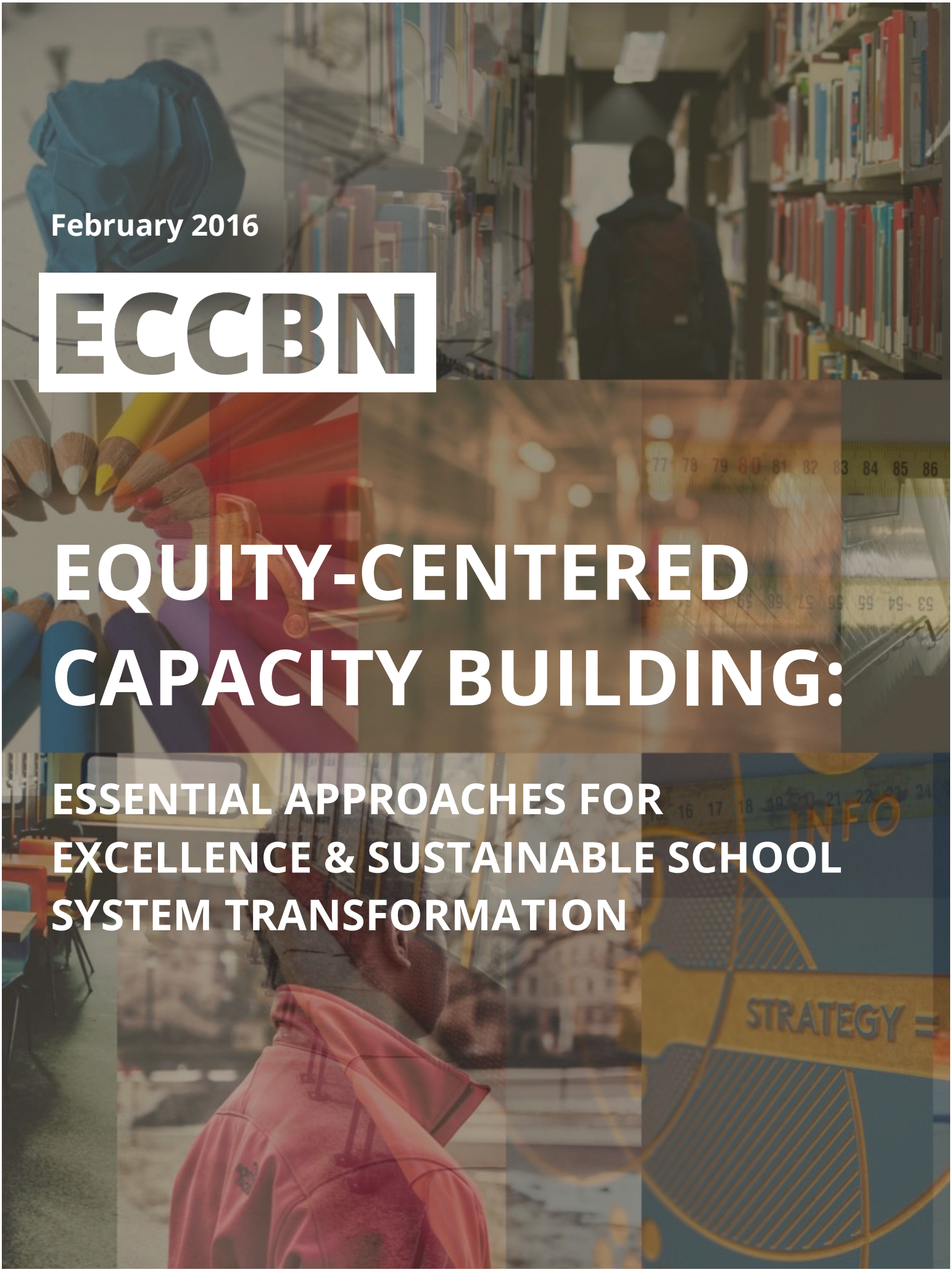


February 2016

ECCBN

EQUITY-CENTERED CAPACITY BUILDING:

ESSENTIAL APPROACHES FOR EXCELLENCE & SUSTAINABLE SCHOOL SYSTEM TRANSFORMATION

ECCBN

The Equity-Centered Capacity Building Network (ECCBN) was formed to unite the efforts and share resources and strategies among equity- and excellence-centered capacity builders and to increase the visibility and impact of capacity-building approaches that promote deep and sustainable school and systems change.

Network members currently consist of regional and national organizations with: a focus on transforming whole school systems, in addition to individual schools; targeted approaches to equity, excellence and cultural responsiveness deeply embedded into every aspect of their work; local credibility as well as national reach and influence; a strong desire to work collaboratively; and a track record of success with school systems locally, regionally and nationally. Future membership anticipates including local individual and institutional capacity builders, as well as other regional and national providers who meet these criteria.

Network members have included the following organizations and their representatives:

- National Urban Alliance for Effective Education (NY)
- Center for Culturally Responsive Urban Education at the University of Colorado, Denver (CO)
- University of Kansas, Special Education Department (KS)
- Panasonic Foundation (NJ)
- Intercultural Development Research Association (TX)
- Mid-Atlantic Equity Consortium, Inc. (MD)
- The Delaware Valley Consortium for Excellence & Equity (DE)
- Education Alliance at Brown University (RI)
- National Equity Project (CA)

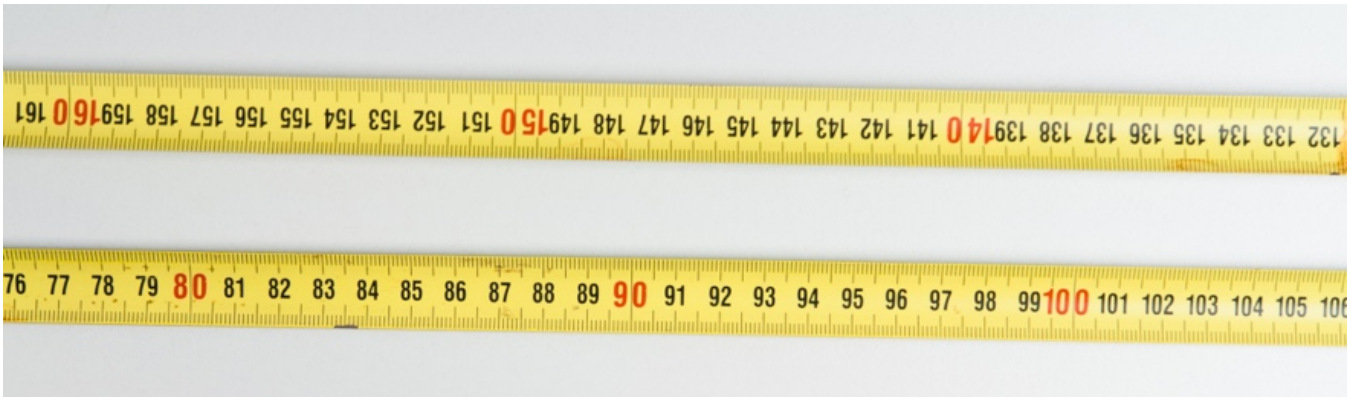
What We Do

1. We seek to promote evidence-based approaches to equity, quality, cultural responsiveness and partnerships with students and communities.
2. We believe that systems capacity-building methods that drive equity and excellence can overcome the most daunting challenges education, students and communities face.
3. We have seen that students of color and those from families with modest means excel academically, socially and personally when whole systems are transformed to focus on equity and excellence. This volume articulates how they, and all students, can succeed.

www.capacitybuildingnetwork.org

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Editor and Curator: Sheryl Petty, Movement Tapestries and Management Assistance Group
Co-Editor: Susan Shaffer, Mid-Atlantic Equity Consortium
Editorial Advice and Support: Maria Pacheco, Education Alliance at Brown University
Volume Host: The Education Trust



INTRODUCTION

By **Sheryl Petty,** Movement Tapestries and Management Assistance Group

---

Systems capacity building approaches that drive both ***equity*** and ***excellence*** can transform the most daunting challenges educators, students and communities face.[i] From implementing the Common Core (or other state standards) and new assessment systems to evaluating the efficacy of teachers and administrators, partnering in skillful ways with parents and communities, allocating resources efficiently and equitably, and ensuring that curriculum and instruction deeply reflect the wisdom of multi-ethnic communities, ***equity-centered capacity building*** brings a set of strategies and perspectives that deepen every approach to school system improvement. The Equity-Centered Capacity Building Network (ECCBN) was formed to unite efforts and share resources and strategies with educational leaders and change agents in school systems and communities across the U.S. [ii]

ECCBN sees the purpose of education as to help youth and adults reach their full potential and use their strengths to support thriving communities. This requires varied skills, including academic, social, emotional, cross-cultural, multi-linguistic, self-efficacy and change agency — competencies that promote multifaceted college, career and life readiness and reflect broadened notions of "success" when equity and excellence are skillfully combined.

Many seek to show the interdependency of equity and excellence, but few resources exist that illuminate the intricacies of implementing rigorous, evidence-based approaches to equity, quality, cultural responsiveness, and partnership with students and communities in a process of continuous reflection and improvement. Too often, approaches to transforming systems are bifurcated, and support for effective implementation is available from a fragmented field of capacity building providers who compete for the finite resources that schools, school systems and states can access.

Attention to continuous improvement cycles and culturally responsive practice (for example) are core competencies for any capacity building provider. Yet, the core competencies of equity- and excellence-driven systems improvement approaches require understanding the *equity implications* of systemic

change. For example, in areas such as *opportunity-to-learn* (including student placement, resource distribution, disciplinary policies and practices, school climate, and strategic use of time), or *assessment and accountability systems*, understanding how the dynamics of power, race and socioeconomics influence perception, communication, data analysis, decision-making, intervention design and implementation, and the internal and external politics of school system functioning is essential and requires many years of on-the-ground, in-system expertise to adequately address. These areas related to race, power and socioeconomics too often combine with the technical challenges of building adequate assessment and evaluation systems and developing and adopting effective, equitable policies, to stall even the best transformative intentions.

Lack of collective *comfort* and *rigorous skill* with these combined competencies is undermining the urgent transformations needed in our schools, systems and communities. There is much work to do to:

1. introduce these rigorous but fragmented communities of practice to one another,
2. develop the courage and humility to seek out and access one another's expertise to benefit students and school systems, and
3. urge the funding and policy worlds to incentivize joint, complementary approaches.

A FIELD-BUILDING STRATEGY

Organizations providing capacity building are often prompted to expand and incorporate approaches into portfolios of services without adequate staff capacity, funding, support for long-term partnering across expertise areas, or deep expertise in newly added focal areas. The funding world can incentivize capacity builders to strategically *learn from* and *complement* one another's expertise, instead of promoting a field that competes to support school systems and garner funding. Given the great need and demand for educational improvement, this *field-building* strategy for capacity building is a core component of transforming systems. It requires skillfully connecting the following (sometimes overlapping, sometimes fragmented) capacity building communities of practice:

1. *Equitable, Cultural and Relational*: these approaches focus on organizational culture; values, beliefs, expectations and relationships; context, history and politics; cultural responsiveness; authentic community partnership; power analysis and analysis of structural inequity patterns and practices as they relate to every aspect of school system functioning
2. *Structural and Technical*: these approaches focus on continuous improvement; the process of planning and systems change over time; collaboration structures for systematic, joint reflection; structural arrangements, including strategic use of time; systems thinking and understanding; and technical evaluation metrics that support these areas
3. *Functional*: these approaches focus on the core functional areas of school systems such as curriculum, instructional practice, socio-emotional learning for youth and adults, human resource management, finance, student assessment systems, and communications, among other areas.

Each of these communities of practice works in rigorous, evidence-based ways. When pursued in their most robust manner, they include teachers, principals, students, school site and central office staff, system leaders, boards, parents/families and communities working collaboratively to successfully undertake their systems change work. We can evolve our collective understanding and standards as a field such that *only capacity building approaches that skillfully combine these three domains could be considered "high quality,"* as these three areas are not mutually exclusive, and actually require one another to function well.

This volume seeks to contribute to this expanded understanding of capacity building and to inform *effective implementation* of the *Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)*, the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), as well as efforts such as the U.S. Department of Education's Equity Initiative focused on educator quality. It illuminates many existing approaches to supporting schools, systems, communities and states in the U.S. The authors work within and across capacity building communities of practice, combining and blending these areas of expertise to provide the highest quality support.

This volume will support the work of:

- practitioners working inside school systems at all levels with a lens toward whole systems improvement;
- capacity builders and technical assistance providers, particularly those who are struggling with or seeking to blend these domains of practice;
- funders supporting capacity building efforts;
- policymakers and policy advocates seeking to deepen their understanding of effective and sustainable approaches to change; and
- community organizers and community capacity builders who are partnering with school systems toward equitable transformation.

STRUCTURE OF THE VOLUME

Drawing on experience across multiple states, systems and the federal level, Janice Jackson (formerly of the National Equity Project; former Deputy Assistant Secretary, US Department of Education) and Monette McIver (The Dana Center, University of Texas) open the volume with a focus on the opportunities and challenges facing school districts when undertaking systemic change initiatives with a focus on equity and excellence.

Peter Senge (Sloan School of Management at MIT and *SoL Education Partnership*) and Mary Scheetz (*Waters Foundation;* former Assistant Superintendent) follow this with examples of organizational culture change and adult transformation in systems, including socio-emotional literacy and cultural responsiveness for educators. Shelley Zion shares state-level perspectives and approaches to capacity building for supporting school systems within and across states.

Sonja Brookins Santelises (*The Education Trust*; former Chief Academic Officer, *Baltimore City Public Schools*) then shares with us part of Baltimore's journey toward implementing the Common Core Learning Standards with a focus on equity, quality and rigor. Elizabeth Kozleski and Molly Baustien Siuty (*University of Kansas*) follow with a focus on requirements in preparing and developing effective teachers who address marginalization.

Bradley Scott (*Intercultural Development Research Association,* Texas) discusses the history, impact, current state of and possibilities with regional Equity Assistance Centers around the country. Yvette Jackson (*National Urban Alliance for Effective Education*; former Executive Director of Instruction and Professional Development, New York City Public Schools), focuses on the core of instructional practice, curriculum, student voice and the relationship between cognition, culture, expectations and beliefs. June Rimmer (*Center for Educational Leadership*, University of Washington; former Chief Academic Officer) discusses approaches to principal development, capacity building and support.

Larry Leverett (*Panasonic Foundation*; former Superintendent) ends the volume with a focus on the role of boards and governance in effective, equitable implementation and system capacity building, and the capacity building needs of governance bodies.[iii]

Our goal in this introductory volume is to describe some of what we've learned as capacity builders working collaboratively with our colleagues to transform schools and systems across the country. Our approaches integrate equity and excellence across the work of many, many programs and partnerships with schools, systems and districts nationally. We invite your energy and expertise as we work together to deepen our ability to support development of the capacities each person needs for their own fulfillment and to contribute to a thriving, healthy society.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We are grateful for the generosity of The Education Trust in providing communications support for the publication of this volume. Managing Editor Robin Harris, former Vice President of Government Affairs and Communications Deborah Veney, Vice President of K-12 Policy & Practice Sonja Brookins Santelises, Senior Web Editor Anneliese Bruner, Production and Design Assistant Allie Nambo, Administrative Assistant Ebony Daughtry and Communications Director Nicolle Grayson have been invaluable in their patience, expertise and commitment to the production of this volume. Thank you!

---

[i] Sheryl Petty, "Supporting Sustainable Improvement in School Systems: Capacity Building for Equity and Excellence," in *Opening the Doors to Opportunity for All: Setting a Research Agenda for the Future,* Select Series Essays from the AIR Research Roundtable on Equity and Opportunity in Education (Washington, D.C.: The Equity Project, American Institutes for Research, January 2015), 64-74, available at: http://www.air.org/sites/default/files/OpeningTheDoors-EquityProject-Jan2015.pdf

[ii] The Equity-Centered Capacity Building Network (ECCBN) was formed to unite the efforts and share resources and strategies among equity- and excellence-centered capacity builders and to increase the visibility and impact of capacity-building approaches that promote deep and sustainable school and systems change. Network members include the National Urban Alliance for Effective Education; the Center for Culturally Responsive Urban Education at the University of Colorado, Denver; the Equity Alliance at Arizona State University; University of Kansas Special Education Department; the Panasonic Foundation; the Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA); the Mid-Atlantic Equity Consortium; the Delaware Valley Consortium for Excellence & Equity; the Education Alliance at Brown University; (and recently the National Equity Project). Network

members currently consist of regional and national organizations with: a focus on transforming whole school systems, in addition to individual schools; targeted approaches to equity, excellence and cultural responsiveness deeply embedded into every aspect of their work; local credibility as well as national reach and influence; a strong desire to work collaboratively; and a track record of success with school systems locally, regionally and nationally. Future membership anticipates including local individual and institutional capacity builders, as well as other regional and national providers who meet these criteria.

[iii] Follow-up volumes will include perspectives on areas not covered in this introductory issue, such as excellence and equity-centered approaches to data and assessment, educator preparation and development, and community capacity building from colleagues such as Oona Chatterjee and the Center for Popular Democracy, and others.

USING EQUITY-CENTERED CAPACITY BUILDING TO ADVANCE SCHOOL SYSTEM IMPROVEMENT

By **Janice Jackson,** National Equity Consultant, California;
and **Monette McIver**, Dana Center, University of Texas at Austin

---

Public schools are a key institution for preparing the nation's youth to participate in democracy, enter the economy, make a living wage and live a fulfilling life. Consequently, stakeholders at every level — classrooms, schools and districts/charter management organizations — are obliged to model equitable strategies that make the needs of all the stakeholders in the internal and external district community, a priority. Equity-driven capacity building is expressly attuned to who is being served and the social, political and cultural context in which the organization is situated. Meaningful use of *the lens of equity* requires leaders to continuously ask, "Who is being well-served, and who is left out or harmed by the policies and practices of the organization?" Leaders for equity are committed to interrupting policies, practices and procedures that, explicitly or implicitly, perpetuate unequal outcomes for children who are furthest away from opportunity.

The work of interrupting entrenched systems often requires redefining "success" and reframing how we understand problems and develop solutions. And although student academic success is important, it is not the only way success should be evaluated. The school organization must also look at the psycho-social development of students, the engagement of employees and families in setting the vision and direction for the system, and the way policies, practices, procedures and inclusion practices are applied to the achievement of the vision.

This article draws on our decades-long experience and research working in school systems around the country. We discuss how to utilize and move beyond solely technical and structural approaches to

improving school systems, and how to blend such approaches with a focus on the social, cultural and political dimensions of systems change.

IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES TO USING AN EQUITY LENS IN DISTRICTS & APPROACHES TO CAPACITY BUILDING AT MULTIPLE SYSTEM LEVELS

School Boards and Governance

Elected school boards govern most district systems. As such, board membership can change dramatically. Several school boards in Colorado recently underwent significant shifts in political makeup, resulting in major shifts in policy, ranging from altering curriculum to promoting school vouchers (Healy, 2014; Hess & Eden, 2013). The voucher program initiated by the Douglas County School Board would permit parents to use taxpayer funds to enroll students in private schools, but the program was met with significant opposition. In fact, the program awaits a Colorado Supreme Court judgment.

As another example, school boards may champion education philosophy that conflicts with the prevailing beliefs of district personnel, and as a result, district staff members may disagree with the direction of the school board, and such disagreements may result in public conflict and high turnover of teachers, school administrators, superintendents, and other staff, often resulting in turmoil. For instance, the Jefferson County School Board, a large urban district east of Denver, Colorado, attempted to modify its history curriculum, moving away from a focus on Advanced Placement content to one more aligned with the school board's proposed direction that some interpreted as a rewrite of history by eliminating attention to dissent and emphasizing obedience. The backlash the Jefferson County School Board received became a national spectacle with students skipping class and protesting in the streets; a vision reflected in the national news for several weeks in Fall 2014 (Healy, 2014).

In some districts, this type of change can mean that strong leadership is missing, important decisions needed to improve the school system languish, and a general lack of direction ensues. In this last example, the school board relented, but the long-term effects of this and other decisions are still not known.

Access

Some school districts once characterized by inclusivity and diversity, within and across schools, are now more focused on encouraging greater use of charter schools and vouchers (Layton, 2014). To be sure, charter schools and vouchers offer many students and families access to types of schools and education opportunities that may not be associated with all public schools ordinarily. But while these alternative education settings give students and parents options, they often are not accessible to *all* students in the system, particularly those with limited financial means or students with various learning disabilities. A district may offer an array of charter schools, but too often it is up to the parents to provide transportation to and from these systems. Further, charter schools have been roundly criticized for selective enrollment, even though this observation has been challenged in a variety of settings (Angrist, Pathak & Walters, 2013). An equitable system would give students and parents clear and easy access to quality programs that fulfill the promise of academic success for *all* students.

Resources

For some time, Heifetz and Linsky (2004) have considered the technical challenges education leaders face. In their view, technical challenges, though numerous, are routine and can often be solved through the collective knowledge of experts or of those in leadership positions. A district-level example is the effective use of resources to meet student needs. A district's capacity to hire teachers and administrators, as well as to purchase textbooks and technology, is based largely on funding from available tax revenue. While school funding formulas vary from state to state, most formulas are based on available tax revenue, including property, state income, and sales taxes. Districts with a limited tax base often have access to federal dollars to augment their funding sources, but these are the districts that serve student populations with increased needs associated with poverty.

This additional funding is helpful, but given the depth and range of social and emotional supports that districts must attend to, education leaders do not often have the freedom and resources to focus on critical and enriching extracurricular activities similar to their counterparts in more affluent districts. As such, additional funding in neighborhoods living in poverty must be used in ways that are not necessary in affluent communities. In addition, districts serving communities with high poverty often struggle to generate the revenues needed to attract and keep a strong teaching force, administrators and support staff. Further, rural and small districts may have limited access to a strong teaching force by virtue of their remote locations, and administrators find that they must wear multiple hats.

APPROACHES TO CAPACITY BUILDING

In spite of these obstacles, districts must carry on with the work of educating students. Toward this end, districts engage in a number of practices to build the internal capacity needed to support quality education. These capacity building activities occur at classroom, school and district levels. Research demonstrates that quality ***teachers*** in every classroom positively affect student achievement (Dean, Hubbell, Pitler & Stone, 2011). Even more, ***school leaders*** who encourage school-level collegiality and professionalism among their teaching force create a respectful environment conducive to ongoing professional growth and development (Marzano, 2003). And finally, ***district leaders*** who appreciate the length of time needed for substantive change set challenging and achievable expectations for improvement. These district leaders also provide resources such as time for collaboration and funding that enable teachers to visit peer classrooms.

The following sections briefly describe several of the pivotal activities for using an equity lens grounded in excellence at each of these levels: *classrooms*, *schools* and *systems and governing bodies*.

Classroom

<u>The Role of Standards</u>

In most states, the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) are the new bar for what students should know and be able to apply at the end of a given grade. Whether or not a state is using the CCSS or another set of standards, they should be clearly articulated and used as the benchmark for student learning. The following questions should be addressed by the leadership and staff:

- What are the expectations of students that undergird the standards?
- How are the standards similar and different from what was expected of students in the past?
- What is required of me to ensure that students master the standards?
- What training and support will teachers and school administrators be provided to support the effective implementation of these standards?
- What are the *strengths* and *needs* of our specific students — by racial, language, socioeconomic and other key factors — that will come into play in implementing the new standards?

Learning About Students and Social-Emotional Development

Using an equity lens and perspective, teachers must hold high expectations for each of their students and demonstrate their belief in each student's potential. These expectations should also be based on a significant and growing understanding of each student's strengths and challenges, academically, socially and culturally. This response is deeper than surface level differentiation. It means knowing the "stuff" of each student's life and using it to engage students in learning. It also means paying attention to the multiple parts of each student's identity as the student sees himself/herself. Our identity is socially constructed and goes beyond our physical features. Educators are required to pay attention to the protected classes as defined by the federal government, yet identity encompasses these and additional areas, including: race, class, gender, socioeconomic level, family history, religion, sexual orientation, language, disability, migration status, ethnicity, geography/region and cultural practices.[i]

Supporting students' socio-emotional development promotes the competencies students need to successfully navigate school and life. The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL)[ii] defines five core competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. According to CASEL, this skill-building is most effective when teachers work to embody these skills themselves, and when they incorporate social and emotional learning skills into academic lessons as well as in separate lessons specifically focused on the development of social and emotional skills. In addition, it remains essential to students to develop a strong sense of self and learn about working with people who may be different than themselves not only in widely diverse school systems and communities, but in all communities.[iii]

Expanded Uses of Data and Deeper Student Engagement in Learning

Gathering data needs to be an ongoing process, including robust information about students: *what they understand, their interests, what they can do with what they know, what they need to learn and how they learn*. Once gathered, this information can be used to shape instruction. This ongoing process of data gathering should also be done in partnership with students so that they begin to understand how they learn and how they can continue to improve. Engaging students in this way helps build a sense of agency in their learning process in deeper ways, by no longer focusing solely on the actions of teachers and other adults.

Instructional Practice

Well-trained and competent teachers significantly affect student academic success. Teachers have a collection of instructional strategies at their disposal that positively affect student achievement (Dean, Hubbell, Pitler & Stone, 2011). In addition to using standards as a guide star, learning about students, adult and youth socio-emotional development, and deepened uses of data, these categories of instructional strategies include:

- Setting objectives and providing feedback
- Reinforcing effort and providing recognition
- Cooperative learning
- Cues, questions and advanced organizers[iv]
- Non-linguistic representations[v]
- Summarizing and note-taking
- Assigning homework and providing practice
- Identifying similarities and differences[vi]
- Generating and testing hypotheses[vii]

While effective use of these strategies can increase student achievement, teachers must be vigilant in their use. For example, simply putting students into groups does not constitute cooperative learning. As Dean and colleagues (2011) explain, cooperative learning must include support for skill-building in positive interdependence (i.e., skills for effectively working in teams) and individual accountability. Without these essential elements, cooperative learning may actually interfere with student learning. Such professional practices as multiple professional learning opportunities and classroom observations can encourage greater fidelity to this and other classroom instructional practices.

School

Seeing and Being Seen: Supporting Adult Learning

The school principal is a key element in successful schools (Sebring, et al., 2006). The school leader must have a deep understanding of his/her role in supporting the development of a *school environment in which all members are clear about the purpose of their work and have a shared vision of success for their work in support of students*. Staff who share the same grades and subjects should have a common understanding of high-quality instruction that leads students to mastery of the content and its application (Johnson, 2015). Visiting classrooms during the school day provides site leaders with an essential window into what is actually happening for children and adults in the building, by witnessing teachers' instructional strategies and students' responses. Seeing and feeling the flow of classrooms provides information about practices and outcome patterns for students and enables leaders to plan and guide staff in continuous improvement.

Professional development (PD) activities can also then be shaped around real needs and not around topics that don't address a specific school need. Too often topics for professional development are chosen based on the ideas circulating at professional conferences or are centrally driven (i.e., the "flavor of the month"). They are not customized to the needs of particular school staff. Classroom visits enable site leaders to determine appropriate and meaningful supports for teachers and staff as well as discover strengths that can be shared across the school. Engaging educators in meaningful and research-based professional learning opportunities can improve student outcomes. Districts, schools and individual educators must monitor use of learning from their professional development experiences in thoughtful and structured ways. Even more, the "lag time" between professional learning opportunities and the measurable impact on teacher practice and student learning varies, often taking extended periods of time to realize a meaningful effect. Changing one's teaching practice takes time. A teacher needs to try what is learned in professional development, receive feedback from colleagues and school leaders, assess its success with students and make needed adjustments.

Another important aspect of improvement at the school level is monitoring the *implementation of instructional strategies* learned in PD to ensure fidelity to the practices as well as their effectiveness on student achievement. Instructional practice should be enhanced as educators engage in one or several professional learning experiences, such as professional learning communities; "lesson study," that is, collaboratively writing lessons, reviewing the lessons in action in classrooms, and then debriefing the lesson to highlight strengths and areas for improvement; and/or online classes. It is important to determine the *depth and spread of implementation* and to gather data about how the strategies learned during professional development experiences impact student learning. Hence, it is essential that all who are affected by professional training clearly understand *what* practices they will be expected to implement, *why* those strategies will improve practice, *how* to implement the strategies, and *when* specific milestones that support implementation should be met. As implementation is reviewed, a monitoring plan should include what and how implementation data will be collected and a clearly defined decision-making process for making adjustments.

Marzano (2003) further noted that *collegiality* and *professionalism* have a positive effect on student achievement. A focus on these areas recognizes the importance of staff support for one another and the expertise that staff members bring to the school. School leaders establish the norms for how all staff members will manage their conduct and behavior, encourage teachers to participate in and contribute to decisions and provide the resources and expectations for professional learning activities (Dean & Parsley, 2010).

Collective Responsibility for Student Learning, High Expectations & Relevant Curricula

A great deal is known about what it takes to develop and maintain a school with high achievement for its students. Critical is a sense of shared responsibility across the school for the success of each and every child, no matter their background or classroom. Diamond, et. al., (2004) noted that most of the literature about teachers' expectations for student achievement was presented as an individual endeavor. Building on the work of Lee and Smith (1996) and others that put forward the notion of *collective responsibility for student learning*, the education field is now more aware of the role of race and social class in shaping teachers' expectations for student performance, as well as teachers' sense of their own role in influencing student success. Diamond et al. found that in schools with high numbers

of African American students and students living in poverty, expectations held by teachers for students were lower and a sense of collective responsibility for the success of all students was lower than in schools with high numbers of students from advantaged groups. Educators we've worked with over the years have expressed a similar concern about the prevalence of deficit- vs. asset-based thinking about students of color and those living in poverty.

To move from an individualistic approach to teaching to one of shared responsibility, principals can structure time for staff to work together to develop *shared values*, deepened understanding of students' strengths, gifts and lives, shared knowledge about their work, and encourage staff to be thought partners for one another. Knowing that collaboration does not happen on its own, principals can introduce teachers to tools and protocols to support the collaborative process. The principal can ground these opportunities in *adult learning theory* and give thought to the learning needs of the teachers as individuals and as a collective.

Principals should also attend to *staff culture* and promoting a "safe space" for staff to discuss *any* areas of concern. This approach to culture-building celebrates successes and looks honestly at difficult challenges that are social, cultural and political. Too often, there are unmentionables or elephants in the room that prevent honest conversations, such as the over- or underrepresentation of certain subgroups of students in disciplinary actions, special education, gifted and talented classes, and the distribution of resources across students, schools and neighborhoods. Site leaders carry responsibility for developing and supporting an environment that provides a sense of psychological safety for adults and children to put the unmentionables on the table. Staff can be guided through frank conversations about and with the children and families the school serves, and high-quality professional development can also include teaching about structural and systemic inequity, and how privilege and power impact educator practice and perceptions of students and their families.

Furthermore, opportunities can be provided for *staff to learn about the cultures of their students*. Teachers can invite children and families to share stories of their lives outside of school, and in this way, the world of the children and families is brought into the learning process. A powerful way to do this is through parent/family teacher conferences where children participate. These conversations can be structured to go beyond children's academic progress. Parents can be invited to share stories about their family and community, and children can speak about their experience of learning and of school. *Storytelling* is a powerful way to create safe space for deeper conversation, relationship-building and for people to learn about one another's assets and incorporate that knowledge into the learning process.

Knowledge of children's lives should be incorporated into the work of classrooms beginning with the physical environment and moving into the instructional strategies used by teachers.[viii] The *curriculum should be culturally responsive*, designed around the students in the classroom, and include resources that help them learn about their own culture and the cultures of others. Literature, art, history and social studies are strong first steps, including having books, stories and visual art that demonstrate to children the richness of their own cultures. Extending this representation to science, mathematics and all subject areas is important for telling the stories of people from a variety of identity groups who have contributed to knowledge in the content area being studied. All children should see connections to their own lives in all school-wide curricula.

Diversity of Instructional and Assessment Strategies

Site leaders can support teachers in using data to determine the most appropriate instructional strategies to be used with students in their classrooms, and ascertain how the school is progressing as a whole through the implementation of these strategies. Teachers should be provided with opportunities to share instructional strategies and receive feedback on their lesson plans and tasks that are assigned to students. *Interdisciplinary teaching and project based learning* enable students to see the connections across content areas and deepen their learning (Blumenfeld et al., 1991). Students engaging in group work learn from each other. A variety of experiences to assess student learning can easily be built into the projects, including standardized tests as one of an array of progress measures.[ix]

There should be a shared understanding of how to assess student learning that includes *real-time assessments* that allow students to relish what they have learned, and to revisit places where they are not yet clear. A notion of continuous improvement and learning from one's mistakes becomes an important part of learning for youth and adults. All students can be provided with opportunities to select ideas they would like to explore and opportunities for enrichment. *Students can then be supported to realize what they know, where they are uncertain, and how to close the gap*.

Building a Staff Representative of Students and Their Families

In schools using an equity lens and grounded in excellence, the staff and community are involved in the selection of new staff members. While staff can be broadly diverse, there is a commitment to bring on individuals that are representative of the community and who have a deep understanding of the challenges the school is facing. There is an additional commitment to search for innovative individuals who think in new ways to uncover solutions to the challenges the schools face. There is a shared responsibility for the introduction of new staff to the building and planned support as they become members of the school community. It is important that they understand the current culture, but are not afraid to raise questions when inequities become apparent, to help the school culture become more equitable and high quality in support of every student.

Matching Teachers' Expertise and Skill With the Children They Teach

While longevity in the system or the school is used to make teacher assignments to grades or classrooms, teachers' expertise and skill sets should drive placements. These skill sets should include the technical aspects of curriculum design, and assessment *for* and *of* learning, as well as culturally responsive instruction and assessment approaches, drawing on students' lives and strengths in the teaching process, and effectively partnering with families. The district/charter management organization's (CMO) best teachers should be placed with students with the greatest academic and support needs, and these (and all) teachers should be given the supports they need to provide a quality education for each and every student in their care. Attention should be given to which teachers are most skilled at guiding struggling students to mastery, as determined by data from student feedback, formative assessments and standardized tests. Such teachers also build relationships with students and their families, in addition to ensuring that instructional strategies are matched to student strengths and needs. The skills and approaches of the most successful teachers can also be shared with other staff to support building their capacity and efficacy with struggling students.

Engaging Families and Community as Partners

Site leadership should have a deep understanding of the children, their families and the local community. They must set clear expectations that these are collective partners in children's success and the success of the school. This perspective has not been held by the majority of educators in the past. Site leaders must demonstrate what such a commitment to partnership means and work with staff to develop and implement policies, practices and procedures that welcome authentic engagement with all stakeholders. Representatives of families can have positions on a school's site council or instructional leadership team. Structures and protocols can be used in meetings to create safety for student, family and community members to participate as equal partners with staff. School leadership and staff can develop opportunities for parents to learn from teachers what children are expected to learn and how parents can support that learning.[x] The Common Core and other state standards are a mystery to many parents. Several districts are using "Parent Academies" in which family members meet with teachers and experience lessons that the teachers are using with students in their classrooms. Participants report that they better understand what their children are learning in school and how they can support them at home. They also talk about the value of connecting with other parents and families. The teacher makes clear what knowledge and skills students are learning and why they are important. They also explain the strategies that they are using and discuss what families can do at home.

District / Charter Management Organization (CMO)

District/CMO leaders must be clear and unwavering about teaching and learning as the core work of school systems. Senior leadership provides supports for principals/school site leaders and teachers in improving their practice. No matter what role an individual at the district level holds, each role must be considered in relation to how it supports the work of teachers, classrooms, and the mastery and thriving of each student.

Clarity About the Meaning of High-Quality Instruction and Support

Senior leadership leads the district's discussion and understanding about the meaning of quality teaching, including: what one should expect to see from teachers and students when visiting classrooms; how we know what students understand and what they can do with what they know; and to what degree implementation of successful practices is taking hold across the district. Senior leadership provides supports for principals/school site leaders and teachers in improving their practice. For instance, they work with site leaders, teachers and the community to provide sample lesson plans that are culturally relevant, as well as access to supplemental materials to support those plans.

Using the Lens of Equity

The use of an equity lens must be at the foundation of a district's work. This means that all levels of the system should be clear about the meaning of equity in relationship to their own roles. Keeping the community context in view as system-wide decisions are made is of paramount importance, which includes taking into account the various demographics of the children and their families (e.g., race, class, neighborhood differentials and power dynamics). In addition, continual attention should be paid

to looking for patterns of unequal outcomes of district policies, practices and procedures, particularly in such areas as disproportionality of implementation of the discipline code of conduct, assignment to Special Education, and "disfavored"[xi] students in higher level classes.

A Systems Approach

Leaders must see that the district/organization develops, implements and evaluates the policies and practices for building a stellar workforce. In particular, there should be an appropriate system for recruiting, inducting, developing and evaluating school site and district leaders and staff; district/organization leadership should place a premium on individuals who understand the community context; and schools should be supported to develop a diverse and collaborative workforce.

Reducing Siloing Across Departments: Improving Coherence & Collaboration

Often districts/CMOs function in silos, with each department focused on its own work without regard to how it relates to the district's core purpose of learning and teaching. In many districts, the individuals who supervise school principals report to a different cabinet member than the individuals who are guiding curriculum and instruction. This can contribute to a lack of coordination about what schools are expected to do around teaching and learning. Those who supervise principals may not be tying their conversations and supports to the expectations of the curriculum and instruction leaders. In order to shift the siloed approach, top leadership needs to set clear expectations and provide professional development and coaching support to help staff transition in how to accomplish their work using more collaborative approaches. Senior leadership can begin by supporting *principal supervisors*, as well as *directors of curriculum and instruction*, including encouraging ongoing dialogue between these two groups, given their critical role in the core mission of school systems and supporting schools. Principal supervisors should engage with principals about the system's districtwide strategies to improve instruction and increase student achievement. Those in the curriculum and instruction department should be informed on an on-going basis by principal supervisors about what they are noticing in the implementation of the district's strategies.

Another method used to support breaking down silos is *cross-functional teams*. In solving problems or generating new plans, bringing together individuals from different parts of the district to share their expertise increases the likelihood of high-quality solutions. It opens the possibility for strategies that push against the current way of doing business and deriving solutions that may have a broader benefit. Making this approach effective requires supporting staff in learning tools and protocols that enable all members of the team to participate with equal voice, no matter status or position. It means giving attention to power relationships and how they often play out, leaving some individuals voiceless. Successful districts often begin this approach by initially using a facilitator until staff develop proficiency to guide these complex discussions and planning processes on their own.

Individuals whose work is not directly involved in the teaching and learning process should be able to articulate how their work contributes to success for students. For instance, those who work in accounting should focus on getting resources to schools in a timely way by streamlining cumbersome systems for ordering materials and supplies that can distract site leaders and teachers from their focus on instruction. Transportation is another critically important area. The system for getting students to

school on time requires regular review to ensure that all students are being served well and to find areas that need improvement. Families' concerns about transportation inefficiencies should be taken to heart, as they understand first-hand whether the system effectively supports their students.

Equitable Distribution of Resources

Equitable distribution of often limited resources is essential. Too often, district and site leaders are expected to accomplish more than their budgets allow. System leaders must have a set of *guiding principles for distributing resources* that is not driven by goals for "equality" of general funding — i.e., equality without consideration for varied student strengths and needs rooted in widely differing starting places. These principles must be driven by student strengths and needs. While this is easily understood, it is very difficult to implement in highly politicized school communities, because it means that resources should not always be distributed to all schools in the same way. Schools with the greatest needs should be provided more resources than schools with students who have fewer unmet resource needs.

Districts must have a commitment to meeting the basic needs of all students. This can become a battle between parents who are privileged and parents who are marginalized and have limited financial resources. Unless district leadership is willing to risk disfavor with those who are in positions of power and influence, and seeks to engage them as allies in the well-being and thriving of all students in a school system, the well-documented pattern of resource inequity will continue. For instance, districts that have attempted to de-track schools and classrooms are often met with opposition from parents whose children had been assured a seat in higher level classrooms or the highest achieving schools.[xii] There can be discomfort for district leadership when resources are distributed more equitably in a system. As political battles are common, a different approach requires courage.

Defined Autonomy Between Schools and System-Wide Goals

Waters and Marzano (2006) identified five district leadership responsibilities that have a positive impact on student achievement: collaborative goal-setting; non-negotiable goals for achievement and instruction; board alignment and support of district goals; monitoring goals for achievement and instruction; and use of resources to support achievement and instruction goals. In addition to these, *defined autonomy* focuses on the degree to which a district provides school leaders with the flexibility to make building-level adjustments to meet the needs of students. Defined autonomy makes it clear that districts must set both *non-negotiable goals* for student learning across schools, as well as *provide school building-level leadership with the autonomy and support* to identify and implement their own strategies for achieving these goals, given their student populations, families and communities.

Assessing Progress & Success

Districts use tools to assess how the system is doing at the classroom, school and district level. Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) in Maryland has designed the *OpenDataMCPS*[xiii] to provide information on performance, budget and facilities to keep track of areas of growth and areas that need attention. District and site leaders use the information in this system for regular conversations about how well they are moving toward achieving the district and school goals. The *LEAD Tool*[xiv] developed by Education Northwest is a web-based tool for leadership teams to self-assess how well they are using

equity as a lens in serving all of the district's children and families. Both of these tools focus on outcomes for children and families, as well as how well the district is operating overall.

SCHOOL BOARD/TRUSTEES OF THE CMO

Board members/trustees set and monitor policy implementation as well as approve the allocation of resources across the system. Along with the superintendent/CEO, whom they are responsible for hiring, they set the vision and mission for the organization. A key aspect of that vision is the commitment to be an organization in which equity is core to the quality of the work. Engaging with employees, families and the community to understand the importance of this commitment is shared with the superintendent/CEO and other district leaders. They also monitor for evidence that the district's goals are being met and look for patterns of inequitable opportunities and outcomes.

In hiring the senior leader, the board/trustees need to look for an individual who shares this commitment and knows how to model leading with an equity lens. This leader should have demonstrable know-how in creating an environment where an "equity lens" is seen as the "way we do our work," not an add-on or a unique and siloed initiative.

As boards/trustees guide the work of school systems, they also are key to community relationships and opportunities for on-going, two-way communication and authentic dialogue. *Listening campaigns,* where meetings are facilitated and real issues are discussed with the community to share ideas and suggestions, can provide insight about what is most important. New ideas can be generated and incorporated into the district's/school system's plans, the community feels heard and in authentic partnership. When done well, this work fosters positive relationships, mutual support and long-term partnership between the district and community.

THE LIMITATIONS OF STRUCTURAL AND TECHNICAL APPROACHES ALONE

Many school districts use structural and technical approaches to their school improvement challenges that rely on expertise based on practices from the past. The challenges confronting systems today require expertise with a nod to past practice, using what remains relevant and positively impactful, with a search for solutions that are derived from deep dialogue and partnership with those being served. Some examples of these combined approaches are the following:

- Many leaders begin by changing the district's reporting structure without attending to the relationships and functions needed to bring about significant change. If a leader decides to reorganize or restructure, he/she has to look beyond the lines of authority on the organizational chart. To solve problems and accomplish the organization's goals, he/she should attend to the informal structure and incorporate what people really do. This work also includes attending to the highly political nature of restructuring in terms of history, relationships and cultivating readiness for change.
- Effective leaders attend to organizational alignment and, in the era of the CCSS, commit to learning and teaching as the system's core work. Too often, however, insufficient attention is given to deeply engaging with and understanding students and their families as essential to implementation of the new standards.

- "Best practices" gleaned from other districts are often implemented without understanding the foundational principles of how they were implemented in another context, and hence the potential relevance is lost as a result of failing to tailor the approaches to a new community.

Such challenges as these often lead to failed implementation and frustration when the intended results are not seen. Without an understanding of *historical context* and the *cultures* in the community, and without attending to the ***deep partnership, relationships, trust-building*** **and** ***collaborative structures*** needed, challenges facing school systems are misinterpreted, and thus the solutions devised are less effective. For these reasons, we recommend additional focus on the following areas to complement our discussion above.

Core Values and Guiding Principles for the System

Senior leadership in a school system must articulate a set of core values that are developed and agreed upon with the full range of stakeholder groups in the community. These values should be broadly shared and used to guide the system's work. While academic research can help with analyzing district challenges, the experience and values of the community should be considered alongside it. Time should be made available for regular reflection across stakeholders at all levels of the system, internal and external, on progress in meeting the goals as well as how people are experiencing the organization.

Shared Sense of Accountability for the Learning of All Students in the System's Care

When a system makes it clear that its core work is learning and teaching, the meaning of this idea needs to be discussed with all employees and stakeholder groups. People will need the opportunity to make sense of what is expected of them in their role. A good example of this is a school district where all employees are engaged in conversations about what the CCSS are and how their work contributes to the implementation of the standards, no matter an employee's formal role in the district. Opportunities are provided for parents to learn about the CCSS and what this means for their children's learning. Several districts use Parent Academies in which teachers and parents share information about the standards and lessons that are being taught. Boston Public Schools, Miami-Dade County, and Washington, D.C., are using this approach.

Regular Communication With Families and Community

Districts can also host "listening campaigns" where they invite families and community, employees and students to give feedback about their experience of the system. Open invitations are issued to participate in gathering and analyzing information from various stakeholders. The data and the meaning that is constructed from the data are made public. Examples of this process are facilitated around the country by organizations such as the National Equity Project, based in Oakland, California; World-Trust in Oakland, California; The Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University; and The Interaction Institute for Social Change in Boston, Massachusetts. These organizations use structured protocols to engage participants in dialogue to analyze and collectively make shared meaning of qualitative and quantitative data. District leadership is in significant conversation with all stakeholders to advance vision, goals, priorities, strategies, and analyze impact and next steps to

improve school systems for the long-haul, in partnership with and support of students, their families and communities.

These blended approaches — structural, cultural, technical, social and political — are suggestions for using a more well-rounded approach to transforming schools and systems to ensure a quality education for all children. Context always matters.

References

Angrist, Joshua, Parag Pathak, and Christopher Walters, "Explaining Charter School Effectiveness," *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics* 5, no. 4 (October 2013): 1-27.

Blumenfeld, Phyllis et al., "Motivating Project-Based Learning: Sustaining the Doing, Supporting the Learning," *Educational Psychologist* 26, issue 3-4 (1991): 369-398.

Dean, Ceri, Elizabeth Hubbell, Howard Pitler, and B.J. Stone, *Classroom Instruction That Works: Research-Based Strategies for Increasing Student Achievement*, second edition (Alexandria, Virginia: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2012).

Dean, C. & Parsley, D. (2010). Success in sight: Introduction to school improvement – Research-based influences on student achievement. (facilitator manual, module 1, segment 1.3). Denver: Mid–Continent Research for Education and Learning.

Diamond, John, Antonia Randolph, and James Spillane, "Teachers' Expectations and Sense of Responsibility for Student Learning: The importance of Race, Class, and Organizational Habitus," *Anthropology & Education Quarterly* 35, no. 1 (2004): 75-98.

Healy, Jack, "After Uproar, School Board in Colorado Scraps Anti-Protest Curriculum," *The New York Times*, Oct. 3, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/04/us/after-uproar-colorado-school-board-retreats-on-curriculum-review-plan.html?_r=0

Heifetz, Ronald, and Marty Linsky, "When Leadership Spells Danger," *Educational Leadership* 61, no. 7 (April 2004): 33-37.

Howard, Tyrone, *Why Race and Culture Matter in Schools: Closing the Achievement Gap in America's Classrooms* (New York: Teachers College Press, April 2010).

Marzano, Robert, *What Works in Schools: Translating Research into Action* (Alexandria, Virginia: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2003).

Hess, Frederick, and Max Eden, "A Suburban Colorado County Tests the Limits of Education Reform," *National Review*, Sept. 17, 2013, http://www.nationalreview.com/article/358627/most-interesting-school-district-america-frederick-m-hess-max-c-eden

Johnson, Joe, "Developing Schools of Achievement for African American Students," at The African American Regional Education Alliance Conference, Oakland, California (San Diego: National Center for Urban School Transformation, San Diego State University, 2015).

Layton, Lyndsey, "In New Orleans, Major School District Closes Traditional Public Schools for Good," *The Washington Post*, May 28, 2014, http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/in-new-orleans-

traditional-public-schools-close-for-good/2014/05/28/ae4f5724-e5de-11e3-8f90-73e071f3d637_story.html

Lee, V. E., & Smith, J. B. (1996). Collective responsibility for learning and its effects on gains in achievement for early secondary school students. *American Journal of Education, 104* (2), 103-147.

Nichols-Barrer, Ira, Brian Gill, Phillip Gleason, and Christina Clark Tuttle, "Does Student Attrition Explain KIPP's Success?" *Education Next* 14, no. 4 (2014): 62-70.

Waters, J. Timothy, and Robert Marzano, *School District Leadership That Works: The Effect of Superintendent Leadership on Student Achievement* (Denver: Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning, 2006).

Whitmire, Richard, "Inside Successful District-Charter Compacts," *Education Next* 14, no. 4 (2014): 42-48.

---

[i] See for example G. Gay, *Cultural Competence & Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, Practice and Research*, (New York: Teachers College Press, 2000).

[ii] www.casel.org

[iii] See for example Y. Jackson, *Pedagogy of Confidence* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2011).

[iv] Material that teachers use to prepare students for learning. This might include telling a story, asking students what they know about the topic, and drawing connections to previous learning.

[v] Using visual images (e.g., pictures, movement, physical models) to represent information.

[vi] By making comparisons and categorizing information, learners solidify their understanding and can more easily integrate new information into existing knowledge.

[vii] Which encourages critical thinking and problem solving, skills highly valued in college and careers.

[viii] See for example J. Banks et al., "Diversity Within Unity: Essential Principals for Teaching and Learning in a Multicultural Society," *Phi Delta Kappan*, (2000): pp. 196-203.

[ix] See for example: http://performanceassessment.org/performance/pcomponents.html

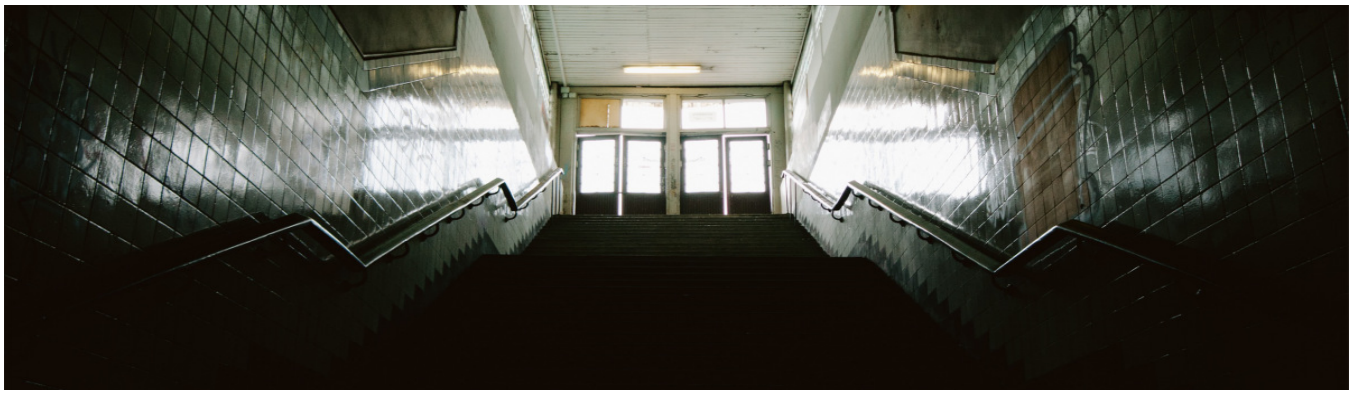
[x] See for example the following: 1) http://www2.ed.gov/documents/family-community/partnership-frameworks.pdf; 2) A. T. Henderson and K. L. Mapp, "A new wave of evidence," *The impact of school, family, and community connections on student achievement* (Austin, Texas: National Center for Family & Community: Connections with Schools, 2002); 3) A. T. Henderson, ed., *Beyond the bake sale: The essential guide to family-school partnerships* (New York: The New Press, 2007); and 4) Tarek Chebbi, "The Parent Academy in Miami-Dade County Public Schools: Second Interim Report 2006-2007" (Miami, Fla.: Miami-Dade County Public Schools, 2008) http://theparentacademy.dadeschools.net/evaluations.htm

[xi] A term used by the organization "*E3*" (*Education, Excellence, Equity,* http://www.e3ed.org) to describe students who are often ignored by adults and for whom there are low expectations.

[xii] See for instance: J. Oakes, A.S. Wells, M. Jones, and A. Datnow, "The social construction of ability, cultural politics, and resistance to reform," *History of Multicultural Education Volume 2: Foundations and Stratifications*, (2012): 293.

[xiii] https://data.montgomeryschoolsmd.org

[xiv] http://leadtool.educationnorthwest.org



SYSTEMIC CHANGE AND EQUITY

By **Mary Scheetz,** Former Assistant Superintendent, Waters Foundation and
Peter Senge, Sloan School of Management MIT and SoL (Society of Organizational Learning)

Systemic change is deeply personal. This simple but paradoxical idea is perhaps the key reason most efforts at systems transformation are so disappointing. Something in the very word "system" or "systemic" consistently leads us astray – seeking some magical change "out there" when the most intransigent aspects of the "*out there*" are inseparable from our habits of thought and action "*in here*."

Nowhere is this misconception more tragic than in efforts to address the extraordinary inequity in America's schools. The many tangible dimensions of inequity in school resources like class size, teacher preparation, curricular relevance and student opportunity are inseparable from deep mental models about the capabilities and potential of students. Since pioneering research 80 years ago by Thomas Merton on the "Pygmalion Effect," we have known that teacher assumptions about student capability directly impacts student performance. This basic "self-fulfilling prophecy" shapes a reinforcing feedback loop that operates with entrenched societal norms and biases to dampen student achievement. This, obviously, was the point of the famous George Bernard Shaw play (later restaged as the musical *My Fair Lady*) from which Merton drew the evocative metaphor for his research findings.

But what strategies and principles does understanding the "inner" nature of inequity help us identify? How does it help those determined to reverse growing inequity in America's schools succeed in doing so? How does it help us understand which strategies that, while well-intentioned and sincere, are destined to be low leverage?

We have had the privilege to work with many committed leaders who have managed to "push the needle" on these profound issues. The aim of this article is to share what we have learned from them.

SOME BASICS REGARDING MENTAL MODELS

We do not "have" mental models; we "are" our mental models. None of us sees an external reality as it is. As is said in the philosophy of language, "We do not describe the world we see; we see what we know how to describe." This is not a tragic flaw. It is what it means to be human. None of us can see our own biases. The more tragic problem, especially because it is avoidable, is that few of us operate in work environments that foster the trust and reflection that can allow us to see the shortcomings in our perceptions and how we operate. The consequence is that our inescapable biases go unseen and become subtly reinforced. For most educators in most schools and systems, no embedded processes exist to help people cultivate a vision of what is possible for all kids, continually reflect on their own limitations in realizing that vision, and to help those who do not share this vision to move on to other work.

Once we recognize this deep challenge, we realize that most efforts to address these *inner realities that shape inequity of opportunity* will continue to disappoint — until our approach itself shifts. Short professional development (PD) workshops can sensitize people to issues, but shifting deeply established habits of thought and action require time and an environment that balances objective observation and ongoing reflection. Creating such an environment represents a significant investment of time and resources to incorporate "learning infrastructures" into the daily routines of teachers and administrators alike.

MENTAL MODELS FOR MAKING AND SUSTAINING PROGRESS

When we have seen this shift achieved to some degree, it has been under the following conditions and guided by the following mental models. We don't know if each of these is needed equally, or if all need to be in place. Every situation is unique, and effective change strategies invariably take this uniqueness into account. There is no "one size fits all" approach to systemic change. Still, we have found each of these ideas to be important.

1. Champions at the district, school and classroom levels who are zealous about equity.

"If it's to be, it's up to me," as the saying goes. The leader must be a zealot for equity who sees the *big picture* of challenges, but recognizes the opportunities to be a change agent. This includes modeling a deep-seated belief in the magnificent potential of each and every child. The message from those in visible leadership positions that all students are to be fully served must be clear and consistent. Developing equity-based structures within schools and districts requires understanding the need to re-examine current systems of teaching, achievement, and discipline and confronting all potential inequities.

A superintendent in the St. Louis area exemplified this mental model. With her unwavering vision and her willingness to take a stance about the education that all students deserve, she facilitated significant improvement in student engagement and achievement as well as parent and community partnerships. She confidently led by example while inspiring others to embrace and facilitate change in a setting that had long embraced the status quo. For her, this was a natural outgrowth of what mattered to her. She

did not see herself self-consciously as "the leader" of the process, but rather as one more person who needed to take a stand and continually examine her own shortcomings. In doing so, she became a model for many others to do likewise. Over time, this led to many shifts in how things worked in the school system such as structures for ongoing training, coaching and peer collaboration to support culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogy in an academic atmosphere of rigor, relevance and engagement for all students, regardless of background or past success.

2. Equity-based leaders are capacity builders.

Trusting that people can learn and change is essential. Again and again, we have seen that, in spite of lacking initial knowledge or skills, educators can develop the capacity to deliver culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogy.

In Milwaukee, district leaders are facilitating a long-term capacity-building initiative, working in partnership with principals of schools targeted for improvement. Together, these leaders have invested in a long-term professional development process focused on meaningful instruction that engages all students in critical thinking and problem-solving that utilizes systems thinking strategies coupled with culturally responsive pedagogy. Six months into the process, we see significant achievement and discipline improvements are evident. The project is expanding to include parents and community members at the schools involved. Soon, a second cohort of district leaders and additional schools will become engaged.

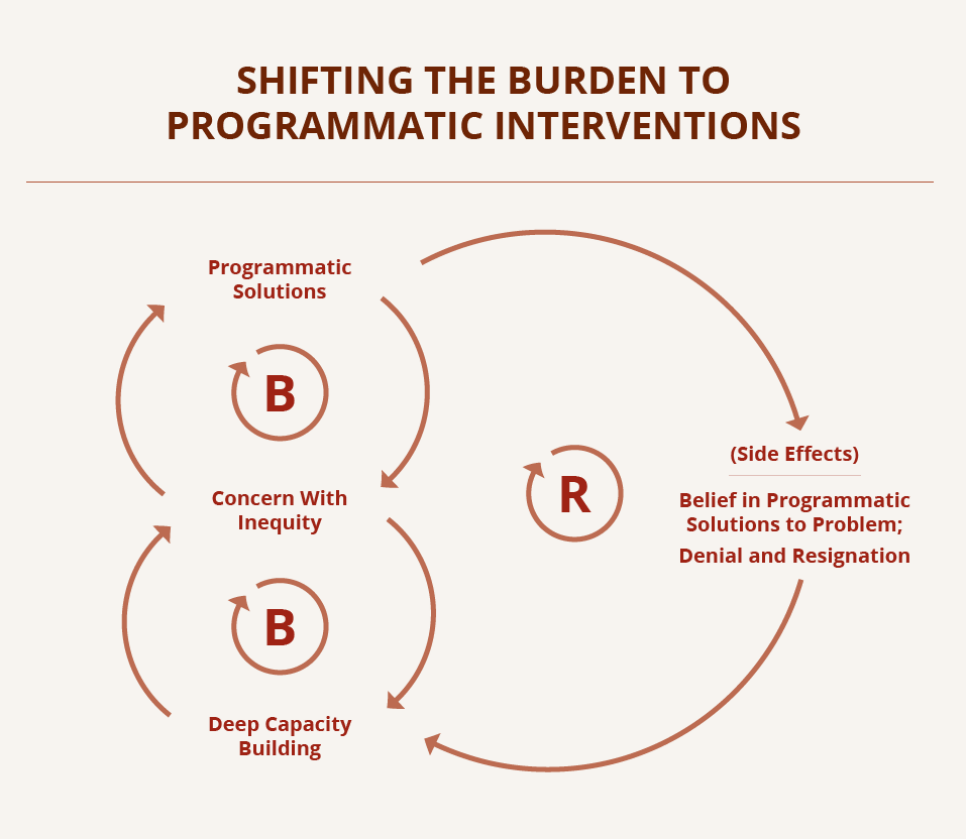
The process of capacity building must be accompanied by a systematic approach to accountability for implementation and improvement that recognizes the *tendency to adopt quick "fixes that backfire"* in the highly politicized, complex system of education. For example, it is common to attempt to intervene through short-term professional development or other "check the box" programmatic interventions. The tragedy of short-term PD arises from the unintended side effects: namely, that it reinforces a belief that there exist simplistic changes that are possible without examining difficult-to-see limiting beliefs and habitual behaviors. By contrast, when there are clear accountabilities, a principal, for example, can establish longer term interventions with clear indicators of progress that can be used for ongoing improvement and which can make visible persistent gaps that remain between intentions and outcomes.

For example, in a Midwest, urban school district serving a high-poverty student population of more than 50 percent African American and Latino students that had been working on culturally responsive pedagogy for three years, a high school principal felt that "some staff members still don't get it." The assistant superintendent worked with the principal to implement instructional evaluation and feedback that increasingly included accountability for cultural relevance and responsiveness. Eventually, the teachers who "did not get it" realized that this really was their job, and those who were unwilling to change saw that their job performance was no longer acceptable. "At some point, it's not really about getting it or not getting it," observed the assistant superintendent. "It is unacceptable to be culturally nonresponsive. The question is really how will we hold everyone accountable for improving how we serve ALL students?" This relentlessness eventually helped that school and the larger district increase

student and parent engagement and significantly improve academic performance. Today, it is sustaining full accreditation, while other districts with similar demographics are struggling to do the same.

3. Beware the tendency to shift the burden from true capacity building to programmatic interventions.

Adoption of a checklist of programs to address inadequacies can also shift attention away from the deeper changes needed — namely, developing of awareness, understanding and sensitivity to the ways in which we underserve many students. When not recognized, an archetypal "shifting the burden" dynamic subtly reinforces the tendency toward the programmatic and away from the developmental. This happens because as resources are directed toward implementing the programmatic solutions, concern for the urgency of inequity can decline as people feel they have addressed the issue, further shifting attention from deeper capacity building, as illustrated in the figure below.



In reading the figure, start with tracing around the "figure 8" on the left-hand side, starting with concern for inequity: As concern increases, programmatic solutions are implemented and concern decreases (the upper "balancing" loop); with diminishing concern, there is less emphasis on deep capacity building, which means that deeper causes of the problems are unaddressed and consequently symptoms of the problem and concern eventually return (lower balancing loop). Over time, this leads often to still more resources invested in new programmatic solutions, such as anti-violence interventions. The two balancing loops make the "figure 8" interact to create a vicious cycle, and the system "shifts the burden" toward depending more and more on low-leverage programmatic solutions. Over time, increasing dependence on low-leverage programmatic solutions lead to further side-effects, like denial and a belief that nothing can be done, which further undermine fundamental solutions.

The consequence of these shifting-the-burden forces is that practical know-how never develops regarding how to support true capacity building. But, this is not inevitable. Our experience shows that these insidious shifting-the-burden dynamics can be averted through *four core elements* that can eventually modify habitual beliefs and behaviors by building capacity:

- Make initial trainings
- Establish effective *coaching* for all — administrators and teachers alike.
- Build *strong peer networks*, which eventually supplant formal coaches.
- Create clear, *effective accountability structures* that track the impact of capacity building on the well-being of students.

There is an important role for meaningful introductory professional development, but only in concert with an integrated capacity building strategy. *Reflective trainings* move beyond PowerPoint presentations to invite participants to reflect on their own experiences of exclusion. Being on the receiving end of bias — be it gender-, ethnic- or profession-based — is an almost universal experience. This becomes a starting point for appreciating emotionally what many of our students are up against and for understanding further how we all subtly contribute to institutionally embedded bias.

When done well, this sort of initial awakening can then lead to greater openness to seeing how each of us can learn, especially when combined with ways to connect this to our daily work — such as through *good coaching*. Coaches attuned to embedded inequity can help teachers translate general concerns into better classroom practices that benefit all students. In the context of classrooms that effectively develop student engagement in and responsibility for their own learning, students increasingly voice their own learning needs. With good support, teachers can understand and address impediments to each student's progress and gradually foster wholly new levels of engagement in their classrooms. Research shows that "by seeking to break down boundaries between teacher and teacher, teacher and student, student and the learning process, we will learn what students want and need. As a result, more and more teachers may go to bed at night remembering the images of wonder, enthusiasm and perseverance on the faces of their students."[i]

Coaching is especially powerful when it helps develop peer networks where more and more of the *"coaching" becomes embedded in peer-to-peer help*. In the long run, no intervention is more resilient than robust peer networks that embody a cultural norm of continual and mutual learning. For example, in a large California school district with an ethnically diverse student population, including 27 percent English learners, peer networks involving more than 100 administrators from both the district and school levels, and including both instructional and non-instructional departments, have been established. Within these networks, small, purposeful learning community groups attend training together, followed by peer coaching sessions where they share strategies to improve how they operate within and between work groups. The focus of this multi-year professional development process is aimed at increasing the capacity of all to work in concert to become a district characterized by equitable and effective practices. As reported by one participant, "knowing that I can be honest about

my challenges but that I can work with my colleagues as partners to meet those challenges has given me new courage and energy."

As argued above, robust capacity building strategies require transparent management practices that create *meaningful accountability* structures based in connecting adult personal development and student outcomes. That said, there are several traps in developing effective accountability structures. First, it is common today that boards and external stakeholders force accountability structures on schools. Like any management system, the most effective accountability structures will be co-designed and accepted as useful by those to be managed, not imposed by those removed from the actual processes we are seeking to improve. Second, there are no perfect measures for tracking student well-being. While academic performance matters, it is often a lagging indicator. Before test scores and other summative, quantitative measures improve, principals, instructional coaches and teachers need indicators of improvements in process. Many of these will be informal and non-quantitative — for example, an increasing sense of *efficacy* (e.g., confidence in one's ability to learn) can be a useful indicator of progress for a formerly disengaged student, well in advance of demonstrated academic achievement. Likewise, school and district *climate audits* can include measures that indicate the degree to which students feel valued, respected, encouraged, challenged and supported. Often, these audits also reveal the reasons why students are disengaged, absent and tending to drop out.

Like many, we have found that effective accountability systems blend qualitative and quantitative measures. "As with all policy changes, governments need to be able to measure success in improving equity, performance and school dropout rates. Numerical targets can be useful tools by articulating policy in terms of what is to be achieved rather than in terms of formal processes. A number of countries have adopted targets for equity in education. Numerical targets for reducing the number of school-leavers with poor basic skills and the number of early school dropouts are particularly useful."[ii] While we agree with this view, what it misses is the danger of relying too strongly on numerical targets. In the absence of *meaningful qualitative indicators* that committed leaders within the system can use to gauge progress, focusing exclusively on numerical targets can lead to countless ways to "game the system" to, as one savvy executive once explained to us, "*look* better without actually *being* better."

4. The long-term consequences of institutionalized and socialized racism must be understood.

Continuous messages of being "less than" and seldom seeing images or hearing examples of hope and possibility take a toll on students and their families. The effects are much like the widely recognized impact of bullying. While the messages are often subtle (and sometimes not so subtle), the results are significant. The cumulative effects are exacerbated when we do not structure schools to address the inequitable distribution of advantages and opportunities experienced by students and generations of their families outside of school. We cannot expect students to engage in learning in a system that mirrors the racial and ethnic bias that they experience on a daily basis. This is not just about more money and better physical facilities; it is about programs, practices and policies that reflect explicit efforts to ensure learning and opportunities that are meaningful and engaging to all students, regardless of their race or ethnicity. Understanding the impact of institutionalized racism on student behavior, motivation and willingness to take risks can help educators be less judgmental and to employ innovative techniques to reach all students.

For example, one principal with a long history at Native American reservation schools and in other high-poverty settings, took over a "turnaround" school, where all the teachers and administrators had been fired. Given her background, she appreciated what this meant to the students and formed one overarching goal for the year.

> *Think how these kids felt. All their lives they have been on the outside looking in and now all their teachers have been fired. They felt more like losers than they ever had, if that was possible. Early in the year, one of the boys told me, 'Mrs. Q…, there are ghosts in this building.' My goal for the first year was simple: I wanted these kids to feel good about themselves, to feel like they had a future.*

The school year ended with a talent show. The principal took this event as the bellwether for the year's progress. "Middle school talent shows can be pretty rocky. Kids make mistakes. I have heard kids get laughed at, even booed. So, I was more than a little nervous when it started. When I saw that all the kids did was cheer, even when something went wrong, I knew we had turned a corner." Educators like this understand the long journey to self-respect for students who have grown up in institutionalized racism and focus on the real indicators of building the social capital for change.

A particularly insidious dimension of institutionalized racism is *white privilege*, privileges taken for granted by some but not available to others. "When Americans talk about race and racism," says University of California Berkeley, Law Professor john a. powell, "we almost always talk about African Americans and Hispanics/Latinos, sometimes Asian Americans, but we rarely talk about white people, the privilege of being the 'generic' category, which is a result of culture and power."[iii] We do not see the water in which we swim. This is true for all people, but when the water in which some have the privilege to swim consistently provides power, status and opportunity, there are strong forces to preserve the blindness. The key is to make the water visible through processes like courageous dialogue. Through a focus on mutual understanding, assumptions can be surfaced, in addition to addressing systemic and institutional bias, *interpersonal bias* can be identified and action can be taken in consideration of all perspectives, rather than solely those of the dominant culture.

The processes of self-reinforcing blindness are subtle and pervasive, but can be revealed by pausing whenever we see someone from a different background react in a way that seems odd or makes us uncomfortable. For example, it is an understandable reaction to criticize, if even completely internally, a member of a "minority" community complaining about something they see as unfair. "They could just ignore that if they wanted to, rather than just complaining," we say quietly to ourselves. But we fail to notice that in this very thought we have constructed a "we and they" world in which we are projecting how *we* would feel when faced with a situation that, in fact, we never have had to face. This happened recently for one of us when an African American colleague was complaining about how she had to teach her kids "to never, *not* be on their guard." By asking myself honestly, "When has this exact circumstance the person is describing ever happened to me? When have I felt that it was necessary for their safety to tell my kids never not to be on their guard because of their skin color?" The answer is never. In that moment of reflection, something that had been invisible became visible, and one small facet of the taken-for-granted nature of white privilege became evident.

Another archetypal pattern comes into play around white privilege that, once understood, can help people see what is difficult to see. "Success to the Successful" operates in any situation where there is a perceived scarcity of resources and resources are allocated in favor of those perceived to be successful. This can happen between departments within an organization, between different organizations (such as different schools), or between individuals. What results is a self-reinforcing drift where "the rich get richer and the poor get poorer." But what makes a success-to-the successful structure especially insidious is when it remains invisible, and the reinforcing dynamics are masked by mental models that justify the inequity of opportunity as a natural or inevitable arrangement — as occurs with white privilege or the allocation of resources in some school systems.

In recent years, many school districts have instituted multicultural education programs. But to be effective, nuanced understandings of privilege need to infuse the related training and coaching. In our judgment, multicultural education is incomplete if it does not truly challenge the roots of structural racism and racial oppression, starting with the matter of white privilege. Addressing this topic through sustained and honest conversation leads to new perspectives and related action. One leader described her developing awareness and understanding of white privilege as "an awakening that is revealing the bias in many of my previous decisions and actions."

CONCLUSION

If we are to reconstruct our educational systems to ensure equity for all, systems thinking is an essential skill, and the habits of systems thinking must guide our actions. This starts with understanding the power of mental models and looking for archetypal patterns like "fixes that fail," "shifting the burden" and "success to the successful." Systems thinking grows with sincere effort to reflect on the larger systems at play behind the behavior of individuals or particular groups. It is a defining feature of non-systemic thinking to over attribute outcomes to individual actions. While individual actions may be important, systems thinkers consistently look for *the role of systemic structures and forces in shaping behavior*. Experts in systems family therapy, for example, help people interrupt their habitual blaming of self and others and begin to look for the systemic structures created within the family that shape individual actions such as how interactions between a mother and father may be a primary cause of a teenager's problems, rather than just blaming the teen. By analogy, the problems of inequity are deeply embedded in larger social and economic systems. "Disparities (in income, health, employment, education) can't be understood in isolation," says Powell. "They are embedded in systems in which there are many interactions and feedback loops."[iv]

But the converse, solely blaming the system, is equally counterproductive: "It's not my fault; the problem is the system" leads to an attitude of victimization and obscures the simple fact that we are all creating the system through our day-to-day ways of thinking and acting. We find true systems understanding enables a particular kind of maturity. Individuals who can see systemic sources of problems can stop blaming themselves and start to look for ways to intervene in the system itself. We have had the privilege of working with many colleagues whose life circumstances would have easily supported victimization, self-criticism, anger and fatalism, yet developed very different attitudes — because they were able to see systemic structures at play. While perhaps not possible for everyone,

one principal we know who grew up poor and black concluded that the attitude of victimization endemic in his family and many friends was ultimately a matter of choice and support.

> *I remember one day seeing clearly that the way I was being treated was not about me. It arose from a system of beliefs and habits that trapped perpetrators as well as victims. In that moment, I realized the system was outside of me and that I had a choice what beliefs I adopted. When I understood this, my circumstances did not change, but how I saw and reacted to them did change. I began a life-long inquiry into understanding the systems in which I found myself and learning how to conserve my sense of who I am at my essence and what is really important to me. Gradually, my anger dissipated and my insight grew.*

Our present education system, while nominally committed to success for all students, actually embodies many success-to-the successful features that work against this aim, and changing these will be very difficult. The same remains largely true in the larger labor market it serves. Actions guided by ideas like those above will challenge a system structured to serve students inequitably, and those who have benefited from that system may resist change. But failing to do so over the past decades has made matters worse.

As noted by William H. Schmidt, co-author of *Inequality for All*, "The ultimate test of an educational system is whether it makes sure that every student, whatever their background, is exposed to the content they need to thrive in today's society. U.S. schools are failing this most basic test, and in the process wasting the talents of millions of American children — children from all backgrounds. The reality is that, for most students, the education they receive is largely based on chance, making academic opportunities into a kind of lottery — one with profound consequences."[v]

Today, the shortage of resources to support learning due to restrictions on public spending in many counties and localities, a condition that has changed little in the past decade, exacerbates the situation and makes reallocations within or between sectors politically difficult to manage.[vi] In the face of such realities, we believe evidence of what *can be achieved* by dedicated leaders such as those described above can help shift the fatalism that subtly pervades the public discourse. Their work should be celebrated and utilized as inspiration to build a coalition of equity-based leadership.

As in all real systemic change, the journey requires patience and persistence guided by deep understanding. This is about all of us. The system works as it does because of how we work, and it will persist so long as we continue to adopt quick fixes and then return to business as usual. Leaders at all levels who achieve real progress embrace the *entwined inner and outer journey* that is imperative if we are to develop an education system that fully serves all students. Seeing the systemic sources of racism and inequity does not change them overnight, but denying them leaves the assumptions invisible and their power intact.

---

[i] Richard Strong, Harvey F. Silver, and Amy Robinson, "Strengthening Student Engagement: What Do Students Want (and what really motivates them)?" *Educational Leadership* 53, no. 1 (September 1995): 8-12.

[ii] "Ten Steps to Equity in Education," Policy Brief (Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development, January 2008), p.7.

[iii] John A. Powell, Connie Cagampang Heller, and Fayza Bundalli, *Systems Thinking and Race: Workshop Summary*, Workshop Series on Racial Justice (The California Endowment, June 2011).

[iv] Powell, *Systems Thinking and Race: Workshop Summary*, 2011.

[v] William Schmidt (Michigan State University) and Curtis McKnight (University of Oklahoma), *Inequality for All: The challenge of unequal opportunity in American schools* (New York, New York: Teachers College Press, July 2012).

[vi] Ben Levin, "Approaches to Equity in Policy for Lifelong Learning," paper commissioned by the Education and Training Policy Division, OECD, *Equity in Education Thematic Review*, August 2003.

THE ROLE OF THE STATE IN CREATING EQUITY & EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION

By **Shelley Zion**, Professor and Director, Culturally Responsive Urban Education (CRUE) Center, University of Colorado, Denver

---

In 2012, the United States Congress created the 27-person *Commission on Equity and Excellenc*e, which included scholars, teacher union leaders, state and local education officials, education reformers and advocates. The Commission's charge was to advise the U.S. Secretary of Education on disparities in our educational system that create opportunity and achievement gaps, and to recommend solutions to those disparities. The ensuing report defines the failure of our education system to provide equitable opportunities and outcomes in keeping with its stated role. It calls this failure economically damaging to our country and failing to meet the moral imperative to educate all our people well. The report names several areas of focus, including better allocation of fiscal resources, a focus on supporting high-quality teachers and leaders, the provision of early learning opportunities for all students, ways to improve services for low-income students and families, and the role of government in ensuring accountability for these goals. In this article, I take on the challenge of exploring the role of the state in meeting the goal of equity and excellence in education.

This report was the latest in a long line of reports and legislation commissioned and enacted by the federal government to ensure equitable outcomes for all students in the K-12 educational system. Beginning with 1954's legal decision in *Brown v. Board of Education,* which required schools to provide equal educational opportunity for all students — and reinforced through legislation, including the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA, 2004) — law and public policy have established a requirement that all students in the United States be provided with equal educational opportunities. These legislative actions set the framework for the state to define how it would carry out its duty to ensure that the goals are met. As discussed in the next paragraphs, this has yet to be achieved.

EQUITY-CENTERED CAPACITY BUILDING:

Essential Approaches For Excellence & Sustainable School System Transformation

NCLB established a high-stakes accountability system that not only holds schools responsible for student learning, but also explicitly holds schools accountable for improving the performance of historically low-achieving students (e.g., low-income, limited English proficient, special education students and students of color [No Child Left Behind Act, 2002, §1111 (b)(2)(C)(v)(II)(aa-dd)]). IDEA's 2004 reauthorization not only broadly addresses ensuring a free and appropriate education for students with disabilities, it makes specific requirements to eliminate the disproportionate representation of students of color in specific special education disability categories and settings. As has been well-documented, these require solutions to issues of inequity in educational opportunity, achievement and outcomes that plague our educational system, which show up in: 1) disparities in achievement between white students and students of color; 2) disproportionality in special education referral, identification and placement; 3) high dropout rates for students of color; 4) disproportionate discipline and referrals for students of color; 5) under-enrollment of students of color in higher education; and 6) an array of other issues related to decreased education and life opportunities for students of color, students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, students from immigrant families and students in urban areas (Kozol, 1991; Ogbu, 1987; Patton, 1998; U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2005).

School reform efforts to address these issues abound, yet there have not been sustainable, scalable reforms leading to equity for all students. Part of the challenge is that the United States Constitution established a decentralized education system, granting states, districts/ local education agencies (LEAs) and schools authority for public education.

While the federal government does enact legislation, enforce education-related civil rights and administer funds for specific programs or populations, the onus for ensuring equitable access to education lies with the state. Over the past 15 years, I have worked with states, districts and schools in a variety of roles: as a leader of a nationally funded technical assistance center focused on eliminating disproportionality; as an independent consultant working on issues of equity; as the director of continuing and professional education at a state university; and as a board member of two charter schools. During that time, I've identified barriers to state capacity to ensure equity and excellence in K-12 education, including: available resources to help schools are overly complex; organizational structure (including State Education Agencies) guarantees siloed work; political pressures; resource competition; and a knowledge and skills gap among personnel in how to advance an equity agenda. In this paper, I explore these tensions to focus attention on the state's role in ensuring educational equity and make recommendations for how states can create capacity and leverage resources to ensure equitable opportunity and outcomes.

THE ROLE OF THE STATE

State Departments of Education (SEAs) were designed to ensure compliance with federal and state regulations by: 1) determining that basic administrative duties performed by local schools comply with state and local laws; 2) ascertaining that public school funds are properly used; 3) enforcing health and safety rules for construction and maintenance of buildings; 4) determining and requiring that teachers and other educational personnel are properly qualified and licensed; 5) ensuring that all children are provided minimum educational opportunities through enforcement of compulsory school laws and child labor laws, and through pupil personnel services; 6) ensuring and monitoring the development of

state educational standards and student performance measures, and determining whether required procedures are used; and 7) ensuring that schools are organized according to the law (Herrington & Roe, 2015).

Beginning with the authorization of NCLB, SEAs assumed a new role — providing technical assistance and support to meet reform goals. This has led to tension between two roles: *evaluation* and *support*. Smarick & Squire (2014) suggest that the solution to this tension lies in "scaling back the tasks SEAs perform and empowering nongovernmental organizations to take up the slack" by focusing SEA on monitoring and regulating, and developing a new state-level network of public and nonprofit entities to provide technical assistance and support. Murphy & Hill (2011), on the other hand, name the challenges SEAs will face in taking on a new role, but pose no solutions. And Lusi (1997) named the challenge as one between top-down and bottom-up reforms.

Additionally, state agencies and their staff face fundamental challenges: the expectation of political neutrality; tensions inherent in being the nexus between federal guidance and local enactment; the pressures of unfunded mandates created by accepting federal funding; and the charge to be both regulator and the provider of technical assistance. In the next section, I'll first describe the varied players at the state level then explore these tensions.

HOW ARE STATES ORGANIZED TO DO SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT WORK?

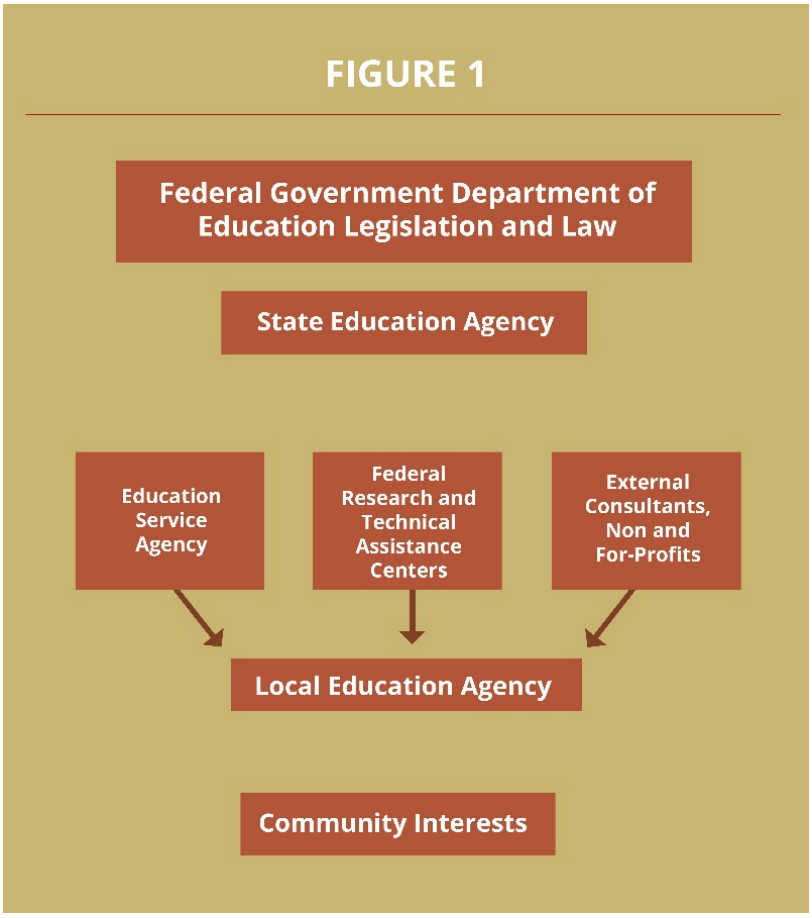
A majority of states have a network of education service agencies (ESAs) established by state statute and funded by a variety of federal, state and local funds to provide educational supports. These include professional development, school and district improvement planning, special education services, purchasing, and administrative services. Some provide other specialized services such as technology supports or teacher preparation, or respond to specific legislative priorities such as responding to disproportionality or Response to Intervention (Williams & Alsop, 2008). In some states, ESAs are organized by geographic region; in others, each ESA may have a specific area of expertise regarding services provided. Local education agencies (districts) can choose whether or not to buy into the services provided by the ESA. Most often, larger districts tend to participate less than smaller or more rural districts.

In addition to the state level ESAs, the federal government has funded a series of **comprehensive technical assistance centers**, at both a national and regional level, to work in specific focus areas (see http://www.tadnet.org/pages/526-find-a-center). The list below includes current topics that are supported by the national centers:

EQUITY-CENTERED CAPACITY BUILDING:

Essential Approaches For Excellence & Sustainable School System Transformation

- Data Quality and Use
- Deaf-Blind
- Dispute Resolution
- Early Childhood
- Instruction / Behavior
- Leadership
- Network Coordination
- Outcomes
- Professional Development / Personnel
- Secondary / Postsecondary
- Technology
- Comprehensive Centers—Content



Beyond the national centers, there are **regionally based technical assistance centers** that include Equity Assistance Centers, Regional Educational Laboratories (RELs) and National and Regional Parent Centers. These regional centers serve specific areas of the country, with specific foci. But again, both state education agencies and local education agencies (districts) have the option of participating with each, and may or may not know the variety of resources available to them through these centers.

Beyond the national centers, there are **regionally based technical assistance centers** that include Equity Assistance Centers, Regional Educational Laboratories (RELs) and National and Regional Parent Centers. These regional centers serve specific areas of the country, with specific foci. But again, both state education agencies and local education agencies (districts) have the option of participating with each, and may or may not know the variety of resources available to them through these centers.

Equity Assistance Centers. There are 10 Equity Assistance Centers (EACs), funded by the U.S. Department of Education under Title IV of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, to serve specific geographic regions. Their charge is to help public schools, upon request, promote equal educational opportunities in the areas of race, gender and national origin. EACs provide training and technical assistance for state or local education agencies and individual schools when requested to do so by teachers, principals, parents, community leaders or state/district administrators.

Regional Educational Labs. There are also 10 Regional Educational Laboratories (RELs), funded to bring the latest and best research and proven practices into school improvement efforts. Current REL

work is focused on identifying educational challenges in their regions, partnering with practitioners, policymakers and researchers, and using data to understand those challenges and to develop and implement improvement strategies.

Both the RELs and EACs compete for renewed funding every five years. In some regions, the same institutions have hosted the REL or EAC for decades. In others, new providers are chosen each cycle.

In addition to these entities, there are a wide variety of nonprofit and for-profit organizations, along with individual consultants, available to help state and local education agencies across a variety of content areas.

At first glance, this might seem like a powerful set of resources that states can draw on in their work to provide equitable education for all students. However, an analysis by the Center for Reinventing Public Education (Jochim & Murphy, 2013) identified three significant barriers to states' ability to support school improvement: 1) flat or declining funding in spite of broader responsibilities; 2) siloed work and a compliance mindset; and 3) limited authority and the complexity of local control.

EXPLORING THE BARRIERS

Resources, including personnel, are especially problematic at the state level owing to an ongoing decline in funds available to support education initiatives. Further, available funds are linked to specific programs and often are focused more on assessment than intervention, and the recruitment and development of talented personnel falls victim to the structure of the state system. Johnson, Oliff and Williams (2011) noted that between 2008 and 2011, 34 states had substantially cut education budgets, with very few anticipating increases through the 2013 school year. Jochim and Murphy (2013) call additionally problematic the fact that state budgets are developed and reported by program or organizational division, a practice that inhibits strategic allocation of resources when different program areas share similar strategic priorities. For example, departments concerned with bilingual education and with special education share a priority around supporting schools to be culturally responsive, but each has separate funds and personnel to carry out those activities, creating potentially overlapping efforts rather than shared and strategic offerings. And, even as the role of the state expanded from a focus on compliance to include supports for intervention, state funding is still allocated disproportionately toward efforts to *assess and evaluate* rather than *intervention or capacity building*. This table shows the ratio of *assessment* to *intervention* dollars spent by states (Jochim & Murphy, 2013, p. 7).

Lastly, the relationship between funding and the recruitment of highly talented personnel is underscored by the differential salary for district level administrators versus similar positions in state departments. "An educational coordinator in the Maryland State Department of Education can expect to make between $50,000 and $81,000, depending on experience, while the same position in the Baltimore City Public Schools pays between $75,000 and $120,000. The median salary of district administrators in New Jersey is approximately $120,000; the median for administrators in the state department of education is just $80,000" (Jochim & Murphy, 2013, p. 8).

SPENDING ON ASSESSMENT COMPARED TO INTERVENTION

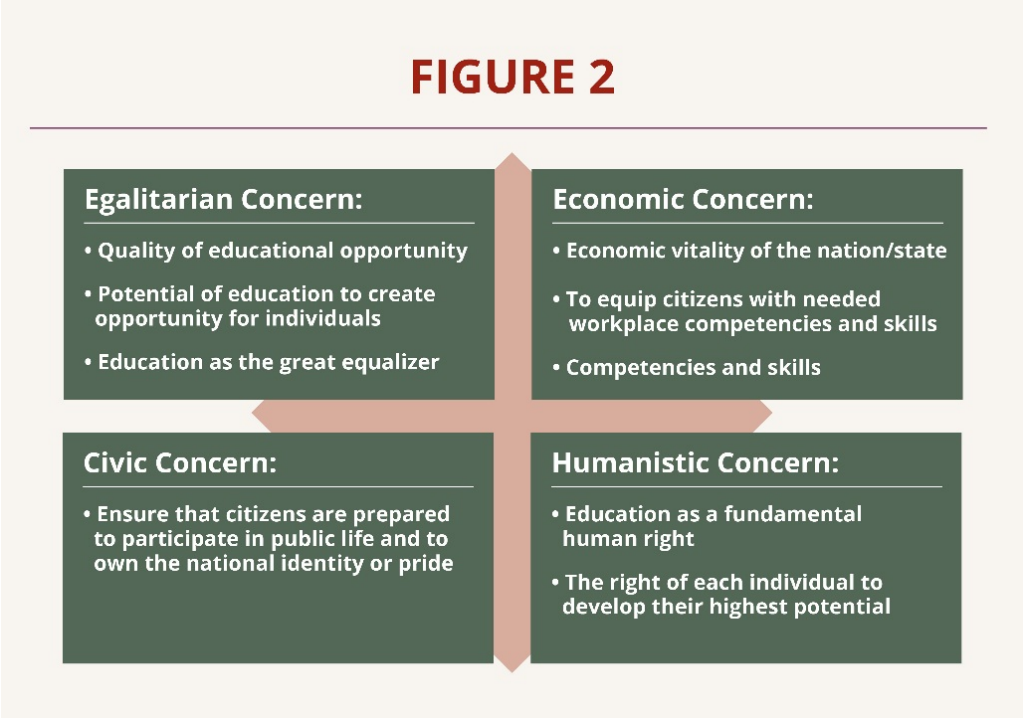
State	Assessment Expenditures Per Dollar of Intervention
Michigan	$0.60
New Jersey	$1.20
South Carolina	$2.00
Connecticut	$2.80
Nevada	$3.30
Washington	$4.10
Kentucky	$4.40
Maryland	$6.20
Florida	$26.40
Colorado*	-

The **organizational structure** of state departments of education, education service agencies and, largely, Technical Assistance and Equity Centers create silos by program focus or content area, with slim opportunities for cross-program collaboration. This is replicated in school districts, which minimizes resource sharing and the strategic alignment of personnel and resources, creating redundancy. As mentioned in the earlier resource allocation sections, in conjunction with the required focus on compliance, funding patterns exacerbate divisions, often creating rigidity.

The final and perhaps most complex barrier faced by state departments sits at the intersection **of local control, local politics, and the state's level of authority** to act. While some states have a clear mandate and authority to require district action to promote equity or address issues of inequity, other states must cajole or encourage districts to act in support of students and equity. In some states, the state board is elected; in others it is appointed. In some states, political pressures created by local control, union influence or legislative dynamics create opportunity; in others, those same elements erect barriers to action. Moreover, states are the nexus between federal guidance and local enactment, but rarely have formal power to require local education agencies to participate. They monitor compliance and can impose sanctions by withholding funds, but are limited in their capacity to require action. Given that the mandates states must implement are predominately unfunded but linked to federal funds, states are often perceived as bureaucrats rather than partners in improving schools. These relationships become further complicated by the complex political dynamics between communities, LEAs and states, and the oft-perceived lack of authentic partnership among them to improve opportunities and outcomes for all students (particularly the most marginalized).

SO WHAT IS THE STATE'S ROLE IN PROMOTING EQUITY AND EXCELLENCE?

The previous sections have described the role of the state, the structure of organizations within the state and the barriers to effectiveness that plague states. But perhaps the ultimate barrier lies in the gap of understanding or agreement regarding the purpose of education, and the pressing need to develop common understandings of both equity and excellence. Figure 2 shows varying purposes around which education is organized (deMarrais & LeCompte, 1995; Kubow & Fossum, 2007). Irrespective of which purpose is emphasized, if we are to meet the mandates codified in law, public



policy, community interests and congressional commissions, we need a framework for thinking about, talking about and organizing our work. One such framework is laid out in the "Opening the Doors to Opportunity for All" series supported by the *Equity Project* at the American Institutes for Research. The series names education as "the best hope for achieving the ideal of an equitable world — where all people, everywhere, have the chance to develop their potential, their capabilities." (Marshall, 2015, p. 17.)

Equity is often used interchangeably with equality, or as somehow undermining excellence. We must be clear that equal is not necessarily equitable. *Equal* implies that everyone receives the same resources, opportunities and supports, whereas *equitable* meets each person where s/he is, utilizes and builds on his/her strengths and ensures everyone receives what he/she needs to thrive. Further, we must be clear that equity and excellence must co-exist. There can be no excellence (in our system as a whole) if all children do not have the resources they need to achieve it.

Pursuing equity and excellence in school system improvement can be thought of as (Osta & Perrow, 2008, p.3-4; Petty, 2010, p.58-59; Petty, 2015, p. 64-66):

- *removing and interrupting* the predictability of academic success or failure based on social, economic or cultural factors and inequitable practices; eliminating biases and creating inclusive school environments for adults and children;
- *discovering and cultivating* the unique gifts, talents and interests that each human being possesses, with schools, districts and communities working in partnership;
- *broadening notions of "success"* and the skills students need to include more robust competencies for their individual thriving, contribution to communities and to creating a society that better supports the well-being of our diverse world; and

- *using a combination of structural, technical, cultural, political and social approaches* to achieve deep and lasting system-wide improvement, which include:
    - a systemic focus on multiple levels of experience in educational systems (bottom-up combined with top-down expertise);
    - the central place of the experience of local educators, students and communities in defining, implementing and refining strategies, in combination with policymakers and funders; and
    - an intentional focus on the nature and impact of race, class, gender, socioeconomics, power and history in how systemic change processes are undertaken and evaluated at local, state and national levels.

WHY NOT ADOPT AN EQUITY-CENTERED CAPACITY BUILDING APPROACH?

In order for states to adopt such an approach, they must develop a foundational understanding and shared definition of equity, commit to building the knowledge base of all staff, and develop a comprehensive approach to considering equity in all decisions about people, practices and policies. What isn't (and hasn't been) working is assigning the work of "equity" to one department, or to one ESA to focus on, or to the EACs, or to a "diversity" consultant or staff on whom all equity issues rest. Rather, all organizations, agencies and departments should have mutual ownership and specific responsibilities for ensuring equity in their crucial functions in support of school systems.

The Urban Strategies Council developed an equity framework (n.d.) that states might use to begin their work in creating a system that has equity as its foundation. In this model, states would:

1. ***Define equity and link that definition to expected outcomes in various settings***. This is a complex process and requires that all *personnel* develop a deep understanding of issues of equity, power, privilege and culture. This work includes the following:
    - defining the purpose of school as the pursuit of equity AND excellence, which may require expanding current definitions based solely on standardized tests and looking to additional metrics to determine excellence (see for example http://opportunitygap.org);
    - developing a set of questions that will guide all decisions (i.e., policy, hiring, resource allocation and intervention) — that are grounded in the twin notions of equity and excellence, and questioning the status quo (i.e., reconsidering routine ways of doing work);
    - committing to the long-term creation of a climate in which equity can flourish by training staff, noting that untrained staff will ensure the failure of the effort and that it takes time to develop skills in equity/inclusion; such skill-building is both a process and a goal;
    - set expectations of all funded organizations (e.g., ESAs, grantees) that equity and excellence are the core of their work, and work to develop their understanding of what this means;

- identify the network of providers who have deep knowledge of equity and excellence in supporting school systems, and leverage it; strategically recruit and hire people who have expertise already, but not as siloed "diversity specialists";
- remove barriers to LEA participation in equity and excellence work by minimizing the number of initiatives, creating communication channels across departments, coordinating efforts and strategically leveraging resources so that silos are avoided.

2. ***Mine and utilize data systems to understand how equity is either supported or constrained***. Too often, states rely solely on quantitative measures as a proxy for equity (namely test scores, graduation rates, special education referrals and identification). States should use those metrics as indicators or "flags" to look deeper. An SEA committed to ensuring equity would also utilize such strategies as *site visits* or *equity audits* to understand the contextual issues and perceptions of stakeholders about the depth and breadth of equity in school systems. A wide array of stakeholders authentically involved in planning and decision-making (including students, families and community members) would be optimal.
3. ***Ensure that all outcomes or goals explicitly address issues of equity and identify strategies to achieve equity***. Again, this means that SEA personnel must be deeply versed in equity issues, and possess the capacity to assess the depth and breadth of goals and strategies designed to improve both equity and excellence in school systems.
4. ***Commit to representation of diverse perspectives*** in leadership, staff and community input. This requires a look into the internal hiring and representation of state department personnel. Full participation by diverse community stakeholders who can collaborate around day-to-day practices and their impact on students, schools and communities is also necessary.
5. ***Focus on dual goals of ensuring equity in access to opportunity and in outcomes***. Too often, equity work focuses solely on outcomes (by focusing on quantitative data), rather than looking at access to opportunity and the removal of barriers to access that lead to particular outcomes.
6. ***Utilize a "targeted universalism" approach*** (Powell, Menendian & Reece, 2009). In this approach, policy and practices must be both designed to improve outcomes for all *as well as* targeted specifically to address the unique needs and conditions of marginalized groups.
7. ***Continually assess for equity***. Rather than identifying equity only as a goal to be assessed as an outcome, create mechanisms for reflecting on how equity considerations inform design, ongoing interim assessment, resource allocation, training and outcome measures.
8. ***Hold systems and individuals accountable for equity*** in both system-level reviews and individual job descriptions and performance evaluations.

QUESTION FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION

To make substantial movement toward our democratic ideal of equitable educational *opportunities* and *outcomes* for all students, we must contend with the changing expectations placed upon states, and rethink how states should be organized to address the tension between enforcement and support. What would happen if the role of the SEA were conceptualized to include:

- Leading:
  - setting the strategic vision, including short- and long-term planning
  - developing standards and interpreting policy
  - coalescing vendors, service providers, and LEAs around a vision for equity and excellence
- Regulating/evaluating:
  - ensuring that LEAs are in compliance with state and local law
  - ensuring that public funds are distributed and used appropriately and equitably
  - ensuring that LEAs meet the standards and expectation set by the state, specifically related to equity and excellence
  - ensuring that all vendors meet standards for equity and excellence
- Connecting:
  - brokering services by connecting LEAs with appropriate technical assistance providers, support services and agencies, such as those listed in previous sections?

There are two key challenges inherent in this suggestion: 1) the knowledge and capacity of current state personnel to lead work around equity and excellence (or effectively partner with those with this expertise), and 2) the complexity of state governmental authority, and the process it would take to shift the role of the state. This might, however, be a potentially useful direction. Narrowing the focus of the state to the above three categories can help mitigate or eliminate the conflict between being both evaluator and coach.

References

Brown, Cynthia, Frederick Hess, Daniel Lautzenheiser, and Isabel Owen, "State Education Agencies as Agents of Change: What It Will Take for the States to Step Up On Education Reform" (Washington, D.C.: Center for American Progress and American Enterprise Institute, July 2011), http://www.isbe.net/SIROEC/pdf/char_midwest_ed_agencies_030512.pdf

DeMarrais, Kathleen Bennett and Margaret Diane LeCompte, The Way Schools Work: A Sociological Analysis of Education (White Plains, New York: Longman Publishers, 1995).

Equity and Excellence Commission, "For Each and Every Child: A Strategy for Education, Equity, and Excellence" (U.S. Department of Education, Equity and Excellence Commission, 2013).

Garcia, Alicia, Lisa Shimmel, and Sara Wraight, "Characteristics of State Educational Service Agencies" (Regional Educational Laboratory Midwest, November 2011).

Herrington, Carolyn, and William Roe, "State Departments of Education, Role and Function,"http://education.stateuniversity.com/pages/2447/State-Departments-Education.html

Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA 2004) H.R.1350, http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/z?c108:h.1350.enr:

Jochim, Ashley, and Patrick Murphy, The Capacity Challenge: What It Takes for State Education Agencies to Support School Improvement (Seattle: Center on Reinventing Public Education, December 2013).

Johnson, Nicholas, Phil Oliff, and Erica Williams, An Update on State Budget Cuts (Washington, D.C.: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, February 2011), http://www.cbpp.org/research/an-update-on-state-budget-cuts

Kozol, Jonathan, Savage Inequalities: Children in America's Schools (New York: Harper Perennial, 1991).

Kubow, Patricia K. and Paul R. Fossum, Comparative Education: Exploring Issues in International Context, 2nd edition (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Pearson, 2007).

Lusi, S.F., The Role of State Departments of Education in Complex School Reform. (New York: Teachers College Press, 1997).

Marshall, Katherine, "Education for All: Translating Ideals of Equity into Robust Realities." Opening the Doors to Opportunity for All: Setting a Research Agenda for the Future (Washington, D.C.: American Institutes for Research, 2015), 17-23.

Murphy, Patrick, and Paul Hill, "The Changing Role of States in Education: The Move from Compliance to Performance Management," policy brief for the PIE Network 5th Annual Policy Summit, September 2011, http://www.crpe.org/sites/default/files/pub_capacity%20challenge_dec13_0.pdf

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, Pub. L. No. 107-110, 115 Stat. 1425, 20 U.S.C.A. §§ 6301 et seq. (2002 Supp.).

Ogbu, John, "Variability in minority school performance: A problem in search of an explanation," Anthropology and Education Quarterly 18, issue 4 (December 1987): 312-334.

Osta, Kathleen and Margaret Perrow, Coaching for Educational Equity: The BayCES Coaching Framework (Oakland, California: Bay Area Coalition for Equitable Schools, 2008).

Patton, J.M., "The disproportionate representation of African-Americans in special education: Looking behind the curtain for understanding and solutions," Journal of Special Education 32, no. 1 (Spring 1998): 25-31.

Petty, Sheryl, The New Frontier: An Integrated Framework for Equity & Transformative Improvement in Education (Oakland, California: California Tomorrow, October 2010). http://www.californiatomorrow.org/media/The-New-Frontier.pdf

Petty, Sheryl, Supporting Sustainable Improvement in School Systems: Capacity Building for Equity and Excellence. Opening the Doors to Opportunity for All: Setting a Research Agenda for the Future (Washington, D.C.: American Institutes for Research, 2015), http://www.air.org/sites/default/files/OpeningTheDoors-EquityProject-Jan2015.pdf

Powell, John, Stephen Menendian, and Jason Reece, J., "The Importance of Targeted Universalism," America's Growing Inequality: The Impact of Poverty and Race, (Washington, D.C.: Poverty & Race Research Action Council, 2009).

Smarick, Andy and Juliet Squire, "The State Education Agency: At the Helm, not the Oar" (Washington, D.C.: Bellwether Education Partners, April

2014), http://www.edexcellencemedia.net/publications/2014/State-Education-Agency-Helm-Not-Oar/State-Education-Agency-Helm-Not-Oar-FINAL.pdf

Urban Strategies Council, "An Equity Framework," http://www.urbanstrategies.org/equity/#.VU0ezflViko

Williams, J.M. and R.J. Alsop, "The role of educational service agencies in supporting alternative teacher certification (Arlington, VA: Association of Educational Service Agencies, 2008).

IMPLEMENTING THE COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS: LESSONS FROM BALTIMORE CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

By **Sonja Brookins Santelises**, Vice President of K-12 Policy & Practice, The Education Trust, and Former Chief Academic Officer, Baltimore City Public Schools

---

The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) have quickly moved from an educator-focused initiative to a political flashpoint. Many state and local education leaders are embroiled in charged assaults or defense of the Common Core, well beyond the walls of local school houses and communities. In the midst of such exchanges, it is easy to forget that long before debates about federal overreach and testing, Common Core represented an important move to create high-level learning targets for all students. The Common Core generated fervency and focus among many engaged in the frontlines of advancing educational equity and excellence.

Alone, the adoption of challenging academic standards will never bring all students to high levels of achievement. However, CCSS does represent a chance for schools and districts to reinvigorate and re-align their work around greater expectations for student learning. Approached with intentionality and strategic purpose, "Common Core implementation" could actually serve as a relevant organizing force if leaders moved beyond technical implementation concerns toward addressing deeper issues around expectations, learning and instruction to engage educators and stakeholders in the work of improving learning. It was this potential that springboarded Baltimore City Public Schools' work with the Common Core, which began shortly after the standards were introduced in 2010.

BACKGROUND

By 2010, Baltimore City Public Schools was well into implementing reforms to realign the system's structures and processes to the needs of students and schools. The shift to schools as the focal point

for decision-making redirected both human and financial resources away from longstanding central office bureaucracies. City Schools CEO Andres Alonso garnered national attention for the district's work on a student-driven, fair student funding model and groundbreaking success in overhauling student discipline, with significant reductions in student suspensions and dropouts, and increased graduation rates. The theory of action promoted schools as the center of decision-making with significant autonomy for school leaders around high accountability for student performance. Coupled with a system of support, the autonomy in exchange for accountability quickly led many high-capacity school leaders and schools to experience new levels of success for students.

Despite the many successes from these early efforts, the city's schools still needed to move from the structural reforms that underpinned the district's early gains to those that would get to the core of teaching and learning for all the city's young people. Increased accountability drew attention to schools with longer histories of underperformance, and many school and teacher leaders still wanted more effective support and direction in increasing student achievement. Even with overall increases in student test scores, too few schools were engaging their predominantly African American and low-income students with the kind of learning that supports long-term student success and promotes greater access. The system needed a way to communicate and actualize a school culture that supported deep learning for its low-income youth and students of color.

MAXIMIZING THE MOMENT

Common Core did not revolutionize the ways in which City Schools approached and considered the work of educating its young people. However, its emergence provided a common focal point for questions about whether our targets for student achievement were truly readying *all* students for college, career and life success. The Common Core further provided an opportune, large scale, national lever to justify, prod and mobilize urgency around the change work some already recognized needed to happen. The focus shifted from merely educating Baltimore's young people to "get by," stay clear of incarceration and acquire a set of minimal skills toward developing a community of schools focused on educating future leaders.

This shift required an approach by school and district educators that would connect with their daily work. Teachers and school leaders needed to see the connection between the Common Core and ways to more effectively work as a team, maximize their own expertise and strengthen their own practice in service of young people. District educators needed to grasp the facilitating relationship between their coordinated, responsive and quality support of schools, and the success of the shift the Common Core furthered. Communication, leadership and guidance were essential.

COMMUNICATING CONNECTIONS

Often, school districts approach efforts like changes in standards as a new frontier of previously uncharted territory. In order to ensure Common Core pushed the most important elements of instructional improvement, it was essential schools saw connections between their core work and the fundamental shifts the standards represented. From the beginning, Common Core in Baltimore City Schools was tied to the need to *increase the cognitive demand* of what we asked young people to do, *enrich teachers' instruction* and *strengthen the instructional leadership* of school leaders.

The challenge was communicating this essential purpose in a way that moved beyond the expected structural responses. "Implementation" and "adoption" do not sufficiently convey the full extent of the change required. At an early principal meeting to introduce key elements of the CCSS, one school leader asked whether it was wise to invest so heavily in a new initiative that would likely end up like many rotating projects and shifting priorities in education. The school leader verbally expressed the thoughts of many colleagues. The response from a trusted colleague who facilitated the session adjusted this framing. He replied almost prophetically, *"You have to ask yourself, if all of this went away today, would these standards still be the right targets for our kids? Even with political agendas and shifting leadership, do we believe young people from low-income communities deserve the kind of instruction that enables them to demonstrate these skills and competencies? If the answer is yes, then we have our answer to the question."* To reinforce this, key messages emerged and leadership attempted to reinforce them, albeit imperfectly, throughout the organization. CCSS messaging: 1) built on existing successes and 2) reinforced that there were no pre-set, cookbook answers.

Building on Success

The district was experiencing some pockets of success in moving high-quality instruction. Under the leadership of a former Maryland teacher of the year, mathematics achievement at the elementary and middle school levels had already begun rising from dismally low levels. Handfuls of exemplary school leaders incubated fresh work in deep teaching and learning at the school level. Likewise, Special Education and Student Support divisions partnered with schools to settle a decades-old lawsuit, representing a chance to move from a compliance focus toward ensuring that students with disabilities experience high-quality teaching and learning. As in many districts, these isolated pockets signaled areas from which to build. Schools' reception of the Common Core certainly benefited from connections to these successes, primarily because whenever possible, the standards represented the next phase of deepening and expanding our collective "wins."

With the early mathematics success, credibility grew among a critical majority of both school leaders and teachers, and, by following district direction, principals had experienced the rise in student achievement scores. Because it was led by a widely respected teacher leader, and the central office math work was staffed by teachers who had experienced success from her leadership in their own classrooms, a majority of teachers viewed the move as authentic. Given this context, when the head of mathematics repeatedly validated the Common Core as the "work we need to take us to the next level," her professional credibility spoke as powerfully as her words. Further, the district's math success grew from a grassroots movement by classroom teachers who gathered on their own after school, on weekends and in each other's homes to rewrite curriculum and adjust their instruction. The way this network continued to evolve benefited the shift to CCSS. The teacher leaders, informal collaboration teams and instructional conversations — all outgrowths of that earlier teacher-led math improvement — had already started to become institutionalized. The district was able to capitalize on the processes but shift the focus to the math standards.

In areas that lacked similar processes, such as in meeting the learning needs of students with disabilities, messages tended to be aspirational. They built on procedural and technical wins from resolving the 26-year-old lawsuit to set up deeper adaptive change. Messaging focused more on "retooling," "finally getting beyond compliance" and "doing more to help students with disabilities

achieve at high levels." The standards represented by the Common Core also increased pressure on both educators and the system itself to shift practice to enable significantly more students to access grade-level content and learning. *One Year Plus* was a groundbreaking district policy that called for students with disabilities, but without severe cognitive disabilities, to achieve state standards. While the policy officially shifted the focus of special education to academic outcomes, the prevailing classroom culture had not kept pace. Too many young people who were performing at two-to-five years below grade level were still languishing in classes where the classwork would never give them the opportunity to come close to a postsecondary academic standard. The Common Core helped shine a light on the need to transform *One Year Plus* from policy to actual practice that improved the lives of young people.

In both cases, building on success and potential helped to connect key bodies of work. Communicating Common Core efforts as the "deeper" or "next" work, rather than "new" work, enabled teachers and school leaders to validate some of their own successes without the misguided comfort of believing no change was required. These messages inspired confidence in some educators to connect new learning to authentic success without justifying the "I already know/I already do all that" mentality in others.

No Cookbooks Here

Given the nature of Common Core and the deeper learning it can promote, it is important to message early and often that achieving this type of learning requires the ongoing examination and reimagining of processes and content. The consequence of framing any major learning initiative as an implementation exercise is that it triggers an automatic search for a new manual or answer key. The Common Core had no user's manual and therefore summoned educators to make sense of the expected student outcomes in their particular contexts, while identifying the implications for the adults who serve them. In Baltimore, the newness of the standards presented an opportunity to provide space early on for people to deconstruct the standards and communicate this need for constant re-examination of practice and understanding. From the outset, it was important that everyone internalized the idea that the standards meant higher expectations for what our young people could accomplish. It also meant higher expectations for adult learning. At district principal meetings in that first year of the Common Core, the message was clear that there would be support and resources, but no simple or pre-packaged answers. Principals did spend some time receiving an overview of the standards, however, they spent far more time engaged in interactive and focused examination of the standards with colleagues.

One benefit to the lack of Common Core-aligned instructional materials was that, out of necessity, *central and school leaders had to spend far more time considering the actual teaching changes that needed to occur to help students reach new levels of achievement*. Teachers and school and district leaders had to first examine instructional shifts as magnifying glasses of our current, insufficient practice. For example, no ready-made "aligned reading series" meant that, as a district, we had to consider why so many of our low-income students of color were rarely asked to write anything beyond a paragraph in middle school or one to two sentences in elementary school. Even without official Common Core standards, we needed these questions answered. Constantly messaging the lack of an official "CCSS Cookbook" took away some of the traditional crutches we educators often use to shroud our own biases about which students are capable of what types of tasks and learning. *Common Core became a useful vehicle to drive home what had been true for a long time: What defined quality teaching and*

acceptable learning targets for the many poor, black children in Baltimore City was radically less than what it was for the children of educators.

Communicating key messages of urgent learning needs, student promise, adult capacity and underlying issues of equity were important in moving beyond standards rhetoric. It created an opportunity to ground the Common Core in the larger work, rather than having the Common Core become the major work. While many still used Common Core as an expedient way to explain the deeper focus, the term now had a different function. Communication helped change the narrative of new standards as a disconnected compliance activity. It would take active leadership to build authentic and essential ownership of these ideals in ways that translated into action.

NEW VISIONS OF LEADERSHIP

Most structural leadership models either directly or indirectly promote a singular, transformative individual as the essential key to turning any plan into a reality: The charismatic superintendent, crusader principal or gifted teacher are iconic. *This path also tends to yield an overreliance on a linear approach to information transfer.* Instead of creating broad bases of understanding among a diverse team of stakeholders, it yields a group of individuals throughout the organization who hold valuable knowledge to be passed on to others. Unfortunately, this "turnkey" approach rarely works in bringing anything to scaled excellence. At some point, an individual responsible for this transfer does not effectively translate or transfer the key learning. Predictably, proximity to learning and information reinforces the "elites vs. non-elites" paradigm.

One of the reasons the leadership of current school reform efforts are plagued with reflecting long-standing trends in racial and economic power inequities is that the access to information flow and decision-making chambers have not changed. Structural responses, whether it is policymaking in Washington or in school district offices in hamlets and urban centers, continue to resist changing the flow of access to information and decision-making. Ironically, not only do we reinforce existing strongholds, we predestine our efforts to failure or limited success because we ignore critical voices from shaping the work, the advocacy and the reform. We give priority to one kind of knowledge while dismissing another. Baltimore City Schools, like many other organizations, could have easily proceeded down the same path if left unchecked. Moving the boundaries on who shares the leadership space and breaking up privileged power silos helped begin to address these counterproductive tendencies.

Leading From Every Position

One of the earliest missteps in moving forward with Common Core in Baltimore City was relying on the transfer of knowledge through hierarchical leadership structures. One month after the first announcement of the Common Core standards, the district engaged principals in professional development. Intended to promote true learning, the sessions were deliberately structured not only to transfer the content of what the Common Core was, but to make sure that school leaders had the opportunity to decipher the standards and their implications for student learning in Baltimore City. The sessions left many principals wanting more information and support to understand the standards, so the Chief Academic Office committed to a full year of monthly, day-long learning sessions for school leaders. Teachers received a two- to three-hour introduction to the standards right before school

opened and additional workshops as part of districtwide professional development days that occurred four times throughout the year.

At first glance, it appeared as if Baltimore City was ahead of the curve in preparing our district to use the standards to leverage student learning. Principals in the district knew about the Common Core's implications for instruction, and Baltimore City teachers had seen and at least interacted with the standards before many of their colleagues throughout the state. These experiences cemented Common Core as a district priority and undergirded a growing focus on student learning and highly effective teaching. However, these efforts fell significantly short of the goal of using the standards as leverage for high-impact change in how the city's low-income students of color experienced learning and demonstrated high achievement. At the end of a year of significant investment of time and resources, particularly in school leaders, the landscape of schools' responsiveness matched familiar patterns. A small percentage of schools with principals who knew how to use their learning to foster solid, site-based, "job-embedded" professional development for teachers were further along the desired trajectory than schools with weaker or less experienced principals. Teachers in most schools reported they still knew very little about how the Common Core worked in operation and some reported they had heard very little aside from a few hours spent in district sessions. The bottom line was that the idea of transferring key knowledge and having school principals serve as the only point person for developing quality learning experiences for teachers followed a well-worn path of relying on hierarchical flow to grow ownership and buy-in. This trajectory changed significantly over the next two years when the district *moved toward concentrating the preponderance of the learning in school leadership teams rather than in groups of principals*.

Given the large body of relevant research, no one should argue the critical role that school leaders play in school improvement and high performance. However, it is also true that even in the best of school contexts, *one person learning and then passing on learning is not as effective as a highly effective team of people learning together*. Instructional leadership teams comprised of assistant principals, instructional support staff (e.g., content coaches, specialists, key aides, etc.), and classroom teacher leaders became the new focus of district support for professional learning. It took some schools longer to find the right people to be a part of this team. As the teamwork centered on teaching and learning, suddenly the missing voice of actual classroom teachers became painfully obvious. Assistant principals relegated only to discipline management became needed instructional partners as well. As teams engaged in learning experiences and planned follow-up together, there was a greater sense of mutual accountability.

If follow-up went nowhere back at the school building, a team of colleagues were aware. Representatives from a fuller spectrum of positions not only received the same information, but participated in shared learning experience that was not dependent on one's place in a hierarchy. Each Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) member had to own the feedback from the larger school community instead of it resting solely on the shoulders of the school principal to communicate and organize action. District professional development sessions became school team planning time interspersed with group learning from content experts. Separate principal meeting agendas became an outgrowth of ILT meetings and other issues related to the role of principals, rather than the driver of the Common Core standards. This resulted in greater ownership among all school players, deeper

application to broad-based learning goals for young people and increased numbers of leaders from which to build Baltimore's overall leadership capacity.

The principal is indeed a leader who, by virtue of the role, has a specific set of responsibilities and accountability. However, every adult working on behalf of young people is called to lead from their place in the ecosystem that is school. Everyone brings an essential element or perspective. Ironically, even in a district that experienced far greater autonomy for principals and schools, Baltimore City still suffered from a hierarchical, command and control culture. Particularly in low-income communities like Baltimore, it is essential that every opportunity to activate collective agency is maximized. Command-and-control cultures are supported and furthered by structures and processes that continue to privilege and withhold necessary information. Building strong, representative ILTs helped move schools, but without central office making similar changes, a vital roadblock to collective agency would remain in place.

Breaking Silos

Early in the Alonso administration, there was a targeted reduction in the number of central office staffing positions in a move to return more decision-making and resources back to schools. The shrinking of central support staff numbers was the first move, albeit structural, to change the long-held method of trying to dictate practice from a position far from the reality of schools. Despite the call for central based staff to provide guidance and support to schools, too often the struggle to align work between central offices revealed just how far away such a goal really was. This misalignment and competing priorities continued to send mixed messages to schools. One office would emphasize compliance around district hiring guidelines, for example, while principal supervisors would communicate the importance of making sure quality staff was hired as early as possible. Principals were left to figure out, circumvent or struggle with these often conflicting mandates.

Similarly, the lack of alignment in central office support and interaction with schools meant that expectations and prioritization of the Common Core changed with each interaction. For example, many young people throughout the city were in classrooms with paltry or low-level book selections. Through discussions of Common Core expectations for student reading and writing, the district emphasized the need for a wider range of more challenging nonfiction texts and novels for K-12 classrooms. The Academic Office messaged the priority of timely, centrally funded, new classroom library orders so that teachers and school leaders would receive them in time for end-of-summer planning and the start of the school year. The finance office did not have the necessary book codes input into the system, so they rejected the majority of school book orders. The lack of effective communication between these two divisions caused a significant portion of the ensuing confusion and disorder. However, a deeper examination also revealed a more fundamental disconnect in understanding about the ultimate goal at hand.

Structures and procedures that foster and support quality communication in large systems are indeed essential. However, by themselves, these systems are insufficient to foster the kind of broad buy-in and understanding that carries an organization forward in the midst of the iterative challenges that characterize large urban school districts. The rejected book orders would be relatively minor if the problem had been identified and easily remedied when the first principal called the finance office to

complain. Nearly a quarter of schools signaled a problem and no one could quickly resolve the issue. The Common Core was not seen as a finance issue, so neither were new novels for adolescents. In large part, the finance team charged with reviewing orders had no larger understanding of why the books were being ordered, the larger student need, or how this action helped to remedy it. In systems where there is a shared goal and everyone sees their role in furthering that goal, similar structural breakdowns yield a very different adaptive response.

Alternatively, *in some districts the articulation of learning goals encompasses the entire system and a focus area becomes a rallying point for every adult.* A northwestern school district focused on increasing student literacy created conversations among all support staff, regardless of position or department. The ensuing staff conversations resulted in bus drivers carrying boxes of reading books on buses for students and cafeteria staff reading to students during lunch periods. One district Chief Financial Officer led the passionate fight to identify additional funding in the budget to keep literacy coaches in the schools where they were most critical. Seemingly small, these are outward manifestations of a system shifting toward integrated and reinforcing actions that support student growth.

Senior leadership's responsibility is to require, support, reward and evaluate results based, in part, on the extent to which work is experienced as coherent at the school level. The only way this can occur is when central office staff view their work as supporting schools and when their own success is assessed in light of the progress of schools and students. Too often, district central office staff do not work together because there is a tolerance for isolated work streams. This isolation makes it easier for each office to view their work as giving a long list of edicts to schools and assuring compliance. Holding central offices responsible for their actual support of schools requires a clear definition of what comprises support, particularly when the goal represents a significant shift in the type of learning we want low-income students and students of color to experience.

GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT ESSENTIALS

Any significant change in practice will remain a conceptual exercise unless teachers and school leaders have the guidance and support to adjust their behaviors and mindsets. Accountability establishes important non-negotiables, starting points and ambitious learning targets. However, it's the corresponding guidance and support for those closest to students that transform course content and daily interactions with young people. The challenge in most districts serving large numbers of low-income children and young people of color is the limited support for the adults who serve them. *In many ways, these educators experience low-level learning activities that mirror those of their students.* Often, they receive a PowerPoint listing discrete steps to follow and limited and unrelated curriculum materials. Most districts are hardwired to activate a system of "implementation" that not only leaves educators with partial understanding of the changes needed, but communities completely disconnected from what can only be described as an anesthetic process. As noted previously, Baltimore experienced many of these same challenging mindsets in early efforts to use the Common Core for transformative change in teaching and learning. However, focused attention on both the responsive nature of increasing capacity and the need to support rapid, iterative learning environments helped schools progress to a new level of learning.

Instructional Materials

Many educators have come to expect a district "roll out" rather than a mobilization. Roll outs are usually a series of short-term actions whereby a district office presents teachers and school leaders with a new textbook series or set of learning materials, with accompanying two-hour workshops. While it is necessary for classroom-, school- and district-level educators to familiarize themselves with new, updated, high-quality learning materials, they are not sufficient for reaching more effective instructional change. *Mobilization certainly includes high-quality learning materials, but beyond this, it also organizes a set of learning and teaching behaviors around them. It takes into account the real need to adjust from varied starting points, given what teachers and administrators learn about students as they put materials in play.* Usually, teachers must secretly make these changes out of fear or experience that the larger system does not welcome this flexibility. Mobilization makes it official that changes and adaptations will be necessary given ground-level context and new learning that can only occur when real teachers are working with real students.

Baltimore faced the same lack of "aligned" instructional materials as every other district in the country. Additionally, schools had received no clear recommended literacy materials in the most recent years prior to the release of the Common Core, which compounded these resource gaps. While the lack of instructional materials is not ideal, it did present a number of opportunities. First, the district moved to ground most of its English Language Arts curriculum in actual novels, nonfiction texts and other poetry and prose. Although there were still materials that provided phonics and word skill units for early literacy, there was a greater emphasis on urban children interacting with real texts rather than excerpts and copies. For many schools and district leaders, it had become acceptable for low-income and African American students to have photocopied picture books for first-graders, a classroom library of 10-15 discarded texts and no school library. The Common Core should not have been necessary to rectify this situation, but it certainly provided the extra rationale and shift needed to push for action.

Second, the development of units of study with Baltimore teachers and partnering content experts provided an opportunity to respond more readily to educator questions and needed changes. To be sure, not every issue could be addressed immediately, but there was an ability to adapt and respond in ways that helped make teaching more effective more quickly and also signaled to the field that their feedback and experiences mattered beyond "faithful implementation." Finally, the early, internal development of literacy curriculum units allowed the district to lay the foundation for deeper content connections that are absent in so many urban schools serving low-income communities and families of color. A lack of instructional leadership, knowledge, and a misinterpretation of accountability guidelines has collectively contributed to content-poor learning experiences for our most vulnerable students. These are often the students who most need content-rich learning experiences. Baltimore used this opportunity to focus again on such content areas as social studies, history and the sciences to reclaim the attention of school leaders and teachers. It also gave teaching and learning support staff more momentum and accountability for the success of the learning changes espoused by the Common Core work.

Ultimately, every district and school will rely on some instructional materials to support their teaching. The key is not to develop every instructional support from ground up. In fact there are a number of places, including at the school level, where this would be misguided energy. The goal of mobilizing

quality action should always be an essential element. *Remaining responsive to ground-level feedback during the entire use of materials, rather than just at the outset, engenders trust and ownership not to mention more responsive instruction.* Embracing the necessity of adapting to local needs seems simple, but somehow is not always easy when moving practice at scale. In fact, fostering adult learning that results in increased student achievement remains an ongoing question, particularly at scale.

Districtwide Learning Processes

One element that differentiated this process from earlier professional development and professional learning community efforts was the fact that there was a *dedicated time for "safe practice" of new strategies*. This finite time proved invaluable in a Baltimore context where many teachers and principals still feared retribution from supervisors if the "messy" aspects of learning were evident. While faulty practice should never be tolerated over the long run, reasonable periods of innovation before the expectation to demonstrate any serious proficiency in a new instructional move gave everyone permission to ask questions and make mistakes. It also helped school and district leaders communicate more balanced expectations for adult learning in a very "results-driven" accountability culture.

The professional learning cycles also helped to link content, Common Core instructional targets and learning processes. The Common Core-focused themes of each cycle — for example, claims-based writing, accountable student talk, etc. — helped drive a common experience that helped teachers and leaders communicate learning across schools. However, schools also expressed appreciation of the fact that because the ILTs were responsible for facilitating the process, the work felt more school-driven than centrally mandated. Principals, coaches and classroom teachers were all represented in ILT leadership, and therefore the learning cycles were a community experience that moved Common Core and adult learning.

As noted earlier, Baltimore's shift away from an over-reliance on a "command and control culture" associated with teaching and learning began in a number of places. Ground-level, teacher-driven improvement in mathematics achievement and moving to a focus on school ILT development were a few such moves. The shift felt most by principals and teachers across the district came when central staff began supporting a cycle of professional learning for these school teams. Cycles of Professional Learning were developed in conjunction with some key outside partners, but it was the focused attention of key school and district leadership on a set of common learning processes that helped give the process its traction.

THE COMPLEXITIES OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: HOW CULTURAL HISTORIES SHAPE THE WAYS TEACHERS RESPOND TO MULTIPLE FORMS OF DIVERSITY

By **Elizabeth B. Kozleski**, Professor & Chair, Special Education Department, University of Kansas, and **Molly Baustien Siuty**, CEEDAR Center, University of Florida, Doctoral Student, Department of Special Education, University of Kansas

INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education is an educational agenda that, in its ideal form, can transform educational policies, structures and agencies. Its implementation demands new patterns and routines in what counts as education, the delivery of opportunities to learn and the forms and processes of student participation. In this article, we make a case for inclusive education as an education agenda for equity that redresses marginalization in several forms. In our view, an inclusive education agenda calls for seismic shifts in how teachers are socialized into the profession, including a curriculum that encompasses critical, contextual and technical knowledge and application. We also advance the notion that teacher education must be a transformative venture in which teacher candidates reframe and renegotiate their own identities as they prepare to teach students whose cultural histories, practices and values may challenge the dominant notion of schooling.

CONTEXT

In the U.S., state and local governments hold sway over national efforts to align and standardize schooling. Preschool through 12th-grade education is the domain of local school districts who devise the curriculum, purchase the textbooks, hire the teachers and build the school buildings. For the most part, locally elected school boards hire and fire their school superintendents, although local city

mayors, in some cases, appoint local superintendents. Teachers unions are most powerful in the northeastern and West Coast states, although most school districts do have teachers unions. Nearly half of the 50 states (n = 24) have laws that prevent unions from requiring that all teachers join.

Local property taxes pay for local schooling, with states supplementing local tax dollars to try to even out the per-pupil expenditures between local school districts. Federal dollars are awarded to states, which in turn distribute dollars to local school districts. However, federal support of local education constitutes, on the average, less than 25 percent of the funding that fuels public education. Annual assessments of student progress are developed and managed at the state level. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) is highly sampled, but is not designed to be used to assess local practice.

There are approximately 110,000 public schools in the U.S. educating about 52 million students, with the 100 largest school systems in the country educating about a quarter of all students. The largest number of large school systems (i.e., districts serving more than 100,000 students) are in the southeastern part of the country. At about 1 million students, New York City is the largest school system. Some of the smallest school systems have less than 100 students. Educational gaps persist in the U.S., with African American, Latino, American Indian and low-income students perennially posting some of the lowest assessments. Graduation rates for students with disabilities and American Indians are a little more than half the number of students from these two populations who attend school.

In recent years, teacher education programs have faced harsh criticism from politicians, business leaders and the general public. These critiques have prompted attempts to professionalize teacher education through universal teacher quality standards and performance assessments (Cochran-Smith & Fries, 2001). In spite of several reform initiatives over the last century, the historical legacy of teacher education is one that perpetuates a white, middle class status quo (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Even when teacher education programs do address diversity or social justice, they are often treated as peripheral to the core pedagogical content, resulting in the *ghettoization of diversity*. Universal policies to further standardize and regulate teacher education do not challenge the deeper social and cultural inequalities within pre-K-12 and higher education. They are thus unlikely to produce the necessary change that will increase equity for historically marginalized communities (Whitty, 1997).

Approaching equity as a homogenization project within these arenas, operating at different scales amidst numerous political and power dynamics, seems misguided. Focusing on standards or indices of equity and learning might bear fruit, but as attempts to create the Common Core Learning Standards and national approaches to assessing student learning are implemented, things get muddled. Assessment and its results seem to take priority over learning. The Common Core, at present, is losing rather than gaining support.

Systems and complexity theory offer some explanations, as we discuss in the following sections.

System Entropy. Examining injustice often seems to occur from a 10,000-foot level — looking across our schools, districts and states to compare and aggregate outcomes — while solutions typically are focused on local response. Why? Because policy is structured to demand change at the local level. Little effort is spent examining how contributions to current levels of inequity are embedded in distal

policies. While local systems may understand that they are not alone, the challenges that a school district in Wyoming faces are often both similar and very different than those faced in Florida, Vermont or Texas. Consider the intersection of size, geography, history, economics, local culture, school demographics, teachers and the curriculum. On the surface, the task may seem straightforward, but local forces can produce very different effects. Therefore, actions within local contexts can differ widely, and rarely does a state leverage enough influence to counter the power of local context. This is particularly true in large school systems and sometimes small systems where the local bureaucracy and history is deeper and more powerful than the leverage that state education agencies can press. Systemic entropy, the loss of sufficient energy to propel substantial and meaningful change, is a product of insufficient attention to change levers at the local level and misguided attempts to standardize locally driven educational systems.[i]

Accountability. Local, state and federal policymakers seem to design accountability systems looking backwards in terms of demographics and the accompanying population differences in language, cultural histories, and ways of learning and sense-making. Most assessments are infused with assumptions of particular approaches to how knowledge accumulates and the ways in which students make sense of curriculum and problem-solving (Kozleski & Atkinson, 2013). Indeed, even for students from the dominant culture, specific tactics have to be learned to ensure that students know how to take assessments. This specialized knowledge is regularly available outside of school through special classes that families purchase for their children to do well on the tests. Because only some families can make these kinds of financial investments, we corrupt the purpose of accountability assessment by using it for purposes for which it was not intended: student categorization and teacher proficiency.

Assessment that improves access to learning through the design and fine-tuning of curriculum and pedagogy to meet learner needs is not accomplished through group administered, uniform assessments. Assessment that uncovers how a learner is making meaning of a task or knowledge area requires conditional assessment tasks to help a teacher understand what instruction and experiences a child needs in order to make progress.

Old assessment discourses that contributed to the social, political and economic subordination of indigenous and African American peoples resurfaced during the immigration tides of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Those same discourses exist today.

> *Whose English is the real English? Whose histories, mores, and geographies are legitimized in schooling? How do teachers navigate the cultural boundaries between and among students, families, and the official school curricula? These are controversial spaces to inhabit, to understand, to mobilize, and to learn in and from. How teachers conceptualize their work, the degree to which they are supported to examine their practices, and grapple with fundamental challenges with what and how we know places the equity challenges in schooling today at the heart of what we mean by inclusive education (Kozleski, Artiles, & Lacy, 2012, pp. 114).*

The U.S., like many other countries, exists at a crossroad. Change inundates us, challenging our views of what an education means, what it should accomplish and who should be educated. Local history, custom and expectations respond to these challenges differently. Resources, vision and opportunities are perceived in very different ways, often by people who live side by side. Teachers are only as good

as their opportunities and access to the best information about how humans learn. If education is the launching pad for exploring, innovating and inventing, how shall it be organized, and what do teachers need to be able to do?

Dewey (1981) wrote that teachers can provide an important, if not the most important, social force in balancing the inherent tensions between democracy and capitalism "by developing democratic habits of thought and action" (p. 225) in our children. Thus, we need teachers who use their knowledge and skills to democratize their classrooms into inclusive centers of civically engaged citizens. This is our accountability measure.

Education in the U.S. is an amalgam of local school systems; not a tightly linked single system. Attempts to rectify outcomes, opportunities to learn and participation in learning cannot be achieved merely by setting standards and assessing student learning. Such endeavors mask the ever-present inequities that abound *locally* in terms of who counts, who is included and what kind of education we want for our children.

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION AS A RESPONSE TO MARGINALIZATION

One challenge that U.S educators face is the absence of discourse on how culture permeates learning and human development (Rogoff, 2003). Our curriculum and the graded organization of schools produce institutionalized marginalization because we lack collective understanding of how cultural histories and experiences shape approaches to learning and knowledge-building (Cole, 2005). Because of this de-cultured view of learning, our teaching methods limit opportunities to learn for groups of students who lack tools to uncover the *tacit or hidden assumptions* built into the culture of schooling. Communities of practice in classrooms, schools, school districts and state education agencies are saturated with these assumptions throughout their daily activities. A number of markers of difference intersect within individual experience such as dis/ability, race, gender, ethnicity and language, enacting particular kinds of injustices for students because of the institutionalized racialized and minoritized practices that exist within schools and the communities they serve.

Inclusivity acknowledges that re-forming communities of practice is a project that is continuous since new forms of difference emerge from intersectionality. Booth and Ainscow (2000) described inclusive education as a process in which participation is expanded while, in response, exclusion from mainstream schools dwindles. Waitoller & Kozleski (2013) defined it as a global movement that emerged in response to systemic exclusion of students who are viewed as different (e.g., students with disabilities, ethnically and linguistically diverse students and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds) from meaningful access and participation in education.

Inclusive education is a continuous struggle toward (a) the redistribution of quality opportunities to learn and participate in educational programs, (b) the recognition and value of differences as reflected in content, pedagogy and assessment tools, and (c) the opportunities for marginalized groups to represent themselves in decision-making processes that advance and define claims of exclusion and the respective solutions that affect their children's educational futures (Waitoller & Kozleski, 2013, p. 36).

This concept of inclusive education as a continuous struggle reflects the notion that we are often unaware of the underlying structures that organize our work (Kozleski, in press). The *margins and centers* of inclusive education are in continuous flow, producing new margins and centers (Artiles & Kozleski, 2007). Recognizing and accounting for individuals and groups constitutes an exercise of power that moves individuals and groups into the flow of a system, refining margins and boundaries for who is included, thereby redistributing identity and power. Inclusivity requires moving from marginalizing to expanding processes that are made possible by disruptions and redirections within activity systems (Engeström & Sannino, 2010). For equity and inclusiveness to flower, these disruptions and redirections must happen in how we prepare educators for their work in inclusive schools. Certainly, teachers will prove critical in the quest for inclusion since they represent the front lines that will build inclusive classrooms and carry out inclusive practices (Hindin, Morocco, Mott, &, Aguilar, 2007; Ross, Bruce, & Hogaboam-Gray, 2006).

EDUCATE WITH DIVERSITY IN MIND: EDUCATOR PREPARATION

Teacher preparation programs must prepare teachers to work with the full range of students they will encounter in their classrooms. While on the surface, dual certification[ii] programs seem to move toward a greater capacity for culturally responsive teaching, they often take an *additive* approach to diversity, so that multiple and intersecting forms of diversity become an additional workload as opposed to being integral to teaching practice (Pugach & Blanton, 2012). Even when broadening the notion of diversity beyond ability, courses and instructors commonly spend greater time and focus on dis/ability rather than such identity markers as race, language, gender, sexuality or class. Moreover, dis/ability is rarely couched in terms of its intersection with race and ethnicity and the marginalization of certain minority groups within special education. Without a greater understanding of the role that power and privilege play within the education system, the most skilled teachers will run the risk of perpetuating inequity and exclusivity in their classroom. Pugach, Blanton, & Florian (2012) deem these dual certification programs as "*transitional rather than transformational* (p. 265)." Change agents must develop systems that can transform teacher preparation in order to prepare teachers for the broad spectrum of students they are bound to encounter.

Engineering change around diversity represents a particular challenge in that systems change is itself an exercise in cultural activity (Kozleski & Huber, 2010). In order to support greater cultural responsiveness, substantive change must begin with a critical analysis of current practices to evaluate the extent to which they privilege certain groups over others and perpetuate an invisible status quo (Kozleski, Thorius & Smith, 2014). Through a process of understanding and reflection, participants can identify elements of the system that are resistant to change or too weak to sustain it (Kozleski & Smith, 2009). Transformational change for greater cultural responsiveness in teacher preparation will require this type of critical analysis at all levels, including state departments, institutions of higher education and local school districts. Highly skilled teachers of the future must have the capacity to teach in increasingly diverse and complex classrooms. The system cannot be inclusive and simultaneously bifurcate the teaching profession so that only some teachers can work with particular groups of students.

PREPARING TEACHERS TO PRACTICE AS INCLUSIVE EDUCATORS

Teaching is a deeply personal and relational practice. The social, intellectual and political capital teachers draw on informs the rapid transactions within classrooms between and among teachers and students (Erickson, 2004). Not only do teachers draw on their own rich cultural histories, but the institutional cultures in which they practice also shape their practice. The school cultures reify certain kinds of knowledge through sorting, gathering and predicting — to the neglect of other types of knowledge. *The curricula are based on particular epistemological assumptions about what constitutes knowledge, how knowledge is accumulated and what knowledge is used and for what purposes.* For instance, indigenous cultures and other localized cultures such as those of the Ojibwe and Navajo nations, as well as cultures that have been deeply reliant on oral histories, sort, gather and predict in very different ways than the dominant pattern prevalent in many U.S. and western nation schools. The very recent history of Indian Boarding Schools in the U.S. is a reminder of the ways in which school may or may not account for and connect to the cultural histories and practices of students.

Teaching requires knowing students. That is, teachers must know students not as a general class, but students in particular, the ones assigned to a particular section and a specific time slot. That group of students brings a specific set of individual characteristics, histories, understandings and learning skills, and together they create a community that is specific to that constellation of individuals, which includes the teacher. This *classroom constellation* comprises culture in action, as the members seek to find patterns of acting and responding that rely on the mediational tools that the teacher and the students use to communicate, exercise choice and engage or resist the disciplined work of learning in a content area. Teachers assess, plan, evaluate, grade, explain, manage and communicate with external authorities all in the context of their subject matter. Teachers who have specialized knowledge of their content and their students are able to respond to the needs of their students, selecting experiences and examples that resonate, while teaching the fundamental concepts and tools of their discipline. Teachers matter (Kozleski, Artiles, & Skrtic, 2014).

One of the partnerships that founded with a local school district focused on helping teacher residents hone their teaching practices as well as providing them with spaces to think critically. The intent was to help teacher residents develop three lenses to engage social justice, equity and opportunities to learn for all students. First, a ***technical*** *dimension* of the program mediated residents' conscious choices of teaching pedagogies and contributed to their knowledge development and how they came to know it, grounded by their teaching practice in particular contexts. We conceptualized the technical dimension of teaching as the cultural mediation of what teachers know, as well as their know-how. A second dimension, the ***context***, addressed the historically situated topology of teaching, which occurs within the complex social and geographic networks of schools. For instance, identity is composed of topologically connected self-concepts (Kozleski, Gibson, & Hynds, 2012). The team that worked on this project extended the contextual dimension of identity to "anyplace, anytime, any connections," including virtual and imagined connections with social constructs such as race, gender, culture, power and abilities. A third and final dimension, the ***critical***, was defined as the arena in which teachers came to understand the role that cultural and justice forces played in the design of formal schooling processes. The critical dimension required an examination of whose interests are served by the design of political, social and learning structures for curriculum, assessment and passage from one grade to another and ultimately to graduation.

Using technical, contextual and critical domains as a way of conceptualizing how we taught, we used a framework to foreground particular perspectives each semester: identity, culture, learning and assessment. The program provided opportunities for teacher residents to be immersed in an urban school setting from the first day of their program, think critically about issues surrounding the four themes and interrogate their own thinking about what it means to create learning spaces with students with a variety of backgrounds, skills, interests and abilities (Kozleski & Waitoller, 2010). Through immersion in the school setting and by working closely with more experienced teachers, new teachers had access to communities of practice and were able to become what Lave and Wenger (1991) refer to as *full participants* by virtue of their daily presence, proximity and practice. Through participation, teacher residents had opportunities to examine their identities and, through participation with other professionals, redefine how they understood the work and practice of educators (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Teaching is a political practice in which the dominant culture is threaded through the teacher and the curriculum in ways that grant access to some students and deny it to others, so it is imperative that teachers are conscious of their role in selecting what to "deconstruct, conserve and transform." Critically reflexive practice requires thinking critically about personal beliefs, values and assumptions about the world we live in and how these ideologies impact interpretations and interactions with others (Cunliffe, 2004). The UITE program created reflective spaces in which teachers could engage in critically reflexive practices to explore their identity and examine their teaching practices. In seminars, coursework and ongoing individual and collective conversations, the site coordinators and professors asked open-ended questions, described practices and shared observations that were designed to shift teacher residents' perspectives from action to reflection. These spaces offered teacher residents the opportunity to reinterpret events of the day. Activities included weekly written reflections (journaling), seminar discussions that focused on teacher identity over a 16-week semester followed by semesters that foregrounded re-mediating culture, the social nature of learning and the roles of assessment in learning and development.

Throughout these themed semesters, teacher residents reflected together on videotaped lessons, narratives from their classrooms and reflections on the assumptions that drove their classroom actions, anchoring their discussions with close analysis of classroom activity. Site professors and teacher residents became increasingly skilled in mediating the conversations so that, over time, the teacher residents were able to deepen their commentary and provide leadership for the discourse.

Transactions between and among students and teachers not only shape the accumulation and expansion of transmitted knowledge and discovery, they form the web of cultural practices that determine what is valued, permitted and suppressed (McDermott & Varenne, 1995). Assumptions made about students' backgrounds, home life and access to resources and support undergird decisions about who may need special help, who can flourish with a bit of extra attention and whose needs are too complex to address (Tyler, Yzquierdo, Lopez-Reyna, & Flippen, 2002). The biases that underlie triage decisions (e.g., distinguishing between who needs extra attention or more complex interventions) are often unexamined in the rush and bustle of daily life in classrooms and schools. Moreover, when teachers come up to breathe and reflect, they are buffeted by school processes and procedures that require them to sort and count in particular ways.

EQUITY-CENTERED CAPACITY BUILDING:

Essential Approaches For Excellence & Sustainable School System Transformation

Context is more than the obvious structures, interactions, processes and outputs of a system on any given day. In complex human systems, historicity, privilege and cultural practices play a major role in determining who has access to levers of change and how that access is granted (Bates, 2013). Systems development needs to account for context locally, regionally, by political boundaries (such as states) and nationally (Fixsen, Blase, & Van Dyke, 2012). Understanding this contextual complexity helps to clarify why attempts to improve the quality of novice teachers need to account for regional variation in the constellations of culture, economics and work force traditions such as a reliance on union/management relationships or the focus on a history of professional bureaucracies.

Increasingly, cities, suburbs, small towns, and rural areas are sharply divided by demographics, values and expectations for their local education systems (Henig, 2013). Disappointing outcomes and multiple demands seep into local and state policy, converging in debate about curriculum, assessment and performance outcomes. Preparing teachers for each of these contexts is difficult. Indeed, the work of preparing teachers is to make explicit the impact of these diverse contexts on how locality impacts the ways in which schools and school systems operate, and continue to prepare teachers using the best information from learning sciences and education.

BUILD CAPACITY AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

Teachers work in communities of practice (Aladjem et al, 2006). They are deeply affected by the norms, work conditions and standards of practice that they encounter in the schools where they work. Together, these factors are closely linked to teacher efficacy and the likelihood that teachers remain in practice (Cochran-Smith et al, 2012). Drawing on work from a number of scholars, teaching and professional teaching identities comprise an “in progress” activity in which the conditions of schooling, school cultures and individual agency and identities interact (Cochran-Smith et al, 2012; Kozleski, Artiles, & Skrtic, 2014). Preparing excellent teachers will not substantially change the teaching force unless the early teaching years are full of daily practice that solidifies knowledge of evidence-based practice, holds teachers accountable for what they have learned, and provides the tools and contexts for producing excellence in the emerging professional self and for designing and implementing content knowledge through pedagogy, and carefully crafted and assessed instruction.

The work of creating professional collaborations between school districts and teacher education institutions needs to be supported and encouraged through state education agency (SEA) support for the time, effort and resources that it takes to develop and maintain such partnerships. The sites where teachers learn to teach are critical to the development of grit, self-determination, collaborative and other dispositions that will enable them to emerge as successful teachers who stay in the profession, honing their skills and capacities to serve a full, diverse range of students. Special educators along with other teachers are part of the whole teaching force. They are anchored by much of the same foundational understanding of schools, including the design, delivery and assessment of effective learning opportunities in core content areas. They also have specialized knowledge that expands their ability to serve students through individualized, carefully calibrated instructional approaches to reading and numeracy and ongoing assessment that guides ongoing adjustments to learning plans (Brownell, Sindelar, Kiely, & Danielson, 2010; Pugach, Blanton, & Boveda, 2014). Local education agencies (LEAs) need support to create shared professional learning communities that encompass

special educators, acknowledging the overlaps and differences in roles, professional identities and the cultural practices of their everyday work at the elementary and secondary levels.

An explosion of research on learning has helped to advance how learning scientists conceptualize optimal learning contexts and designs (Bransford & Schwartz, 2001; Pea et al, 2012; Scribner & Cole, 1975). A 2013 report sponsored by the National Science Foundation details critical features of learning that include understanding that mastery of knowledge and skills emerge from decisions about how to access and use information distributed across resources, and then applying that knowledge to authentic, complex situations (Computing Research Association, 2013). The report goes on to highlight the importance of a focus on conceptual and analytical capabilities that ensure that learners are able to function, adapt and problem-solve in diverse contexts.

Further, persistence, engagement and stereotypic threat are among the socio-emotional aspects of cognition that have important implications for learning. Another influential group of learning scientists outline the important features of what they call connected learning: "learning that is socially embedded, interest-driven, and oriented toward education, economic, or political opportunity." (Ito et al, 2013, p. 4.) Thinking of learning in these ways has implications for moving away from the organization of high schools, in particular, in discipline-specific arenas. Instead, high schools become spaces where generative scholarship occurs, and where teachers lead their students in solving complex, local issues, drawing on the reservoirs of expertise available through the Internet and partnerships with local and community-based groups, organizations and institutions. In this way, learning involves empathy, support, motivation, persistence and the emergence of expertise through application. This kind of approach to learning involves centering learning on the complex problems of the 21st century, draws on developing expertise in a number of content areas, maps onto student engagement and supports the development of a set of mind-tools that will serve students in multiple ways throughout their lifetimes.

Inclusive education requires a high-level skill set in which the effective inclusive educator excels at content knowledge as well as the design of learning spaces where students with multiple capacities and experiences can engage in learning. Sustaining engagement and progress, even though what and how students perform may be very different, would be the hallmark of such a learning domain. A workforce that is poorly prepared compounds its vulnerabilities. A group of poorly prepared or supported teachers creates a network of poorly designed learning environments. Similarly, a critical mass of high-quality teachers is able to support student-learning gains in schools with high-need students (Heck, 2007). Schools with high levels of teacher quality provide more equitable learning opportunities school-wide. Partnerships between universities and schools can leverage structural changes in schools as well as reshape the professionalization of teachers.

CONCLUSION

Educational discontinuities are shaped by structural, economic, political and cultural fissures that give students from non-dominant cultures less access to higher education and thus to teaching careers at a time when we need them more than ever. In this article, we presented inclusive education as an agenda for substantial shifts in the way we organize, conceptualize and work within the policies, structures and agencies that inform teacher education. The dominant assumptions that undergird

teaching and learning largely have gone without critical reflection, and those that fall outside of the perceived standard of normalcy have been relegated to the margins. Inclusive education can be a vehicle for examining and challenging these tacit assumptions. This cycle of critical investigation should be ongoing with constant renegotiation of the margins to produce new and more inclusive centers (Artiles & Kozleski, 2007).

Inclusive education as a tool for decreasing marginalization will require significant changes in the systems that prepare teachers and socialize them into the profession. As we've noted, teacher education programs must prepare teachers to teach with diversity in mind by valuing culturally responsive practices as an integral part of their practice rather than an additive skill set (Pugach & Blanton, 2012). Moreover, teachers' notions of diversity must account for the varied ways cultural makers of difference intersect to impact identity. We believe that it is imperative for teachers to be prepared to locate sources of power and privilege within the school system in order to uncover and dismantle the mostly invisible status quo.

We made these arguments with the recognition that teachers work in communities of practice (Aladjem, et al, 2006), which significantly impacts teachers' identities (Cochran-Smith et al, 2012; Kozleski, Artiles, & Skrtic, 2014). Thus, LEAs must support sustainable learning communities committed to professional development by sharing expertise and consuming cutting-edge research on teaching and learning in the 21st century. Indeed, inclusive education will require highly skilled teachers with the capacity to support a wide range of students.

The program for preparing inclusive educators that we described combines three domains of effective inclusive practice: (a) technical, (b) contextual and (c) critical (Kozleski, Artiles, & Skrtic, 2014). In this way, teachers become adept at choosing effective pedagogical practices for diverse populations of students, while locating them within the complex social and cultural histories of their specific contexts. Moreover, the critical domain emphasizes the political nature of teaching and schooling. Through critically reflexive practice, teachers become conscious of their own identity and histories and are better able to locate their role in promoting inclusivity within their own classroom (Cunliffe, 2004).

Freire (1990) stated, "The educator has the duty of not being neutral" (p. 180). Teaching is a highly political act and, yet, the underlying assumptions and biases that undergird pedagogical decisions go largely unexamined (Waitoller & Kozleski, 2015). Moreover, the educational systems, including those that prepare and socialize teachers to the profession, operate within a status quo that perpetuates dominant notions of teaching and schooling that produce marginalization. Inclusive education has the potential to be a transformative tool to reframe the educational policies, structures and agencies in teacher education to produce teachers who view their practice through an equity-centered lens.

References

Aladjem, Daniel K. et al, *Models Matter—The Final Report of the National Longitudinal Evaluation of Comprehensive School Reform* (Washington, D. C.: American Institutes of Research, 2006).

Artiles, Alfredo and Elizabeth Kozleski, "Beyond convictions: interrogating culture, history, and power in inclusive education," *Language Arts 84,* no. 4 (March 2007): 351-358.

Aud, Susan et al, "The Condition of Education," U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, NCES 2011-033, (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2011).

Bates, Agnieszka, "Transcending systems thinking in education reform: implications for policy-makers and school leaders," *Journal of Education Policy* 28, no. 1 (January 2013): 38-54.

Billingsley, Bonnie, "Special Education Teacher Retention and Attrition: A Critical Analysis of the Literature," (Gainesville, Florida: University of Florida, Center on Personnel Studies in Special Education, April 2003).

Booth, Anthony, and Mel Ainscow, *The index for inclusion: developing learning and participation in schools* (Bristol, United Kingdom: Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education, 2000).

Boyd, Donald et al, "The draw of home: How teachers' preferences for proximity disadvantage urban schools," *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 24, issue 1 (2005): 113-132.

Brownell, Mary, Paul Sindelar, and Theresa Kiely, "Special Education Teacher Quality and Preparation: Exposing Foundations, Constructing a New Model," *Exceptional Children* 76, no. 3 (April 2010): 357-377.

Cochran-Smith, Marilyn, and Mary Kim Fries, "Sticks, Stones, and Ideology: The Discourse of Reform in Teacher Education," *Educational Researcher* 30, no. 8 (November 2001): 3-15.

Cochran-Smith, Marilyn et al, "A Longitudinal Study of Teaching Practice and Early Career Decisions A Cautionary Tale," *American Educational Research Journal* 49, no. 5 (February 2012): 844-880.

Cole, Michael, "Cross-cultural and historical perspectives on the developmental consequences of education," *Human Development* 48, no. 4 (2005): 195-216.

Cunliffe, Ann, "On becoming a critically reflexive practitioner," *Journal of Management Education* 28, no. 4 (August 2004): 407-426.

Darling-Hammond, Linda, and Gary Sykes, "Wanted: A national teacher supply policy for education: The right way to meet the "highly qualified teacher" challenge," *Education Policy Analysis Archives* 11, no. 33 (September 2003): Retrieved fromhttp://epaa.asu.edu/ojs/article/view/261

Dewey, John, "Democracy and educational administration," *John Dewey: The Later Works*, vol. 11: 1935-1937, pp. 217-225, (Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1981).

Engeström, Yrjo, and Annalisa Sannino, "Studies of expansive learning: Foundations, findings and future challenges," *Educational Research Review* 5, issue 1 (2010): 1–24.

Erickson, Frederick, *Talk and Social Theory: Ecologies of Speaking and Listening in Everyday Life* (Cambridge, United Kingdom; Malden, Massachusetts: Polity Press, 2004).

Fixsen, Dean, Karen Blase, and Melissa Van Dyke, *From Ghost Systems to Host Systems via Transformation Zones,* U.S. Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education, Adult Education Great Cities Summit (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, March 2012), http://www.lincs.ed.gov

Freire, Paulo, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York City: Continuum International Publishing Group, 1990).

Heck, Ronald, "Examining the relationship between teacher quality as an organizational property of schools and students' achievement and growth rates, *Educational Administration Quarterly* 43, no. 4 (October 2007): 399-432.

Henig, Jeffrey, *The End of Exceptionalism in American Education: The Changing Politics of School Reform* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard Education Press, 2013).

Hindin, Alisa et al, "More than just a group: teacher collaboration and learning in the workplace," *Teachers and Teaching: theory and practice*13, no. 4 (August 2007): 349-376.

Horton, Myles, and Paulo Freire, *We Make the Road by Walking: Conversations on Education and Social Change* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990).

Kozleski, Elizabeth, and Linda Atkinson, "We Are What We Assess: How Schools Construct and Shape Identity and Performance," in Diana Lawrence-Brown & Mara Sapon Shevin (eds.), *CONDITION CRITICAL: Key principles for equitable and inclusive education* (New York City: Teachers College Press, 2013).

Kozleski, Elizabeth, and Jennifer Huber, "Systemic change for RTI: Embedding change within a critical framework," *Theory into Practice* 49 (2010): 258-264.

Kozleski, Elizabeth, and Anne Smith, "The complexities of systems change in creating equity for students with disabilities in urban schools,"*Urban Education* 44, no. 4 (July 2009): 427-451.

Kozleski, Elizabeth, and Federico Waitoller, "Teacher learning for inclusive education: Understanding teaching as a cultural and political practice," *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 14, issue 7, (2010): 655-666.

Kozleski, Elizabeth, Alfredo Artiles, and Lucy Lacy, "The Dangerous Politics of Difference: How Systems Produce Marginalization, in Leonard Burrello, Wayne Sailor, and Jeannie Kleinhammer-Tramill (eds.), *Unifying Educational Systems: Policy and Leadership* (New York City: Routledge, 2012), pp. 271-229.

Kozleski, Elizabeth, Alfredo Artiles, and Thomas Skrtic, "Getting to High Quality Instruction and Support in High Need and Culturally Diverse Inclusive Schools, in James McLeskey, et al, (eds.), *Handbook of Effective Inclusive Schools: Research and practice* (New York City: Routledge, 2014): pp. 118-136.

Kozleski, Elizabeth, David Gibson, and Anne Hynds, "Transforming Complex Educational Systems: Grounding Systems Issues in Equity and Social Justice," in Cynthia Gersti-Pepin & Judith Aiken (Eds.), *Defining Social Justice Leadership in a Global Context*, (Charlotte, N.C.: Information Age Publishing, 2012): pp. 263-286.

Kozleski, Elizabeth, Kathleen Thorius, and Anne Smith, "Theorizing systemic reform in urban schools," in Elizabeth Kozleski and Kathleen Thorius (Eds.), *Ability, Equity, and Culture: Sustaining Inclusive Urban Education Reform* (New York City: Teachers College Press, 2014): pp. 11-35.

Ladson-Billings, Gloria, "'Yes, but how do we do it?' Practicing culturally relevant pedagogy," in Julie Landsman and Chance Lewis (Eds.), *White teachers/diverse classrooms* (Sterling, Virginia:): pp. 29-41.

Lave, Jean, and Etienne Wenger, *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation.* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

Loeb, Susanna, and Michelle Reininger, "Public Policy and Teacher Labor Markets: What We Know and Why It Matters" (East Lansing, Michigan: Michigan State University, The Education Policy Center, April 2004).

McDermott, Ray, and Herve Varenne, "Culture as disability," Anthropology and Education Quarterly 26 (1995): 324-348.

Pugach, Marleen, and Linda Blanton, "Enacting Diversity in Dual Certification Programs," *Journal of Teacher Education* 63, no. 4 (2012): 254-267.

Pugach, Marleen, Linda Blanton, and Lani Florian, "Unsettling Conversations: Diversity and Disability in Teacher Education. *Journal of Teacher Education* 63, no. 4 (September/October 2012): 235-236.

Rogoff, Barbara, *The Cultural Nature of Human Development* (Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2003).

Ross, John, Anne Hogaboam-Gray, and Catherine Bruce, "The Impact of a Professional Development Program on Student Achievement in Grade 6 Mathematics," *Journal of Mathematics Teacher Education* 9, issue 6 (December 2006): 1-27.

Tyler, Naomi et al, "Diversifying the Special Education Workforce (COPSSE Document No. RS-3)," (Gainesville, Florida: University of Florida, Center on Personnel Studies in Special Education, September 2002).

Waitoller, Federico, and Elizabeth Kozleski, "Working in Boundary Practices: Identity Development and Learning in Partnerships for Inclusive Education," *Teaching and Teacher Education* 31 (April 2013): 35-45.

Waitoller, Federico, and Elizabeth Kozleski, "No Stone Left Unturned: Exploring the Convergence of New Capitalism in Inclusive Education in the U.S. *Education Policy Analysis Archives* 23, no. 37, (March 2015) http://epaa.asu.edu/ojs/article/view/1779

Whitty, Geoff, "Creating quasi-markets in education: A review of recent research on parental choice and school autonomy in three countries," *Review of Research in Education 22* (1997): 3-47.

---

[i] To address such entropy, local community organizing groups often work to aggregate power across within and across local geographies, discovering that such aggregation "trans-locally" can provide more leverage both locally and nationally. See for example the Alliance to Reclaim Our Schools.

[ii] Subject area or early childhood certification, along with special education certification.

THE REGIONAL EQUITY ASSISTANCE CENTERS — FIFTY YEARS AND COUNTING: FORGING CIVIL-RIGHTS-BASED TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE TO SERVE ALL STUDENTS BY BUILDING EQUITY-CENTERED CAPACITY IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

By **Dr. Bradley Scott,** Director (Retired), South Central Collaborative for Equity, Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA)

INTRODUCTION

The 10 equity assistance centers (EACs), funded through the United States Department of Education Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, are the only technical assistance (TA) centers that find their origin in the Civil Rights Act (CRA) of 1964. There are many types of technical assistance centers, including comprehensive centers, technical assistance and dissemination centers, regional laboratories and parent technical assistance centers, but none of these are based in this landmark act. The EACs are the oldest TA centers in the nation and hold a unique position of focusing their work on civil rights considerations and implications in public education.

For over 50 years, the centers have evolved based upon the changes that have occurred in public education, including the social, political and cultural shifts that have become a part of the national landscape. In all these years, the EACs have continually focused on providing technical assistance to all educational stakeholders to ensure that students are not discriminated against in public schools on the

basis of race, gender or national origin, nor by the programs and activities within those schools. Their work supports technical assistance to implement the requirements of Title VI of the CRA, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color or national origin, and Title IX of the Educational Amendments of 1972, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex. Such discrimination is prohibited in any programs in public schools, kindergarten through the 12th grade, receiving federal dollars as a part of their operation. In addition to ensuring that all learners receive equal benefit from an equitable, effectual educational experience — regardless of the differences among those learners — the work of the EACs also helps states and local education agencies ensure non-discrimination under the law regarding inclusion, access, treatment and opportunity to learn.

This article will focus on:

1. Who are the EACs?
2. What do they do?
3. Why is their work important?
4. What difference do they make to equity-centered capacity building?

WHO ARE THE EQUITY ASSISTANCE CENTERS?

The work of the desegregation assistance centers (DACs), the original name of the TA centers, has expanded throughout the years. Historically, the centers were created to assist local education agencies (LEAs) and states address desegregation-related issues by helping them prepare, adopt and implement plans for the desegregation of public schools. Districts and other entities operating K-12 schools (e.g., charter schools, magnet schools, juvenile justice centers) were included. Technical assistance included informing such agencies about effective methods for addressing specific problems occasioned by responses to desegregation (i.e., community relations, racial ethnic hostility, uneven or discriminatory board policy and administrative practice). Technical assistance also included providing support to cope with those challenges to the personnel in agencies (board members, administrators, certified and non-certified personnel, community members, parents and students). (Civil Rights Act, 1964.)

Since 1964, when the Civil Rights Act was enacted, the DACs have evolved in name and in purpose. Whereas the DACs provided technical assistance in creating, adopting and implementing desegregation plans that addressed access to school settings that were segregated by race, and eventually took into account national origin and sex, the EACs' work now includes access to all aspects of public education, including curricular and extra-curricular activities. Accompanying a 1990s name change, equitable access to schools and programs within those schools has become the expanded scope of the work of the EACs and their technical assistance (Scott, 1999).

Important administrative and legislative actions solidified the understanding that the desegregation of public schools and access must be made available to all students regardless of their race, sex or

national origin (including linguistic difference). The May 25th Memorandum of 1968, which clarified that national origin referred to language minority learners in addition to ethnicity, and the Educational Amendments of 1972, Title IX, and court actions, including the U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Lau vs. Nichols,* are examples. The early 1970s reshaped the work of the DACs to include technical assistance focused on *equal* access under the law and *equal* treatment of all students. The work of the DACs further expanded in the early 1980s to encompass educational *equity*. Beyond insisting that equal educational opportunity must be fully in place for students in order to ensure their non-discriminatory access to schools and programs, the concept of *educational equity* acknowledged that the different characteristics of students must be taken into account regarding how students access curriculum, programs, supports and other opportunities in educational settings. The shift in technical assistance expanded beyond *desegregation* to the more complex concept of *integration*, which embraced the breadth of access and depth of inclusion into schools and programs and non-discriminatory, full access to all quality educational opportunities.

The goal is to create, for all learners, comparability in excellent opportunities and outcomes. This leads the centers to challenging and critical inquiries as they assist clients, including such investigations as:

- Do different learners in desegregated and *de facto* re-segregated settings have equal opportunity to access schools and all of their high-quality programs, regardless of their race, sex, language or national origin?
- Do all students have an equitable opportunity to learn where their racial, gender, linguistic, social, cultural, economic and ability differences are factored into how they are presented with opportunities to learn, and are they treated in equitable ways that account for those differences?
- Do they have highly effective teachers and principals who ensure the fair and equitable treatment of all learners?
- As a result of their inclusion in all aspects of the school's programs and offerings, and of equitable treatment therein, are comparable academic and other outcomes achieved?

WHAT DO THE EACS DO? EVOLUTION OF THE EACS

Since the mid-1990s, the Desegregation Assistance Centers have been called Equity Assistance Centers, which, as noted, suggests an evolving role that is important and appropriate considering the nation's rapt attention to school reform efforts over the past 25 years. A national voice demands comparable high student outcomes, both academic and in other areas (e.g., responsible citizenship, competent decision making and problem solving, community service, advocacy for social justice), for all diverse learners. This must happen in: 1) all communities; 2) all kinds of traditional and non-traditional schools; 3) desegregated settings under federal court or other external mandate to desegregate; 4) districts that are no longer under such mandates, but are voluntarily desegregating; and 5) those districts for which desegregation challenges are not an issue at all. EACs are now in a position to assist all kinds of public schools, wherever they are in communities and however these public schools may be configured, to create excellent opportunities for all learners to achieve high standards of success.

EQUITY-CENTERED CAPACITY BUILDING:

Essential Approaches For Excellence & Sustainable School System Transformation

The EACs' mission is to assist schools and communities to recreate schools that work for all learners to achieve high standards. This means embracing *equity-based excellence*. Thus, instructional models and programs must be flexible and adaptive enough to accommodate all kinds of learners, in all kinds of learner settings, and produce comparably high outcomes for all of them. The EACs' special charge, then, is to help others to see and implement — in the changing context of public education — what the EACs have asserted since the early 1980s. Public schools are accountable for educating all learners to high academic standards and outcomes, regardless of differing characteristics among those learners.

The Equity Assistance Centers have defined ***six generations of civil rights and educational equity approaches*** that have framed their work across the United States. These generations are presented below (Scott, 1990; 1995).

First Generation: 1954-1964 – **Litigation**, starting with *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*, which shaped civil rights in public education in what the EACs referred to as "the modern era of civil rights." The goal of this first generation was racial, physical desegregation. Major concerns included the eradication of dual school systems through the development of student assignment plans, which were to produce a racially balanced, unitary school system. Two other concerns involved the elimination of racial isolation in schools and the eradication of race bias and stereotypes in curricular materials.

Second Generation: 1964-1983 – **Legislation**, starting with the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, redefined the civil rights landscape. This generation lasted for approximately 20 years and was also characterized by several pieces of legislation that prohibited discrimination against children and opened access for them to schools and programs within those schools, regardless of race, sex, national origin, religion, economic status or "handicapping" condition. Educational *equality* (not necessarily equity) for all children became the focus of this period. That is, all students would receive the *same treatment and access regardless of differences*. It became clear that while educational equality, including equal access and treatment, was a necessary condition, it was not sufficient to produce the desired outcomes of effectively desegregated schools.

Third Generation: 1983-1990 – **State-Driven Reform Efforts**, starting with reports such as *A Nation at Risk* (NCEE, 1983) and other reports that refocused the civil rights conversation on issues beyond access alone. In an article in the Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA) Newsletter (1990), "In Pursuit of Equity: An Idea Whose Time Has Come," the three generations of desegregation were discussed by the 10 regional desegregation assistance centers in their publication, *Re-segregation of Public Schools: The Third Generation* (1989). That discussion served as the basis for why many districts began monitoring for equity, not just equality.

The new goal in this phase was the elimination of re-segregation in schools and classrooms, the elimination of achievement disparities among identifiably different students and the production of comparable outcomes in school performance. Major concerns included the creation and implementation of culturally relevant curriculum, varied teaching styles and strategies to match different student learning styles and heightened teacher expectations for high achievement for all students, regardless of differences. Educational *equity* was the focus of this generation. From an educational perspective, all learners cannot be treated the same because their different learning,

social, cultural, emotional, psychological and physical needs automatically give rise to a need for varying approaches for them to achieve comparability.

Fourth Generation: 1990-2000 – **State and National Government Reform Efforts**, starting with a national governors meeting on education, challenging the country to view the new century as a marker for how public education should support educational excellence for all (Scott, 1995). The goal in this phase was to create new schools that work for diverse students, produce world-class students with world-class skills and to create new paradigms for civil rights and equity-based excellence. The concerns in this period included: providing reorganized and restructured professional development to help educators meet the challenges of preparing students for the 21st century; implementing culturally sensitive curricula to reflect equity; educating students for an economically, socially and politically diverse world that tilts toward social justice; developing lifelong learning competencies, including literacy, critical thinking, problem-solving and decision-making skills; providing instruction to produce 21st century workers and citizens possessing knowledge, skills and competencies in technology, information management, math, science and diverse cultures; and creating school and community collaborations on social and political issues affecting school operations and outcomes.

Fifth Generation: 2001-2011 – **No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)** passage, starting with the educational and civil rights conversation, challenging public schools to be accountable for disaggregated student achievement outcomes (Scott, 2001). Here, the single primary focus was systemic equity. It was defined as the transformed ways in which systems and individuals habitually operate to ensure that every learner — in whatever learning environment that learner was found — had the greatest opportunity to learn, enhanced by the resources and supports necessary to achieve competence, excellence, independence, responsibility and self-sufficiency for school and for life. The EACs took this position even though the implementation of the act fell far short of it.

In our work at IDRA, which has for more than 40 years involved advocacy for underserved, diverse learners and their families in communities served by public schools, we have found that systemic equity can only be created in an environment where there are underlying assumptions about the right of every learner to receive the best possible public education. These assumptions include:

- In public schools, excellence is never achieved if various groups of learners fail to succeed and achieve high standards with adequate supports.
- Educators, parents and community members (all education stakeholders) who are committed to the national security of the United States are also committed to the Goals of Educational Equity and schools of excellence in principle and in practice.
- A compelling commitment to excellence and educational equity disdains and seeks to eradicate racism, sexism, classism and the manifestations of discrimination spawned by these ways of thinking and behaving.
- Just laws establish the necessary foundation for just action, and the achievement of the Goals of Educational Equity provides a necessary incentive to cause appropriate action to produce the desired outcomes.

- When many education stakeholders see and understand what is right, just and fair for all learners, they desire to do what is right, just and fair.
- Many people's failure to do right by all learners is a function of a failure to see or understand, not a lack of will to do right by all learners.
- When many people of good faith see disparities in outcomes for learners, they immediately desire to correct the deficiencies in systems and in individuals who operate those systems, as well as the practices those systems produce (Scott, 2001).

Sixth Generation: 2012-Beyond – NCLB as updated by the current administration's *Blueprint for Reform* (2010) starts with challenging public schools to be more focused on rigorous curriculum presented by highly qualified, effective teachers under the supervision of dynamic principal leadership. How does one begin to create systemic equity? A good place to start is by conducting an educational equity audit. The Goals of Educational Equity above and the equity issue questions are excellent places to begin (Scott, 2012; 2013). This era challenges us to be more focused on rigorous curriculum presented by highly qualified teachers under the supervision of dynamic leadership.

Other factors are emerging in this generation. The factors that cause persistent outcome gaps for learners — including issues of disproportionality; over- and under-representation in special education and gifted and talented programs of minorities, the linguistically different and learners living in poverty; high dropout rates for these same populations; persistent low college-going and college completion rates; and gender differences between learners — are clearly some of the key challenges this current generation of civil rights and educational excellence and equity compel us to address. But there is more. The sixth generation demands that we examine the quality, correctness and suitability of the inputs to produce different outcomes for all learners, regardless of their differences, and that support them to develop the knowledge, skills and competencies that raise their global competitiveness in this 21st century world. Will our learners have the supports, resources and confidence they need to thrive? Will they be successful? Will they be able to support and work collaboratively with their counterparts locally and around the globe and transform our collective living toward a more sustainable, prosperous future for all? It is necessary to see the world now through a different lens.

A SYSTEMS LENS AND AN EQUITY LENS

A *deficit lens* seeks to explain away, trivialize, excuse or fabricate the lived experiences of learners and their families as a reason for why they fare so poorly in schools. An *equal lens* ignores the diversity of real students in real communities and schools and the experiences they bring with them that shape who they are. An *equity lens* creates a different context to really see diverse learners, to value and embrace their similarities and differences and to find ways of appropriately responding to and capitalizing on those diverse characteristics to support, nurture, learn with, guide and help move them to success as a part of their experience in public schools, college and life.

An *equity lens* sees context that is comprised of the systems and structures a school district exists within and puts into place to ensure that no learner is denied the fair and equitable benefit of a quality, sound educational experience afforded to all students regardless of race, gender, national origin,

language, economic level and special need. Great educators and leaders are prepared to engage students, families and communities so that the equitable benefit is created and guaranteed for all learners. This context becomes the most powerful lens through which all of the LEA business is conducted.

At a minimum, the following questions must be posed before a school system can employ an equity lens to serve all students well:

1. How does this (practice or activity) impact all learners, including specific groups of learners?
2. What might create a negative or adverse impact on any identifiable population?
3. How might that adverse impact be avoided?
4. What precautions should be taken as a district (campus/school, program) moves forward?
5. How should implementation be monitored regarding comparable outcomes for all students and specific student groups?
6. How must policies, practices and processes be changed to produce fair and equitable outcomes for all students and specific groups of students and their families?

WHY IS THE WORK OF THE EACS IMPORTANT?

The EACs have a continual history of expanding conversations and practices that positively impact outcomes for learners by race, gender and national origin in the nation's schools. The origin of the EACs in the Civil Rights Act of 1964 — the only TA centers whose origin is connected to issues of non-discriminatory treatment, equal access and opportunity under the law, and protection from isolation by identifiable characteristics — is a singular and essential distinction. While funding has dwindled over the years for these centers, the need for the special focus and distinct technical assistance these centers provide continues to increase. While other TA providers may use an equity and excellence lens and approach in their service delivery, partnership with the EACs often becomes essential to providing support, direction and guidance to ensure appropriate civil rights-based considerations are reflected in the TA provided to schools, districts and state departments of education.

EAC services support both state departments of education and local education agencies (LEAs). This capacity to serve both states and LEAs helps to ensure a seamless and articulated connection between state administrative action and local, day-to-day response in implementation at the systems and community levels. While this is the intent in the work of the EACs, bringing it into existence is both difficult and uneven. The EACs continue to push for this seamless articulation to the greatest extent practicable. Finally, because the EACs work collaboratively with the Office for Civil Rights (U.S. Department of Education) and the Equal Education Opportunity Office (U.S. Department of Justice), they help to ensure that learners' civil rights protections in public schools receiving federal funds will be addressed in policy and practice at the district and school levels. No other TA providers have this charge.

The work of the EACs challenge educators and other stakeholders to understand that educational institutions have an obligation to filter their business in support of student success through a lens of

educational equity and excellence (Scott, 2013). This lens helps to protect the civil rights of every learner under the law; guarantee equitable educational opportunity for every learner; provide the appropriate educational supports for school success, postsecondary school attendance and completion, and life success, supported by the necessary resources to make that success possible; and ensure that every education stakeholder holds him or herself and others responsible for promoting these outcomes.

WHAT DIFFERENCE DO THE EACS MAKE IN EQUITY-CENTERED CAPACITY BUILDING?

There are five ways the EACs make a difference in equity-centered capacity building. To begin with, at the center of the capacity building and technical assistance provided by the EACs is the civil rights standard of non-discrimination under the law. This core or essential element in their capacity building helps to ensure educational stakeholders can assess and correct biases and practices that would deny educational benefit to learners because of their race, color, sex, national origin, language or other differing characteristics. Second, the EACs have more than 30 years of history framing technical assistance and capacity building centered in civil rights that speaks not only to standard non-discrimination, but equally to important measures of equitable access, treatment and inclusion in educational settings, and the programs and offerings in those settings, regardless of the differences of learners. Third, because the EACs have historically been the TA providers for the Office for Civil Rights and the Department of Justice to assist districts and states to correct violations under the civil rights laws of the land, the EACs have been able to influence compliance in the application of the laws.

Fourth, in the implementation of major educational initiatives, the EACs have been able to craft a distinctive voice based on the requirements of civil rights laws. That is, because of this unique civil rights perspective, EACs have been able to guide educators to contemplate and respond to civil rights concerns in the implementation of Response to Intervention, the Common Core Learning Standards, graduation requirements, Codes of Student Conduct and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) flexibility waivers. In each instance, the civil rights-based concerns raised by the EACs have alerted the nation to potential violations.

Fifth, the current sixth generation of educational reform is asking stakeholders to apply civil rights standards to teaching; learning; teacher and principal development, capacity building and preparation; curricular reform; student assessment and placement; policy development; fiscal management and resource allocation; facilities construction and geographical location in districts; technology acquisition and application; infrastructure creation, distribution and placement; and accountability — to mention only a few of the educational concerns that help to ensure fair and equitable treatment of learners under the law. This fifth and final aspect speaks to matters of the quality of the educational experience learners and their families have in public schools. Remarkably, it harkens back to the decision of the Supreme Court in the original *Brown v. the Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas,* and the Civil Rights Act itself, where our work began.

The nation must ask itself if the investment in all learners is a matter important enough to national security, political and democratic viability, economic strength and global competiveness, and social stability to guarantee excellent education to every learner. The EACs have continually taken the

position that the answer is yes. Their technical assistance, to build equity-centered capacity, has reflected that assertion since 1964.

References

Civil Rights Act of 1964, Public Law 88-352, 78 Stat. 241 (1964).

Network of Regional Desegregation Assistance Centers, "The Re-segregation of Public Schools: The Third Generation," (June 1989).

Scott, Bradley, "In Pursuit of Equity: An Idea Whose Time Has Come," *IDRA Newsletter* 17, no. 8 (San Antonio: Intercultural Development Research Association, September 1990): 9-12.

Scott, Bradley

"The Fourth Generation of Desegregation and Civil Rights, *IDRA Newsletter* (January 1995).

"From 'DAC? to 'EAC? – The Expanding Role of the Equity Assistance Center," *IDRA Newsletter* (February 1999): 5, 8.

"Coming of Age," *IDRA Newsletter* (March 2001).

"The Challenge of Seeing," *IDRA Newsletter* (September 2012).

"The Challenge of Seeing, Part II," *IDRA Newsletter* (November – December 2013).

U.S. Department of Education, "A Blueprint for Reform – The Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act," (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, March 2010).

U.S. Department of Education, The National Commission on Excellence in Education, "A Nation At Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform, A Report to the Nation and the Secretary of Education (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, April 1983).

TRANSFORMATIONAL PEDAGOGY: CASHING THE PROMISSORY NOTE OF EQUITY FOR ALL STUDENTS – ESPECIALLY THOSE WHO ARE MARGINALIZED

By **Yvette Jackson**, Ed.D., CEO, National Urban Alliance for Effective Education

---

In a sense we've come to our nation's capital to cash a check. When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir. This note was a promise that all men [and women], yes, black … as well as white … would be guaranteed the "unalienable rights" of "Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."

(Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., March on Washington)

What makes equity so hard to achieve are its many facets, so numerous and complex they are hard to define. This inability to define equity handily is especially confounding for urban districts that reach out to our organization, the National Urban Alliance for Effective Education (NUA), for help in translating their commitment to "equity" into practices to stem the tide of unnecessary underperformance plaguing their schools. These districts are predominantly in cities where "urban" is a euphemism for "low-performing" students of color and their teachers (Jackson, 2011, p.1).

Martin Luther King understood the difficulty in defining complex concepts such as equity, so he employed metaphors to help people decipher and grasp the concept. In this context, equity is the promissory note he spoke about in his *I Have A Dream* speech: equity for all people to be free to pursue

a life of happiness. In both the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, this right to the pursuit of happiness was based on belief in the potential of Americans (at that time specifically male, land-owning Americans of European descent) to develop strengths and abilities for self-actualization. These strengths and abilities were valued for their currency … for their worth in contributing to a developing society.

When people are valued for their potential, tools and opportunities are expressly created to mine for that potential and to eradicate hindrances. In education, believing in and valuing the innate potential of students is apparent in a school district's written vision and policies for students. These articulate and support an image similar to the one posed by Paulo Freire: students being engaged and supported to be self-actualizing so they can transform themselves to both thrive in as well as transform the world (Freire, 1970).

Neuroscience has demonstrated that all brains are predisposed for high intellectual performances and the imperative for self-actualization, yet in urban districts around the country, Freire's vision is still not applied to students of color. "Potential," "thriving," "flourishing" and "self-actualization" are actively absent from the lexicon of vision statements for urban schools. Without a district vision statement that clearly articulates genuine belief in the currency of the potential of students of color, equitable practices are hard to put in place. Staff are not inspired to believe in the potential of their students and are therefore unmotivated to search for, or even envision, possibilities for practices and opportunities that would surface the potential of these students (Jackson and McDermott, 2012). Students' innate potential remains elusive, unidentified and uncultivated. With this loss of potential, student engagement and achievement degenerate in response to low-level repetitive tasks, which stifles motivation and results in underperformance.

Osta and Perrow have provided a catalyst for a transformational vision to build deepened understanding of equity. They explicate equity as having three salient dimensions:

1. Removing the predictability of academic success or failure based on social, economic or cultural factors;
2. Interrupting inequitable practices, eliminating biases and oppression and creating inclusive school environments for adults and children;
3. And discovering and cultivating the unique gifts, talents and interests that each human being possesses (Osta and Perrow, 2008, pp. 3-4)

The transformative part in this definition is the third element, yet this is the one that is rarely utilized to guide vision statements or equity efforts. For us, if discovering and cultivating the unique gifts, talents and interests of students of color and other marginalized students fueled a district's vision and its resulting policies and practices, then predictability of academic success or failure based on social, economic or cultural factors would be removed and inequitable practices interrupted, eliminating biases and oppression.

REALIZING THE THIRD ELEMENT

The disregard for the third element is readily apparent to our organization during our intake discussions with districts. When asked what practices they have currently instituted to promote equity, the majority delineate a short list of "reform" procedures, the most frequent being increased offerings of Advanced Placement classes. Access to Advanced Placement courses alone does not result in the potential of students of color being identified or supported to flourish. In fact, most often the opposite happens — their success withers. Success in such courses depends on students being previously "gifted" with *exposure to conceptual understandings* that expand their frames of reference; *high-level thinking skills* that deepen how they construct, communicate and create meaning; and *supports* that motivate development of the habits of mind that build competence and confidence. Most underperforming students of color are school-dependent, i.e., they depend on schools for the promise of equity-driven pedagogy that "gifts" them with such exposure and support. Unfortunately, that promise most often goes unkept.

PEDAGOGY OF CONFIDENCE: THE MEDIUM FOR EQUITY

Pedagogy and equity must work together. When we are truly committed to equity, we design pedagogy that achieves its original purpose: "to lead a child" for self-actualization and self-transcendence; self-actualization that enables students to thrive in society, and self-transcendence that motivates them to contribute to that society (Chen, 2014; Freire, 2012; Gladwell, 2008; Jackson, 2011).

One ideology that offers a concrete vision of what equity-driven pedagogy should be is "gifted education." (As used here, gifted education is distinguished from programs for students "labeled as gifted.") In this ideology, students are "gifted" with pedagogy in which: a) belief in and expectations for their ability drive the direction, instructional choices and opportunities that are made available to them; b) their education is actually designed as an invitation for them to explore the "frontier of their intelligence; their innate capital"; c) the practices, strategies and opportunities are designed to identify and cultivate their unique strengths, gifts and talents; and d) the invitations they receive through their education are complemented by guidance on how to apply the discoveries they make about their intelligence so they can better determine what they want to pursue to feel self-actualized and to experience agency and investment in society (Jackson, 2011, p. 86; Whyte, 2002).

Equity-driven pedagogy that generates practices and structures reflective of "gifted" education and the pursuit of excellence is what our organization describes as the Pedagogy of Confidence®. The Pedagogy of Confidence is based on the fearless expectation that all students are capable of high intellectual performances when provided High Operational Practices™ that motivate self-directed learning and self-actualization. High Operational Practices are actually labels for the categories of supports fundamental for eliciting high levels of engagement and intellectual processing. The practices can serve to guide teachers in choosing effective pedagogical strategies to optimize learning.

The High Operational Practices include (Jackson, 2011, p. 71):

- Identifying and activating student strengths
- Building relationships

- Eliciting high intellectual performances
- Providing enrichment
- Integrating prerequisites for academic learning
- Situating learning in the lives of students
- Amplifying student voice

These practices are the fulcrum around which our meaning of "gifted" education revolves, gearing the objectives for each practice to facilitate students' exploration and action on their own potential to produce the high intellectual performances that can motivate self-directed learning, self-actualization and self-transcendence.

Three beliefs reflect the science behind the High Operational Practices:

- Intelligence is modifiable.
- All students benefit from a focus on high intellectual performance.
- Learning is influenced by the interaction of culture, language and cognition (Jackson, 2011, p. 71 and 89).

Neuroscience has substantiated the impact that "gifted" pedagogy has on reversing underachievement, stimulating motivation and activating self-determination. The strategies and practices inherent in "gifted education" serve to enhance how students construct meaning and comprehend the world, resulting in strengthened competence, confidence, resilience and high intellectual performances. *Confidence acquired from competence* causes an individual to become intensely stimulated. This stimulation causes a burning of glucose, which results in the brain being energized, making an individual feel stronger, increasing the sense of confidence. The sense of competence and confidence activates neurotransmitters of pleasure: The endorphin release that helps students enjoy learning more focuses their attention more deeply and motivates a desire for self-directed learning. When feelings of competence are increased, the sense of possible achievement catalyzes the quest for self-actualization, while decreasing the release of catecholamines, the body's natural chemical response to stress (Jackson, 2011, p. 9).

Learning and teaching are reciprocal processes, so approaches such as the Pedagogy of Confidence have a positive effect on teachers as well. For teachers, demonstrations of student learning and competence resulting from their pedagogy provide affirming feedback about their teaching. This feedback is a great asset to teachers, for it catalyzes positive relationships with students, generating enjoyment in work and a deep sense of competence and being valued. These responses activate the release of endorphins, dopamine and oxytocin, which increase creativity in the pursuit and design of effective teaching strategies and inspire greater collaborative relationships with students and staff (Jackson, 2011, p. 9).

The evidence from this research is unequivocal. It substantiates the power and efficacy of an equity-driven pedagogy as a core medium for equity.

The Consequences of Inequitable Practices: The Science Behind It

Research that supports a pedagogy of "gifted" education shows that the philosophy of gifted education (i.e., assets-focused, enriching learning experiences for all students) has not been part of equity efforts for political and social, rather than genuinely scientific, reasons. The most pernicious of these reasons are beliefs that drive policies grounded in a degenerative focus on what are labeled as the weaknesses of our underperforming students of color. These policies not only translate into disenfranchising instruction, they also perpetuate debilitating myths and generate marginalizing or "otherizing" labels — "low-achiever," "minority," "subgroup" — which imply our students of color possess little intellectual potential. These myths become disenfranchising practices that echo disbelief in the potential of these students:

- Static, narrow testing;
- Remedial education;
- Tracking across all disciplines based on standardized test scores;
- Unsubstantiated referrals to special education; and
- Inequitable suspension practices.

Declaration of belief in the innate potential of students and commitment to equity are nullified when labels and practices that segregate, marginalize, prejudice and withhold "gifted" pedagogy are vetted and institutionalized in districts. The implication of these labels causes the capacities of these students to be devalued and unaddressed, resulting in predictable underachievement and disengagement.

The detrimental impact on achievement of inequitable, marginalizing practices and labels is also substantiated by cognitive and neuroscience. Research shows that *weakness-based approaches are the antithesis of what stimulates learning*. In the cognitive domain, the remedial, un-enriched, decontextualized instruction (often euphemistically labeled as "literacy programs") that is implemented results in under-performance in reading (and, consequently, learning and achievement across the disciplines) for an inordinate number of students of color. Inequity that results in the absence of enrichment or contextualized instruction causes short-circuits to occur in the cultural anchors needed for cognitive functioning and comprehension. In the neurobiological domain, *lack of enrichment and instruction that connects to students' life experiences or frames of reference, hinder the development of neural patterns that make the learning process more efficient and expansive* (Feuerstein, 1979; Holloway, 2003; Jackson, 2011, p. 48; Medina, 2008). There is also a damaging, neurobiological impact from inequity-producing "otherizing" labels (e.g., low-achiever, minority, subgroup) on learning and achievement. Such positional or marginalizing language associated with prejudice, degradation or stereotype threat incite high levels of stress (Steele and Aronson, 2004). This stress causes the emission of cortisol, which inhibits comprehension and causes regions of the brain associated with executive decision-making and goal-directed behaviors to degenerate.

The diminishment of achievement, executive decision making and self-directing behaviors incite a cascade of repressive, inhibiting repercussions for students *emotionally* (low self-esteem and self-confidence), *socially* (resistant behaviors provoked by low self-esteem and low self-confidence, often

leading to dropping out either in-school or out of school, literally or figuratively), and *culturally* (lack of access and underrepresentation in programs that signify achievement or talent, ineligibility for higher education and limited career options). These repercussions are barriers to the development of the dispositions, habits of mind and growth-mindset upon which competence, confidence, self-actualization and positive contribution to society are built.

The effect inequitable practices and labels have is staggering but not irreversible. Neuroscience has substantiated the powerful findings of the eminent cognitive psychologist Reuven Feuerstein that when students are provided with the mediation of High Operational Practices, cognitive impairments can be mitigated and learning capacity optimized (Feuerstein, 1979; Feuerstein, et al, 2010).

The Common Core State Standards and Equity-Driven Pedagogy

There is a value-added benefit of the equity-driven, Pedagogy of Confidence. The strategies and methodology of High Operational Practices are exactly what students need if they are to achieve the college- and career-ready goal of the Common Core State Standards. The conception of this goal is founded on six very specific assumptions:

1. Staff believe that all students have the innate potential to be college and career ready.
2. Teachers are knowledgeable about the learning process and the science behind that process.
3. Districts will guide and support teachers in creating pedagogy, practices and structures to elicit high levels of thinking and learning dispositions/habits of mind that motivate and enable self-directed learning.
4. Districts, schools and classrooms will address the barriers that inhibit high levels of learning.
5. Teachers will be guided to institute formative assessments that demonstrate growth of thinking and identify strengths.
6. And students will be provided opportunities and supports for authentic application of thinking and discipline-related concepts of learning that engage and encourage demonstration of high intellectual performances.

Ignoring these assumptions by propagating inequitable, marginalizing practices make the goal of the Common Core and other state standards a goal denied to students of color. Effectuation of these assumptions comes when districts provide a Pedagogy of Confidence — a pedagogy that fosters delivery of the practices and structures that enable students' innate capacities and motivation to flourish so they can develop into citizens who thrive in the world.

Mediative Equity-Driven Capacity Building

Helping districts develop and act on a vision based on the real, innate potential of all students comes about through effective, equity-driven capacity building: It is generative, inspiring and catalyzing. The key to equity-driven capacity building is *transformational mediation*.

EQUITY-CENTERED CAPACITY BUILDING:

Essential Approaches For Excellence & Sustainable School System Transformation

Mediation, as developed by Reuven Feuerstein, is a process that highlights the quality of interaction a mediator (adult or youth) uses to intervene between a learner and his or her environment to inspire in the learner a personal motivation for learning (Feuertsein, 1979; Jackson, 2011, p. 157). In equity-driven capacity building, mediation is directed at transitioning staffs and the community from the repressive focus on weaknesses and narrow perceptions about the potential of students of color and other marginalized students to belief in and value of their innate potential. Mediators of equity-driven capacity building recognize that for many of the districts they assist, such transition necessitates reculturation that requires techniques for *second-order change* (Marzano, Walters and McNulty, 2005). That is, for many districts a new vision that reflects a belief in and the value of the potential students of color and other marginalized students possess will be outside staff's existing paradigm, conflicting with their prevailing values and norms, and requiring them to develop new knowledge and skills.

Mediators intervene by providing understanding, strategies and techniques they have honed from an epistemology informed by human dynamics as well as the cognitive and neuroscience research that substantiate the innate potential of all students to achieve high intellectual performances and the human imperative for self-actualization. Through strategic and mindful mediation, the district sheds its former perceptions to craft a transformational vision that reflects a belief in and the value of the potential their students of color and other marginalized students possess. Mediators assist districts in ensuring that this vision is effectively transmitted by guiding realignment of district functions to create the architecture of support needed to increase the capacity of its schools to implement an equity-driven pedagogy.

We have found that *effective mediators of equity-driven capacity building* are skilled in

- Demonstrating sensitivities that inspire, influence and cultivate trust in order to engage collaboration, involvement and action;
- Utilizing specialized competencies that guide reculturation of the awareness, attitudes, beliefs and perceptions of staff about the innate potential of students of color, low-income students and students who speak languages other than English;
- Delivering professional learning that incorporates the science of learning to arm the staff with understandings and skills that build their competence and confidence to engage student learning and motivate self-determination;
- Implementing strategies that create a shared culture of confidence — a culture that recognizes and capitalizes on the assets and values of the students, their teachers and their communities;
- Facilitating dialogue to garner productive community investment and support;
- Employing techniques to engage the district, school staff and school board in shared responsibility for implementing equitable practices and eradicating inequitable, marginalizing practices that perpetuate prejudice and segregation; and
- Guiding the development of a system-wide vision that articulates belief in and the value of the strengths and potential of all students.

EQUITY-CENTERED CAPACITY BUILDING:

Essential Approaches For Excellence & Sustainable School System Transformation

MANIFESTATION OF EQUITY-DRIVEN CAPACITY BUILDING

Inspiration and Direction From the Top

When districts embrace belief in and the value of the innate potential of all their students, these beliefs and values are clearly articulated in their vision and mission statements. Mediators astutely recognize the power of language to broadcast a message of equity and excellence. They assist district leadership in affirming, inspiring and mediating equity by guiding them to reflect on how the current language in their vision and mission statements would change if they articulated the district's commitment to realizing the potential of *all* students (Jackson and McDermott, 2012). Mediators guide the introspection and search for appropriate language through a lens they craft from the strategic reordering of Osta and Perrow's dimensions of equity so the dominant focus is on the third dimension — discovering and cultivating the unique gifts, talents and interests that each human being possesses (Osta and Perrow, 2008). This focus steers the identification of language that acutely conveys the message that all district goals will be aimed at enabling all students to thrive inside and outside of school. As districts develop the policies, practices and structures that emanate from these goals, mediators use the other two dimensions described by Osta and Perrow to navigate the identification of inequitable practices that perpetuate disbelief in the innate potential of students of color; practices they determine will no longer be permissible.

The bold vision statements of San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) and the Robbinsdale Area Schools (Minnesota) provide two poignant examples of equity-driven approaches. The mission statement of the SFUSD, delivered through its strategic plan entitled "*Beyond the Talk: Taking Action to Educate Every Child Now,"* states:

> *The mission of the San Francisco Unified School District is to provide each student with an equal opportunity to succeed by promoting intellectual growth, creativity, self-discipline, cultural and linguistic sensitivity, democratic responsibility, economic competence, and physical and mental health so that each student can achieve his/her maximum potential (SFUSD LEA Plan, 2008).*

The goals and objectives of SFUSD's strategic plan ensure clarity about the expectations of the district.

Access and Equity: Make social justice a reality.

- Diminish the historic power of demographics.
- Center professional learning on equity.
- Create an environment for students to flourish.
- Provide the infrastructure for successful learning.

Student Achievement:

- Engage high-achieving and joyful learners.
- Ensure authentic learning for every student.

- Prepare citizens of tomorrow.
- Create learning beyond the classroom.

Accountability:

- Keep our promises to students and families.
- Provide direction and strategic leadership.
- Create a culture of service and support.

In Robbinsdale, the statement is delivered through its *Unified District Vision: High Intellectual Performance through Equity*. The vision states:

Robbinsdale Area Schools is committed to ensuring every student graduates career and college ready. We believe each student has limitless possibilities, and we strive to ignite the potential in every student. We expect high intellectual performance from all our students. We are committed to ensuring an equitable and respectful educational experience for every student, family and staff member, focusing on strengths related to:

- *Race*
- *Culture*
- *Ethnicity*
- *Home or first language*
- *National origin*
- *Socioeconomic status*
- *Gender*
- *Sexual orientation*
- *Age*
- *Ability*
- *Religion*
- *Physical appearance*

Clarity about Robbinsdales's expectations is delineated in four goals.

1. Implement policies and practices that open pathways to academic excellence for all students.
2. Utilize culturally relevant teaching and personalized learning for all students.
3. Engage family and community members as partners.
4. Engage and empower students by amplifying student voice.

EQUITY-CENTERED CAPACITY BUILDING:

Essential Approaches For Excellence & Sustainable School System Transformation

The strategic plans of both districts are ambitious, but relentless ambition and unwavering direction from the top are what is needed for a systemic, cultural shift from the traditional focus on weaknesses that influences student expectations to outcome-directed belief in the intellectual capacities of *all* students (Jackson, 2011, p.139).

In just one year, the transformational impact of Robbinsdale's *Unified District Vision* and its goals is manifested in many policies, practices and structures, including:

- An Office of Integration and Equity with a District Equity Council and Equity Teams at the school level
- Recruitment and hiring are driven by what the district identifies as an "equity consciousness," resulting in one-third of the district leadership team (cabinet, school administrators and instructional coaches) now comprised of people of color.
- School Improvement Plans explicitly reflect the Unified District Vision, with schools specifically describing both practices to identify and develop student strengths and fortify underdeveloped skills, as well as practices identified and labeled as the *impermissibles*: those which will no longer be permitted.
- Cohorts of teachers from all 14 schools have participated in professional learning through equity-driven capacity-building (provided by NUA mentors or certified coaches) in the Pedagogy of Confidence, ensuring coherence and a shared vision for learning and teaching.
- All professional learning for the superintendent's leadership team (cabinet, school administrators and instructional coaches) is aligned with the Unified District Vision aimed at developing and supporting effective, equitable practices, opportunities and structures at all levels and across all schools.
- Data walks engage teams in collecting evidence about specific equity practices reflective of the Pedagogy of Confidence and the emphases set forth in the Unified District Vision. Classroom walk-throughs have been expanded to include students. Together, teachers and students identify examples of high engagement, discuss principles of engagement and exploring ways of developing strategies and practices to increase engagement.
- One high school has now de-tracked the ninth grade English program, making pre-AP classes available to all and providing ongoing support to students and teachers for the new arrangement. This process will extend to English 10, and discussions are underway for the redesign of the English programs in the middle schools.

These changes have demonstrated a new culture of learning and teaching in Robbinsdale; a culture that boldly articulates belief in and value for the innate potential of all the district's students; and a culture that portends equity-centered pedagogy throughout the district's schools.

Schools as Mediative Learning Communities

Mediators of equity-centered capacity building provide the mediation to transform schools into *environments where the district's equity vision of belief in and the value of the innate potential of all students can be realized*. We at NUA call these environments *Mediative Learning Communities*. Just like a mediator,

a Mediative Learning Community deliberately intervenes in the lives of its school-dependent students and teachers by creating an environment where equity-driven pedagogy can flourish, where strengths are the primary factors for cultivation, and where intellectual growth is optimized. Schools where staff engage in professional learning communities (PLCs) are primed for co-creating a Mediative Learning Community.

The driving intention of the Mediative Learning Community is to cultivate strengths and mitigate the impact of factors that are barriers to learning for many students of color and poverty: stereotype threats, feelings of failure, focus on weaknesses and remediation, absence of enrichment, and stigma associated with marginalizing labels (Jackson, 2011, p. 157; Jackson and McDermott, 2012; Noguera, 2008; Steele and Aronson, 2004). Mediators of equity-driven capacity building assist in creating Mediative Learning Communities by supporting staff in activating this intention for the students as well as mediating the considerations for the staff themselves. They appreciate that, *like students, teachers have emotional needs that have to be addressed in a safe, supportive environment where they can continually rejuvenate their spirits and energize their competence and confidence* so they can provide pedagogy that elicits the innate potential of their students while mitigating their needs.

Equity-driven capacity building is most effectively mediated in schools through professional learning that emanates from an equity-driven pedagogy such as the Pedagogy of Confidence. This professional learning:

- Guides teachers in developing an *ecological perspective* that begins with a deep understanding and appreciation for the realities of students' lives that affect their ability to learn. It includes a strong belief in their potential and desire for excellence;
- Integrates the findings of *cognitive and neuroscience research* through training in High Operational Practices that build teachers' competence and confidence to elicit and optimize student potential for high intellectual performances and self-actualization; and
- Equips teachers with strategies to dynamically assess and increase their students' depth of conceptual understandings, facility with literacy, use of higher order thinking, and the capacity to learn how to learn and apply learnings.

A compelling metaphor for a Mediative Learning Community is an oasis in which students who have struggled and been marginalized feel they belong — they see themselves reflected in the culture of the school (Jackson, 2011). Mediators assist teachers in nurturing this culture by creating opportunities for student input through authentic collaboration in such things as professional learning sessions focused on the science of learning, student-led report card conferences, town hall meetings, teacher-student committees, co-created inquiry projects (students with staff) and participation in the design of school standards for academic and social behavior. NUA has codified these collaborative opportunities through a process we call *StudentVoicesNUA*™. These opportunities encourage student investment in creating a shared culture, facilitate bridges between students and teachers and develop the currency of academic language. They also strengthen the competencies of the Common Core and other state standards as illustrated in Figure 1.

EQUITY-CENTERED CAPACITY BUILDING:

Essential Approaches For Excellence & Sustainable School System Transformation

Figure 1. Reflection of Common Core State Standards in StudentVoicesNUA[i]

Common Core State Standards	StudentVoicesNUA
Students who are college and career ready in reading, writing, speaking, listening and language …	**How shared professional development, enrichment opportunities and student-led report card conferences correlate to the targets of the standards.**
Demonstrate independence.	In student-led report card conferences, students select the work samples they wish to present and decide on their own learning goals. Initiating, executing and controlling processes that were formerly out of their hands gives students a pronounced sense of agency.
Build strong content knowledge.	Because students are responsible for following up on shared professional development by delivering lessons in a variety of subjects and grade levels, they not only learn about pedagogy, but also deepen their understanding of the content. As every beginning teacher knows, the best way to learn something is to teach it.
Respond to the varying demands of audience, task, purpose and discipline.	Enrichment opportunities open up new venues for expression (video, radio, blogs and wikis) and target real audiences (fellow students, teachers and the community). Although the products vary, one purpose permeates StudentVoicesNUA projects: They provide a platform for students to investigate and express their insights, concerns and perspectives on subjects that matter to them. During a clean water project (for example), students took on many roles, from learning to expert. They faced multiple audiences, conducted different tasks for different purposes and negotiated the language and conventions of the various disciplines in which they worked.
Comprehend as well as critique.	Shared professional development is built on a foundation of engagement and open-mindedness. Students engage in activities that give them a profound understanding of the content and the learning process, teach them to express their learning needs in a language that teachers will understand and hear, and spur them to challenge assumptions with sound reasoning.

Value evidence.	As students who participated in the clean water project examined different aspects of the issues, they became experts on those aspects. They gathered and evaluated evidence, developed a point of view about what they researched, and presented their positions to colleagues on Skype.
Use technology and digital media strategically and capably.	StudentVoicesNUA enrichment activities are awash in the use of technology and digital applications. These, in turn, reflect the six areas of proficiency identified by the International Society for Technology in Education / National Educational Technology Standards (ISTE/NETS), including: • Creativity and innovation • Communication and collaboration • Research and information fluency • Critical thinking, problem solving and decision-making • Digital citizenship • Technology operations and concepts
Come to understand other perspectives and cultures.	One of the first reactions students have to shared professional development is empathy for teachers. Invariably, students will say, "I had no idea how hard it is to teach." This response is generally followed by self-reflection: "Now I will pay more attention in class." Teachers similarly see students in a different light as students provide insight into what makes learning work for them. This opportunity to shift their frames of reference is purposely orchestrated to bridge the divide between student culture and teacher culture.

Equity is contingent upon a transformation in how we as educators, capacity builders and systems change agents consider our students who have struggled and been marginalized, which are too often students of color and students living in poverty. Instead of students who only need access to address what they are lacking, they are students whose innate potential provides the capacity for developing strengths and abilities we have been privileged and entrusted to nurture. We can demonstrate the value and importance of this privilege by "gifting" our students with equity-driven pedagogy that elicits their innate potential so they can not only thrive and transform themselves to be self-actualized, but also self-transcend by contributing to transform our country and world to reach its highest potential. This "gifting" is the promissory note Martin Luther King Jr. described. Mediative, equity-driven capacity building facilitates the long overdue delivery on that note.

References

Chen, Ingfei, http://ww2.kqed.org/mindshift/2014/08/18/how-a-bigger-purpose-can-motivate-students-to-learn/ (2014).

Costa, Arthur, and Robert Garmston, "Mindful Mediation: Conversations That Promote Self-Directedness," paper presented at the National Urban Alliance Summer Coaches Academy. Alexandria, Virginia (2007).

Doidge, Norman, "Our Amazingly Plastic Brains," http://www.wsj.com/articles/our-amazingly-plastic-brains-1423262095, (2015).

Dweck, Carol, *Self -Theories: Their Role in Motivation, Personality and Development* (New York: Psychology Press, 2000).

Feuerstein, Reuven, "Cognitive Modifiability in Retarded Adolescents: Effects of Instrumental Enrichment," *American Journal of Mental Deficiency* 83, no. 6 (1979): 88-96.

Feuerstein, Reuven, Refael Feuerstein, and Louis Falik, *Beyond Smarter: Mediated Learning and the Brain's Capacity for Change* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2010).

Freire, Paulo, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970).

Freire, Paulo, Myra Bergman Ramos, and Donaldo P. Macedo, *Pedagogy of the oppressed,* 30th anniversary ed. (New York: Continuum, 2012).

Gay, Geneva, *Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, Research, and Practice* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2000).

Gladwell, Malcolm, *Outliers* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2008).

Hargreaves, Andy, *Changing Teachers, Changing Times: Teachers' Work and Culture in the Postmodern Age* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1994).

Hilliard, Asa, "Classical Failure and Success in the Assessment of People of Color," in M. Coleman (Ed.), *Black Children Just Keep on Growing* (Washington, D.C.: National Black Child Development Institute, 1977).

Holloway, Marguerite, "The Mutable Brain," *Scientific American* 289, no. 3 (2003): 79-85.

Jackson, Yvette, *Pedagogy of Confidence* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2011).

Jackson, Yvette, and Veronica McDermott, *Aim High, Achieve More: How to Transform Urban Schools Through Fearless Leadership* (Alexandria, Virginia: ASCD, 2012).

Jensen, Eric, *Teaching With the Brain in Mind* (Alexandria, Virginia: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD), 1998).

Ladson-Billings, Gloria, *The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1994).

Marzano, Robert, Timothy Waters, and Brian McNulty, "School Leadership That Works," (Alexandria, Virginia: Association for Supervision & Curriculum Development (ASCD), 2005).

Medina, John, *Brain Rules: Twelve Principles for Surviving and Thriving at Work, Home, and School* (Seattle: Pear Press, 2008).

National Urban Alliance, *Professional learning model*, unpublished manuscript (Syosset, New York: Author, 2012).

Noguera, Pedro, *The Trouble with Black Boys … and Other Reflections on Race, Equity, and the Future of Public Education* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008).

Osta, Kathleen, and Margaret Perrow, "Coaching for Educational Equity: The BayCES Coaching Framework," (Oakland, California: TheBay Area Coalition for Equitable Schools, 2008), www.bayces.org

Robbinsdale Area Schools, *Unified District Vision: High Intellectual Performance Through Equity, Robbinsdale Area Schools 2014 Strategic Plan_Final* (Robbinsdale, Minnesota: Robbinsdale Area Schools, 2014).

San Francisco Unified School District, *Beyond the Talk: Taking Action to Educate Every Child Now, SFUSD 2008-2012 Strategic Plan* (San Francisco: San Francisco Unified School District, 2008) retrieved from http://portal.sfusd.edu/template/default.cfm?page=home.strategic plan

Steele, Claude, and Joshua Aronson, "The Stereotype Threat," retrieved fromhttp://www.mtholyoke.edu/offices/comm/csj/092404/steele.shtml

Teacher's Mind Resources, "The Meaning of Education," retrieved September 2009 from www.teachersmind.com/education

Toppo, Greg, "Poverty Dramatically Affects Children's Brains," *USA Today, Dec. 8, 2008.*

Whyte, David, *Clear Mind, Wild Heart: Finding Courage and Clarity Through Poetry* (CDs) (Boulder, Colorado: Sounds True, 2002)

---

[i] Adapted from Y. Jackson and V. McDermott, *Aim High, Achieve More: How to Transform Urban Schools Through Fearless Leadership*, (Alexandria, VA: ASCD, 2012): p.95-96.

DEVELOPING PRINCIPALS AS EQUITY-CENTERED INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERS

By **June Rimmer,** Associate Director, Center for Educational Leadership, University of Washington

Many would argue that one of the most egregious contributors to the achievement gap is the opportunity gap. Over the past several years, we have become more keenly aware of the pervasive nature of opportunity and achievement gaps in many of the schools serving our most vulnerable students. These differences in opportunities, supports and outcomes represent some students' limited access to excellence in all aspects of their education. Students often don't have full access to such resources as quality pre-school education, the highest quality teachers, maximum amounts of instructional time, enriching life experiences, college preparatory curriculum, engagement with rigorous content and authentic learning that allow students to develop and create meaningful, useful outcomes and the supports essential for student success. The challenge for principals is to ensure each and every student has the opportunity to engage in a quality education experience. To meet this challenge, both equity and excellence must be driving forces in the leadership of schools. Principals must be equity-centered instructional leaders.

The achievement gap has been a nationally visible concern since the Coleman Report era of 1966. Most educators would agree that this gap is perhaps our schools' most onerous manifestation of inequity. It represents disproportionately disparate opportunities and learning outcomes between and among students of color and poverty with their wealthier counterparts, many of whom are white. It also reflects disparities between English Language Learners (ELL), special needs students and other groups of students. Additionally, there is a disparity between the academic performance of many students and the academic expectations established by the new, more rigorous state standards. And, there is the gap between our U.S. students and their counterparts in other countries, a disparity which some suggest has cost our country trillions of dollars (McKinsey, 2009).

EQUITY-CENTERED CAPACITY BUILDING:

Essential Approaches For Excellence & Sustainable School System Transformation

Most of us will acknowledge that the vast majority of teachers work hard at their craft, are fully committed to student learning, and willingly engage in their own continuous learning. As we know, however, the students with the greatest needs academically too often have less experienced or less skilled teachers. According to Haycock and Crawford (2008), a study (Gordon, Kane, & Staiger, 2006) in Los Angeles showed that students taught by teachers in the top quartile of effectiveness advance, on average, approximately five percentile points each year compared with their peers. Those taught by teachers in the bottom quartile of effectiveness, *lose*, on average, five percentile points, compared with their peers. Moreover, these effects are cumulative. The same study suggested that if all black students were assigned to four highly effective teachers in a row, this would be sufficient to close the average black-white achievement gap. Less competent teaching can result in students being assigned work that is sometimes not on grade level, not aligned to the expectations of the standards and lacking the kind of rigor necessary to build students' capacity to think critically, use knowledge to build new knowledge and apply their learning to real world problem-solving. These kinds of learning experiences can result in disparities in outcomes both in test scores and in the level of educational attainment for different groups of students whenever they exit our systems. The economic and social impacts of the opportunity and achievement gaps, coupled with the moral challenges, should give all of us — educators, parents, the business community, politicians, lawmakers — reason for serious concern.

Yet, with all that we already know, some *still* ask, "Why does it matter?" It matters because a quality education is for many, particularly our most vulnerable students, the *only* pathway out of poverty. A young person's college and/or career readiness can enhance his/her potential for jobs that can help secure a decent standard of living and an opportunity to thrive in a society where some suggest the middle class is shrinking (Parlapiano, Gebeloff, & Carter, 2015). While schools cannot do this work alone, they have a legal and moral responsibility to ensure that every student exits our systems with the knowledge, skills, competence, confidence, creativity, curiosity, tenacity, support, sense of advocacy and efficacy to access and succeed in college, careers and society.

I have been an urban educator since the days of court-ordered desegregation. I have served as a teacher, a staff developer, a counselor to students with severe discipline issues, a high school principal, assistant superintendent, chief academic officer, and a number of other academic roles. I have also worked outside of education in the private sector and at the university level, working side-by-side with school leaders supporting their efforts to transform their school systems in order to educate *all* students well. I have seen many students of color and those living in poverty survive and even thrive in our public schools. But I have seen far too many who did not survive our school systems and instead, fell onto pathways of limited- or under-employment, poverty and even more destructive lifestyles of drugs, crime and incarceration. I realized years ago that my passion lies with the education of this vulnerable population of students, and that my calling as a teacher is to work with and support the adults, the leaders who are charged with educating students in school systems.

The research remains clear: Among school factors, the teacher is the most influential on student achievement, and the principal is the second most influential factor (Leithwood, Seashore, Anderson, & Wahlstrom 2004). To ensure excellence, equity and a quality learning experience for every child, in every classroom, every day, and to close these gaps, the principal, and other school leaders, working alongside families, must demonstrate equity-centered instructional leadership. Equity-centered leadership is essential because, through a sharp equity lens — i.e., the process to diagnose and assess

equity within the culture, policies, programs, practices and processes within a school — leaders model and set direction; they shape an environment where equity and excellence are the standard for everything; they develop people personally and professionally; and they make the organization "work" so that teachers and school-site staff can engage in effective teaching, learning and support (Leithwood, 2004). I address two essential questions in this article:

1. *What is the work of an equity-centered instructional leader in the improvement of instructional practice in order to improve student achievement, eliminate opportunity gaps and close achievement gaps?*
2. *How do we build the capacity and expertise of principals to equip them to be equity-centered instructional leaders of schools that ensure equity so that every student experiences excellence in their learning and achieves at high levels?*

WHAT IS THE WORK OF THE EQUITY-CENTERED INSTRUCTIONAL LEADER?

According to *The Washington Post*, January 4, 2015, more than 20 states now have legislation requiring that student test scores be a part of teachers' evaluations. What might now intensify, particularly in low-performing schools, is instruction that focuses primarily on the test, or student acquisition of facts, which, unfortunately, can be fragmented within and across disciplines, but are necessary for the "test." In these situations, the students' work is primarily about recall, memorization and following the right procedures and processes to get to the "right answers." For many students, teacher expectations are low, and there is little belief in student potential. Note these results from the Metlife Survey of the American Teacher: Collaborating for Student Success (2009) ED509250:

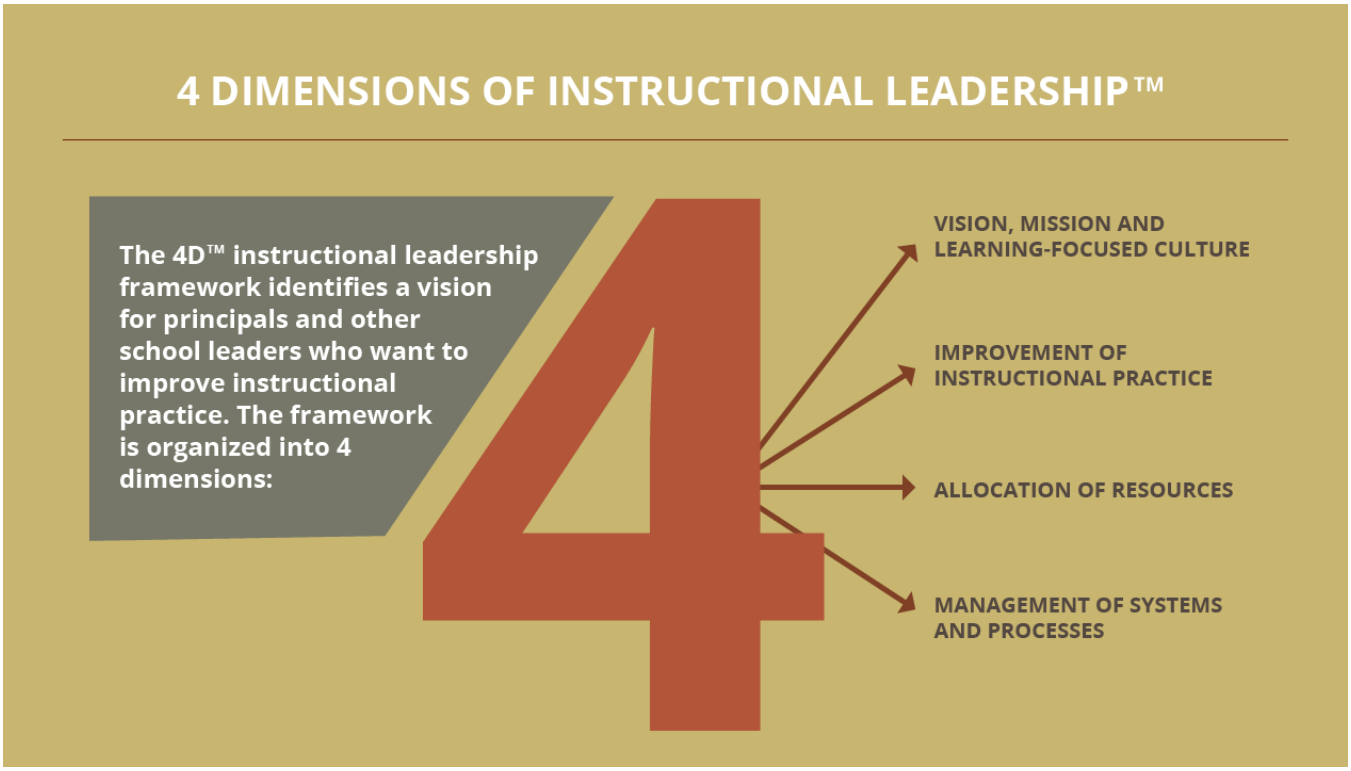
- Most teachers (84 percent) said they could enable all of their students to succeed academically; yet only 36 percent strongly agreed that all of their students have the ability to succeed academically.
- In 2008, half of secondary school teachers said that their classes had become so mixed in terms of student learning abilities they could not teach students effectively.

Unfortunately, some educators can come to accept mediocre student performance or even failure as normal, inevitable and outside their control. We see this phenomenon particularly in schools serving our most vulnerable students, students of color, students living in poverty and growing numbers of English Language Learners (ELLs). If we are going to improve the learning experience for these students and increase student success, we must dramatically improve instructional practice, establish non-negotiable standards of excellence for each and every student, leverage teachers' beliefs in their ability to teach students, and provide teachers with as much support as possible to do this challenging work. This is the core work of the instructional leader, and s/he must do this work using an equity lens.

The improvement of instructional practice is perhaps the most important task of the school principal. Recent research shows that principals typically spend an average of 8 to 17 percent of their time in instructional activities (Jerald, 2012); that's about three to five hours per week (Supovitz & May, 2011). This research also suggests that some of the work principals do lacks the instructional focus needed to improve teaching and learning. Over the past few years, through the support of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the University of Washington *Center for Educational Leadership (CEL)* has been

working with several school districts and charter management organizations (CMOs) on a knowledge-development project to support principals as instructional leaders. We initially found no consensus among these districts on the leadership practices principals should implement to improve the quality of teaching. This lack of consensus led us to develop a framework of high-leverage instructional leadership practices essential to the work of improving teaching quality. We fully acknowledge that there are a number of ways to articulate high-leverage leadership practices. *What is most important is that schools and districts have a shared vision and common language around the essential work of equity-centered leaders who seek equity and excellence for all students*.

The framework that follows is just one of many research-based examples. This framework is not the sum total of everything a principal or schools need to do to be successful, but rather some of the most salient equity-centered practices that can help improve teaching and learning. Based upon our research and fieldwork, we identified four dimensions of instructional leadership:



Let's look closely at these four dimensions of the instructional leader's work and focus carefully on the *embedded equity practices of effective instructional leaders*.

1. **Vision, Mission and Learning-Focused Culture –** In *Shaping School Culture,* Deal and Peterson (2009) gave us this widely quoted perception, "Culture is the way we do things around here." The equity-centered principal must shape and nurture a culture that integrates an inclusive approach to schooling where collaboratively, the staff and community are all committed to *each* child's academic success. The work must be grounded in equity and designed to achieve this goal. The principal must foster a learning-focused culture, based upon data-driven goals

that establish high performance expectations for students *and* adults, and a climate of respect for every person, and for collaborative work. It must be clear that "around here," diversity in ethnicity, gender, culture and languages are all valued. "Around here," we recognize that we all bring similarities and differences, and we respect our differences. "Around here," we engage positively with one another by listening and learning from one another's stories. "Around here," we strive for excellence in all of our work. "Around here," we provide opportunities for rigorous learning experiences for every student, every day, in every classroom. We ensure that students have the supports necessary to be successful in this learning. Finally, "around here," we share responsibility for achieving our goals for all students and living our school mission.

2. **Improvement of Instructional Practice –** The highest leverage leadership practice for the improvement of student achievement is perhaps the improvement of instructional practice. Every school needs a high-quality teacher in every classroom. Achieving this goal begins with the leader using a research-based instructional framework which describes the essential elements of quality, equitable instruction and is used to create a shared vision and a common language among all educators. At CEL, we developed the *5 Dimensions of Teaching and Learning,* an instructional framework that serves this very purpose. Equitable instructional practices, including culturally responsive instruction, a classroom culture of respect, differentiation, scaffolding, students' engagement in self-assessment, "accountable talk," and authentic intellectual work, are embedded throughout the framework. Approximately one-third of the school districts in the state of Washington are using this framework, as are other districts around the country. School leaders should use a research-based framework consistently to conduct learning walkthroughs and to observe classroom instruction, gather and analyze the data from the observations, provide targeted feedback to teachers, and provide coaching and professional learning to support the improvement of instructional practice.

Three years ago in Central Kitsap School District in Silverdale, Washington, the superintendent, cabinet and union leaders made a commitment to provide the professional development necessary for all school leaders to build a shared vision and common language around quality instruction. They used as their framework the *5 Dimensions of Teaching and Learning*. This work was also coupled with an intensive focus on the culturally responsive classroom. In these classrooms, teachers are intentional about making strong links between culture and learning. Expectations are high for every student, and teachers build upon the students' life experiences. Geneva Gay described culturally responsive education as "using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning more relevant and effective for them" (Gay, 2002).

Principals and teachers understand that immigrant students and students from various cultures make significant transitions or shifts between home and school every day. Academic expectations for *all* students, however, are high, and there are scaffolds of support for student learning. Principals foster a supportive environment and build a sense of community that enables teachers and students to connect. Principals also model what Brown (2011) in "*Leading Schools for Equity and Excellence"* refers to as academic optimism. They work constantly to create a sense of collective efficacy among staff, students and parents/families. They create a sense of trust and cooperation among all stakeholders. Everyone's work is about academic excellence for each and every student, and social endeavors

support this academic emphasis (Brown, 2011). In addition, principals provide teachers with the resources and professional learning needed to understand the role that culture and language play in learning and the implications for their teaching practice. Leaders in Central Kitsap decreased discipline issues by increasing culturally responsive classroom interactions. Culturally responsive instruction resulted in increased learning time for students who would otherwise be sitting in the office.

Finally, principals learned to lead learning walks to observe and analyze instruction, identify both positive and problematic trends across classrooms, and engage together in problem-solving regarding issues of teaching and learning. The district subsequently engaged all of its teachers in professional learning to help ensure they have the same vision and common language around quality instruction and deep understanding of, and skill in, the delivery of culturally responsive instruction. Assistant principal Craig Johnson says, "Teachers are now having more conversations with each other, working collaboratively more often because we're all using the same language." (Fink & Rimmer, 2015.)

Based upon our experience in schools, we have seen evidence of the impact of a principal's focus on instruction, quality learning experiences in teacher and student engagement, and culturally responsive classrooms. As an example, Principal Airola (Indianapolis Public Schools) guided staff to trust students more and decrease the amount of time that students stand in lines during the school day. He then insisted that if there had to be a line, teachers were to use "line time" to engage students in some academic activity such as chorally responding to quick questions, verbalizing multiplication facts, or reciting poetry. In a number of our partner schools, we see evidence of the principal's leadership through the emphasis on student engagement practices that help ensure every student is participating in the learning experience. Typical examples of these strategies include student "turn & talk" opportunities before one student provides an answer for the class; student use of white boards, requiring every student to respond in writing before one student gives an answer; the use of clickers, which gives every student an opportunity to respond individually and gives teachers instant information on individual students and the class as a whole; and teachers' use of equitable strategies for calling on all students to respond to let every student know that everyone is expected to be prepared, and to ensure teachers are not inadvertently giving preferential treatment to some students over others in soliciting response and dialogue in classrooms.

A second way that principals focus on instruction and quality learning experiences is by ensuring all students are provided much more than just basic skills and drill for the tests. Students also engage in authentic intellectual work, allowing them to construct knowledge and create products that can be used in real life, rather than just reproduce knowledge. Doing so helps students build metacognition and a stronger sense of responsibility for and sense of partnership with adults in their own learning. Further, all students have opportunity and access to rigorous learning, problem-solving, project-based learning, honors, the arts, the sciences, language, technology, and the support to be successful within and across disciplines.

3. **Allocation of Resources –** Principals have the responsibility of ensuring that resources such as time, money, specialists, coaches, expertise, space and technology are deployed efficiently and equitably, particularly in the face of dwindling resources. Effective leaders therefore use data to make *strategic* decisions about the allocation of these resources. They work collaboratively with staff and use a continuous cycle of analysis to examine, assess and then refine the use of

resources. These leaders, along with their teams, pose questions like the following to help in their decision-making: *What are the varying needs of our students, and how do we allocate resources equitably to address priorities? Are we doing anything that is not aligned to our goals? What is the impact of the programs we are funding? How do we use instructional coaches, mentors and other teacher leaders to improve instructional practice?*

The equitable allocation of resources is often a very difficult task for principals and one that can create political nightmares for leaders. Acknowledging that the academic expectations are the same for all students, but that students have varying needs for achieving those expectations is palatable for most staff, parents/families and community members. But the instant it appears that a student or a group of students receives more money, more time, more intervention, more instructional expertise, or more support of any kind than some other student or group of students, the challenge begins. Principals and other leaders are accused of taking from some students to give to others. Jerry Weast, former superintendent of the Montgomery County Public schools in Maryland, is one of the most successful leaders in the area of rigorous outcomes for all students. Weast differentiated resources and instruction to ensure all students reached the outcomes. I once heard him say that he had to help constituents understand that the allocation of resources applied to *all* students. Some may need academic intervention while others might need tutorials in advanced mathematics. Some students might need academic support while others might be in buildings needing facilities enhancement. He worked with his community to help deepen understanding that the equitable allocation of resources was not just for our most vulnerable students who are struggling academically, but was a principle to be applied for *every* student.

4. **Management of Systems and Processes –** In terms of people, structures and processes, there are a number of tasks principals must fulfill. The highest leverage in terms of equity includes, first of all, getting the right people in the right places. Principals have varying degrees of responsibility for recruiting, hiring, developing and supporting staff. Identifying people with the necessary skills, culturally responsive approaches, belief systems and commitment to the achievement of every student is essential. One of the essential skills leaders must bring to this process is their own cultural competence and the skill to ascertain the degree of cultural competence in others. Many have found that the typical written application and interview process does not give sufficient information about candidates' values, beliefs and level of cultural competence. Many have found a bit more success in rethinking the hiring process and shifting to a performance-based process where applicants are presented with real-world school situations and asked to problem-solve on site rather than simply answering textbook type interview questions.

Second, the principal must ensure that key structures, systems and processes are in place to facilitate communication, collaboration and accountability among colleagues. Teachers must have the time and space to work together. Being able to work together using a range of qualitative and quantitative data to identify problems and strengths of student learning and support, and then to engage in collaborative reflection, problem-solving and leveraging strategies, empowers staff and can strengthen relationships, trust and the culture of learning. One of the key challenges that we see with principals when it comes to collaborative structures is that of *knowing how to plan time* — time for their own instructional leadership work as well as collaborative time for teachers. Another critical system

principals need to focus on is that of accountability. Doing so requires systems for the collection, analysis and use of a range of qualitative and quantitative data to inform all work, monitor the student and school performance, assess the effectiveness of the work and be in dialogue to make decisions about next steps.

Finally, considering all of the initiatives in which schools and districts are engaged, there are two critical tasks for principals relative to initiatives: 1) ensure that every initiative is well aligned to the vision and goals of the school, particularly for struggling students; and 2) make certain that the staff understands how all of the district and school initiatives are integrated, aligned and support the vision and mission of the school. The alignment and integration of school initiatives can be extremely challenging, and when not done, or not done well, can result in fragmentation, poor communication, lack of focus, isolation, mistrust and, quite frankly, a bit of chaos. For this work to be done well, a number of processes must be in place: There must be clarity and agreement on a shared vision and mission grounded in equity and excellence; there must be a widely understood theory of action about ways to address problems of practice at all levels; and there must be clearly articulated measures of success and a school-wide commitment to adopt only those initiatives that are aligned to the vision and that address the defined problems of learning, practice and support. Finally, leaders must ensure there are equity-based systems in place for ongoing assessment of program implementation, performance management, and student and school performance. Accomplishing this degree of clarity, alignment and systems is a significant feat, requiring ongoing reflection and refinement.

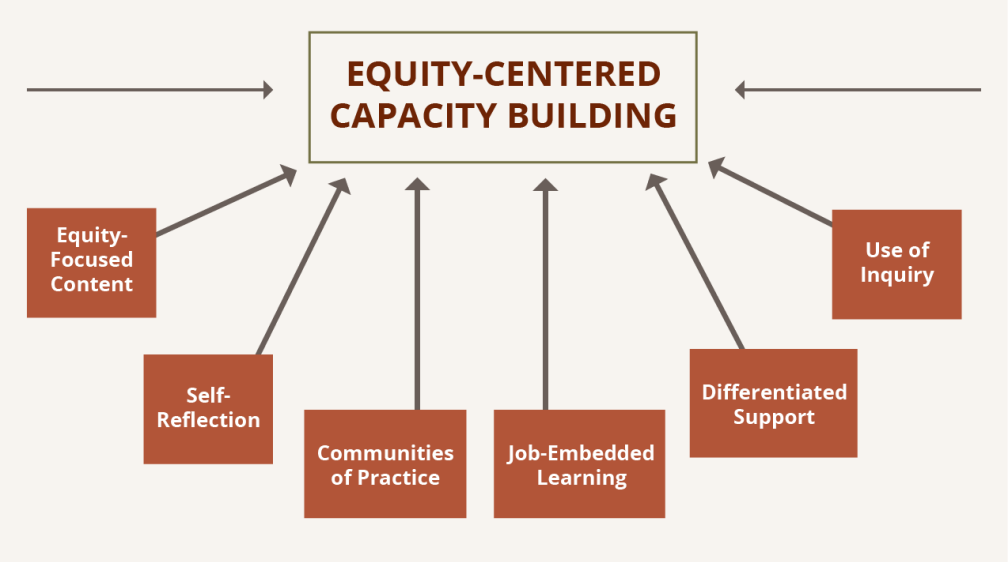
Some principals have limited skill and/or confidence in building and engaging the leadership capacity of others. It is clear, however, that one person cannot do all the work of school leadership, nor should one try. Leadership of a school should be the work of a team of leaders; and the principal should be the leader of these leaders, working in partnership with families and communities.

BUILDING THE CAPACITY OF PRINCIPALS TO BE EQUITY-CENTERED INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERS

Clearly, leading from an equity stance — that is, leadership that is grounded in and driven by a belief in equity and excellence for each and every student — is the right work. But as we have learned through our partnerships, it is hard work. It requires leaders to have an exceptional knowledge base and expert skills in classroom observation, analysis and feedback when it comes to leading for change in teaching and learning. It also requires leaders to be self-aware, courageous and resilient in the face of bias, cultural misunderstanding and resistance. So, how do we build the capacity of principals and other school leaders to be equity-centered leaders? We have found that there are at least six critical elements of effective professional learning designed to build this capacity.

EQUITY-CENTERED CAPACITY BUILDING:

Essential Approaches For Excellence & Sustainable School System Transformation



Equity-centered capacity building is a complex process coupling both structural and technical processes with those that are more social, cultural and political (Petty, 2015). School leaders must be aware of and attentive to issues of race, class, power and privilege and their implications for policy and practice. If leaders do not understand quality teaching and learning; if they cannot observe and analyze instruction; if they cannot provide teacher feedback that can change practice; and if they cannot establish a culture of learning, then the likelihood of improving student achievement and closing opportunity and achievement gaps is limited. The structural/technical and social/cultural/political approaches are not mutually exclusive; both are necessary for the work of building the expertise of leaders to lead an equity agenda for the improvement of student achievement.

SIX ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF CAPACITY BUILDING FOR PRINCIPALS

Equity-Focused Content

In describing equity-centered capacity building for school leaders, we begin with the *content* of the professional learning. We have already discussed *four dimensions of instructional leadership* with key strategies of equity-embedded practices. These kinds of leadership practices must serve as a significant part of the core content for any professional learning designed to focus on equity-centered instructional leadership. Participants need both the knowledge base and leadership skills to:

1. Establish a vision and mission for their school community that every student's success is non-negotiable;
2. Lead for the improvement of instruction, supporting teachers through coaching, professional learning, and professional learning communities;
3. Create a culture of results-focused learning that values racial, linguistic and economic diversity; and
4. Lead an equity agenda — an intentional plan to provide all students the opportunity, access and support to achieve rigorous levels of knowledge and skill that they can apply to real-world experiences.

EQUITY-CENTERED CAPACITY BUILDING:

Essential Approaches For Excellence & Sustainable School System Transformation

In addition to having content that focuses on the improvement of instruction by leading with an equity lens, we have found the following five essential characteristics of effective professional learning or capacity building for school leaders.

Opportunity for Self-Reflection

Leaders and prospective leaders focused upon leading for equity need time for self-reflection. They need to grapple with critical questions about their personal beliefs about teaching and learning and the capacity of *all* students, especially those who are struggling, to master today's rigorous academic expectations and garner the social, emotional and academic skills and competencies to share their gifts and thrive. Leaders also need to reflect on their daily practice and lessons they have learned that they will carry forward in their work. Finally, equity-centered leadership is often met with strong resistance. Leaders sometimes feel very lonely in this work. Self-reflection can sometimes fuel self-renewal, a very necessary process for equity-centered leaders.

Communities of Practice

Not only do principals need time for self-reflection, we find in our work with school leaders that one of their preferred structures for learning is that of a *community of peers and other educators* who share similar work and have similar goals, experiences and challenges. It is in these communities where leaders learn together. Through dialogue and "consultancy protocols," they share their most challenging problems of practice and engage in collaborative problem-solving. They engage in inquiry together, using a range of meaningful data and strategic questioning to examine critical issues. Communities of practice also provide a place where leaders can safely deal with the strong emotions that inevitably arise in the work of equity-centered leadership. It is in these communities of practice that principals can share their stories, the impact of the challenges they face upon them personally, emotionally and professionally, and their strategies.

Job-Embedded Learning

Professional learning needs to be job-embedded. It needs to be relevant; it needs to include feedback; and it needs to be able to facilitate a change in principal practice. Principals actually need to be able to take what they learn in their communities of practice back to their school settings and try different strategies, noting successes, challenges and results. They then bring these results back to the group for debrief, analysis, celebration, problem solving and discussion of potential next steps. These practices, especially when coupled with individual coaching, can be very effective in helping leaders go deeper in their learning and changing practice. We often see challenges in working with principals in this way.

Changing one's practice is sometimes difficult to do; change can be hard. This process works best when *principals' supervisors* are closely involved in this process, consistently providing resources, coaching and support for principals. This means that the principal supervisors must acquire the same level of knowledge and commitment to leading with an equity agenda. They too must understand how to analyze data and work with principals in an inquiry process identifying strengths and the right problems of practice and strategies to address the problems at all levels. In order for principals to be equity-centered leaders, they must have the full support of the central office*. For many central offices,*

providing this kind of support will require major transformation, beginning with a focus on equity from the district perspective. We often talk of a necessary "through-line" from the superintendent's desk to the student's desk. This through-line is necessary if we are going to see broad-scale change for students across schools and across districts rather than finding just the "pockets of success" that we often see in districts. All students have a right to an education grounded in equity and excellence, no matter what school they find themselves attending.

Differentiated Support for Principals

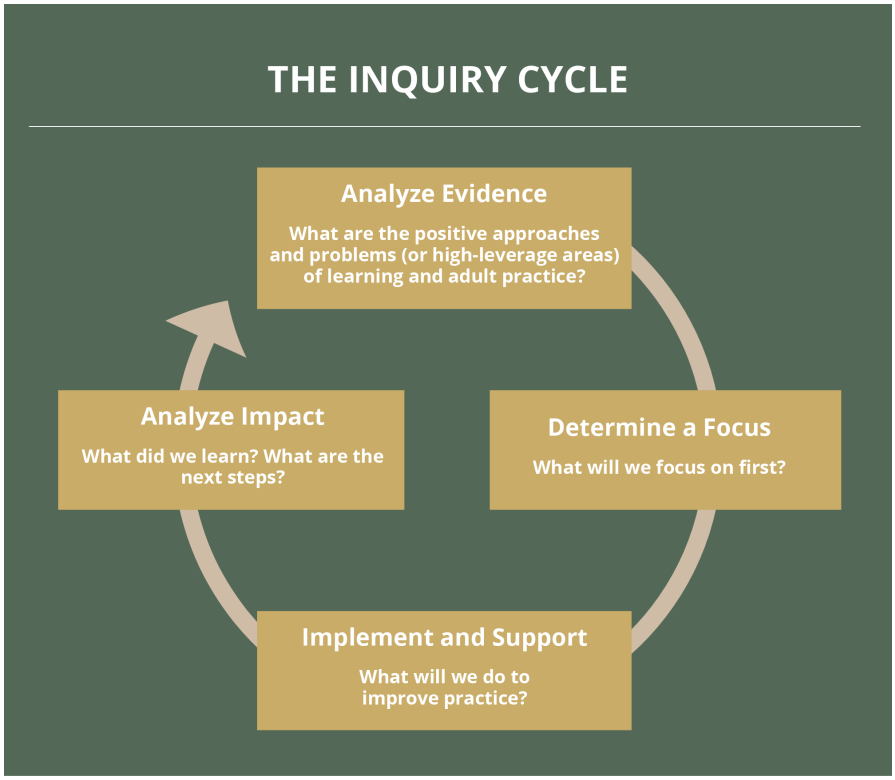
School leaders will, of course, be at different places in their journeys to equity-centered leadership. Professional development providers should therefore give careful consideration to *differentiated support* by creating different structures for the school leaders' learning and growth. First of all, the whole group structure is quite conducive to presentation, sharing and discussion of research and information. It is also during whole group sessions that leaders can focus on building knowledge and skills, group learning and dialogue. A second viable structure for learning is *one-on-one coaching.* Coaching facilitates differentiation by providing the opportunity for principals to take the knowledge and skills learned in the whole group sessions and focus collaboratively with a coach on their own strengths and areas of focus, and go deeper in their own learning as it applies to their specific needs and context. This coaching protocol is strengthened by the use of qualitative and quantitative, disaggregated student and school performance data, as well as data from classroom observations and student work. Finally, grouping leaders in small groups by area of focus (i.e., creating a learning-focused culture, analyzing disaggregated data, looking at student work, etc.) can serve as another effective strategy for building leaders' capacity in very specific skill areas and differentiating support.

The Use of Inquiry

Finally, one of the most important processes we can use in capacity-building work, and that principals can use in the work of improving instructional practice, is *inquiry*. Inquiry is a process through which leaders can study their own leadership practices as well as teaching and learning in their schools. Initially, some may think inquiry is similar to, if not the same as, reflection. While it is true that inquiry includes reflection, in and of itself, inquiry is much more than reflection. It is a process that requires participants to analyze a range of data, ask reflective questions, identify strengths, try out potential strategies for problems of practice, analyze the impact of the strategies and make data-informed decisions about next steps. The chart below depicts four phases of the inquiry process:

EQUITY-CENTERED CAPACITY BUILDING:

Essential Approaches For Excellence & Sustainable School System Transformation



The use of inquiry is an essential skill for leaders committed to equity-centered leadership. It is a process by which principals, teachers, school supervisors, superintendents, students and others analyze multiple sources of disaggregated data. Then, they use the results to ask critical questions such as the following: *What are the patterns of achievement among our students? Which students are doing well? Why? How will this particular initiative help the low-performing students? Who is taking honors courses? Who is in special education? Who is caught in-between systems and supports? Why? Are we hearing student voices about their learning experience in our school? What are the methods we're using to hear and be in dialogue with students? Are they deep enough or authentic? How does behavior impact learning? Who is being suspended? For what reasons? What teachers are being successful with which students, within which disciplines? Why?*

Inquiry helps leaders (in many fields) identify successes and problems, name inequities, determine solutions, leverage strengths, implement strategies, use data to determine impact and then identify next steps. It is a process essential to improving instruction as well as building the capacity of principals and other school leaders to be data-driven and equity-centered in their work. Regular inquiry practice can help build an equity-centered community where educators can collectively investigate their greatest strengths and challenges and pursue solutions to student problems of learning and teaching and leadership problems of practice.

In order for this process to be successful, leaders must first of all use multiple sources of both qualitative and quantitative, disaggregated data to get as full a picture as possible of student learning, instruction and leadership. Then, realizing the plethora of challenges and opportunities facing schools, a driving question for example, might be, "*Which student problem of learning, if solved, would yield the greatest benefit across grade levels and disciplines?*" Or, one could flip this question to investigate, "*Where are students with the greatest barriers succeeding and thriving in ways that far exceed their peers in other schools? Why is this the case, and how might we leverage across classrooms and schools the strategies being engaged with these students?*" Finally, leaders need skill and courage in the analysis of data, and they must be willing to accept the fact that data will often tell us things we do not particularly want to hear.

EQUITY-CENTERED CAPACITY BUILDING:

Essential Approaches For Excellence & Sustainable School System Transformation

Many school leaders are working very hard to ensure that each and every student — regardless of ethnicity, zip code, socioeconomic status, language or gender — engages daily in a rigorous learning experience that results in the highest level of social, emotional and academic success and readiness for college, life and living-wage careers. This is a daunting task and, quite frankly, very difficult to do without school districts also making the same commitment. Part of this district commitment must include the kind of professional learning and coaching that will build the capacity of school leaders to be equity-centered leaders: Those who lead with an equity frame, who are relentless about having the highest quality of instruction and robust supports in every classroom and who have the courage to partner widely and effectively, inside and outside of schools, stand up on behalf of each and every student.

References

Brown, Kathleen et al, "Leading Schools of Excellence and Equity: Documenting Effective Strategies in Closing Achievement Gaps, *Teachers College Record* 113, no.1 (2011): 57–96.

Deal, Terence, and Kent Peterson, *Shaping School Culture: Pitfalls, Paradoxes, and Promises* (second edition) (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, March 2009).

"The Economic Impact of the Achievement Gap in America's Schools," McKinsey & Company, Social Sector Office, April 2009.

Equality of Educational Opportunity (COLEMAN) Study (EEOS), 1966 (ICPSR 06389), http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/icpsrweb/DSDR/studies/06389

Fink, Stephen, and June Rimmer, "Building a Better Principalship: Supporting principals as instructional leaders," *Principal Leadership*, January 2015.

Fink, Stephen, and Max Silverman, "Principals as Instructional Leaders," *School Administrator* 71, no. 4 (April 2014): 23-26.

Gay, Geneva, *Culturally responsive teaching* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2002).

Parlapiano, Alicia, Robert Gebeloff, and Shan Carter, "The Shrinking American Middle Class," *The New York Times*, Jan. 26, 2015.

Haycock, Kati, and Candace Crawford, "Closing the Teacher Quality Gap," *Educational Leadership* 65, no.7 (April 2008).

Jerald, Craig, "Leading for Effective Teaching: How School Systems Can Support Principal Success" (Seattle: Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2012).

Leithwood, Kenneth et al, "How Leadership Influences Student Learning" (New York: The Wallace Foundation, September 2004).

Malarkey, Tom, "Inquiry for Equity: What Does It Mean for Teacher Research?" *Working Toward Equity: Writings and Resources From the Teacher Research Collaborative* (2005): 1 – 11.

Matthews, Jay, "Trouble grading teachers with test scores," *The Washington Post*, Jan. 4, 2015.

Petty, Sheryl, "Supporting Sustainable Improvement in School Systems: Capacity Building for Equity and Excellence," Opening the Doors to Opportunity for All: Setting a Research Agenda for the Future, AIR Research Roundtable on Equity and Opportunity in Education (Washington, D.C.: American Institutes for Research, The Equity Project, January 2015).

"The MetLife Survey of the American Teacher: Collaboration for Student Success" (MetLife, 2009, pg. 25).

Review of research, Kenneth Leithwood et al., "How Leadership Influences Student Learning" (2004): 3.

Staiger, Douglas O., Robert Gordon, and Thomas J. Kane, "Identifying Effective Teachers Using Performance on the Job," (The Hamilton Project/The Brookings Institution, April 2006).

Supovitz, Jonathan, and Henry May, "The scope of principal efforts to improve instruction," *Educational Administration Quarterly* 47, no. 2 (April 2011): 332-352.

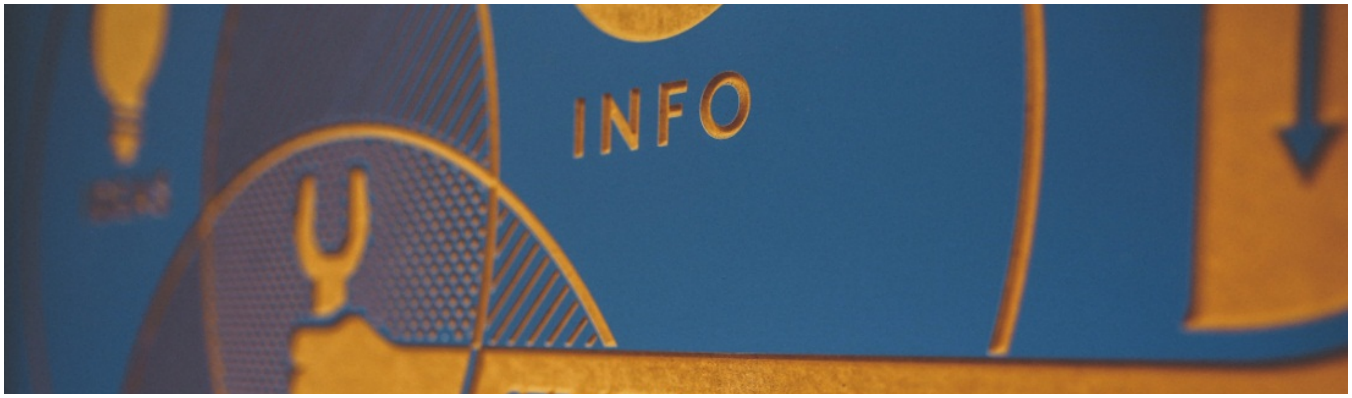
Teachers Matter. Understanding Teachers' Impact on Student Achievement," (RAND Education, 2010).

University of Washington Center for Educational Leadership, *4 Dimensions of Instructional Leadership: Instructional Leadership Framework Version 1.0.* Seattle (2012), Author. Retrieved from https://www.k-12leadership.org/ University of Washington Center for Educational Leadership.

University of Washington Center for Educational Leadership. (2012). *5 Dimensions of Teaching and Learning Framework Version 4.0.* Seattle (2012), Author. Retrieved from https://www.k-12leadership.org/ of Washington Center for Educational Leadership.

University of Washington Center for Educational Leadership. *Principal Support Framework.* Seattle (2013) Author. Retrieved fromhttps://www.k-12leadership.org/

Brown, Kathleen M., Jen Benkovitz, A. J. Muttillo, and Thad Urban. 2011. Leading schools of excellence and equity: Documenting effective strategies in closing achievement gaps. *Teachers College Record* 113.1: 57–96.



SYSTEMS CHANGE AND GOVERNANCE: SCHOOL BOARDS THAT LEAD FOR EQUITY

By **Larry Leverett**, Executive Director, Panasonic Foundation

---

The Panasonic Foundation, established in 1984, is guided by its core commitment to support efforts of school systems to improve academic and social outcomes for all students: "All Means All." The Foundation provides direct technical assistance to support system effectiveness with attention focused on equity challenges in the school system. Our theory of action has continuously evolved as a result of: 1) changing contexts (i.e., federal and state policy and legislation such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and Race to the Top (RTTT)); 2) changing emphasis of major school reform approaches; 3) the ever-growing body of knowledge supported by educational research influencing practice (e.g., teacher quality, impact of access to rigorous curriculum, motivational and resiliency theory, valued-added equity strategies, critical race theory); and 4) the influences of demographic factors and the societal responses to race, culture and ethnicity. In our early years, we emphasized the school as the unit of change and invested our resources in strengthening the capacity of school-level educators to implement school-based management processes. Some years later, we grew frustrated by the impact of central offices who were not supportive of the creativity and innovative spirit of schools who began asserting their views about autonomy, authority and decision-making roles.

In the late 1980s, the Foundation responded by rethinking its theory of action and landed on a greater emphasis on central office as the unit of change. However helpful this shift was, it quickly became evident that the *school board's* role required our additional attention as the Foundation worked to refine its systemic approach to school system change. The present theory of action encompasses the board of education, superintendent, senior leadership team or cabinet, and other central office supervisors and administrators, as well as individual schools. Our work with school boards seeks to support the development of ***governance structures to provide important leadership for systemic equity*** through policy, resource allocation, community and family engagement, comprehensive communications and monitoring system-wide performance.

EQUITY-CENTERED CAPACITY BUILDING:

Essential Approaches For Excellence & Sustainable School System Transformation

WHY FOCUS ON GOVERNANCE?

As the Foundation made the shift to districts as the unit of change for our work with school systems, we quickly became aware of the importance of working with school boards to increase effectiveness. The district remains a viable organizational structure for advancing system-wide equity strategies with such equity-focused policies as weighted resource allocation, strategic staffing, differentiated school support systems and locally determined accountability designs to monitor system performance using multiple measures. School boards have an important role as stewards of the education investment made by communities. However, the storied history of public school boards that have failed to perform responsibly has caused numerous reformers, advocates and legislators to believe that school board influence must either be reduced or eliminated as a means to govern public school districts.

Today, we see various hybrids of school board models, from boards under mayoral control, to advisory boards that vary in their ability to act on personnel or finance matters, to county or state-operated takeovers with replacement of school board structures and composition. The Foundation has supported board development in school systems with various structures and roles, including working with school boards that represent practices and policies that affirm the views of many school board critics, and working with districts that are models for using the governance structure to lead for equity. We have worked with school boards that honor their responsibility to engage effectively with communities and staff to provide governance that steers school systems toward equitable outcomes for all students. We join with those who demand effective governance systems in public education. Cronyism and nepotism — and politically driven, unethical (sometimes illegal) policies and practices — adversely impact systems' ability to provide the opportunities and experiences that learners need and must be firmly addressed by the appropriate enforcement agencies.

We believe that effective school boards make a difference in system efforts to improve student performance. Several we have worked with in the Foundation's partnership program have provided their communities with system-wide stewardship by working with the superintendent to shape an authentic vision and mission. They have defined core values and beliefs and established goals based on high expectations for students and staff, and have created effective systems for deliberate policy governance, orienting, monitoring and evaluation of system and superintendent performance. Their effectiveness is often evident in the systems of support available for schools, investments in capacity building, and diverse interventions available to support student success in universal high-quality teaching and learning environments.

These boards drive accountability through *governance-driven monitoring systems.* They are in the position to engage families, communities and internal and external stakeholders; have a clearly defined annual work plan; engage in self-assessment to determine priorities for board development; engage in ongoing learning to expand their knowledge of the latest developments in the field of education; and have multiple approaches to engaging their diverse communities. Finally, these effective boards work arduously to ensure that their work is aligned with system-wide efforts to improve achievement for all learners. All means all.

Through its leadership and in partnership with communities, school boards have the responsibility to give direction, determine resource allocation formulas, and set the vision, mission, core beliefs and

strategic goals of the system. The board determines whether or not equity becomes a front-burner issue in a school community and supports the leverage points to make change happen (i.e., system goal-setting, strategic and operational plans and accountability systems to measure and publicly report on indicators of success).

School boards can demand that school systems act affirmatively to examine the root causes for student performance disparities, set clear expectations for the elimination of these gaps and intentionally confront the disparities among student populations. School boards that lead for equity intentionally provide different levels of support to meet the most urgent student needs and achieve improved student performance. Effective school boards are organized to "break the links" of longstanding barriers that adversely impact the success of all students and fully accept the responsibility to lead for equity. According to the Panasonic Foundation, school boards that lead for equity:

> *"Systemic equity [exists when] . . . systems and individuals habitually operate to ensure that every student has the greatest opportunity to learn, enhanced by the resources and supports necessary to achieve competence, excellence, independence, personal and social responsibility, and self sufficiency for school and for life" (Bradley Scott, 2000).*
>
> *Scott, B., (June-July 2009). IDRA Newsletter by the Intercultural Development Research Association.*

1. Adopt, support and implement an equity-based *vision, mission, system goals and policies* to provide a framework for the work of school district staff;
2. Maintain *effective communications and relationship* with the superintendent and hold the superintendent responsible for student achievement;
3. Demonstrate *leadership, courage and the will* to govern the district on behalf of the entire community;
4. *Allocate resources equitably* to ensure that all students have the opportunity to learn and succeed academically and socially;
5. Educate and engage the community to create a *sense of system- and community-urgency* to aggressively do "whatever it takes" for every student to achieve success in school;
6. *Enable all students* in all classrooms to engage in mastering rigorous academic content;
7. Act to hold the school board and *all adults accountable* for the improvement of student outcomes based on multiple and varied measures;

8. *Monitor* system performance of all students to assess, report and communicate the academic performance of all students;
9. Ensure that every student is taught by a *high-quality* teacher and that every school is led by a high-quality principal;
10. Strategically *engage* students, families, communities, residents, businesses, elected and appointed municipal officials, community-based organizations and others to increase the effectiveness of collaborative efforts to support the academic and social success of all students;
11. Establish clear board of education *work plans* that align with system improvement priorities, invest in their own development, reflect on their effectiveness throughout the calendar year and annually engage in a formal self-assessment; and
12. *Model high standards* of ethical practices both individually and as a full board.

SCHOOL BOARD LEADERSHIP FOR EQUITY-DRIVEN, ACHIEVEMENT-FOCUSED SCHOOL SYSTEMS

School boards have the responsibility to lead their school systems in partnership with communities, to share a commitment to ensuring that every learner has the resources, supports and opportunities to be successful, academically and socially. Too often, boards rely exclusively upon standardized test results as the sole indicator of how well a school system is performing. Unfortunately, school boards most often fail to measure system performance in areas that support such college and career readiness goals as social emotional competence, digital literacy, global awareness, cultural responsiveness, self-efficacy and managing diversity. It is often said that we should "inspect what we expect." We expect our graduates to master the so-called "soft" skills, but too often boards fail to establish the policy framework or set goals followed by monitoring system performance in these important areas for student growth and development. Certainly, we realize that performance on standardized testing in our meritocratic, credential-oriented society will be necessary. However, school boards who accept the vision of graduating students who are well-prepared for adult roles require our measurements to be broader than a narrow set of indicators based on a limited, test-result-only definition of what it means to be prepared. Boards that lead for equity and excellence are urged to broaden their lens to include a wider scope of indicators to judge system success.

There are very few districts that can claim the absence of gaps between their highest performing students and all other students (i.e., African American, Latino, Native American, English Language Learners, students requiring special education and children from economically challenging conditions). Educational equity is a challenge for urban, suburban and rural school districts. The demographic shifts in the United States are projected to include more and more diversity. For the first time in the history of public education, the majority of students enrolled in American public schools are children of color. Every community is experiencing the impact of these shifts, whether a toney, affluent suburban district with a mainly homogeneous student population or an urban district that is mainly African American with high levels of poverty. Equity issues vary in type, scope and attention to each population — including historically underserved student populations, or the growing population of immigrant students, students who are tracked into special education, or English Language Learner (ELL) students who languish in programs that fail to accelerate performance in meeting Common Core Learning

Standards (CCLS) and other state standards. Whether there are 20 students or tens or hundreds of thousands of students, school systems are responsible to provide every learner with the opportunity to learn and succeed in rigorous academic programs.

POLICY AS A TOOL FOR SUSTAINING AN EQUITY FOCUS

Typically, school boards that we have worked with over the years have incrementally adopted literally hundreds of policies over time. Clearly, it is difficult for boards to govern policy effectively in such situations. Some school boards have succeeded in efforts to dramatically reduce the number of policies in their policy manuals and have been able to introduce coherence, resulting in clearer policy direction to guide the systems, improved ability to monitor key policies and ability to better track system performance.

Some boards that have made these shifts have not only created a more manageable number of policies to monitor, but have also been able to require that superintendents engage with them to ensure shared understanding of the data to be used to demonstrate adherence to major policy provisions. Too often, school boards are frustrated when reports provided by the administration do not align with the policy intent. This frustration can be significantly reduced by boards and superintendents allocating time soon after policy adoption to build shared understanding of expectations, supporting data and indicators of alignment with policy intent. Investing the time on the front end of the policy-setting process saves time and confusion when system performance is reported by the superintendent.

Elimination of the “policy-cluttered” reality of so many school boards is particularly important for boards that define their work as leading for educational equity. A leaner, more focused set of policies gives the equity-driven board a chance to systematically concentrate on a portfolio of high-leverage, equity-based policies to determine system performance and superintendent effectiveness in advancing strategic and tactical strategies and activities designed to improve student learning. Without such a deliberate system in place, the difficulty to sustain equity initiatives through superintendent or board member turnover increases.

Having a strong equity focus supported by a thoughtful, deliberate and strategic board policy framework increases a board’s chance to sustain an equity-based agenda during board or superintendent changes. When policies and monitoring systems are aligned, systematic and emblematic of the governance culture’s modus operandi, it is far more likely that policies, practices and expectations become more deeply embedded as governance tools to promote and sustain equity commitments in a school district. While this board policy approach may not be completely unassailable by future board members or superintendents, there is a far greater chance to sustain an equity focus over multiple years, even when board members and/or superintendents come and go.

School boards committed to sustaining equity efforts are urged to engage their communities, with their full diversity of interests and needs, to develop and share ownership of an equity-based policy framework. The extent to which the board and community linkages use differentiated approaches to build community knowledge, understanding, co-development of and commitment to the system’s equity work will be an important factor that affects the sustainability of an equity agenda. Boards are

encouraged to invest in building the community-based support and partnership needed to increase the difficulty for future boards or superintendents to dismantle a policy-based equity framework because it is valued and co-owned by the community as a hallmark of their school district.

There are strong examples of school boards that have developed and implemented an equity-based policy framework that memorializes the important equity expectations for a system. In one district we have worked with, there have been three different superintendents in the past decade and some changes in board composition. Yet, the equity focus has remained intact and is continuously anchored to a set of policy commitments made by earlier boards. A second district has developed a set of system-generated accountability indicators to better understand district progress on key equity-oriented leverages. This system's balance scorecard tells the story of successes, challenges and continuous improvement in areas directly aligned with major policy provisions in the several, key equity-oriented policies.

However, we have found that, for boards that have several hundred policies covering a range of topics — from managing blood borne pathogens, to disciplinary procedures for students carrying firearms, among other issues — the likelihood of the board monitoring policy implementation is fairly minimal. The policy governance model developed by Dr. John and Miriam Carver[i] has great potential as a resource for helping boards steward their organizations by developing, monitoring and reviewing their policies. Districts implementing such streamlined policy governance usually have 50 or fewer policies that they monitor annually. The power of this model is the use of policy as a lever for change and accountability as opposed to the present paradigm of volumes of policy documents that are most often not used or referred to until a problem arises.

USE BOARD WORK PLANS AND LEARNING TO FOCUS TIME AND MEETING EFFECTIVENESS

Some of the practices to promote board learning include allocating time in the annual board calendar for workshop meetings focused on a topic of shared interest; development of monitoring reports that provide data on key teaching and learning policies; multiple indicators for measuring student performance; and organizational culture and climate markers at the school and district levels. Boards also use data from their own self-assessments, learning from community forums or carefully designed community linkage meetings focused on topics of shared interest with the board.

Effective boards dedicated to equity and excellence also seek out opportunities to update their knowledge on topics related to board members' interests. It is important that school boards, as stewards of a community's educational system, model "learning for leading." Effective school boards keep abreast of changes in the education field and their potential impact on the community by adopting annual board development goals that expand board members' knowledge in areas that may have implications for the school district.

Boards that lead for equity will benefit from learning more about the complexity of system changes necessary to address matters of racial, socioeconomic and cultural diversity within their communities and districts. They'll also benefit from seeking to understand how racism and other marginalizing practices affect access, opportunity and outcomes. The ability to deal with matters of race, socioeconomics, language and other factors — and build shared knowledge around cultural

responsiveness — informs policy development, resource allocation practices, systems of professional development, human resource approaches and accountability policies and practices.

Sadly, school boards often lack developmental and training experiences needed to build their capacity to lead for equity. Most states have school board associations that provide a range of services to orient new school board members: tools for board self-assessments, training on state and federal laws, rules for ethical conduct and other necessary topics. The board's role in leading for equity, however, is not generally a skill set in which many state school board associations have a depth of knowledge.

SUSTAINING THE DISTRICT'S EQUITY & EXCELLENCE FOCUS

Maintaining traction on an equity-focused, board-, superintendent- and community-driven agenda is a major challenge for many school systems. Too often, school districts are confronted with the challenge of superintendent turnover or shifting priorities of school boards. The hiring of a new superintendent frequently leads to abandoning the change efforts of the preceding superintendent and starting with a new vision, mission and strategic direction. Unfortunately, the tenure of urban superintendents is on average 3.2 years — less than the five-year period that deep change usually requires in complex organizations. Shifts in board membership also contribute to an absence of long-term ownership of equity initiatives and to the extremely difficult challenge of building and sustaining the multi-level support and commitment needed across school systems and communities.

Effective boards recognize this reality and invest in building a framework that promotes continuity of a board- and community-owned system of governance designed to survive the impact of churn at the board and superintendent levels. School boards that carefully develop, articulate and monitor policies to anchor the system's vision, mission, core values and broad goals, are in a stronger position to sustain long-term system changes even when superintendent turnover occurs. Effective, equity-oriented school boards hire superintendents who enter the relationship with the board with clear guidance and expectations it sets in partnership with the superintendent. Without such clear direction, there is essentially no anchor for changes that require long-term commitment.

When a board is highly effective, it is engaged in actively maintaining a productive working relationship in partnership with the superintendent. There are no "magic potions" that can be applied to instantly create a productive board/superintendent relationship. While not a total solution, boards that develop and support locally adapted versions of policy governance usually have a better opportunity to create conditions for both the board and superintendent to work within mutually agreed boundaries and expectations. The board's work as a policy-monitoring body calls for clear agreement on board expectations and the evidence required to demonstrate progress and/or adherence to policies in areas of student performance and wellness, organizational climate and culture, finance, operations, human resources, facilities and other areas.

When education boards provide policy direction, set clear goals, delineate expectations, and are clear on desired system performance, there is a foundation for significant clarity between the board and CEO/superintendent about the expectations of adherence to educational equity. When the board is clear on expectations for system performance, the board and superintendent are in a better position to assess the impact of the superintendent's leadership on the system. An equity-driven board is also

clear that a *balance of pressure and support* are required to move the system forward on equity goals. All support with no pressure = little or no change. Similarly, all pressure and no support also = little or no change or improvement.

EFFECTIVE EQUITY-DRIVEN BOARDS MODEL COLLABORATION

Education boards become less effective when they fail to model collaboration, respect, team building and relational trust. "Do as I say and not as I do" does not work as a way to lead toward a vision and mission within an organizational context that values people and their ideas, and depends upon the shared effort of many working across cultures and perspectives toward a common mission. Too often, we focus on the technical changes without considering the importance of investment in development of the adult relationships required to engage the tough work of supporting deep equity in every school. The adaptation of social and emotional (SEL) competencies and skills to *adult* relationships requires more reinforcement. Effective school boards must model the behaviors they expect others in the system to model in their day-to-day interactions with colleagues, students, parents and community members. The dynamics, communication and work styles among and between the board members, board and superintendent, board and staff send a message about the district's culture and expected behavior.

Recently, Panasonic Foundation consultants have encouraged boards with deep conflicts to "push the pause button" on judging their colleagues harshly. One technique that has been used quite widely is to have board members share their "stories" of school experiences, remembering times when they have been affirmed or judged and the impact of each, and reflect on learning experiences or conditions that either catapulted their learning, or situations that blocked learning. Each time we use this exercise, board members emerge with a different understanding and appreciation for their colleagues on the school board. Some boards working with superintendents have launched "courageous conversations," supported cultural responsiveness training, and invested in organizational development processes that foster teamwork and collaboration. Others have developed by-laws, norms, and disciplined operational agreements and procedures for managing complaints, problem-solving processes, setting agendas and other routines that often can fan the embers of conflict. Panasonic's work with school boards recognizes that *technical change* is often difficult to successfully penetrate in school districts where the board and superintendent team does not model or fails to invest in the *adaptive changes* necessary to build the critical mass needed to make change happen. *Greater investment and support for the personal development of adults* has often been a missed opportunity that yields benefits to sustainability.

BUILDING BOARD CAPACITY TO LEAD FOR EQUITY

School boards are either appointed or elected to guide school systems. Through a significant community, staff and student engagement process, they are responsible for setting the vision, delineating the mission and core values and aligning policy accordingly to set the system's direction. This is the school board's role. Superintendents are hired by boards, as intended representatives of their communities, to drive the mission and vision and to organize the school system in a way that is aligned with the system's core values. Superintendents have a responsibility to organize the system to respond to what the governing body and community have determined is important.

Likewise, once the board has executed their responsibilities to define and articulate the mission, vision and values, there is an important responsibility to be clear with the CEO/superintendent about what is expected of him/her, and not get involved in management. Management is not a role of the board. A "shipwreck" often occurs when the board does not define its work as policy, but as management and administration; or when the accountability of the superintendent is not clear, and the board lacks polices to hold the superintendent accountable. When these things are not clear, systems are likely to have turnover of superintendents that is attributable to a lack of shared understanding and agreement between the board and superintendent.

Nearly all state school board associations have developed board training programs designed to meet minimum requirements set by state legislatures or state boards of education. Typically, these programs are organized to clarify the legal responsibilities of local boards of education, compliance with state ethic codes, state education law, sunshine laws, and other guidance related to a broad range of state-specific requirements for school boards. Nearly every state has set minimum expectations for training board members. However, *there is little state-level emphasis on the role of the school boards to function as leaders for equity,* which leaves to chance the development of knowledge, skills and expectations related to educational equity and student achievement.

Education boards need to be clear about their own development. It is important for boards to engage in processes such as self-evaluation and self-assessments, to examine and be reflective about their policy agendas, to have clearly defined goals for their own improvement, and the ability to govern systems. Boards also need to have outward exposure, to look at practices from other boards within their local and state contexts as well as nationally, to attend conferences, and be well-read. Boards need to have a way of learning new information to help them understand movements (e.g., the Common Core, or the role of assessment). Boards need to be *learning organizations* in order to be clear about their roles.

When superintendents and school board members do not have shared understanding, there is an absence of the coherence, focus and support needed to drive equity-driven policies and practices in the district. The relationship that is positive and optimistic in the early tenure of a superintendent tends to fade over time and is replaced by tension in the relationship, micromanagement, and role dysfunction in the responsibilities of both the superintendent and school boards. The behaviors that result decrease the effectiveness and ability for governance and executive functioning by the superintendent to carry out an agenda focused on student achievement.

Every community context has unique issues, challenges and concerns that require active board learning to build their capacity and ability to respond effectively to their local context. Boards should have a "learning agenda" on best practices nationally (e.g., reducing long-term ELLs in districts, the most effective means of accelerating the progress of black and Latino males, the gender issues related to STEM, etc.). This level of learning should be part of board activity where the system is set up for learning, including self-assessment, workshops, key learnings from the field, and state and federal policies and their impact on the district. Boards must be informed in order to be pro-active.

EQUITY-CENTERED CAPACITY BUILDING:

Essential Approaches For Excellence & Sustainable School System Transformation

THE PANASONIC FOUNDATION'S WORK WITH SCHOOL BOARDS

The Panasonic Foundation district partnership is a philanthropic and capacity building commitment to decade-long relationships with our partnership districts. Superintendents and school boards are key district leaders that agree to support a 10-year partnership in a continuous improvement effort anchored in a shared commitment to eliminate the predictability of student achievement based on false beliefs that associate the ability of students with their race, ethnicity and poverty. The Foundation, school board and superintendent sign on to an agreement to identify several areas of work to address system-wide barriers and obstacles to improved student achievement. The Foundation and district agreement works toward locally identified goals that require continuous focus of the district leaders to set goals, develop strategies, build system capacity to achieve the mutually defined objectives, monitor system and student performance (including broadened notions of success), and to make mid-course adjustments to refine the strategic and technical work necessary to achieve the desired results.

Presently, the Panasonic Foundation partnership districts include: Elizabeth, New Jersey; Oakland, California; Prince Georges County, Maryland; Jersey City, New Jersey; Portland, Oregon; Milwaukee, Wisconsin; Newburg, New York; and San Diego, California. The Foundation is also an actively engaged supporter and convener of the *New Jersey Network of Superintendents*, a community of practice focused on system leadership for educational equity. Participating superintendents represent a diverse group of urban and suburban school systems.

Many of our partnerships have gone the full 10 years; some more. However, we learned early on that the improvement effort often fails to reflect a linear design. Ten years seems to be a long enough commitment to make system change, but the realities of superintendent turnover, changes in membership of boards, and local, state and federal policy changes often deter anything that approaches a linear march toward desired partnership outcomes. In many ways, we are reminded of the classical Greek legend portraying the unending work of Sisyphus who rolled a heavy stone up a hill and every time he neared reaching the top of the hill, the stone escaped his grasp and tumbled back to the starting point at the bottom of the hill. Some would conclude that partnerships have not achieved their full potential due to the inability to secure a consistent approach that fixes the problems of governance and leadership.

We have accumulated experiences of good work undone by the breakdown of the board and superintendent relationship; changing membership, politics and values of school boards; and challenges that emerge as ideologies, political agendas, and turnover in system leadership that places forward progress and institutionalization at risk. Some things get better, but the reality is that the constant churn of leadership at the top mitigates against the early energy to move the needle on breaking the links between race, poverty and educational outcomes across entire systems. However, we have also learned that the long-term commitment of the Foundation far exceeds the "three years and out" approach of most philanthropy that is based upon the faulty view that permanent solutions to system governance and leadership are permanently resolved and can be permanently "fixed," given the complex nature of large system change. Panasonic's commitment is to remain engaged through superintendent changes, and ideological and political changes of the boards. We have supported improvements for a period of time, but the tough reality is that school boards and superintendents require ongoing support to weather the storms that are certain to emerge over time.

EQUITY-CENTERED CAPACITY BUILDING:

Essential Approaches For Excellence & Sustainable School System Transformation

The Panasonic Foundation's approach is to help school systems create conditions that support increased board and superintendent ability to focus on equity. This approach requires the Foundation to understand the dynamics and realities of board governance and superintendent leadership. The following are descriptions of our work in the real-time context of school boards and superintendents in our partnership districts:

- **Managing Board and Superintendent Transitions** – The Foundation often works with school boards as superintendent changes occur due to resignations or terminations. Our efforts often include work with the board to identify equity and excellence work that the board values and wishes to sustain as it seeks to identify a new superintendent. Work during transition often seeks to build board unity on the work that is important to sustain. School boards often change in ways that require support, including school board composition changes due to elections, mayoral appointments and, occasionally, mid-term resignations. The change of two or three board members results in re-shuffling relationships, politics and interests. Boards need assistance to increase chances that the re-constituted board finds common ground on the critical work of leading for equity and excellence.
- **Development and Implementation of Superintendent Evaluation Processes** – The Foundation engages the school board and incoming superintendent to reach agreement on the focus, tools and process to assess the performance of the superintendent. All states in the U.S. have statutes requiring the board to define a process for superintendent evaluation. There are many models for the board and superintendent to select from, but some customization is often needed to tailor the process to the district's vision, mission and strategic goals. It would seem that this "low hanging fruit" requirement would be easily accomplished without much ado. However, "off the shelf" models may not capture the specific equity interests, policies and goals of a school board. The Foundation provides assistance to both the board and superintendent to achieve agreement on an evaluation tool and process that can be used to effectively monitor the system's performance through the superintendent evaluation process.
- **Monitoring Board Effectiveness** – Effective boards have established systems for monitoring their own as well as system performance. The work with school boards to re-examine their responsibility to monitor key policies to promote equity is not typically included in most training experiences of school boards. The Foundation uses retreats and workshop sessions to increase board knowledge on how to structure agendas, meeting time and annual calendars, and to be in partnership with the superintendent about establishing clear directions. Each board we support is involved eventually in development of a board-adopted work plan that sets the expectation for scheduled monitoring of policies intended to measure system performance.

We have found that boards that enact a locally adapted form of policy governance have been more effective in reducing the administratively developed presentations, reports and updates that too often fail to provide boards with the information they need to evaluate system performance in targeted policy areas related to improved student learning. The superintendent receives clear direction through an interactive process in which the administration provides the board with its interpretation of measurements to be used to report on progress toward attainment of major policy provisions. Such deliberate approaches have resulted in boards revising policies to provide greater emphasis on teaching and learning; reduced the number of administratively initiated board presentations on

initiatives, plans or updates; and increased board meeting time on matters that have greater relevance to monitoring system performance related to student achievement.

- **Monthly Follow-up with School Board Leadership** – Monthly district site visits are a standard component of the Foundation's protocol. Our senior consultants use this opportunity to "check-in" on the work of the school board, emerging challenges and successes.
- **Board Retreats** – Most of our partnership districts hold 2-3 board/superintendent retreats per calendar year. The retreat process includes a series of confidential interviews with each board member synthesized into a report to the board that highlights areas of agreement and tension; hopes, fears, aspirations and interests; and perspectives on board effectiveness and board/superintendent relationships. This information is often used for customized self-assessment instruments that sometimes supplement other ad hoc board assessment surveys.

Typically, the board is asked to organize a small, ad hoc retreat committee representative of the perspectives held by board members. A key purpose of having the committee is to build board ownership for the success of each retreat. The committee has the responsibility to draft the agenda, retreat objectives, and advanced reading or preparation materials.

- **Disciplined Processes** – Too often, the absence of agreement on basic operations of the school board can trigger conflicts between the board and superintendent. Boards have targeted areas such as complaint management procedures, communications protocols, agenda setting, board norms and agenda setting. Our work with school boards and superintendents helps to clarify procedural matters to ensure that the full board, superintendent and her leadership team are operating within agreed upon processes.

SUGGESTIONS FOR BUILDING BOARD CAPACITY TO INCREASE EFFECTIVENESS

The Panasonic Foundation's work is focused on ensuring all kids have access to high-quality instruction and supports, and ensuring systems are hiring and supporting highly effective system leaders. We also convene a Superintendents' Network where we work with superintendents themselves and (to an extent) with their leadership teams. There is no area of work that a superintendent leads that is not impacted by the governance system in which they are immersed. When highly effective leaders of districts are working with highly effective boards, the likelihood of achieving equity and excellence is dramatically improved.

Once boards are elected or appointed, people tend to view boards as either "good" or "bad." There is very little attention focused across the nation on building highly effective boards. This is a major problem. Furthermore, who runs for the board is more and more complicated. There are ideologically driven candidates, single-interest candidates, candidates supported by unions, those supported by wealthy people external to the district, etc. More attention needs to be devoted to who is elected or appointed, and what it takes to develop high-performing boards. We need to maintain an expectation that boards are supported in developing their ability to effectively govern a system driven by equity and excellence.

EQUITY-CENTERED CAPACITY BUILDING:

Essential Approaches For Excellence & Sustainable School System Transformation

It is very important for boards to have a real sense of vision, mission and real core values that are authentic and used with sincerity, purpose, deliberateness and intentionality. Also, foundational documents and policies give direction to the system and clearly communicate values for a school system. Support through policy and planning, a human resource framework for hiring, developing, and building people's capacity to deliver on the system's core values and expectations — all need to be clear, real and authentic. This is one component of making this work.

A second component is to clarify roles for the board and superintendent through clear policy coming from the board to the superintendent. Investing in developing a shared understanding of the desired level of system performance upon which the superintendent will be judged is critical. Very serious attention needs to be given to the monitoring, support and evaluation of the superintendent using multifaceted system performance data throughout the year, in partnership with communities. This is not an annual event.

The steps associated with achieving these two components include:

- Having deliberate intentionality as to how the board's *time* is used (e.g., for workshops, monitoring, etc.);
- Building the board's understanding and capacity to be informed *stewards* of a community system;
- Having infrastructure around policy and policy monitoring, and clear lines around where the board's *role* begins and ends on the management-policy continuum;
- Having clear goals for each year where boards model active learning through *reflecting, assessing and monitoring* their own improvement goals; and
- Connecting to the *community* by re-thinking the board's relationship with the community in its work, for example, how the board consults and links with the community and the policies of the board to require system-responsiveness and broad and authentic family and community engagement. Boards need to be clear about their particular work in this area, and how it is different from that of the superintendent and his or her staff, and schools.

Reducing the impact of disparities on the education of America's school children will require men and women who have a strong sense of urgency to ensure that all children are prepared academically and socially to meet the challenges of our times. The work of school boards will continue to be a factor in how communities — urban, rural or suburban — will organize efforts to ensure student success. The work and responsibility of school board members help shape a local policy context that recognizes the importance of ensuring that all students have the opportunities and supports necessary to be successful, contributing members of society.

There have been many debates about the purpose and value of local boards of education. It is likely that the next decade or so will not result in the dissolution of school boards across the United States. Communities will likely continue to elect or appoint school board members with the hope that they will be good stewards of their community of schools. Hopefully, a sense of civic responsibility and acceptance of the urgency needed to dramatically increase the development of learners who are

college, career and life ready will inspire quality candidates ready to invest in school board membership.

The challenges of school boards are not likely to be less arduous a decade from now as we continue to move forward in a global economy, which will have less value and opportunities for young people graduating schools without the hard and soft skills necessary to succeed. The development of school board members committed to an "All Means All" belief system will be important to providing equitable opportunities for learning and growth.

[i] http://www.policygovernance.com

CONTRIBUTOR BIOS

VOLUME EDITOR:

Sheryl Petty, Equity, Personal Transformation and Systems Change Consultant, Movement Tapestries and Management Assistance Group

Sheryl Petty has worked in educational systems change and organizational development for 20 years. Her expertise includes equity-driven change process design and facilitation, cross sector field-building, strategy development, strategic planning, alliance building and network development, education equity assessments, qualitative research, visioning and coaching. She has been a high school teacher, program manager, executive director, and consultant to districts, nonprofits, foundations, universities and schools. Dr. Petty is a consultant through Movement Tapestries, a senior consultant at Management Assistance Group (Washington, D.C.), an associate consultant with Movement Strategy Center (Oakland, California) and was most recently a Principal Associate at the Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University.

Dr. Petty's current work comprises field- and movement-building and promotes aligned approaches across a number of education sectors, including practice in school systems, capacity building, policy, research, community organizing, educator preparation and development, messaging and communications, mindfulness and contemplative practice. A fellow at the Mind and Life Institute and a past fellow at Stanford University's Center for Opportunity Policy in Education, Sheryl has co-designed and facilitated trainings and planning processes with consultants, practitioners, staff and boards nationally and internationally. She holds a B.A. in Mathematics, an M.A. in Systematic and Philosophical Theology, and an Ed.D. in Educational Leadership and Change. Dr. Petty's focus is on supporting the alignment efforts of practitioners and advocates to unleash our most vibrant selves and improve our collective life.

CO-EDITOR:

Susan Shaffer, President, Mid-Atlantic Equity Consortium*, Inc.* (MAEC)

Susan Morris Shaffer is the president of the Mid-Atlantic Equity Consortium, Inc., an educational nonprofit, and director of the Mid-Atlantic Equity Center, the Equity Assistance Center for the U.S. mid-Atlantic region. For more than four decades, Shaffer has been a nationally recognized expert for her transformational work in public schools and the development of comprehensive technical assistance and training on educational equity and multicultural, gender-related issues. She has published extensively on gender equity, family engagement, civil rights, multicultural education, and disability. Shaffer has co-authored (with Linda Perlman Gordon) five books, including the recent *How to Connect with your iTeen: A Parenting Road Map* (McGraw Hill-Education, 2015). Shaffer serves on several boards, including the National Association of Family, School and Community Engagement (co-founder*)*, School

of Education, Bowie State University in Maryland, the Maryland Women's Heritage Center, and Harmony Through Education, an international NGO for children with disabilities. She holds an undergraduate degree in history and a graduate degree in education from the University of California, Berkeley. Shaffer is the recipient of numerous awards for her service, leadership and significant contribution to curricular materials on women.

EDITORIAL ADVICE & SUPPORT:

Maria Pacheco, Principal Investigator, Education Alliance at Brown University

Maria F. Pacheco is principal investigator and co-director of the New England Equity Assistance Center (NEEAC) at The Education Alliance at Brown University. With more than 30 years of experience in urban schools and higher education, Dr. Pacheco specializes in culturally responsive pedagogy, second language acquisition and cognitive development. Dr. Pacheco has worked as a public school teacher, a bilingual director, migrant education supervisor, and civil rights specialist for the Massachusetts Department of Education. Since 1992, she has directed and taught in Brown University's master's program in ESL Education and Cross-Cultural Studies. She joined the NEEAC in 1996 and became the director in 1997. She has held faculty positions at multiple institutions of higher education across New England and at the International Center for the Enhancement of Learning Potential in Jerusalem, Israel. Dr. Pacheco has worked extensively in the areas of culturally responsive curriculum, equitable instructional practices and the development, implementation and evaluation of Lau plans. A certified trainer of Feuerstein's Instrumental Enrichment, she has trained hundreds of teachers in this model, aimed at helping children who are struggling learners to develop effective learning strategies. As a practitioner/scholar, she is the co-author of several texts on culturally responsive teaching, including *Leading With Diversity: Cultural Competencies for Teacher Preparation and Professional Development* and *The Teacher's Guide to Diversity: Building a Knowledge Base*. Dr. Pacheco holds master's degrees in Bilingual/Bicultural Education and in School Administration and a doctorate in Leadership in Schooling from the University of Massachusetts. She speaks English, Portuguese, Spanish and French.

CONTRIBUTORS:

Molly Baustien Siuty, M.S.Ed., doctoral student in the Department of Special Education at the University of Kansas

Molly Baustien Siuty's research interests include systems change for equity and social justice in teacher education, inclusive education and urban education. In addition to her studies, Molly works as a State Facilitator for the CEEDAR Center, a national technical assistance center aimed at supporting state departments and institutions of higher education to create aligned professional learning systems in teacher education and licensure. Molly comes to Kansas with five years of classroom experience in the New York City public school system. She earned a master's degree in Special Education and Leadership from the City College of New York. A Teach for America alumna, she holds a New York State Professional Teaching Certification.

–

Janice Jackson*, Consultant*, former Senior Associate, National Equity Project

Janice Jackson is an independent systems change consultant. Most recently a Senior Associate at the *National Equity Project* (Oakland, California), she is the former Executive Director of Stanford University's Center for Opportunity Policy in Education (SCOPE). She also worked previously at Harvard University, where she provided support for its Urban Superintendents Program and other leadership development initiatives such as a Wallace Foundation-funded leadership project for states and urban school districts. Jackson has been a faculty member and researcher at two universities, working in areas ranging from teaching and teacher education to leadership development. She has deep experience in supporting and running schools and school systems, including having served in the leadership cadre of three major urban school systems (including Boston) and as a consultant to many others. She has also worked in the policy arena at the federal level, as Deputy Assistant Secretary in the U.S. Department of Education in the Clinton Administration. Jackson has also worked as a board member or consultant for a wide variety of major education organizations that support professional development, academic, social and emotional learning for students, and the pursuit of equity.

–

Yvette Jackson, Chief Executive Officer, National Urban Alliance for Effective Education (NUA)

Yvette Jackson is internationally recognized for her work in assessing the learning potential of disenfranchised urban students. Changing this reality for these students to one in which their intellectual potential is believed in, valued and optimized has been Yvette's calling for her entire career. She has applied her research in neuroscience, gifted education, literacy, and the cognitive mediation theory of Dr. Reuven Feuerstein to develop integrated processes that engage and elicit high intellectual performances from underachievers. She designed the New York City Board of Education's Gifted Programs Framework while serving as Director of Gifted Programs. As New York City's Executive Director of Instruction and Professional Development, she led the creation and implementation of the Comprehensive Education Plan, which maximizes the delivery of all core curriculum and support services in the Public Schools of New York City.

Dr. Jackson currently serves as the Chief Executive Officer of the National Urban Alliance for Effective Education, founded at the College Board and Teachers College, Columbia University. She works with school district superintendents, administrators, teachers, and students across the United States and internationally to customize and deliver systemic approaches that enable students to demonstrate high intellectual performances. She bases her work on the principles and practices of the Pedagogy of Confidence, which she created to enable educators to accelerate the intellectual development and academic achievement of their students.

Yvette has been a visiting lecturer at Harvard University's Graduate School of Education, Columbia University, and Stanford University. She has also served as a member of ASCD's (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development) Differentiated Instruction Cadre. She is a keynote presenter at national and international conferences including the Feuerstein Institute, Israel; the Conference of ANEIS – Associação Nacional para o Estudo e Intervenção na Sobredotação, Portugal; and Thinking Schools, United Kingdom.

She has been published in numerous educational journals. Her most recent book (co-authored with Dr. Veronica McDermott): "Aim High, Achieve More: How to Transform Urban Schools Through Fearless Leadership" follows her previous bestseller: "The Pedagogy of Confidence: Inspiring High Intellectual Performance in Urban Schools" which received the 2012 ForeWord Reviews' Silver Book Award.

On September 15, 2012 the Academy of Education Arts and Sciences Educators Voice Awards honored Yvette for "Education Policy/Researcher of the Year."

–

Elizabeth Kozleski, Professor and Chair, Special Education Department, University of Kansas

Prof. Elizabeth B. Kozleski chairs the Special Education program at the University of Kansas. There she leads the specialization on the intersecting oppressions of disability, race, ethnicity, language, gender and sexuality in education and society. Her work theorizing systems change for equity, inclusive education, and professional learning for urban schools is well recognized nationally and internationally. She was awarded the UNESCO Chair in Inclusive International Research in 2005. Her research interests include the analysis of models of systems change in urban and large school systems, examining how teachers learn in practice in complex, diverse school settings, researching multicultural educational practices in the classroom to improve student learning and the impact of professional learning schools on student and teacher learning. She has led a number of national technical assistance projects, including the center for principals in helping to build inclusive schools, NIUSI-LEADSCAPE; NCCREST, the national technical assistance center on disproportionality; and the National Institute for Urban School Improvement (NIUSI), which provided support to urban schools working on creating inclusive schools for all learners. Dr. Kozleski co-edits a book series for Teachers College Press on Disability, Culture, and Equity. Dr. Kozleski has presented her work at scientific conferences in Africa, Asia and Europe, as well as throughout the United States, and is currently working with an international coalition of researchers studying equity. Professor Kozleski began her career as an early childhood educator and became a special educator working in Virginia and in Boulder, Colorado. Her undergraduate and master's degrees are from George Mason University. She received her doctorate in special education at the University of Northern Colorado.

–

Larry Leverett, Executive Director, Panasonic Foundation

Dr. Larry Leverett is the Executive Director of the Panasonic Foundation, a corporate foundation with a mission to help public school systems with high percentages of children in poverty to improve learning for all students so that they may use their minds well and become productive, responsible citizens. Leverett recently served as Superintendent of Schools in Greenwich, Connecticut. His career in education has included urban and suburban experiences as a classroom teacher, elementary principal, assistant superintendent, school board member and Assistant State Commissioner of Education. During a 15-year span, he was a superintendent in three school districts, including Plainfield and Englewood in New Jersey. Leverett serves on advisory committees for the George Lucas Educational Foundation, Educators for Social Responsibility and the Laura Bush Foundation for School Libraries. He is committed to social justice and ensuring that all children have access to a high-quality educational experience in public schools.

–

Monette McIver, Manager, Higher Education Services, Dana Center, University of Texas, Austin

Dr. Monette McIver serves as the manager of higher education services, providing leadership, guidance, and continuity across all higher education resources offered by the Center. In this role, she leads the Center's national higher education developmental mathematics reform initiative, the New Mathways Project. Dr. McIver supports the ongoing effort to work at scale within Texas and develop and implement a plan for expansion to other states.

Dr. McIver has more than 20 years of experience in education. She most recently served as a consulting director for the Center for Systems Transformation at McREL International, where she oversaw and supported work in school and systems improvement. She led projects designed to increase the capacity of schools, districts and state departments of education to systematize improvement efforts. Prior to this position, Dr. McIver was a supervising principal consultant for McREL, leading projects focused on improving achievement for K–12 students. She facilitated and managed training opportunities at the school, district and state levels that focused on systemic change, leadership, strategic use of instructional strategies and curriculum development. In this role, Dr. McIver supported schools and districts with implementation of the Common Core State Standards.

Dr. McIver was also an assistant professor in the School of Education at the University of Colorado at Boulder. She conducted research in the area of writing and writing instruction and taught courses related to elementary writing and writing instruction. Dr. McIver holds a B.A. in Mathematics from Spelman College, an M.A. in Elementary Education and a Ph.D. in Curriculum and Instruction from the University of Colorado at Boulder.

–

June Rimmer, Associate Director, Center for Educational Leadership, University of Washington

Dr. June Rimmer joined the Central for Educational Leadership at the University of Washington's College of Education in 2011 as an Associate Director. In this role she leads the design and implementation of services for school leaders, and develops and manages district partnerships committed to building leaders' expertise in instructional leadership and transforming central offices. Prior to joining the CEL team, she served as a program director with the Stupski Foundation in San Francisco, coaching and providing technical assistance to urban district leaders committed to reform. In addition she was part of a research team examining powerful student learning experiences that lead to 21st century skills and competence as well the system-level changes needed at both the district and state levels to support 21st century learning.

Over the years, June has served in numerous leadership roles in urban education settings most recently as Chief Academic Officer in Seattle. Prior to working in Seattle, June worked in her hometown of Indianapolis, IN as a high school teacher and principal, as well as in numerous roles at the central office including multicultural education, professional development, assistant to the superintendent, and Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum & Instruction. June's professional interests lie in the design of equity-based instructional systems and building expertise in educators' practice to ensure

that all students, particularly our most vulnerable children, exit our systems able to thrive in our dynamic, interconnected, global community.

–

Sonja Brookins Santelises, Vice President of Policy & Practice, The Education Trust

Dr. Sonja Santelises provides strategic direction for the organization's K-12 research, practice and policy work, which includes developing and implementing strategies to ensure that Ed Trust's K-12 efforts effectively focus national attention on inequities in public education and the actions necessary to close gaps in both opportunity and achievement. Before joining The Education Trust, she was the chief academic officer for Baltimore City Public Schools, where she focused on setting academic priorities for City Schools to raise achievement of students across all schools.

Dr. Santelises came to City Schools from Boston, where she was the assistant superintendent for pilot schools, a network of 23 schools with broad autonomy and a track record of successfully meeting student needs and improving the achievement of low-income students and students of color in particular. Prior to the pilot schools post, Sonja was assistant superintendent for teaching and learning/professional development in Boston. Before joining Boston Public Schools, Sonja lectured on urban education for two years at Harvard University and spent six years as a senior associate with Focus on Results Inc., where she worked with five major urban districts, coaching superintendents and training school leaders. Prior to that, Sonja served as executive director of the New York City Algebra Project, the local site of the acclaimed national math reform program, also present in City Schools. Sonja began her career in education as director of professional development and teacher placement with Teach for America, New York, followed by stint at a year-round school in Brooklyn, where she was a founder, teacher and curriculum specialist. She holds an undergraduate degree from Brown University, a master of arts in education administration from Columbia University and a doctor of education in administration, planning and social policy from Harvard.

–

Mary Scheetz, Former Assistant Superintendent, Waters Foundation

Mary Scheetz has over 40 years experience as an innovative teacher, administrator, project director and consultant. From 2007 to 2013, Scheetz served as the Assistant Superintendent with the Ritenour School District in St. Louis and is currently a trainer and consultant working with the Waters Foundation Systems Thinking in Schools Team. She has presented systems thinking in schools work at numerous national and international conferences and facilitated related workshops. Mary's belief is that all students are capable of the critical thinking levels that systems thinking tools produce, and that it is essential for schools to ensure that ALL students are ensured access to rigorous and relevant learning. As an assistant superintendent, she implemented multiple strategies for the integration of systems thinking in school improvement and classroom instruction. She developed the annual St. Louis Systems Thinking in Schools Institute, which involves participants from multiple school districts and universities in the region. Mary's work is guided by the words of Marvin Weisbord, "If I had a crystal ball, I would not ask what's wrong here and who's to blame, but what's possible here and who cares?"

–

Bradley Scott, Ph.D., Director (Retired), South Central Collaborative for Equity (SCCE), Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA)

Dr. Bradley Scott is a former IDRA senior education associate who brings more than 40 years of experience to the field of education. While at IDRA, he directed the SCCE, which works with school districts in Texas, New Mexico, Louisiana, Oklahoma and Arkansas, in the implementation of educational equity plans that increase equitable educational opportunity and greater access to high-quality instruction for all students, regardless of their race, gender or national origin; the preparation and adaptation of desegregation and unitary status plans and settlement agreements to decrease and eliminate racial isolation in public schools; community, parent and student involvement in the diverse school setting; establishment of nondiscriminatory policies; elimination of racially biased curricular materials, establishment of safe/non-hostile school environments and the reduction of bullying, harassment and school violence for all students; and the creation of alternative materials for the development of human relations activities to promote racial harmony and an appreciation for diversity in public schools.

Dr. Scott has conducted training and provided technical assistance in human relations, intrapersonal and interpersonal communication, management and leadership skills development, effective leadership in diverse and desegregated settings, multicultural education, training for diversity, developing cross-cultural competence, and creating educational excellence for all through systemic change based on the Six Goals of Educational Equity and School Reform. His broad background has been instrumental in his present capacity, where he provides technical assistance and training to public school districts, school personnel, students in those schools, parents and community persons in the development and implementation plans to cope with educational issues emerging from the desegregation, unitary status, and settlement agreement processes and the effort to create educational equity and excellence for all learners in public schools. Dr. Scott has authored and co-authored numerous publications at IDRA.

–

Peter M. Senge Ph.D., Senior Lecturer, Sloan School of Management MIT, Founding Chair *SoL* (*Society of Organizational Learning* and the *Education Partnership*), a global network of people and institutions working together for systemic change, and co-founder, *The Academy for Systemic Change*

Dr. Peter Senge's work centers on promoting shared understanding of complex issues and shared leadership for healthier human systems. This involves major cross-sector projects focused on global food systems, climate change, regenerative economies and the future of education. Peter is the author *of The Fifth Discipline* and co-author of the three related field books to include *Presence* and *The Necessary Revolution. The Fifth Discipline* (over two million copies sold worldwide), was recognized by *Harvard Business Review* as "one of the seminal management books of the last 75 years," and by the *Financial Times* as one of five "most important" management books. *The Journal of Business Strategy* named him one of the 24 people who had the greatest influence on business strategy in the 20th century.

–

Shelley Zion, Professor and Director, Culturally Responsive Urban Education (CRUE) Center, University of Colorado, Denver

Dr. Shelley Zion is the Executive Director of the Center for Advancing Practice, Education & Research (CAPER) in the School of Education & Human Development at the University of Colorado Denver. In this position, she is responsible for establishing and executing a vision for outreach and partnership activities, particularly related to entrepreneurial program, grants and continuing education programs, through the development of collaborative and entrepreneurial partnerships aligned to the mission, vision and values of the school. Additionally, she holds an assistant research professor appointment, and teaches in the doctoral program, conducts research on topics related to school reform and equity, and serves as the executive director of the CRUE center, which provides technical assistance and training to schools and districts who are working to address issues of equity in their schools. Dr. Zion's work is multidisciplinary, grounded in the social sciences, and specifically within sociology as it seeks to understand how institutions, social systems and individual experiences create and sustain systems of power and privilege that ensure access for some while excluding others. Her research is situated within a framework of sociopolitical development, informed by a range of critical theoretical perspectives, and advanced by an understanding of the nature of both individual and systemic change. This framework requires that to impact a transformation of the current public education and other social systems towards goals of equity and social justice, we must work to disrupt dominant ideologies by creating spaces in which people begin to develop a critical understanding of the cultural, political, economic and other institutional forces that perpetuate systems of privilege and oppression.