



Guiding Principles for
**Equity in
Education**

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Foreword

By Bill de la Cruz

Equity work is designed to meet the diverse needs of students that the current structure of the K-12 system was not created to address. The government created the public school system in the 1800s to meet the needs of a mostly white population of men taught by other men—a system designed to promote equality among a homogeneous group of students. Today, we are attempting to create a system based on equity, rather than equality.

Equity is designed to differentiate for the diverse needs of student learning and create more inclusive environments for the diverse school staff and faculty members as well. There are no exact strategies for operationalizing equity and no one size approach that fits all schools, but many districts are experimenting with finding the formula that works best to infuse and operationalize equity into their schools.

I have had the pleasure of working with the McGraw Hill research and education teams and have found them to be dedicated in the effort to find ways to effectively infuse equity into schools. What we are discovering is that the issues impacting the ability to operationalize equity work into current district practices and protocols are similar across the country.

The principles shared in this white paper start with the premise that the adults in the building are responsible for student learning, for creating equitable systems in schools, and for using an inquisitive approach to designing school systems that are equitable. The approach starts with acquiring an equity mindset, driving your equity plan, and expanding your equity vision. The research from this document is designed to give equity practitioners a road map for creating systems of equity. I encourage you to use this as a tool to drive deep, honest discussions about your own systems and the willingness of everyone involved to create a more equitable educational system.

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Introduction

Whether you are just starting to think about educational equity, or you have already begun to implement equitable practices in your school, we are so pleased that you are engaged in this noble and important endeavor.

We have designed this resource, which builds upon existing equity research and established best practices, to support your efforts. It is our hope that these principles can serve as a set of guideposts for you—wherever you are on your path to educational equity.

We recognize that this is a complex path. Even defining what equity itself means, exactly, can be a challenge. Indeed, definitions of equity can vary depending on context. For the purposes of this resource, we can draw upon definitions that frame educational equity as the driving force behind ensuring that all students, everywhere, receive rigorous, rich educational experiences that are designed to meet their specific learning needs. At its heart, equity means turning the tables on who is responsible for student learning. If a student does not make sufficient progress in school, it is on us—the adult stakeholders—to figure out what’s going on and how to fix it.

Here at McGraw Hill, our job is to deeply and broadly survey research and then find ways to apply what we learn toward improving student and teacher outcomes. As we continue to engage in this work it has become increasingly clear that educational equity is not only a critical topic for our students but also for the future of our nation.

In addition, it is also clear that ensuring equity means avoiding a one-size-fits-all approach. Thus, even as you read this, we invite you to consider how these principles may best apply to your own educational settings, because no two schools, classrooms, or students are alike.

Before you explore these principles, we would like to invite you to ask yourself, as we did, the following questions: Who is framing the problem? Who is creating the solution? What factors should we take into account as we think about teaching and learning? How can we adapt our existing practices and hierarchies to better serve our world’s future citizens?

When we collectively keep asking these questions and seek to find the best possible answers for all our learners, we can be sure that we are staying on the path to equity, and indeed, to the brightest of futures for our nation.

Ten Guiding Principles for Equity in Education

Part One: Adopt an Equity Mindset

- **Commit:** Understand that equity is a journey that requires collaborative commitments.
- **Collaborate:** Value and prioritize inclusive communication.
- **Frame:** Foster a culture that encourages self-reflection and new perspectives.

Part Two: Drive Your Equity Plan

- **Nurture:** Provide social and emotional supports to all students and staff.
- **Empathize:** Implement culturally responsive teaching practices.
- **Build:** Replace institutional inequities with innovative supports.
- **Challenge:** Ensure that all students are held to high expectations.

Part Three: Expand Your Equity Vision

- **Support:** Deliver ongoing professional learning opportunities.
- **Listen:** Continually solicit feedback.
- **Persist:** Drive positive change through perseverance.

PART ONE: Adopt an Equity Mindset

The first three principles focus on how school and district leaders build a foundational commitment to equity, align stakeholders on a shared vision for equity in a specific community, and level-set expectations for equity work.

Guiding Principle 1: COMMIT

Recognize that equity is a journey that requires collaborative commitments.

One of the first steps toward achieving educational equity is to recognize that equity is an ongoing, collaborative journey, rather than simply a box to be checked. The leaders of an **equity** initiative, which may include district administrators, faculty and staff, families, students, community members, and policy makers, should all fully commit to the efforts, changes, and complexities that accompany the creation of an equitable system.

Before planning can begin, however, it is fundamental that every stakeholder first understands the depth and breadth of their unique educational equity journey. Striving for equity often requires fundamental structural changes that go beyond temporary initiatives or surface-level changes.

COMMIT Strategies:

- Discuss clear definitions of the terms you will be using in your equity journey (i.e., what do we mean by “equity?”), expectations, and rationale with all stakeholders. Consider drafting and distributing a written version of your equity vision, including a glossary and visuals, to all stakeholders, including community members, and solicit feedback so you can make any necessary revisions.
- Set explicit, measurable, and time-bound goals for the purpose of clear communication and tracking, while making clear that these goals are iterative and do not isolate the equity initiative to a “box-checking” exercise (Rose, 2015).
- Communicate early and often with all families, staff, and students, and be transparent about the scope of an equity mission: when applicable, make clear that leadership understands that this will be a fundamental shift. Convey that equity can only be achieved through systematic and ongoing adaptations of the educational landscape to best support the needs of all students—and that it is not simply a temporary initiative.
- Identify the student populations who are least adequately served by your system as it functions now, using a variety of observation and measurement tools. Work to better understand the causes for those inequities, being prepared for the causes to come from myriad spaces, including the structure of the system as it exists now (Chatmon & Watson, 2018).
- Continually work to identify the skills and competencies that students will need to succeed in the global economy awaiting them upon graduation. Due to the rapidly changing workforce landscape, this research will need to be done on an ongoing basis (Darling-Hammond, 2015).

- Commit to a research-backed approach for learning that aligns to both the needs of your most underserved students and to the skills all students will need in their future careers. Use this as an anchoring point for pedagogy across systems when it becomes difficult to pinpoint the path to equity (See NCTAF, 2016, for examples of such an approach).

Guiding Principle 2: COLLABORATE

Value and prioritize inclusive communication.

The creation of any type of equitable system—especially a system that involves teaching and learning—requires the consistent prioritization of inclusive communication. The needs and concerns of all stakeholders, including families, students, district staff, and community members, should be factored into every step of developing a plan for equity, implementing and iterating that plan, and monitoring progress.

Equity initiative leaders can actively work to include individuals whose perspectives have not traditionally been heard in education decision-making, or in the construction of education institutions over time—even if this practice leads to some discomfort. Recognize that, at times, this may push leaders out of their social or cultural spheres of familiarity to make these connections, and while this can be uncomfortable, it is a critical part of the process.

COLLABORATE Strategies:

- Examine the communication practices that are already in place. Do leaders consistently communicate with all stakeholders, including families, community members, and students? Are these communications representative of, and respectful to, the cultural norms and needs of the students and families in the district? Have appropriate accommodations been made for populations that may have previously been overlooked, and multiple methods of communication put in place (e.g. sending paper notices home to families who may not have regular access to an online school portal)?
- Review the existing activities, programs, and supports currently in place to engage families and the community (e.g. open house nights). Rather than increasing the frequency or scale of existing programs, identify which parent and community populations are not attending these events or programs and redesign them to address the needs of those groups (Ishimaru, 2016).
- Consider any existing community perceptions of equity (outside of school) and how community values may interact with, support, or sit at odds with the school's established understanding of equity. How can district leaders collaborate with other community leaders to contribute to a collective community story and set of values that prioritizes equity in and out of school?
- Disrupt patterns of alienation or disempowerment among the families of underserved and/or marginalized student populations within the school by empowering them to become change agents, community-district partnership leaders, and valued advocates (Ishimaru, 2016).

- Identify and engage with community and family groups representative of student populations, including:
 - Equity coalitions, advocacy groups, cultural centers.
 - Nonprofits, hospitals, and businesses.
 - After-school/summer school centers, shelters.
 - Family members who may not currently engage with the school (that is, do not limit outreach to already-organized groups).

Guiding Principle 3: FRAME

Foster a culture that encourages self-reflection and new perspectives.

Framing a collective understanding of what educational equity is—and what it takes to reach it—can ensure that each stakeholder can benefit from targeted self-reflection, while maintaining an optimistic, open mind. To help foster an equitable culture, district leaders may consider continually providing all stakeholders, including students, with the opportunity to engage in self-reflection and sharing.

District and school leaders are often in an excellent position to foster an environment within which staff, students, and families can engage in open, ongoing conversations about any persistent and pervasive inequities that may be present in the school and community. These conversations should be held after setting clear expectations regarding flexibility, reflectiveness, adaptivity, and the need to acknowledge and address the personal implicit biases that all people hold. Framing the educational culture around the shared goal of equity will have powerful, positive impacts on the teaching and learning experience.

FRAME Strategies:

- To assist in framing an equity mindset, it can be helpful for leaders and equity trainers to explain that biases are assumptions rather than beliefs. From the onset of the planning stages, strive to create an affirming, positive environment for these conversations that both acknowledges all stakeholders' desires to understand and addresses any implicit biases that may be affecting students (Warikoo, Sinclair, Fei, & Jacoby-Senghor, 2016).
- Educational equity work cannot happen in isolation: encourage stakeholders to regularly examine biases and assumptions from the perspectives of others, as well as conduct internal self-checks during interactions with students, peers, and community members. See Zaretta Hammond's *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain* (p. 54–69) for a step-by-step guide to engaging in this reflective work for classroom teachers and leaders.
- Value student voice and experience during reflection-based dialogue and use these conversations between stakeholders—many of whom may not have previously engaged in this form of dialogue—as an opportunity to create more inclusive student experiences (McLatchie & Campbell, 2017).

- Frame equity through an intersectionality lens, examining the various factors of a student’s identity and experiences that may contribute to their relationship with school, and the way these facets of their identity may impact their challenges and needs. If possible, collect and analyze data that can help inform which factors have the greatest positive and negative impacts on student outcomes. When having conversations with families, be mindful of the ways that different worldviews can influence behaviors and conversations.
- Extend the intersectionality approach described above to the challenges and needs teachers face as well, setting expectations for reflection, empathy, and humility.
- In an effort to reframe the way stakeholders think about equity, each other, and their own biases, encourage teachers to explore their own roles in equity—as well as how those roles may change depending on context. Reinforce and remind educators of their agency and of the vast role they play on a micro and macro scale to influence equity shifts that benefit all students (Ríos, 2017).

PART TWO: Drive Your Equity Plan

Once stakeholders are aligned on the district’s vision for equity and the expectations for equity work, the next step is to identify key areas for action and implementation.

Guiding Principle 4: NURTURE

Provide social and emotional supports to all students and staff.

To promote educational equity, experts in diverse fields are recommending that special attention be paid to social and emotional learning (SEL). SEL supports are critical to any equitable education system: without addressing the holistic needs of every child, including those related to behaviors, emotions, and social interactions, educators cannot expect any student to flourish in school settings.

Researchers and experts in the field recommend that district leaders prioritize SEL supports at all grade levels and provide all staff with training in how to promote SEL. An equitable SEL initiative is one that is implemented at a district-wide scale, integrated into academic learning throughout the school day, and is differentiated based on specific student needs.

NURTURE Strategies:

- Ensure students experience high-quality social and emotional supports by instituting research-based best practices in social and emotional instruction, such as the integration of SEL into academic content instruction throughout the school day (Aspen Institute, 2019).
- When possible, social and emotional instruction should include content, approaches, and skills that are relevant to students’ daily challenges, relationships, and interests. Consider how elements of student cultures can be leveraged to spark conversations about resiliency, trauma, or goal-setting.
- When possible, provide all educators with training in trauma-informed teaching practices to expand upon existing SEL supports. If stakeholders determine that trauma-informed practices will be implemented, consider incorporating these practices at a universal scale to account for the inability to know which students in your community have experienced trauma (Bruznell, Waters, & Stokes, 2015).
- Whether selecting a new SEL program or evaluating the efficacy of a program you are already using, look for efficacy research to indicate the program’s effectiveness for a wide variety of student populations. Ideally, the chosen program can be modified or is already adapted to be responsive to the full spectrum of student cultures (Castro-Olivo, 2014).
- Encourage students and staff to take part in available community programs, nonprofits, and special events to place an emphasis on key areas of social and emotional learning, such as kindness or empathy, in a celebratory fashion that appeals to students’ interests. For example, The Great Kindness Challenge offers free resources to promote kindness in schools.

- Provide classroom teachers and principals with the opportunity to discuss and explore the cultural norms of students in their classrooms, and how those norms might affect student behaviors, interactions with peers, or interactions with adults. For example, consider how educators are prepared to provide SEL instruction to students who may have a different cultural response to authority than that of the teacher’s home culture (Ladson-Billings, 2014).
- As research on social and emotional learning expands, evidence is mounting that time spent on fostering educators’ own SEL competencies is critical for both teachers and the students they serve. Ensure that supports are in place to boost teachers’ SEL competency and well-being—for the sake of both teachers and their students (Schonert-Reichl, 2017).

Guiding Principle 5: EMPATHIZE

Implement culturally responsive teaching practices.

Researcher and educator Gloria Ladson-Billings (1994) coined the term “culturally relevant pedagogy” in the 1990s, and since then this term has evolved to encompass additional research and perspectives, with related terms also emerging—such as “culturally responsive teaching,” “culturally sustaining pedagogy,” and more—most of which refer to a pedagogical approach that acknowledges, respects, and integrates students’ cultural identities in relation to their learning experiences.

Today, culturally responsive teaching is as relevant as ever. To fully explore culturally responsive teaching would require another set of principles altogether—but it is included here since it is a critical consideration for any educational equity initiative.

Achieving a culturally responsive learning environment typically requires a number of supports, such as training, curriculum, and opportunities to engage with experts as well as family and community members. In addition, school policies and procedures can often be improved by means of a careful examination through a “cultural responsiveness” lens. At the heart of this lens is a key social construct that influences every stakeholder: empathy.

EMPATHIZE Strategies:

- Conduct an analysis of discipline practices at the district level by identifying disparities in discipline frequency or severity by gender, race, or ability. Explore culturally responsive frameworks such as restorative justice to promote equitable behavioral interventions for all students (Larson et al 2018; Gonzáles, Sattler, & Buth, 2018).
- Drawing from the initial conversations during the reframing phase of the equity planning, all stakeholders should be encouraged to reflect on both explicit and implicit biases and understand that all humans have biases, but these biases need not be permanent or negatively influence interactions with students. This is also a good time to collaboratively brainstorm strategies for integrating culturally responsive teaching into daily practice (De La Cruz, 2018).

- Cultural diversity in the student population should be embraced and recognized—beyond surface-level conversations about holidays and food—by valuing student perspectives in class and leveraging community relationships.
- Culturally responsive teaching is a critical space for translating research to practice. District leaders can take on this work by first identifying the needs of their particular district, and then aligning them to specific research-based practices in order to prioritize teacher training.
- All stakeholders who interact with students should take care to adopt affirming attitudes towards diversity as opposed to promoting color-blindness (i.e. “not seeing” differences among individuals and groups), adopt **asset framing** rather than deficit framing, and value students for the contributions they bring to the classroom (Villegas & Lucas, 2002).
- All stakeholders should be mindful of **preparatory privilege**, in which some students may enter school having received more academic enrichment than their peers. Work with staff, families, and community members to identify and address any early disparities in creative and culturally-affirming ways (Robinson, Jahanian, & Reich, 2018).
- Examining inequities in society and how those inequities impact the lives of all members of the school community is a hallmark of culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogy. Engaging in this kind of critical inquiry rests on providing safe classroom environments and learning spaces that honor critique, differing opinions, and open discourse. Supporting the development of safe learning spaces will allow inquiry to flourish as students critically examine, question, and solution around what they are learning without being fearful that their voice may be muted or silenced.

Guiding Principle 6: BUILD

Replace institutional inequities with innovative supports.

Many of the most persistent inequities are difficult to disrupt because they are ingrained into the operations and traditions of educational institutions. As individuals, tackling institutional barriers and oppressors can be daunting. While individual educators—or even entire districts—cannot dismantle and reform centuries-old institutions alone, they can each begin to evaluate specific components of institutional barriers and replace those structures, processes, or resources with innovative substitutes that prioritize the needs of all students.

Work in this principle requires a deep understanding of current community dynamics, the history of a community, and daily student life in and out of the classroom—including their greatest obstacles and greatest interests.

BUILD Strategies:

- Use technology, but wisely. Education technology has the potential to be a powerful driver for disrupting inequities. But research shows that the implementation of technology is just as pivotal as the tool itself. Social and cultural forces can be derailed by good intentions so be mindful of how

culture intersects with access, and how the approach to technology can be an unseen barrier to combating inequities (Reich & Ito, 2017).

- Support models such as **MTSS / PBIS** or universal design for learning offer alternative structures for responding to student needs, allocating resources, and organizing individual learners within institutional parameters (Makowski, 2016).
- Makerspaces, or designated areas where students can practice STEM skills through invention, have increasingly attracted the attention of researchers interested in equity. Such spaces require careful consideration of elements beyond simple access to tools and equipment. Here, too, it is important to foster an understanding of how culture and power structures can influence student interests and self-perception of their own competencies and abilities in STEM (Calabrese- Barton, Tan, & Greenburg, 2017).
- Extend equitable learning opportunities through partnerships with community leaders, internship and apprenticeship opportunities, and local higher education institutions to establish academic bridge programs and peer mentoring or summer outreach programs. Allowing students to analyze how the practices of community partners, companies, and businesses impact their communities continues a critical inquiry mindset and engages students' agency around institutional issues of equity (Castleman & Page, 2013).
- All stakeholders can prioritize and contribute to ongoing research efforts into innovative instructional practices as the education landscape and student demographics served each evolve over time.

Guiding Principle 7: CHALLENGE

Ensure that all students are held to high expectations.

In an equitable educational system, every student should have access to rigorous learning experiences that meet them where they are and challenge them to grow and excel. However, **rigor** is only equitable when all students are appropriately challenged, not just those who are already succeeding in traditional academic settings. District leaders should structure systems that hold all students to high expectations and provide each with academically and developmentally appropriate, yet challenging, learning experiences.

Information gathered when implementing other principles, such as BUILD and NURTURE, can each be useful in helping educators to identify and challenge those students who may have otherwise been excluded from rigorous learning activities.

CHALLENGE Strategies:

- All students must have access to rigorous and challenging learning opportunities that help them develop critical inquiry, metacognitive skills, and deep problem-solving abilities. When evaluating the rigorous nature of instruction, consider elements beyond the written curriculum or established learning standards, including the types of cognitive tasks students undertake in class, the interactions between students and teachers and between students during learning moments, and

the quality of support offered by the teacher—all through an equity lens (Windschitl & Calabrese-Barton, 2016).

- Studies demonstrate that responsive discussion between teachers and students—where teachers are building on existing knowledge, ensuring students participate in classroom conversations, and making connections to students’ experiences—is critical to rigor. Ensure that teachers have the skills and support to engage in responsive discourse with all students by relating to students’ lived experiences, fostering participation in class discussion, and building on existing knowledge (Thompson et. al., 2016). All stakeholders can prioritize and contribute to ongoing research efforts into innovative instructional practices as the education landscape and student demographics served evolve over time.
- When selecting technology for classroom use, consider exploring available adaptive technologies that deliver instruction at the point of need and challenge students according to their skill levels.
- Critically examine current approaches to placement and instruction of traditionally underserved groups, and identify any disconnects between levels of ability and rigor. **Long Term English Learners**, for example, are often excluded from rigorous learning because they have received no language development instruction. They may be inappropriately placed in mainstream instruction or newcomer programs indefinitely. As a result, these students often fall drastically behind in academic achievement (Olsen, 2010).
- Ensure that proper systems and trainings are in place to differentiate learning dis/abilities from other complications that require different interventions, such as preventing the overdiagnoses of dyslexia.
- Provide rigorous learning opportunities that empower students to succeed within established institutions and that affirm their home cultures, languages, dialects, and identities (Delpit, 2008).

PART THREE: Expand Your Equity Vision

The last three principles underscore the vital importance of continuing your equity initiative beyond initial launch. These principles build upon research findings regarding the maintenance, refinement, and expansion of educational equity plans.

Guiding Principle 8: SUPPORT

Deliver ongoing professional learning opportunities.

Many of the previous principles highlight specific opportunities for specialized professional learning for classroom teachers. Indeed, professional learning is so vital to any equity initiative that it is included here as a principle unto itself. Existing research strongly suggests that educational equity initiatives are more successful when they include extensive, ongoing, and job-embedded professional learning opportunities for all staff at every level.

These opportunities should provide stakeholders with access to emerging research in the field, as well as tangible, actionable teaching practices, and the social and emotional supports they need to take on this challenging work. These professional learning opportunities also present district leaders with the opportunity to address persistent teacher retention issues, which, on a national scale, can also contribute to educational inequities (McKinney et al., 2007).

SUPPORT Strategies:

- Research studies point to the importance of providing educators with training in the **learning sciences**. A strong understanding of the science of human learning can empower teachers to more efficiently deliver instruction, capitalize on the ties between social and emotional learning and academic learning, and more deeply understand students' capabilities. For example, when teachers have a strong grasp of the concept of **neuroplasticity**, they are more likely to be able to strategically introduce new, challenging content by relating it to students' existing neural connections (Aspen Institute 2019; Blankstein, Noguera, & Kelly, 2016).
- Similarly, research also indicates that educators benefit from increased knowledge of child development and student environmental influences. A strong understanding of holistic child development empowers teachers to design learning experiences that are developmentally appropriate, address specific learning needs, and draw from research-based norms and benchmarks. When reviewing environmental influence in professional learning, teachers should also be given the tools to understand and apply new learnings through the varying cultural, linguistic, and ability backgrounds of their students (Blankstein, Noguera, & Kelly, 2016). Integrate opportunities for collaboration among educators within schools, between districts, and beyond school systems into professional learning programs. These opportunities should a) expose staff to the perspectives and strategies of teachers that operate within different spaces or under different school cultures and b) encourage them to take risks or identify existing weaknesses. They can be powerful instigators of

systemic change—at the classroom, school, or district scale (Chapman, Chestnutt, Friel, Hall, & Lowden, 2016).

- Just as with classroom instruction, professional development should be delivered in a variety of ways to accommodate all learning needs. Consider how these opportunities can include and engage all staff members, thereby providing educators with equitable learning experiences.
- Beyond professional learning opportunities, educators should also be supported socially and emotionally. Educator well-being is important to promote retention (which supports student outcomes) and to support teachers' social and emotional skills, which in turn support students' SEL skills (Schonert-Reichl, 2017).
- Provide a safe space for teachers to reflect on their practices, engage with critical friends, analyze the practices of others, and try new things without fear of retribution or failure.

Guiding Principle 9: LISTEN

Continually solicit feedback.

Achieving an equitable educational environment requires the continuous collection of feedback, data, concerns, and suggestions across multiple domains. Throughout the journey, leaders should listen carefully to all stakeholders, including students. Such feedback can be invaluable in determining which aspects of the equity plan are succeeding, which are not working as well, and which are areas of potential growth and innovation.

It is important that the listening process respects and reflects the population served, especially as the student and staff demographics may change over time. All stakeholders are also well-served by staying current with emerging research in the field of educational equity, as new findings may provide guidance as well as information that can be shared in conversations with stakeholders.

LISTEN Strategies:

- Engage in an ongoing **collaborative inquiry** process with all school or district staff as part of your equity plan. The inquiry process should be ingrained into system operations, and specific time should be designated for staff to collectively identify any existing challenges and listen to others' perspectives. Leadership should consistently use this feedback to make any necessary adjustments to current practices, supports, and services for students (Winkelman, 2012).
- In both daily decision-making and overarching policy formation, place a high value on student voice. Research has demonstrated that equity policies are most effective when district leaders recognize students themselves as primary actors in shaping policy, rather than as the objects of policy reform. Students can provide valuable ideas and feedback that can be used to solve equity-related programs. Experts recommend using qualitative methods, such as interviews and naturalistic observations, as opposed to more quantitative methods, such as surveys, to promote dynamic communication (Mansfield, 2014).

- When listening to the concerns of families, students, and community members, allow those members to lead the conversation with their own concerns. This can help leaders avoid any of the problems that sometimes arise when conversations are framed through the perspective of the district, by placing the views of the community at the center of the conversation (Green, 2017).
- Be careful to avoid deficit language when responding to feedback. For example, rather than framing groups of students as “problems,” instead highlight the assets these students bring to the table and consider how those assets could be leveraged to develop solutions to issues that arise.
- Consider restructuring school operations to accommodate cultural needs (such as allowing time for the care of family members or for family farm work) and designating time for teachers to visit homes or cultural spaces to allow for further listening opportunities (Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis, 2016).

Guiding Principle 10: PERSIST

Drive positive change through perseverance.

By definition, work in educational equity must be both incremental and ongoing. This highlights what is perhaps the most powerful, challenging, and exciting of these principles: don’t give up. In a constantly changing world, in which we are all faced with rapidly shifting systems and events—some of which create barriers to student success—experts agree that it is critical for all stakeholders to challenge themselves and others to continuously push for equitable education (Blankstein et. al. 2016). Schools that succeed in achieving equity do so through persistent innovation, strategic thinking, and regular communication with students, teachers, families, and communities in ways that evolve as new issues and needs arise.

PERSIST Strategies:

- While experts acknowledge that equity work can be difficult to quantify, stakeholders can ideate ways to monitor progress for the purposes of goal and strategy iteration and accountability. For a review of various equity measurement methodologies, see Kelly, 2015.
- Stay connected to how national policies affect equity in schools and, when possible, leverage your community’s voice to advocate for change at a national level that will impact your learners at the local level.
- When using student data to iterate instruction and evaluate progress, ensure that guidance is in place to assist both classroom teachers and school leaders in the process of data interpretation. Misinterpreted data, such as only attributing poor student performance to student ability rather than instructional quality, has been known to be a significant deterrent to equity progress. Researchers recommend that leaders pay special attention to data interpretation in relation to student populations whose learning experience relies heavily on data, such as English Learners and students in special education (Bertrand & Marsh, 2015).

- School or district leaders should regularly acknowledge their own responsibilities in relation to equity progress within the community. Educator and author Curtis Linton strongly encourages equity advocates to both instill and demonstrate a personal and moral obligation to supporting the achievement of all students, including those who have traditionally been marginalized (Linton, 2011).
- Dedicate time, patience, compassion, and commitment to fostering trusting relationships with students and the community, and then work within those relationships to ensure work toward equity continues and grows.
- Make equity a part of all action plans every year. Keep a consistent focus on issues of equity and strive to keep working toward equitable practices as part of the daily work of the district.

Conclusion

Ensuring that all students are enabled to reach their full potential is a complex task. As part of our collective work within this space, we must all recognize that there will be a continuous need for research, discussion, policy change, collaborations, and resources. Admittedly, the journey, once begun, will never quite be complete—but we believe this is the best sort of challenge.

The pursuit of equity will always require the creativity, dedication, and persistence of all those who take on this challenge. Though this is a difficult undertaking, it is an exciting one. By determinately applying research-based best practices over time, we have seen that it is possible to empower every learner and every teacher to surpass expectations. In turn, the benefits of this life-changing shift in education have the potential to positively influence not only today's generation of young learners but countless generations to come.

Glossary

- **Asset framing:** “[A practice that] involves use of language that focuses on an individual’s strengths and aspirations before discussing the challenges they face.” (McKnight et al., 2017)
- **Collaborative Inquiry:** “The process of following a question through data gathering, resource identification, and action planning.” (Winkleman, 2012)
- **Equity:** All students should have access to the right resources they need at the right moment in their education, regardless of their race, gender, sexual orientation, disability, ethnicity, language, citizenship, religion, family background, or family income. (The Aspen Institute)
- **Implicit biases:** “The attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner. These biases, which encompass both favorable and unfavorable assessments, are activated involuntarily and without an individual’s awareness or intentional control.” (The Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity at the Ohio State University)
- **Intersectionality:** “The complex, cumulative way in which the effects of multiple forms of discrimination (such as racism, sexism, and classism) combine, overlap, or intersect especially in the experiences of marginalized individuals or groups.” (Merriam-Webster)
- **Learning sciences:** “An interdisciplinary field focused on the development of effective learning methodologies and solutions.” (McGraw Hill Applied Learning Sciences Team)
- **Long Term English Learners:** Learners who, “despite many years in our schools and despite being close to the age at which they should be able to graduate, are still not English proficient and have incurred major academic deficits.” (Olsen, 2010)
- **Multi-Tiered Systems of Support:** “A process of systematically documenting the performance of students as evidence of the need for additional services after making changes in classroom instruction.” (PBIS.org)
- **Neuroplasticity:** “The ability of the brain to form and reorganize synaptic connections, especially in response to learning or experience or following injury.” (Oxford English Dictionary)
- **Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports:** “A process that offers a range of interventions that are systematically applied to students based on their demonstrated level of need and addresses the role of the environment as it applies to development and improvement of behavior problems.” (PBIS.org)
- **Preparatory privilege:** “[Privilege rooted in] a student’s prior experience before entering the classroom. It may be interpreted by teachers as a “natural gift” and influence the classroom climate negatively for other students.” (MIT Teaching Systems Lab)
- **Rigor:** “Creating an environment in which each student is expected to learn at high levels, and each is supported so he or she can learn at high level, and each student demonstrates learning at high level.” (Blackburn, 2008)
- **Social and emotional learning:** “The process through which children and adults understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions.” (CASEL, <https://casel.org/>)

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