They must decide if they will allow Woodson's quote to live anew in the 21st century or if they will equip themselves and their teachers with the tools necessary to fight against the false narratives. They must decide whether their responsibility to every child will be trumped by a need to assuage the unrealistic fears of the few.

Curriculum can be an important lever for system-level change. Ensuring every child has access to a high-quality curriculum can be ground zero for one of the core tenets of culturally relevant pedagogy: academic achievement.

Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995) elevated academic achievement as an essential factor in being culturally relevant because when educators don't believe that children of color can and should succeed academically, students experience under- and miseducation.

We see the effects of belief gaps outlined three years ago in TNTP's *Opportunity Myth* (TNTP, 2018) and in its current work with Zearn (TNTP, 2021) where researchers found students

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CURRICULUM EVALUATION TOOLS

- Assessing Bias in Standards and Curricular Matter (Great Lakes Equity Center)

- Culturally Responsive English Language Arts Curriculum Scorecard (New York University)

- Guidelines for Improving English Language Arts Materials for English Learners (English Learners Success Forum)

- Improving Representation and Diversity in Open Education Materials (OpenStax, 2020)

- The Knowledge Map (Johns Hopkins Institute for Education Policy)

- New York State Culturally Responsive Sustaining Education Framework (New York State Education Department & The New York University Metropolitan Center for Research on Equity and the Transformation of Schools)

- Social Justice Standards – The Teaching Tolerance Anti-Bias Framework (Teaching Tolerance/Southern Poverty Law Center, 2018)

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in schools designated as high-poverty and those with higher populations of Black, Latino, and Native American students are more likely to be academically remediated even when they have demonstrated mastery on core content than their Asian-descended and white counterparts.

Educators' beliefs about students' competence and potential affect the quality of the curriculum students have access to and the outcomes students are able to achieve. Every student having access to high-quality curriculum is a critical first step in moving toward system-level academic change.

Unfortunately, high-quality alone, as currently defined, is insufficient. Many districts already make use of EdReports' evaluations and similar tools to determine the quality of curriculum. But most definitions of high-quality do not consider ways authors may be telling stories or how characters may be represented.

District and state leaders need tools to help them better understand elements of cultural relevance, responsiveness, and sustainability and whether they are embodied in curricula. Fortunately, such evaluation tools are emerging.

For example, the Institute for

Education Policy at Johns Hopkins offers the Knowledge Map, designed to analyze curriculum in terms of the knowledge it offers students about their world and the human condition. It looks at the topics offered in curriculum and, in doing so, tacitly addresses the narratives and messages the curriculum sends, especially in nonfiction texts and units. Through this tool, districts can gain insight into the strengths and challenges of the content of their curriculum.

Leaders should consider what the curriculum contains and what it omits. The omissions are important because it is through understanding what is left out that leaders can help teams explore how to make curriculum more complete. While the Knowledge Map does not explicitly address race, ethnicity, gender, and other factors of representation, it does offer leaders a window into the state of their curriculum and the needs for expanding topics.

Other tools support districts in leaning into cultural relevance, responsiveness, and sustainability, and can help leaders begin to uncover bias in curriculum. Great Lakes Equity Center, New York State Education Department, Learning for Justice

(formerly called Teaching Tolerance), OpenStax, English Learners Success Forum, and New York University all have tools equipping educators with the skills to evaluate curriculum through a culturally responsive and relevant lens. (See list on p. 58.)

By using such tools, system leaders can support building leaders, curriculum leaders, coaches, and classroom teachers in fine-tuning their eyes to see where groups of people are misrepresented or even left out of the stories students are asked to consume in their learning.

KEY QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

When employing tools for evaluating cultural responsiveness, there are several questions to consider:

What is prompting a review of curriculum? You will need clarity before embarking on any review to make sure a review is being done to uncover authentic information, not to satisfy or defend against unfounded accusations.

What are the aims of a curriculum review? This question provides focus, which will allow choosing the proper tool. Not every tool is useful for every type of review.

Who will conduct the curriculum review? A well-rounded group of stakeholders will make the process more transparent and foster good will across the district and in the community.

What support is needed to execute a curriculum review? Training and professional learning are essential to ensure the process is completed within the framework chosen. A lack of professional learning will yield inaccurate results and bias the process. Many tools are designed to be self-directed; however, having the right team to prepare and support evaluators is crucial for a successful analysis.

How will findings be shared? Knowing how and to whom the findings will be shared should be determined in advance as well as the mechanism for sharing.

- Will findings be shared with

District and state leaders need tools to help them better understand elements of cultural relevance, responsiveness, and sustainability and whether they are embodied in curricula.

school board members?
- Will findings be shared with community stakeholders?
- Will findings be shared only with school-based staff?

What funds are needed to execute the review? It is important to be realistic about funding such a project as it will be time-consuming.

- Is the district poised to solicit external funding from a local or national funder to complete this work?

How will the district respond to the findings? The district must have a proactive plan for how to take steps in response to the results. The specific steps should not be determined until the results are known, but it is reasonable to expect that curriculum changes will be needed.

To be responsive and meet students' needs, you might not be able to wait until the state adoption timetable to make changes, so consider how you can take action sooner if necessary. Being prepared fiscally is essential.

Taking these steps in a timely and proactive way messages to the community the importance of this endeavor; sitting on the results for a long time or failing to make changes will only erode trust.

Having an eye toward the logistics of a curriculum review will make the process successful and let district stakeholders know the leader is serious about addressing the need for every student to have access to a high-quality curriculum that is culturally responsive, relevant, and sustaining.

While our nation continues to diversify, students can no longer be

relegated to the margins of learning through staid curricula designed to tell incomplete stories and render them stuck in a wave of stereotypes. Leaders have a responsibility to ensure all students have the opportunity to see themselves and others in the pages of the material they are charged to consume.

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COVID-19's impact on Latinx students

WHAT EDUCATION LEADERS NEED TO KNOW

BY GUADALUPE DÍAZ LARA, LISA M. LÓPEZ, R. GABRIELA BARAJAS-GONZALEZ, AND CYNTHIA GARCIA COLL

Latinx children and their families have been hit particularly hard by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has brought long-standing economic, health, and educational disparities to the forefront (López, Barajas-Gonzales et al., 2020).

Even before the pandemic, systemic racial and social inequities meant that Latinx students had less access to high-quality instruction and teaching than white students, were tracked into less rigorous courses, were met with lower expectations, and ultimately experienced opportunity gaps that hindered educational and economic development (U.S. Department of Education, 2021). The pandemic exacerbated these patterns (Fortuna et al., 2020).

Teaching and learning don't happen in a vacuum — school leaders must be cognizant of these needs and take steps to address them. Research suggests that school leaders should start by prioritizing professional learning

Teaching and learning don't happen in a vacuum — school leaders must be cognizant of these needs and take steps to address them. Research suggests that school leaders should start by prioritizing professional learning for staff, advocating for structural and systemic changes, and building intentional partnerships with families.

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HEALTH AND ECONOMIC IMPACTS

COVID-19 illness has affected Latinx populations more than others. Latinx families make up 18.5% of the U.S population but account for 29.5% of COVID-19 cases, and hospitalizations for Latinx are 4.6 times the rate of their white peers (NIHCM, 2020; Romano et al., 2021).

This is due in large part to disproportionate exposure to COVID-19 illness fueled by systemic racial and social inequities. For example, Latinx families are overrepresented in the essential workforce, which limits their ability to benefit from stay-at-home orders and increases their exposure to COVID-19.

Relatedly, financial hardship from the pandemic is higher among Latinx children and families. Compared to 33% of all U.S. adults, 49% of Latinx adults indicated that either they or someone in their household took a pay cut, lost their job, or both during the pandemic (NIHCM, 2020).

As a result, Latinx families experienced the largest increase in the child poverty rate during the COVID-19 pandemic — an increase of 4.2 percentage points — bringing the current Latinx child poverty rate to 27.3% (Chen & Thomson, 2021). This means that almost one out of every three Latinx children in the U.S. lives in poverty.

Additionally, almost a third (29%) of Latinx families are experiencing three or more accompanying economic and health-related hardships such as unemployment, inability to pay rent or mortgage, food insecurity, physical health problems, symptoms of anxiety or depression, or lack of health insurance as a result of the pandemic (Padilla & Thompson, 2021).

The most economically vulnerable among them are unable to access key safety nets that could help buffer the chronic stress and mental health impacts of COVID-19. For example, many Latinx families were excluded from COVID-19 Economic Relief due to the immigration status of a household member, even though their children are U.S. citizens and entitled to these supports.

At the same time, the health and economic crises of the pandemic compounded resource disparities that already existed in schools serving Latinx children and other marginalized populations (Garcia & Weiss, 2017).

All of these stresses affect children's ability to learn, especially the most vulnerable children, because children with previous trauma or loss are at higher risk to show symptoms of traumatic stress, depression, anxiety, or other mental health problems after COVID-19 (Osofsky & Osofsky, 2018). Younger children are especially

vulnerable given their unique developmental needs (Osofsky et al., 2007).

EDUCATIONAL IMPACTS

Other longstanding systemic disparities also put Latinx children at educational risk during the pandemic. Low-income Latinx children are often segregated into poor schools in low-resource communities. These communities had fewer resources to draw on when it became necessary to shift to remote learning than wealthier schools that were able to distribute computers, provide internet access, and offer other technology to students and families.

Low-income Latinx and Black children were disproportionately more likely to receive low-quality or no instruction during the COVID-19

pandemic, contributing to learning loss as a result of lack of access, limited home support for learning, and disengagement.

A large proportion of Latinx families have lower levels of formal schooling and struggle with reading in English (up to 56% in one study; López, Komaroff et al., 2020). As a result, Latinx families might have been unable to institute in-home teaching, help children with their schoolwork, or provide supplemental educational experiences during the implementation of distance learning (López, Barajas-Gonzales et al., 2020; PIQE, 2020; Sanchez et al., 2020).

Furthermore, about 30% of Latinx students are identified as English learners (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). School districts report having limited numbers of appropriately trained teachers to provide appropriate virtual instruction to English learners, with many schools employing only one English as a Second Language certified teacher (U.S. Department of Education, 2021), who was then expected to be in dozens of virtual classrooms each week. The gap had a particularly large impact on students with disabilities, who lost access to therapies, learning aids, and services necessary to support academic progress during the pandemic (U.S. Department of Education, 2021).

As a result of the exacerbation of systemic racial and social inequities in schools, the average learning loss for Latinx children has been estimated at 9.2 months, and the learning loss for low-income children, of which Latinx children make up a significant percentage, has been estimated at 12.4 months (Dorn et al., 2020).

To address the lost instructional time during COVID, leaders might increase instructional time by extending the school year or day, providing one-on-one tutoring, and offering after-school programing (Sanchez et al., 2020). In addition, they can promote activities that foster healing and belonging for both students and educators.

LEADERSHIP FOR PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

As educators and school systems work together to address and allocate funding such as COVID relief funds to ameliorate the impact of COVID-19, they must understand that going back to business as usual would continue to place Latinx students and their families in a system designed to exclude them and exacerbate the opportunity gap. Achieving success for all students will take rethinking the way things have always been done and making adjustments.

The first step is for school leaders to prioritize and support ongoing professional learning to help teachers understand the experiences, strengths, and needs of Latinx students and families. Latinx children and families represent a heterogeneous group. Teachers and administrators should devote time to understand the uniqueness of Latinx families within their school community. This includes understanding their needs but also recognizing Latinx families' strengths that support their children's learning. This understanding underlies culturally responsive practice.

Professional learning should also help cultivate teachers' understanding of the relationship between systemic racial and social inequities and instructional and educational opportunities for Latinx students.

For example, immigration policies have a disproportionate impact on Latinx families, which often result in policing and deportations and prevent access to safety net services (Barajas-Gonzalez et al., 2021). In addition, 3.7 million U.S. citizen or legal immigrant children living with unauthorized immigrant parents were rendered ineligible for federal COVID relief (Gelatt et al., 2021).

Such experiences increase children's anxiety and depression, impacting their ability to learn. Understanding these factors can help educators understand why their students may have low attendance, seem distracted

or disengaged, or lack the resources to participate fully.

Professional learning should build knowledge of and capacity for effective instructional practices for English learners. Effective instructional practices are critical to addressing their academic and language needs. Previous research has documented that teachers often feel unprepared to teach English learners and have little access to professional development on effective instructional practices, especially those around digital learning.

STRUCTURAL AND SYSTEMIC CHANGES

School leaders can allocate COVID relief funds as well as other funding to take steps to address the systemic racial and social inequities that negatively impact Latinx children. Here are a few of the possibilities.

Implementing dual language instructional models and supporting oral language development builds on the linguistic assets of Latinx students and families so that students can access grade-level content and engage in rich discussion and processing of that content. These strategies are effective practices to address the opportunity gap among Latinx students, specifically those classified as English learners (NASEM, 2017).

Hiring and supporting bilingual/bicultural staff, especially trained community members, can improve direct communication between teachers, school, and parents (Sanchez et al., 2020). These include consistent translation of documents to be available in families' home languages as well as consistent interpretation during school events.

Another step is to compensate teachers and staff for the additional work with Latinx community. This is specifically important for Latinx teachers and staff who often take on additional work to address the needs of Latinx families.

School leaders also play an important role in securing resources to

meet students' comprehensive needs. This should include evidence-based, culturally and linguistically appropriate, trauma-informed school-based mental health services for students, educators, administrators, and staff (Barajas-Gonzalez et al., 2021).

It should also include access to technology. Computer hardware and reliable internet access will continue to be an essential piece of learning even as students return to in-person learning, and currently, too many Latinx students lack those resources (PIQE, 2020; Sanchez et al., 2020). School leaders can be advocates and liaisons who leverage national, state, and local resources to meet these needs.

CONNECTIONS WITH FAMILIES

Too often, Latinx families feel alienated from schools, especially when teachers and leaders do not speak their home language or share aspects of their culture. Strong school-family partnerships do not happen by accident. They are built through intentional, sustained effort and a willingness to listen and learn.

One important step is to involve Latinx families in decision-making. School leaders can survey Latinx families in multiple languages (e.g. indigenous languages) to better understand their strengths, needs, and create convenient and authentic opportunities for them to engage in dialogue, and center their voices by providing spaces for them to serve in leadership roles that have an influence on school- and system-level decisions.

A TIME FOR CHANGE

Latinx children and their families have long experienced restricted access to resources that support their economic well-being, education, and health, and those inequities have been exacerbated by the pandemic.

Although the connection between systemic racial and social inequities and access to high-quality health services is widely recognized, the explicit acknowledgment of the impact of those inequities on educational access is less often acknowledged (Kohli et al., 2017; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2021). School leaders can change that by working together with teachers and other colleagues to make meaningful change for Latinx students.

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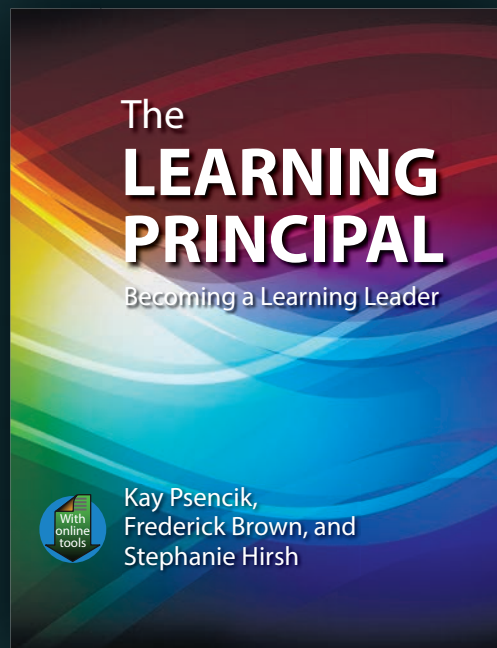
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TOOLS

LEAD WITH EQUITY-FOCUSED TOOLS

Equity-focused tools can help leaders at all levels make progress on the journey to ensuring every student succeeds. Although equity can't be achieved by implementing one-off strategies, the right tools can help leaders build and monitor equitable mindsets, practices, and systems over time.

This issue's tool shows how to incorporate equity and inclusion into goal-setting processes. It can be used to make equity an intentional part of strategic goals at school, district, state, and organizational levels.

For more equity-focused tools, visit *The Learning Professional's* tools archive at **learningforward.org/department/tools/.**

S	M	A	R	T	I	E
Specific	Measurable	Attainable	Results-oriented	Time-bound	Inclusive	Equitable
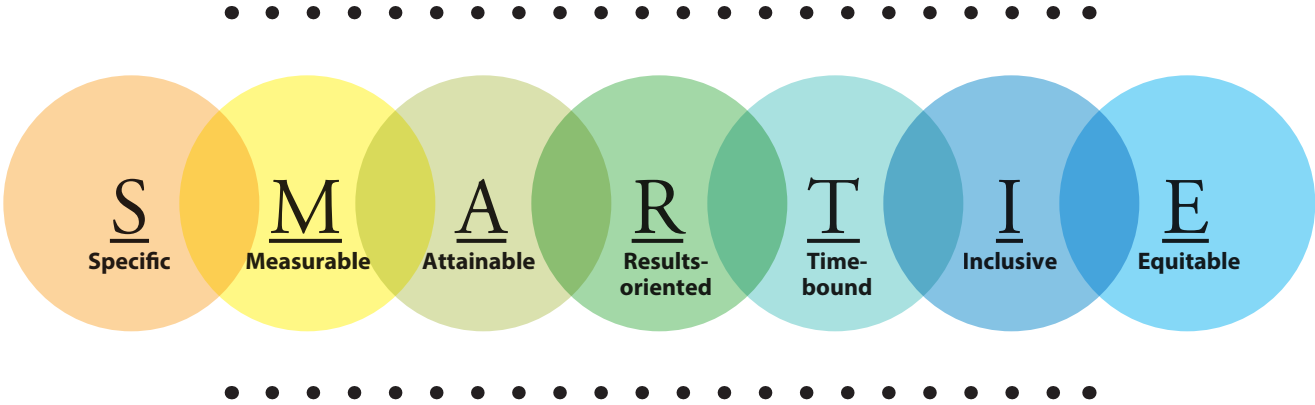
Set a SMARTIE goal to target inclusion and equity

Goal setting is a critical part of the strategic planning process for individual educators and teams at the school and system level. SMART goals are a well-known and often-used framework for ensuring that goals can lead to meaningful change. The letters of the SMART acronym indicate that goals should be *specific, measurable, attainable, results-oriented, and time-bound* (Hirsh & Crow, 2017).

Learning Forward and other organizations have recently begun expanding the SMART goal framework to explicitly incorporate equity and inclusion, through what are known as SMARTIE goals (The Management Center, 2021). SMARTIE goals intentionally center two additional components with the original SMART components:

- **Inclusivity:** The extent to

SMARTIE goals intentionally center two additional components with the original SMART components.

which a goal brings traditionally marginalized people into processes, activities, and decision-making; and

- **Equity:** The extent to which the goal includes an element of fairness or justice that seeks to address systemic injustice, inequity, or oppression.

Because creating SMARTIE goals can help create inclusive and equitable professional learning policies and practices that benefit and support all students and educators, we have begun to apply them in learning networks and tools, such as the *Principal Induction and Mentoring Handbook,* which was created in collaboration

with the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2021).

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HOW TO CREATE A SMARTIE GOAL

1. DEVELOP A SMARTIE GOAL
In collaboration with your colleagues or team members, develop a SMARTIE goal that is aligned with your school or system's vision and strategic priorities for professional learning.
Strategic priority targeted:
Initial draft of goal statement

How is your goal a SMARTIE goal? How is it:

• Specific?	
• Measurable?	
• Attainable?	
• Results-oriented?	
• Time-bound?	
• Inclusive?	
• Equitable?	

Are there any components of a SMARTIE goal that you did not address? If so, list the components you need to add here and then revise your goal statement.

2. DEFINE SUCCESS.
With your team, discuss: How will we define success if we achieve our SMARTIE goal?
What would success look like if you achieve your SMARTIE goal? How will that help you address your overarching strategic goal?
How will you measure progress toward the SMARTIE goal?
When and how will you collect data?
What personnel and resources will you need?
How will you use the information you learn about progress toward your goal to move the work forward?

3. REFLECT ON INCLUSION AND EQUITY.
How was this process different from your usual goal-setting processes? How was it similar?
How is the goal you set or the process for achieving it different as a result of specifying the roles of inclusion and equity?
What did you learn about your school or system's approach to equity and inclusion?
What are the next steps you will take to work toward your SMARTIE goal? How will this inform and support your work toward achieving inclusion and equity more generally?

UPDATES

BYLAWS ELECTION COMING SOON

All Learning Forward members will soon have the opportunity to vote in an election about several bylaws. The organization's bylaws, guidelines by which board members operate to ensure continuity and effective leadership, contain articles that guide membership structure, the role of voting members, and facets of board operations and procedures.

Visit **learningforward.org/board-of-trustees/2022-bylaw-election** to learn more, and look for email updates about this opportunity to engage.

UPDATES

New online learning courses

Learning Forward's new online learning platform has proven to be a big hit for high-quality adult learning in a virtual environment. Participants have met virtually for live, facilitated sessions; asynchronous learning experiences; and group collaboration. The feedback has been positive, so we have several new courses planned for 2022.

Now accepting registrations for

Powerful communication skills for coaches

Led by expert coaches Sharron Helmke and Jennifer Miller, participants will engage in a combination of synchronous and asynchronous learning and coaching practices to enhance their critical coaching skills of self-awareness, listening, questioning, and supporting the critical thinking of others. Both new and experienced coaches will practice critical coaching interactions with support from their colleagues and expert coaches. Course begins Jan. 7.

New courses and cohorts coming soon

For instructional coaches:
- **Coaching for Equity**
- **Virtual Coaches Academy**

For principals:
- **Leveraging Feedback & Coaching**
- **Building a Trusting and Positive Culture**

For more information and registration, visit l**earningforward.org/online-courses**.

LEARNING FORWARD ACADEMY UPDATES

Earlier this year, Learning Forward extended the Academy Program, its flagship professional learning experience, for an additional year so the program's current participants could return to an in-person experience in July 2022.

Since then, Academy attendees in the Classes of 2021 and 2022 have engaged in several learning experiences, including book studies and webinars. Participants will return to in-person learning in July in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

We are recruiting members for the Class of 2024. For more information, email **kristin.buehrig@ learningforward.org**.

UPCOMING WEBINARS

Learning Forward's popular series of timely webinars continues in 2022. Check your email and our social media channels for more details and registration links.

- **Jan. 13:** How districts are using American Rescue Plan funding.

- **Jan. 20:** How student voice and agency can shape professional learning.

- **Jan. 25:** Coaching with impact: A research-practice partnership (in collaboration with Jim Knight).
- **Feb. 10:** Retaining educators as systems transition between remote, hybrid, and in-person learning.
- **Feb. 15:** Professional learning with impact (in collaboration with AIR and the Danielson Group).
- **Feb. 24:** Communication and collaboration in a divided world.

🐦 #TheLearningPro

FEATURED SOCIAL MEDIA POST

Follow us on social media. Share your insights and feedback about *The Learning Professional* by using **#TheLearningPro**.

> **Val Olekshy** @volekshy ⋯
>
> Love the "professional learning ecosystem" in another solid article from Learning Forward. Speaks to our focus on building a culture of learning and comprehensive professional learning planning.
> **cass.ab.ca/planning-for-i...@CASSalberta**
>
> > 🌟 **Learning Forward** @LearningForward Nov 8
> > "When designing & facilitating professional learning, leaders should check whether resources & goals are aligned. For example, they should examine how schedules & routines enable or inhibit collaborative PL." @sarahlouwou ow.ly/5XVb50GIFop#TheLearningPro

NEW WEBSITE AND TOOLS FOCUS ON PROFESSIONAL LEARNING IMPACT

Learning Forward is creating a new website, Powered by Title II, as a way to increase awareness, provide tools and resources, and support the collection, compilation, and sharing of data on the impact of professional learning.

As part of the process, Learning Forward is refreshing tools for Title II advocacy and data collection. A new tool for educators to use in collecting data will be simpler and focused on telling a professional learning story and its impact.

The tool will be integrated with the Voter Voice software for ease of collection. Learning Forward will also publish the tool in a stand-alone format so that it can be shared.

NEW STAFF MEMBER

Chelsea Collins is Learning Forward's new part-time project manager for the Equity-Centered Pipeline Initiative. She will help manage a series of professional learning convenings that Learning Forward will lead for eight district partnership teams over the next two years.

Collins is a state consultant for New Jersey Principals and Supervisors Association, where she leads a team of instructional coaches to provide systems and instructional support, and also leads JerseyCAN's Teacher Leader Policy Fellowship.

Previously, Collins was the 2016 New Jersey State Teacher of the Year and led statewide policy initiatives for the New Jersey Department of Education.
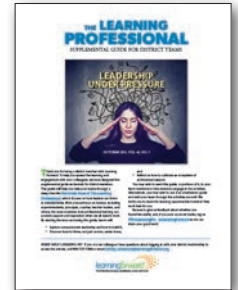
Collins holds a bachelor of arts degree from the Pennsylvania State University, a master of arts degree in teaching elementary education from the College of New Jersey, and is working on a Ph.D. in education.

Write for us

Submit your articles for upcoming issues of *The Learning Professional.* More information and submission guidelines are available at **learningforward.org/the-learning-professional/write-for-us/.**

April 2022: Coaching across contexts. Submission deadline Jan. 15.

June 2022: (Re) setting the standard. Manuscript submissions will not be accepted for this issue. If you would like to suggest an article based on your experience with the Standards for Professional Learning, email **christy.colclasure@learningforward.org** by Feb. 1.

August 2022: Nurturing new teachers. Submission deadline May 1.

October 2022: Teaching difficult topics. Submission deadline July 1.

December 2022: Dismantling racism. Submission deadline Sept. 1.

DISTRICT MEMBERSHIPS

Learning Forward welcomes these new district members: Cherry Creek Schools, Centennial, Colorado; Hattiesburg Public Schools, Hattiesburg, Mississippi; and Littleton Public Schools, Littleton, Colorado. We are also pleased to continue our relationship with renewing district member Oak Park Elementary School District 97 in Oak Park, Illinois.

In addition to other benefits, district members receive an exclusive supplemental guide for each issue of *The Learning Professional*. The short, practice-focused guides include discussion questions and professional learning activities that incorporate and build on articles from each issue. To find out more about the district membership, visit **learningforward.org/membership/** or contact **office@learningforward.org.**

🐦 #TheLearningPro

TWITTER CHAT

Beth Houf, national Principal of the Year, joined authors from the October issue of *The Learning Professional* for a Twitter chat Oct. 28 on how learning leaders can thrive under stress. Participants talked about leading with compassion, modeling learning and growth, and making time for professional learning in these stressful times.

To learn about future Twitter chats, follow us **@learningforward.org #TheLearningPro.**

Beth Houf @BethHouf

Thank you for having me! I hope everyone has a restful weekend! Thank you for all you do! **#thelearningpro**

Learning Forward @LearningForward Oct. 28
Well, that wraps up #TheLearningPro chat for today. What a wonderful hour it has been! Thank you to all who contributed to the rich conversation — we hope you enjoyed it. Special shout out to our co-host @BethHouf & our special guests.

#TheLearningPro

THANK YOU!!

Learning Forward VIRTUAL 2021 ANNUAL CONFERENCE — DEC. 5-7, 2021

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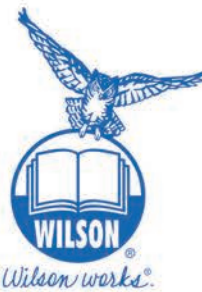
ABOUT LEARNING FORWARD

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.

STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, AND CIRCULATION

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b. Paid circulation (by mail and outside the mail)	1	Mailed outside-county paid subscriptions stated on PS form 3541 (include paid distriution above nominal rate, advertiser's proof copies, and exchange copies)	3255	3301
	2	Mailed in-county paid subscriptions stated on PS form 3541 (include paid distriution above nominal rate, advertiser's proof copies, and exchange copies)		
	3	Paid distribution outside the mails including sales through dealers and carriers, street vendors, counter sales, and other paid distribution outside USPS	108	105
	4	Paid distribution byother classes of mail through the USPS (e.g., First-Class Mail®)	215	200
c. Total paid distribution [Sum of 15 (1), (2), (3), and (4)]			3578	3606
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	3	Free or nominal rate copies mailed at other classes through the USPS (e.g., First-Class Mail)		
	4	Free or niminal rate distribution outside the mail (Carriers or other means)	322	277
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f. Total distribution (Sum of 15c and 15e)			3900	3883
g. Copies not distributed (See instructions to publishers #4 (p. #3))			74	21
h. Total (Sum of 15f and g)			3974	3904
i. Percent paid (15c divided by 15f times 100)			92%	93%
16. Electronic copy circulation			**Average no. copies each issue during preceding 12 months**	**No. copies of single issue published nearest to filing date**
a. Paid electronic copies			8275	9370
b. Total paid print copies (line 15c) + paid electronic copies (line 16a)			11,853	12,976
c. Total print distribution (line 15f) + paid electronic copies (line 16a)			12,175	13,253
e. Percent paid (both print and electronic copies) (16b divided by 16c x 100)			97%	98%

☒ I certify that 50% of all my distributed copies (electronic and print) are paid above a nominal price.

17. Publication of Statement of Ownership
☒ If the publication is a general publication, publication of this statement is required. Will be printed in the December 2021 issue of this publication.

18. Signature and title of editor, publisher, business manager or owner. Tracy Crow, publisher, Learning Forward *(signature)*	Date: Dec. 1, 2021

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:
DATA
IN ACTION

Data are essential for understanding where your system stands with equity and whether you are progressing toward your goals. Several authors in this issue point to the value of data collection and monitoring for multiple components of equity, including culturally responsive curriculum (p. 56), staff diversity (p. 36), and teachers' learning (p. 42).

TO CONSIDER

- What data do you collect that provide insight on equity in your school, district, or organization? What additional data could you collect?

_____
_____
_____

- How are you using that data to inform your efforts to make your system more equitable? How could you use it more intentionally?

_____
_____
_____
_____

STANDARD:
OUTCOMES
IN ACTION

Creating a strategic approach to equity improvement requires establishing a clear definition and vision of equity and setting clear goals for outcomes. Maurice Swinney writes (p. 30) about how Chicago Public Schools' goals are informed by the concept of targeted universalism, "an approach that establishes common goals for the whole community but distinct pathways to reaching those common goals for different groups with different needs." He reports that this approach has brought the community together while helping to ensure that those furthest from opportunity get what they need.

TO CONSIDER

- Does your system incorporate different pathways to common goals? If not, how might shifting to that approach help you progress toward equity for all students?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

- How might the targeted universalism approach be received by your community? Could it help overcome any current barriers to full engagement and collaboration?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

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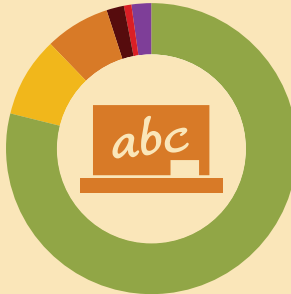**www.learningforward.org/standards-for-professional-learning.**

Nearly half (49%) of U.S. public school students are people of color.[1]
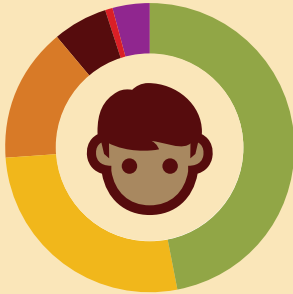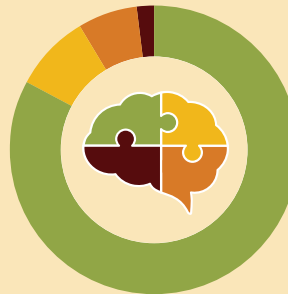

- 47% White
- 27% Hispanic
- 15% Black
- 6% Asian & Pacific Islander
- 1% American Indian/Alaskan Native
- 4% Two or more races

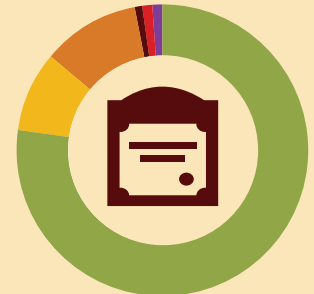**But only 21% of American public school teachers are people of color.[2]**

- 79% White
- 9% Hispanic
- 7% Black
- 2% Asian & Pacific Islander
- <1% American Indian/Alaskan Native
- 2% Two or more races

**Disparities are particularly striking among special education teachers.[3]**

- 88% White
- 9% Hispanic
- 7% Black
- 2% Asian & Pacific Islander

Principals are also disproportionately white.[6]


- 78% White
- 9% Hispanic
- 11% Black
- 1% Asian & Pacific Islander
- <1% American Indian/Alaskan Native
- <1% Two or more races

Charter schools and schools with >75% low-income students have higher percentages of teachers of color.[2]

Legend: Hispanic, Black

	Charter	Low-income schools
Hispanic	16%	17%
Black	10%	14%
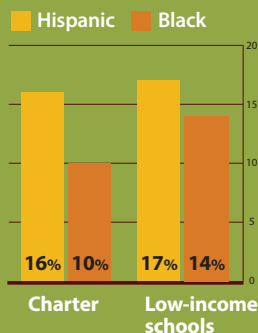
There is more diversity among teacher assistants/paraeducators, suggesting one avenue for recruiting and developing teachers of color.[3]

- 74% White
- 17% Hispanic
- 14% Black
- 8% Asian & Pacific Islander
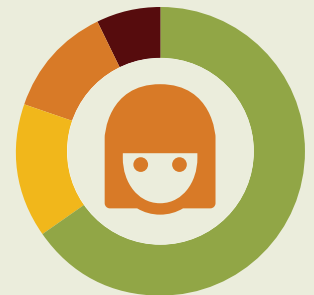
In schools with a majority of Black, Hispanic, or Asian students, about 1/3 of teachers were of the same race, but white teachers were still the majority.[4]

Some indications suggest the racial gap may increase. About 1/3 of Black teachers in a nationally representative sample said they planned to leave their jobs at the end of the 2020-21 school year, compared with 1/4 of all teachers.[5]

Students, schools, and communities benefit from a diverse educator workforce.

For example, for a low-income Black male student in grades 3 through 5, being taught by at least one Black teacher reduces the probability of dropping out by 39%.[8]

Only 10 states have set clear goals for increasing teacher diversity and equity, and only 7 states currently make educator diversity data visible and actionable to stakeholders.[7]

Sources can be found at **learningforward.org/journal/leading-for-equity/mind-the-gap/**. *Note: Data from the National Center for Education Statistics at the U.S. Department of Education are from school year 2017-18. Data from the U.S. Census are from 2020.*

NEW ONLINE LEARNING
FROM LEARNING FORWARD

Advance your knowledge, skills, and practices with guidance from Learning Forward's top practitioners and the highest quality online learning experience available.

Learning Forward's new online learning platform brings participants together to meet virtually for live, facilitated sessions; asynchronous learning experiences; and group collaboration.

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