The AWSP
EQUITY
GUIDE

The Heart Work of School Leadership

ASSOCIATION OF WASHINGTON SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

A Message from AWSP's Executive Director

Simple, but proven over and over again; an effective leader is a reflective leader. Leaders who are willing to build reflection into their daily leadership practice tend to increase not only their effectiveness, but sustainability in the role. Our students and staff deserve consistent leadership, but that leadership must be willing to look into the mirror.

The AWSP Equity Guide pushes our leaders to take that reflection to even deeper levels. Glancing into the mirror to see ourselves as contributing members to both problems and solutions is vital to successful leadership. However, we'd encourage leaders to expand their reflection to also include the rear-view mirror. What in our backgrounds and lived experiences have played key roles in shaping who we are and how we lead? Reflecting on our past is essential.

In the *School Leader Paradigm* we refer to this as the "Individual Context". Everyone has an individual context that influences our thinking, decision making, biases, attitudes, leadership actions, relationships, etc. Being aware of the influence of one's individual context on the leadership environment is crucial. The individual context is both our past and present reality and heavily influences leader effectiveness. This individual contextual awareness contributes to a leader's ability to effectively identify inequitable systems while simultaneously rebuilding student-centered systems.

Where were you born? How were you raised? Where did you grow up? Who influenced your journey through life? What trauma have you experienced? What or who influenced your opinions? What's going on in your personal life right now? These are just a few of the questions we'd encourage leaders to ask themselves as they dive into exploring their individual context.

You can't take an intentional, equity-based leadership stance until you've reflected on your past and how it influences your present. This guide will help you along that journey.

Dr. Scott Seaman, Executive Director, AWSP

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Using the AWSP Equity Guide

Regardless of your school leader title, racially-literate leaders actively pursue a deep understanding of their own individual racial identity, continually hone their ability to recognize structural and systemic racism, and courageously change the status quo. This AWSP Equity Guide Roadmap will help you determine where you need to jump in to grow your racial equity skills and understanding, and how to support your learning and the learning of others. As you begin to think and engage in sustainable efforts around racial equity work in your school and community, this roadmap should be used in conjunction with this AWSP Equity Guide.

LEADING INQUIRY FOR EQUITY

Grounding your moves as racially-literate leaders to focus on the needs of students, through use of data and looking at problems of adult-practices that are preventing students from connecting/ accessing opportunities.

THE DOOR OF CURIOSITY

Guiding yourself or your team toward becoming racially-literate leaders from a stance of curiosity, openness to new learning, and looking at the systems which might not be serving your school populations well.

CREATING AWARENESS FOR EQUITY

Engaging in deep personal and professional learning over a period of time to understand how racism and other forms of marginalizing bias create inequities in your school.

RESOURCES

Engaging with common equity vocabulary and resources centered around where you are in your personal racial equity-centered "leadership journey".

TAKE ACTION FOR EQUITY

Taking a teaching and learning stance through a racial equity lens and engaging in school inequity inquiry. Building racially literate leadership capacity in self and others.

CULTURE, SYSTEMS, AND LEARNING DOMAINS

Engaging, fostering, working and developing the culture, systems, and learning needed to address and grow racially equitable practices within the learning organization.

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School Leadership: An Indispensable Driving Force for Equity

School Leader Defined

The principalship is critical to the success of the entire education system. It is also unique to all other roles in education, managing both adults and students. Throughout this document, the term "school leader" is frequently used. It is important to understand that this term refers to principals, assistant principals, and associate principals. Regardless of your school leader title, AWSP recognizes the impact and influence you have on your building, your district, and your entire school community. This document defines high-quality leadership for any school leader.

School Leadership Matters

To best address historical inequities and to dismantle systems of inequity for populations of historically underserved students, the work simply cannot happen in the absence of strong school leadership. This does not simply rest on the shoulders of the administrative team, but in collaboration with every adult in the system—both formal and informal leaders. As school leaders, we definitely lead the charge, but in doing so, we intentionally build collective efficacy amongst our staff, students, and community to better serve the students in our system.

As leaders, we are not seeking to change systems but rather to *transform* them. The vision of having positive school outcomes distributed equitably across all demographic and identity groups is why we have created the *AWSP Equity Guide* resource. AWSP's definition of equity explicitly calls out educational disparities based on race, economics, and other dimensions of difference and the responsibility of school leaders to eliminate those barriers.

It is critical all school leaders understand the nuance and complexity of how race functions and how to counteract its impact. Leading equity, diversity, and inclusion for justice work is challenging. The guide is set up to help leaders first to build their own understanding of the vocabulary, the conditions needed to lead with inquiry and how to take action.

Regardless of your school leader title, racially-literate leaders actively pursue a deep understanding of their own individual racial identity, continually hone their ability to recognize structural and systemic racism, and courageously change the status quo. It's also important to acknowledge one's own intersectionality of identity and the role it plays in school leadership and the creation of equitable systems. Knowing your own identities, privileges, and centering your personal "why" will help to give you the insights and skills to bring others along and move your system forward.

The research is clear that leadership practice rather than the individual leader is critical to sustaining efforts to impact our system and create the opportunity for marginalized students to thrive. The events of the past three years have shown that we collectively are unsure how to make systemic changes so are leading at the pace of privilege and without the sense of urgency needed to support our students NOW. We must move at the pace our most marginalized children deserve, not at the most comfortable or convenient for us. Our hope is that the *AWSP Equity Guide* is a call to action, where we collectively lean in and learn to be anti-racist and inclusionary leaders. In order to do so, the work must occur in context and community.

Equity Basics

Using This Document

AWSP would like school leaders to familiarize themselves with the critical terminology and phases of learning and leading for equitable practices before using the *AWSP Equity Guide*. This document serves to help each school leader to learn the grounding vocabulary of justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion as it comes alive within the school context and to reinforce the school leader's personal responsibility to lean into their own thoughts, practices, and leadership story as they grow and learn in their leadership practices as a transformational school leader.

> **"Regardless of your school leader title, racially literate leaders actively pursue a deep understanding of their own individual racial identity, continually hone their ability to recognize structural and systemic racism, and courageously change the status quo."**

AWSP's Definition of Equity

Educational disparities based on race, economics and other dimensions of difference are eliminated. Positive school outcomes are distributed equitably across all demographic and identity groups.
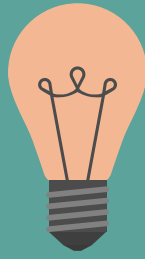
Racial Literacy

Race is a social construct; there is no genetic foundation to it. However, race and racism continue to influence all aspects of public education. Inequitable outcomes for groups of students reveal the collective impact of structural and systemic racism. Diversity and equity are a priority for us at AWSP. They're foundational in our association's priorities of *Grow, Support, and Sustain*, and we believe all school leaders should be racially literate. Racially-literate leaders actively pursue deep understanding of their own individual racial identity, continually hone their ability to recognize structural and systemic racism, and courageously change the status quo. It is critical all school leaders understand the nuance and complexity of how race functions and how to counteract its impact.

Resources

Equity Guide Vocabulary

Use this QR code or visit bit.ly/3P7dKX3 to access the Vocabulary List for this Guide.

Words Matter

Which vocabulary were familiar to you? Which vocabulary were unfamiliar to you? How might your own sense of racial identity affect how you interact and reflect on the usage of this vocabulary? How might someone from a different racial identity experience this vocabulary?

What kind of deficit language is being used in your system? How are you grounding yourself in the vocabulary of equity to assist in your personal growth and leadership as it pertains to justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion work within your leadership role?

The words we use lead to justice and liberation. Words direct us to envision a transformed world, a beloved community. Words convey tremendous power. Examine the words you use about yourself and others. Are the words disparaging, dehumanizing, narrow and constricted? When a word points to a problem, where is the blame placed—on the child, or their family or community? On their school? Which words and phrases place responsibility on broader socio-political institutions on the histor-

ical events that resulted in the suffering of some communities? These words lead to justice. Which words direct us to envision a transformed world and a beloved community? These words lead to liberation. (Ch. 3 Coaching for Equity Elena Aguilar)

AWSP would like you to familiarize yourself with the vocabulary and concepts before engaging with the *AWSP Equity Guide*. One of the most important steps to becoming literate in the language of equity is to immerse yourself in the definitions which might be unfamiliar to you, but have a big impact on the work. Words do matter. Our words provide a basis for human connection. School leaders who lead for equity understand the importance of establishing common vocabulary in order to advance initiatives. In order to transform school leadership and to eliminate barriers for each and every student, we have compiled a list of common vocabulary to provide a foundation to get you started. The list is not exhaustive, but a place to begin. We know school leaders might be on different mile markers on their JEDI journey. The list compiled will be the foundation for learning, and will be used throughout our professional development to reinforce key ideas leaders should be paying attention to.

Access the Interactive Resource

Use this QR code or visit go.awsp.org/EquityGuide to access the page with the link to the Interactive Resource for this Guide.

Interactive Resource

The Interactive Resource, at first glance, can be overwhelming. The intent is to provide a "zero entry" pool for any leader on their personal equity journey. We know that equity work and understanding is important for leaders, but we also want leaders to be cognizant and aware that it's okay to start from ground zero and grow from where they are, adding to the interactive resource with tools, articles, and resources that make sense to them on their own personal learning journey.

The Interactive Resource is broken into eight specific sections. These sections can be unpacked one per month, or once a session depending on how you personally decide to unpack it.

On our Equity Guide page of the AWSP website, you'll have the option to log in to Google with a Google account and make a copy of the Interactive Resource for you to customize with your own resources. Or, you can download the PDF and save it to your files.

Are there tools on there that are too novice? Delete and add your own resources! Are there tools on there that pique your curiosity? Dig in and enjoy the learning. Is there a resource we might be missing that's been helpful to you and your journey? Please share by emailing us at comms@awsp.org. We would be happy to include it on the web-based guide.

Equity Leadership Dispositions

The Door of Curiosity

We invite all school leaders to come to justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion work with a sense of curiosity and wonder. The *AWSP Equity Guide* is a tool to help school leader's move beyond fear to guide themselves and their systems from a stance of curiosity, of openness to the information discovered, and to view that information as an opportunity for learning in order to discover how biases, assumptions, and routines have inadvertently created inequity. With this knowledge and subsequent feedback, change can happen.

A frame of curiosity and an openness to information (including feedback) can help school leaders be aware of acts that are, fundamentally, disrespectful, and to appreciate deeply the difference between intent and impact. Our system will improve when insights are followed by actions. It is imperative that each individual begin to understand where implicit and explicit bias is at work within themselves and their systems. We do not want school leaders to be afraid, but to be empowered to lean in, learn and shift not only their individual behaviors but those behaviors that exist in the organizational systems in our schools.

Throughout each portion of The *AWSP Equity Guide* you will find interactive tools which aim at differentiating the learning for leadership practices to support justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion work in your school. These tools are meant to provide multiple entry points and opportunities to push yourself further into the learning and leadership practices you are using to lead this important work. The justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion journey is a marathon and not a sprint. If you find tools that are helpful and that we should incorporate, there is an open invitation to share those with us, so we in turn can share with others.

The Teaching and Learning Stance

True learning that is transformational does not happen in a vacuum but rather in a social context where there are trusting relationships. Building trust will be critical not only with others but within yourself as you explore your own intersectionalities, beliefs, and values. Intentionally leading for and making visible your own learning is foundational to establishing relationships and can be accomplished through taking a lead learner stance in improving your equity, inquiry, instructional, and systems focused leadership. This also requires centering the racial and cultural identities, knowledge, and practices of staff, students, families, and the community you serve. These actions set the conditions and expectation for a culture of reflective practice for yourself, your staff, students, and community.

Leading for equity is the accumulation of many discrete activities, decisions, and practices that need to be infused with intention. That intentionality should reflect not only your core values and beliefs but should amplify the community you serve. Your studied leadership moves build a culture of reciprocity in learning and a shared mindset of continuous reflection on both practice and learning. By modeling focused feedback and

dialogue as part of the learning cycle you build transparency and relationship as a learner and leader with yourself and your community.

The Cycle of Inquiry

Quality school leadership involves clearly defining your mission/vision, setting clear goals, supporting the work of each and every student within your system, and continually promoting the importance of student learning and growth. Creating a culture that focuses on continuous progress that strives to create a learning environment that engages all learners is critical. Being committed to leading this work and assessing progress is the real art of leadership.

This does not always come easily. An all-too-common educational leadership problem is *initiativitis*, where leaders unreflectively launch multiple "quick fixes" at complex issues. *Initiativitis* often results in discrete demands on resources and educator effort, but with little connection with each other in daily work. Lacking a coherent sense of how initiatives connect often result in frustration and fatigue.

An alternative approach that blends the thoughtful use of data, educational research and action has greater odds of making a difference for students. These approaches go by various names—action research, plan-do-check-act, improvement science—but they all involve inquiry cycles that help to focus a school's efforts.

The cycle of inquiry can help support, guide, and assist in this important work. It incorporates a deliberate strategy (plan, implement, assess, reflect) focused around a theory of action that explains what is supposed to happen and why. Having clarity and purpose around what you expect to happen and defining why it should happen is at the heart of the cycle of inquiry. Clearly articulating this cycle of inquiry, allows the school leader and their team to identify evidence in order to quantify the impact of the work they have done.

Theory of Action vs. Theory in Use

The cycle of inquiry begins with the individual school leader hypothesizing, "If I do (action), THEN (action) will happen." This same cycle of inquiry is followed up with the school leader and their team hypothesizing, "If we do (action), THEN (action) will happen." Establishing a theory of action can lead to leadership moves which affect the individual leader, school, and community context in positive ways. As we test out our theories of action, we consistently want to collect data about how the theory is being put to use. We can have an amazing idea, but without collecting feedback, we may not be making the impact we were initially looking to see. Therefore, it is important to consider the gap between theory in action (we're doing race/equity work) and theory in use (the evidence of change/transformation) by collecting data about justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion work and initiatives. Feedback should be collected from all of the partners affected by the intended change: students, staff, families and communities.
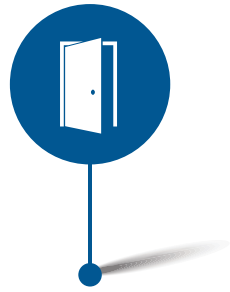
Equity Anchors

RCWs and WACs

School leaders should familiarize themselves around the most current WACs, RCWs, and definitions. These can be found on the OSPI website at www.k12.wa.us.

A very brief listing of the most recent WACs and RCWs where justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion are specifically called out in school practices are below:

- **HB 1541 (2016):** Set the goal to "Enhance the cultural competence of current and future educators and classified staff" and it required that leadership and teacher evaluation framework trainings address updated topics like Special Education, Since Time Immemorial, and established new discipline laws. https://bit.ly/3PsksXB

- **HB 1426 (2021):** Requires teachers and administrators to have clock hours every 5 years re: equity. https://bit.ly/3aCTaPq

- **SB 5044 (2021):** Required PESB to update the Cultural Competency Diversity Equity & Inclusion (CCDEI) standards. https://bit.ly/3P76nie

- **WAC 181-79A-244:** Updated certification requirements for public school employees, with specific professional development clock hours around equity based school practices. https://bit.ly/3PsI0vw

- **RCW 28A.320.170:** Required incorporation of Washington State tribal history, culture and government in social studies curricula. https://bit.ly/3PqIUsk

- **WAC 392-172A-01175 (2)(c):** SDI means adapting the content, methodology, or delivery of instruction to address the unique needs of a student with a disability and endure access to and the progress in the general education curriculum. https://bit.ly/3aBbngn

- **WAC 392-172A-02050:** Special education services must be provided: "(1) To the maximum extent appropriate in the general education environment with students who are nondisabled: and (2) Special classes, separate schooling or other removal of students eligible for special education from the general educational environment occurs only if the nature or the severity of the disability is such that education in general education classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily." https://bit.ly/3P44GSO

AWSP Leadership Framework Connections

Six specific components in the AWSP Leadership Framework 3.0 highlight the importance of justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion in the principal's evaluation. The following components directly connect to important work being led around justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion. The content of the *AWSP Equity Guide* serves to expand on the following framework components.

- **1.5** Creates and sustains a school culture that values and responds to the characteristics and needs of each learner.

- **2.3** Creates and protects identity safety.

- **3.3** Creates data-driven plans for improved teaching and learning.

- **6.2** Considers the need of diversifying the workforce when recruiting.

- **6.3** Assigns staff and puts students first.

- **7.2** Incorporates strategies that engage all families, particularly those that historically have been underserved.

- **8.2** Creates plans to dismantle barriers and increase achievement.

As you work through the guide, there are opportunities to stop, lean in and learn while making metacognitive connections to these AWSP Leadership Framework components. As school leaders use the *AWSP Equity Guide,* we encourage them to engage in conversations with their mentors, colleagues, and supervisors around the topics highlighted in the guide. We are not looking at systemic change for the sake of change but transformational leadership and systems level transformations that permanently shift opportunities, access, and hope for each and every student in our system.

> **"To understand how racism and other forms of marginalizing bias creates inequities in your school, school leaders must engage in deep personal and professional learning over a long period of time."**

SCHOOL LEADER PARADIGM
Becoming While Doing

Ways to Consider Using the Equity Guide

An Interactive Resource

The *AWSP Equity Guide* is not intended to be used by simply reading it cover-to-cover. Instead, it's a resource that highlights the most important areas of equity work. It provides links for deeper learning, as the document features necessarily brief descriptions. And the interactive features give opportunities to translate learning and thinking into action.

We hope that this resource will help experienced and novice school leaders navigate the landscape and lean into the skill set needed to be successful in leading for equitable systems within their schools and communities.

Although the equity landscape in the *AWSP Equity Guide* is broad, the best advice is to start small, find a starting point, and persist. Use the cycle of inquiry to help find your entry. The *AWSP Equity Guide* is meant to outline the potential areas that will make your school more equitable for all students. The many uses for this guide include:

- Mentor/mentee collaborative learning tool
- Individual cycle of inquiry
- Professional learning community focus, cohort style
- Central office/district-wide professional learning
- Used to create a teaching and learning stance
  - Self discovery and self-learning >> becoming curious and inquiry based about your system >> leading to actions (small and larger scale).
  - How do we bring others along and build collective adult efficacy?

This is not an exhaustive list, but it does provide multiple entry points into growing your skill set in equity-based leadership practices.
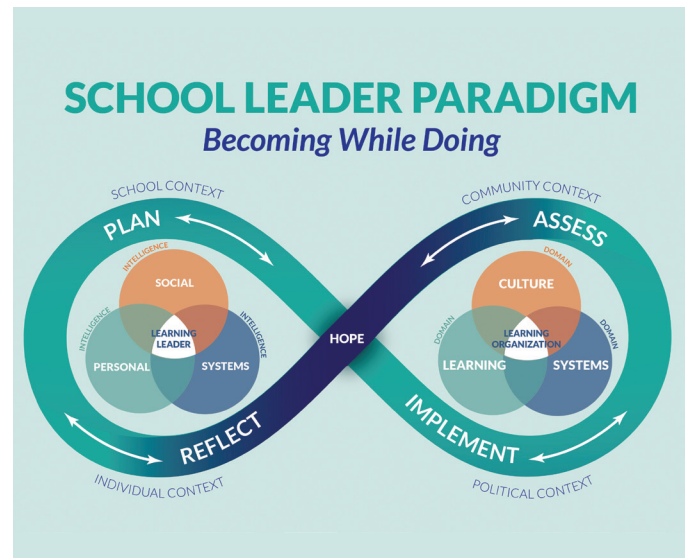
Becoming While Doing: Critical Leadership Actions to Create Equity Impact

The next section of the *AWSP Equity Guide* is essential to improving leadership dispositions (becoming) while effectively leading the development of culture, systems and learning (doing) around justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion. These capacity-building areas help principals deepen their abilities to engage in a constant cycle of *plan-implement-assess-reflect* that leads to impact for the benefit of all students.

The focus areas listed here are in no way exhaustive of places to work for equity in your school. However, they expand on areas in the AWSP Leadership Framework (see p. 8) and are potential places where mentors can collaborate with mentee principals to build their capacity for equity-centered leadership. The headings in **bold** are stated as capacity-building areas for both mentee principals and mentors.

The action areas listed here are not meant to be considered in sequential order; however, the reality is that "Creating Awareness for Equity" is an indispensable step toward all work to advance equity. Similarly, "Leading Inquiry for Equity" is an essential leadership move that ensures that considering "Taking Action for Equity" accurately targets the needs of the school.

Creating Awareness for Equity

An old leadership truism is "You can't lead what you don't know." To understand how racism and other forms of marginalizing bias creates inequities in your school, school leaders must engage in deep personal and professional learning over a long period of time. As they learn, equity leaders engage those they lead in a similar learning journey as a foundation for action toward educational justice.

Planfully and intentionally engage in personal and professional growth to deepen their own understanding on how racism, sexism and gender bias, homophobia, and ableism serve to create unsafe learning environments and exclude marginalized and historically underserved students, families, and communities.

To truly serve the needs of all students, particularly from communities that have been historically underserved, leaders must show courage, commitment, and resolve, starting with one's own personal learning. The racialized realities that marginalized and oppressed communities face have taken centuries to create, and justice comes with barriers and obstacles. Superficial knowledge will not support the efforts to achieve equity for your students, nor are there quick and simple fixes.

Race, racism, culture, and language differences are complicated, broad topics with undefined boundaries that go beyond the scope of the education profession. They are also highly emotionally charged subjects, with discomfort, defensiveness, conflict, and avoidance not uncommon. But understanding racism is an important starting point. While it is true that there are many ways that students are marginalized in school (ableism, gender bias, homophobia, classism), racism and racial stratification cut across all categories of identity (Harry & Klingner 2014; Mayo 2022). An understanding of how racism operates in society and in schools is essential for school leaders to deeply comprehend how other forms of bias and discrimination work together to exclude students from educational opportunity.

A reality of our current political environment is that equity efforts can generate opposition from some sections of the community. Experience over the last several years has highlighted responses that work better than others. Denying that anyone is teaching "critical race theory" or attempting to refute arguments point-by-point have not proven helpful in reducing criticism. Instead, straightforward and honest accounts about how educators are creating opportunities and belonging for every student are the best way to respond to accusations. Highlighting student voice and creating community by sharing the diverse identities and perspectives in the school make it clear that leaders are creating a positive school environment. Building and maintaining strong relationships with communities of color is also a way to demonstrate that teachers and school leaders are responding to real needs and concerns of families in working for equity (Pendhakar 2022; Rogers & Kahne 2022; Sweetland et. al. 2022).

Taking an ongoing learner stance on issues of racism can be a source of the will and motivation needed to develop their long-term effectiveness in equity leadership. To work to unravel equity challenges facing your students, leaders must engage in protracted personal and intellectual work to understand how privilege, power, and oppression operate—both historically and currently—in school and society to reproduce inequality. As part of this process, leaders must examine their own identities, values, biases, assumptions, and privileges (Khalifa 2018).

In doing so, school leaders avoid taking a "colorblind" approach that shuns conversations or action about racial issues in favor of more comfortable avenues. If leaders are blind to color, they will fail to see the lived realities of students, parents and caregivers, teachers and staff members, and the communities they are responsible for leading and serving. Colorblindness cripples an education leader's ability to shape and sustain a school culture that draws strength from diverse backgrounds, experiences, perspectives, and concerns because it suggests that these differences do not exist or are too controversial to acknowledge and, thus, better left ignored.

There are many resources to guide one's self-learning and the learning of others. A starting point is to access resources from Washington State and national associations: Association of Washington School Principals (AWSP), Washington Association of School Administrators (WASA), Association of Washington Student Leaders (AWSL), National Education Association (NEA), and the National Parent-Teacher Association (PTA), to name just a few.

Use new insights in justice, equity, diversity and inclusion to lead the equity learning engagement of others in the school community and develop a focus on personal and professional growth.

A destructive approach to educational inequity is placing the blame for unequal outcomes on students, their parents, and their communities—the "deficit" perspective (Khalifa 2018). An equity-driven school leader guides school staff to recognize that inequities are systemic in nature, rather than rooted in individual children or their families. The learning that a school leader leads is an essential first step to ensure that equity is embedded deep in the culture of a school and its community, and that equitable teaching practices take place in the classroom.

School leaders who stand for equity tackle the challenge of developing the awareness of staff on the role of identity, values, biases, assumption, and privilege. One of the most important ways is to model one's own learning journey, including the difficulties and vulnerabilities involved. The learning of educators, however, has to go beyond basic understandings of race and racism and move toward delving into how racial inequity actually is manifested in classrooms and schools.

To lead the learning of educators, school leaders can access the deep scholarly work created over decades by many educational authors of color and others which clarify in detail on one hand, specific ways in which school systems destroy the spark of learning of students of color. On the other hand, the literature by these sources holds a promise of liberatory, transformative teaching and learning that should not be ignored. Although it is always difficult to turn literary sources into practical action steps, there are many authors that have clear guidance that can be used to plan for shifting classroom and school practices. A listing of resources can be found in the links featured in the previous section "Creating Awareness for Equity," or the references to this document.

By leading the learning of staff and parents, the school community can take important steps toward a vision that prioritizes eliminating systemic disparities by race, ethnicity, class, and/or home language.

Leading Inquiry for Equity

In equity-centered inquiry, to ensure that action is well-grounded in the needs of students, data is used to outline a problem of student learning that describes how and where students are being excluded from learning. The inquiry expands to look at problems of adult practice. What are the school's structures and practices of adults that prevent students from connecting with and accessing educational opportunities that are described in the problem of student learning?

A sound description of problems of student learning and adult practice based on data provides a target for theories of action. A theory of action solidly connected to outlines of school problems can then specify what is expected to happen as a result of leadership initiatives. Theories of action establish clear pathways toward the goal of impacting student learning. A well-thought-out theory of action that grounds action planning also can be a source of a set of checkpoints to make sure that the expected outcomes of the "theory" are realized at each step along the way. An authentic consideration of equity does not stop at academics, though it is an important foundation of student success. Racism and White cultural domination in education cause great harm to strong, successful learner identities of BIPOC students. As well, hidden, implicit biases can impact the social and emotional growth of historically marginalized students, particularly in the quality of relationships and sense of belonging in school. Together, academics, learner identity, and social-emotional growth are important areas for equity-focused educators to conduct inquiry and develop theories of action and action steps to make a difference for students.

Identify sources of quantitative data that illustrate equity problems of student learning in the areas of academics, learner identity, and social emotional growth.

> "Problems of student learning are often defined by educators without the voice and participation of the populations who are impacted the most—the students."

Equity leaders use disaggregated student data of various types to highlight and identify inequities. But equity-driven school leaders are not satisfied with surface examination, and "peel back the wallpaper" to dig deeper for data that may be concealing hidden inequities (Johnson & La Salle 2010).

Through skillful dialogues, data can help expose how established "status quo" educational practices and school decision-making may be connected to hidden biases and beliefs that hinder progress. For example, structures that unwittingly divert students of color from advanced learning constitute barriers that can be identified by deeper looks at student course assignments and related forms of data. Participating in extracurricular activities, student government, and other clubs can reveal patterns along the lines of race, culture, and class. Data dialogues can surface assumptions about group abilities that may be impacting the engagement of students in rigorous instruction (La Salle & Johnson 2019).

Quantitative data is not limited to academics. Surveys and other types of broadly gathered data can provide information on how learners perceive their identities as strong, capable students, who are secure in their racial and cultural identities. Similarly, in social-emotional areas, the quality of adult-student and student-student relationships, disaggregated by race and other characteristics, can identify problem areas. Discipline and attendance data are major indicators of school and classroom practice. Staff and parent surveys, particularly dealing with topics of equity, can be a valuable way to triangulate data on student learning, and can inform forming a problem of adult practice.

More importantly, school leaders use data to increase the capacity of staff to collaboratively attack the sources of unequal outcomes. Data can be used as a tool to create a sense of urgency for action and can contribute for the school community to keep oriented to their "true north" of equity. Organizing participation in data examination and analysis can be a powerful force for teachers, parents, students, and the community to take action against conditions creating inequity. Carefully structured sharing of data can be a means to reach parents of underserved students and bring them into co-designing equity initiatives. Finally, a data-informed process can allow for mid-course corrections of equity initiatives (see "theories of action", next pge), the reinforcement of positive directions, and the celebration of success.

Utilize qualitative approaches to access insights from student, family and educator voice to inform and highlight equity problems of student learning, especially for those marginalized in school.

Educational leaders need to broaden the definition of what constitutes data to include qualitative forms. This approach to inquiry is especially useful to delve into areas of learner identity and social-emotional growth. Problems of student learning are often defined by educators without the voice and participation of the populations who are impacted the most—the students. Finding opportunities to listen to and systematically capture student, as well as family and community voice, are pathways to understand their lived experiences. Besides discovering what is "right" about students, they can uncover hidden barriers to learning, threats to identity, relationships or sense of belonging presented by unintended mismatches in instruction or classroom culture. Understanding the perceptions and perspectives of students and their families can reveal how educators and schools may be unwittingly setting up structural and cultural barriers to opportunity that quantitative data doesn't reveal. There are many instances, for example, where schools discover that students of color may be receiving unspoken messages that advanced, rigorous learning or postsecondary opportunities are not for them. Or how unconscious bias may be conveying hostile or derogatory messages to students based on their identities, such as subtle microaggressions that communicate successful learning in complex subjects like math or science might be unattainable.

In the absence of perspectives from students of color and their families, community cultural wealth and assets which provide valuable insights about educating students from underserved communities can be overlooked. Cultural wealth in this context is defined as the familial knowledge, skills, and resources that have allowed communities to survive and thrive despite a history of racism. For example, communities often have rich language traditions different from mainstream forms that are used in schools that can serve as bridges to literacy. Family histories are often replete with amazing lessons of tenacity and endurance that are never tapped as a learning resource. And parents from marginalized populations often have ambitious aspirations for their students' futures that belie the low expectation of schools.

Structured but open-ended forms of deep listening such as student or family focus groups, interviews, or home visits are one means of garnering data. Equity-focused walkthroughs, peer observations or student shadows may reveal a lot about students' classroom and school experiences. Collaborative means of analyzing these forms of data can reveal insights not found by relying on quantitative measures (Safir & Dugan 2021).

Develop collaboration to examine and analyze data to identify problems of adult practice that contribute to perpetuation of inequities and marginalization connected to problems of student learning.

Leading collaboration to analyze multiple quantitative and qualitative data points can bring to light problems of practice, learning conditions created by adults in the school that are producing disparities. Quantitative data can be the gateway to a deeper qualitative inquiry to teaching, discipline, and access practices within the school. For example, examining how identified, below-grade level students in elementary grades are actually served, or examining course-taking patterns in secondary can

reveal how students are being excluded from opportunity. Or, examining how students of color are disproportionately qualified for special education (Harry & Klingner 2014). Data can show how practices of administrators, counselors and teachers impact the placement and aspirations of subgroups of students.

The target of defining problems of practice is to ascertain what is going on with instruction and educator-student social interactions in the school. What are teachers and other adults doing, or not doing, in their instruction and interaction that's helping or hindering students' performance? At this stage, it is important to clarify that the purpose is not to assign blame or recrimination, but to provide explanations of root cause and effect that will provide the basis for theories of action.

Problems of teacher practice also point toward another target for analysis. Problems of leadership practice parallel problems of teacher practice in answering the question of what are leaders doing or not doing that changes the state of affairs of instruction in classrooms. Combined with a well-illustrated problem of student learning, an analysis of problems of adult practice creates a strong case for theories of action.

Identify theories of action aimed at interrupting school and classroom practices and structures that produce racism and other forms of marginalization and replacing them with those that produce equitable outcomes.

A theory of action is, at its core, a simple IF, THEN statement. IF the school takes a particular path of action, THEN student learning will improve. The power of theories of action is that they take the equity learning and the analysis of data and school equity problems and begin to turn them into focused action steps that will ultimately impact students. A theory of action considers the previous steps of learning about equity and data about students and educators and turn them into the rationale for the explicit actions of an equity plan.

Guided by a solid analysis of school problems, theories of action to improve school equity focus on these likely areas of academics, learner identity and social-emotional growth:

- Eliminating inequities and disparities in student achievement, discipline, and other critical school success factors.

- Fostering a safe, healthy school climate that increases belonging of marginalized student populations.

- Promoting an inclusive culture that engages and draws on the assets of students, families, staff, and community members.

- Fostering leadership development for equity.

- Facilitating ongoing conversations about equity and social justice.

Theories of action also provide a source for checkpoints to come back to so that school leaders can assess the impact of action and test its correctness, as well as diagnose problems and barriers during implementation. For example, do well-intended interventions reveal a lack of resources for success such as teacher training? Do they cause unintended consequences such as increasing "tracking," or inadvertent blockages to accessing opportunity? A theory of action can help leaders reflect on improvements that a school undertakes to ensure they increase equitable outcomes.

It may be now apparent that an inquiry approach to equity is not separate from, but central to overall school improvement planning. In other words, "doing equity" is not something that is done "when there's time". In fact, an authentic inquiry approach to equity targets the overall goals of a school improvement plan to attack disparities in student learning. And inquiry informs and provides direction to required student growth goals. The action steps that follow are meant to be woven into a school's overall work to improve learning outcomes for all students.

Connect and Reflect:

AWSP LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK CRITERION 3: PLANNING WITH DATA

- How are you connecting with students, staff, and stakeholders around planning with data?

- How are you using your school data to address Justice? Equity? Diversity? Inclusion?

- What evidence could you collect for your next evaluation cycle?

AWSP LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK CRITERION 5: IMPROVING INSTRUCTION

- What beliefs do your staffuly hold around instruction, learning, and achievement?

AWSP LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK CRITERION 8: CLOSING THE GAP

- What are the most important and immediate actions you can take to increase racial literacy and inclusionary practices?

- What professional development is needed for all staff to increase their understanding of how bias, stereotypes, and race function?

SCHOOL LEADERSHIP PARADIGM: SYSTEMS DOMAIN

- What systems need to be rethought, reframed, or replaced?

- Are there inclusionary systems missing from your school?

SCHOOL LEADER PARADIGM: LEARNING DOMAIN

- What is the current reality of learning in your school? For each and every student? For all adults?

- How will you instill a growth mindset around instructional practices? How will you assist staff in developing deep awareness and knowledge of others' viewpoints and perspectives?

Taking Action for Equity

In taking a teaching and learning stance toward equity learning and engaging in inquiry into school inequities, leaders build up their equity muscle and moral compass—in other words, leadership capacity—to confront three realities (La Salle & Johnson 2019):

- Every school is perfectly designed to get the results it currently gets.

- Every student deserves the outstanding education that only some currently experience.

- Every educator has a moral obligation to help our most vulnerable students receive the best education possible.

Rather than mindlessly launching initiatives, a theory of action based on data and school problem analyses provides intentionality and focus for action planning. Leaders can act with confidence that their activity is grounded in real issues impacting students.

The *School Leader Paradigm* clearly delineates the dispositions or "The Becoming" side of leadership from "The Doing" or leadership moves school leaders take to get desired outcomes. Therefore, "Taking Action for Equity" is divided by the school leadership domains of culture, systems, and learning—the things leaders do that are visible and observable.

"Artfully incorporating messages about the 'why' of the work in an ongoing manner, including the celebration of accomplishments, keeps school stakeholders attached to the mission of working toward a more equitable school."
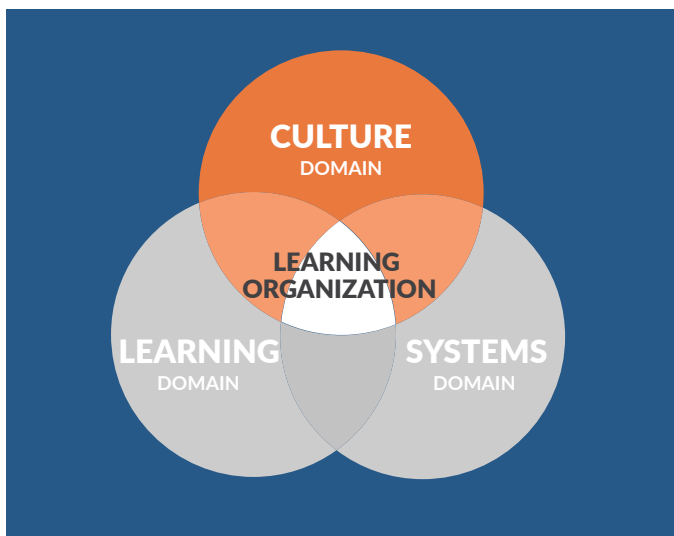
Culture Domain

> **Engage with members of the school community (particularly from traditionally marginalized communities) to develop a vision of collective responsibility and a school culture supporting racial equity.**

Equity-focused school leaders avoid the temptation to think there are shortcuts to achieve justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion. The road to an equitable school is to diligently, consistently and over time engage the entire school community—staff, students, parents—to assume ownership of a vision of a school that serves students of every background and identity, so that it is deeply embedded in the culture.

In doing so, a school leader avoids the many pitfalls that can derail such work, which are very well outlined in "Beware of Equity Traps and Tropes", (Dugan 2021; Safir & Dugan 2021).

For example, some attempt to reduce racial equity to a checklist of toolkits and compliance tasks, thinking one can just skip the ongoing learning detailed in this document's earlier section "Creating Awareness for Equity". Instead, equity must be envisioned as a whole-person, whole-system change process linked to culture, identity, healing, and the assumption of a learner stance. Without creating a background of deep understanding of race, racism, and equity, mechanical implementation and resistance often ensues. Some activities might even cause harm and disruption due to a lack of skill in sensitive areas.

In another example, responsibility for leadership of equity is often "outsourced" to individual educators of color, conferring the status of equity "lone ranger" or "equity warrior", solely tasked with the development and implementation of racial equity initiatives. At best, this reflects a very shallow understanding of equity as separate and isolated area—"doing equity" is a nice "add on", if one "has time"—but it's not the "real work" of improving learning.

In actuality, a deep understanding of racism and other forms of marginalization is central to grasping why our system is unsuccessful with many students. Conversely, understanding anti-racist and culturally responsive teaching benefits the achievement

of ALL students, including those from White backgrounds. The idea that "someone else" (i.e., staff of color) can do the learning about achieving educational equity will result in serious, ongoing shortcomings in accomplishing the mission of making schools work for every student.

The "outsourcing" approach to equity guarantees these efforts will remain in an isolated "silo", with little or no impact on student or adult learning. And it will result in the frustration and exhaustion of educators of color pressured into solitary leadership, which is one of the factors in their higher rates of departure from the education field.

On the other hand, the consistent engagement of school leaders in deepening their knowledge while leading equity efforts signals that all school community members need to take responsibility for an equitable school culture. Leaders that publicly model a learner stance, foster collaboration, and conduct inquiry cycles blending learning and thoughtful action will make a difference in transforming the school's culture to embrace justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion, leading to success for every student.

> **Foster an equitable school culture by building authentic, supportive relationships across the school community and developing identity safety, belonging and voice for all students, especially those who have been traditionally marginalized.**

"Stereotype threat" affects students belonging to groups who are negatively stereotyped in the larger society by racism and other forms of oppression (Steele 2010). It is the hidden, destructive impact to students' learner identity as they receive societal messages that they are members of a stigmatized group. Schools who do not address implicit biases are strong reinforcers of stereotype threat.

The devastating impact of stereotype threat on academic success of students affected by racism, sexism and gender bias, homophobia, and ableism has been extensively documented. As well, stereotype threat destroys the sense of belonging in school that is a critical part of a student's learner identity.

Equity-minded educators reject the idea that simply and narrowly focusing on strong academics alone will overcome stereotype threat of marginalized students. Educator efforts to build a strong learner identity for the historically underserved is indispensable for academic achievement.

Building identity safety, the antidote to stereotype threat, is a central aspect of belonging and developing a successful learner identity (Steele & Cohn-Vargas 2013). It is based on a sense that students' racial and social identity is an asset rather than a barrier to success in the classroom, no matter what their background.

Fostering an inclusive and safe school culture is a necessary condition to build identity safety. In addition, explicitly building pride and creating a warm environment for students from diverse racial, gender, and ability backgrounds is essential for strong learner identities (Mayo 2022). Examples of such efforts include ensuring all students "see" themselves in the curriculum and visual imagery within the school. Creating safe spaces for students from various identities to have a voice, conduct dialogues and share experiences can be another.

Work together with students, staff, and parents to build a sense of urgency and commitment, using quantitative data and qualitative insights to build a strong and influential case for equity initiatives.

When inequitable outcomes of groups of students are so common that it no longer causes pause of any sort, failure has been normalized in the culture of a school. In order for members of the school community—staff, parents, students—to commit to work that transforms a school where inequities exist, it's indispensable that they have a sense of urgency. A more common way to frame the need is that all partners must deeply understand and be highly motivated by the "why" of the work. This is the foundation upon which collaborative action rests. Without it, efforts will be half-hearted at best.

Kotter (2008) and Fullan (2016) illuminate several essential truths about leadership that successfully creates urgency. First, that commitment has as much an emotional component as a fact-based logical argument—winning "hearts and minds" to engage in collaboration for equity, with "hearts" being first. Both are important, but addressing the emotional attachment to justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion is often overlooked by task-oriented school leaders. Secondly, a leader should think of providing living experiences and messages that convey the ethical and moral underpinnings of educational justice. Stories, testimonials, videos, etc., of injustice, combined with how educational justice was achieved, are aimed at creating inspiration toward action. Leaders provide illustrations of the problem of student learning in a living way, including utilizing student voice and experience. They create the rationale for engaging in action by appealing to the basic sense of justice of students, parents and staff.

Without urgency, collective action will be half-hearted at best. Maintaining a sense of urgency is not a "one and done" activity. Artfully incorporating messages about the "why" of the work in an ongoing manner, including the celebration of accomplishments, keeps students, staff, and parents attached to the mission of working toward a more equitable school.

Engage in ongoing, two-way communication to build deep understanding of the diversity of beliefs, values, practices, and cultural and social capital of traditionally underserved communities.

School leaders use outreach and language-appropriate communication to share ways families and community partners can support the school's learning agenda at home or outside the classroom (e.g., supporting homework completion, fundraising, donating supplies, or providing social services). While these are positive practices, they still constitute one-way communication to parent communities, who under this construct are passive, subordinate recipients of the school's expertise.

The history of disconnection and exclusion of parent communities of color from schools is well-known, and there is much work to do to bridge the divide. An equity-focused school leader develops and maintains meaningful, ongoing relationships with families and communities through regular two-way, culturally responsive communication. School leaders strive to create opportunities to listen deeply to how families understand their students' school experience and refrain from responding with "eduspeak". Instead, leaders need to work to understand family perspectives and treat conversations as an important form of data to improve learning environments and a greater sense of student belonging. Parents, after all, know a lot about their children (Ishimaru 2020).

School leaders working for equity are also receptive to partnering with community organizations to address the needs of students. The messaging of school leaders is about the need to build relationships to improve on the diversity of values, practices, and social/cultural capital in the school community. School leaders should guide teachers and staff in proactively partnering with and learning from families and community organizations, especially from non-dominant communities. A part of the evidence that schools are bridging the school-family divide is the creation of policies and practices that result in greater awareness and valuing of the diverse assets of the surrounding community (Khalifa 2018).

Develop and maintain meaningful relationships with parents, families, and community leaders, especially those from non-dominant communities, to reduce the power differential and engage in planning and implementation of equity initiatives.

While learning from parents is a positive step, for schools to effectively serve students from underserved communities, it is important that they be brought into reciprocal relationships to help shape learning initiatives aimed at achieving educational justice. Equity-focused leaders need to be aware of the inherent power differential that is a "built in" barrier between historically marginalized families and schools as institutions and school staff as professionals and strive to understand how to reduce the distance (Ishimaru 2020).

Equity-minded leaders share data with parents to show how the school is progressing with their students. Data should be shared in parent-friendly ways, and especially should avoid communicating messages of blame and deficit. Instead, data should communicate the rationale for action for a more just school. Data can be presented in the context of conversations communicating high student expectations and for purposes of engaging parents as equal, knowledgeable partners in supporting student growth. Equity-driven school leaders collaborate with students, families, and community members, especially from non-dominant communities, in shaping educational processes and school improvement for equity.

Student, family, and community voice should be prominent in the leadership direction of the school. Over time, a school leader positions the school as part of the larger, surrounding community and builds capacity to co-create and meaningfully enact a collective equity vision (Khalifa 2018). An equity-minded school leader recognizes that there is a rich source of support for the learning of students in the community. Schools that are authentically connected to their communities can show evidence of teacher, staff, student, family, and community capacity to embed "funds of knowledge" and other resources in instruction and school-to-student interactions. Principals can engage teachers and staff in integrating community resources and expertise, especially from non-dominant communities, to improve and enrich teaching, curriculum, and learning. Over time, school leaders should be able to show evidence of ongoing processes to collaboratively assess and update partnership work.

Bringing students and communities of color into positions of power in the school community is especially important in this time of assaults on equity efforts. The voice of organized students and families from diverse communities serve as a powerful counterweight to those who would attack educators working for justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion.

Connect and Reflect:

**AWSP LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK CRITERION 5: IMPROVING INSTRUCTION**

- What does a results-oriented environment mean to you? Your staff? Your students? Your community?

AWSP LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK CRITERION 7: ENGAGING FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES

- What strategies have you used to engage all families, especially historically underserved families?

- What communications, partners, and community resources are you utilizing to engage with your school community and promote student learning?

SCHOOL LEADER PARADIGM: CULTURE DOMAIN

- How will you analyze and evaluate the effectiveness of communication protocols and tools in addressing students, staff and parents in an equitable manner?

- How will you and your school team diagnose practices and structures of inequities?

- What are your ideas for motivating, supporting and assisting staff members, students, and parents to recognize and resolve issues of inequities?
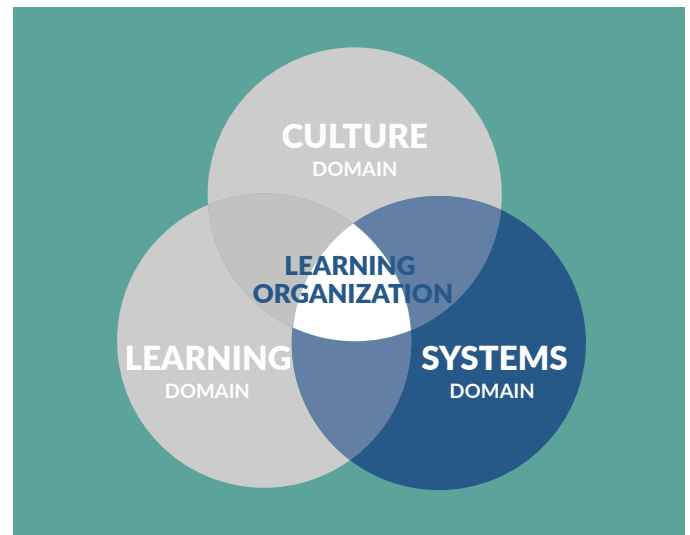
Systems Domain

Consistently and openly responds to instances of racism, homophobia, and other forms of hate and bias to protect a culture of belonging and inclusion.

Hate incidents involving racial and other types of bias are not isolated instances but can reflect a deeper problem in the cultural environment of the school or the surrounding community. The impact goes beyond the participants involved and poses a threat to a sense of belonging and inclusion throughout the school. Similarly, the responses of school leaders and staff will inevitably communicate strong messages. Are they weak, delayed, and non-existent, or strong, immediate, and proactive? Inaction is not without impact—it communicates silent inferences that the behavior is permissible.

While schools have mandated policies to respond to harassment, intimidation and bullying, proactive planning for hate incidents should be just as intentional as for other crises. In fact, crisis response provides a prototype for a plan to respond to incidents. Some of the elements parallel action in other types of emergencies:

- Contacting appropriate district-level staff—supervisor, community relations, equity departments, legal, human resources.

- Following investigation protocols.

- Deciding on the scope of parent communication and response if news media are involved.

- Acknowledgment of the seriousness of the incident, along with the restatement of the school's values around equity.

- Meeting with staff to debrief and guidance on talking points and themes of school values.

- Ascertaining if there are any support needs for students or families, and connection with relevant support staff or community resources.

Communications should be immediate, straightforward, and from the principal. Core messages can be:

- An unacceptable incident has occurred (be specific in the description as permissible, otherwise gossip and rumor will allow mistaken information to take root). If the incident involves vandalism or threats, be clear and unambiguous in denouncing it as a hate crime. If the incident involves conflicts between students, while not naming names, name the aspects of hate or bias that are unacceptable.

- A full investigation is underway.

- Our school stands for respect and inclusion, a place where all are welcome and appreciated.

- The positive steps that will be taken.

The abovementioned strategies are immediate and short-term responses to instances of bias. The reality is that the prevalence of name-calling, conflict, bullying, and other types of hate incidents based on race, gender identity or ability are indicative of deeper issues in the school's culture. There is no quick fix to eliminate the underlying conditions that engender hateful or discriminatory conduct, and they will not go away by themselves. Ignoring or making light of these problems only perpetuates conditions that make some students feel unsafe and excluded, with sometimes terrible consequences. Instead, it requires proactive, deliberate, and ongoing action plans to achieve an equitable and safe learning environment for all students.

Every bias incident should increase the urgency of school leaders to find resources and plan opportunities to advance the equity learning of both adults and students the school. Constructive, ongoing dialogue and messaging about fairness and belonging, and that classrooms are no place for intolerance need to be incorporated into the life of the school to make a difference over time.

An example of resources to support these efforts is the *Learning for Justice* website, with a wealth of materials for teachers and school leaders aimed at positively shifting the classroom culture and school climate. Look under "Classroom Resources" and "Professional Development" for concrete ideas to target hate and bullying and build a school atmosphere of respect and belonging. There are other resources, but once again it is the job of all school leaders, and not just educators of color, to take the lead against hateful behavior.

> **Bring together teams of school partners in learning (teachers and other educators, students, parents, and community members) charged with providing collaborative leadership of equity initiatives at the school level.**

An outgrowth of school leaders providing purposeful learning about justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion is a desire in the school community to collaborate on action. An essential step is to assemble a school community team (e.g., administrators, staff, students, community members, parents) responsible for overseeing development and implementation of initiatives, practices, and policies aimed at improving equity within the school. There can be a variety of types of collaborative groups, depending on the state of current structures within the school. A school leader should assess the best and most flexible way to facilitate plans for action, and how to mesh with other teams. An existing leadership team might be the best way to make inroads on equity, or assembling a new group devoted to this purpose might make the most sense.

However, a common problem of leadership practice is determining the direction and work of equity-based teams once they are established. Often, "doing equity" is relegated to a small group of educators, with little impact on the school and the non-involvement of school leadership. As they are a relatively new development in the field, schools do not have a lot of experience in determining how equity teams are connected with the leadership of the school and how they benefit students (Hanover Research 2019).

There are three leadership moves that will facilitate the effectiveness of equity-focused teams. The first is giving responsibility to the team for the shared leadership of the school's equity learning outlined in the previous section "Creating Awareness for Equity". Secondly, and more importantly, a connection to leadership of the inquiry process (i.e., the heart of the school improvement plan) should be at the center of an equity team's work. A team of school community members can contribute valuable perspectives to the analysis of equity problems of students and adults, and the resulting development of theories of action and action plans that are an ongoing part of a cycle of inquiry. Thirdly, an equity team can help advise school leaders on equity-related crisis responses outlined in the prior section on hate and bias incidents. In this manner, equity team members can then become active leaders and important communicators about the equity actions that are being developed. Important first steps to launch an equity team include:

- Communicating school leader support and participation—principal involvement is essential.

- Identifying the appropriate people to serve on the team that balances representation with a workable number of members.

- Ensuring diverse representation, with members reflecting the race/ethnicity, national origin, language, and economic diversity of the community; or finding an ongoing way to represent their perspectives.

- Securing necessary basic resources (time for staff to meet, meeting location, books and other learning materials, compensation, refreshments).

- Accessing needed assistance (district or community resources and expertise).

- Planning for team development, including developing agreements, protocols, and norms.

- Developing a plan for ongoing equity learning of the team.

- Establishing and communicating clear goals through the inquiry process, so the school community understands the purpose of the team.

- Providing access to larger staff agendas to help facilitate the school-wide work.

- Establishing means of communicating work of the team to the larger school community.

For the efforts of the equity team to have a real benefit for students, action planning for educational justice cannot be a separate agenda from the overall school improvement plan, working in isolation or even in competition with other school initiatives.

An effective leader manages to weave together equity action plans with the larger school improvement goals and core work of the school so that they align, reinforce, and serve each other (Hanover Research 2019).

Recruit, retain and develop staff members with strong equity commitments, understanding, and skills, especially professionals of color.

Recent research is emerging that even a few teachers that match the racial and ethnic background of students of color make a tremendous difference in achievement. Yet while nationally 51% of the school-age population are students of color, only 20% of educators are of similar backgrounds. In addition to systemic difficulties in luring students of color into education, teachers of color often face situations within the system that are serious barriers to retaining them.

Education Trust and TeachPlus (2019) conducted an in-depth case study of teachers of color and found consistent themes. Teachers of color, due to implicit or sometimes explicit biases, often encounter an antagonistic work culture that leaves them feeling unwelcome and/or invisible. Subtle microaggressions, for example, are aimed at their perceived competency as compared to White professionals. Contributions, such as ideas on how to better serve students and communities of color, or shift deficit perspectives, low expectations or other marginalizing practices, can be seen as challenging, impractical, or even threatening. Such offerings sometimes encounter skepticism and dismissal from school leaders. Credibility for these ideas then only occurs when White colleagues also give their approval.

As they are observed to identify with and have cultural assets that are similar to the demographic backgrounds of students, teachers of color often take on greater duties and roles. While this results in additional responsibility, teachers of color report that their work is undervalued, unacknowledged, underleveraged and uncompensated. And as they become valuable assets to a school, teachers of color can be passed over for the commonplace and informal encouragement to access leadership advancement opportunities (Knaus 2014).

Because of societal racial wealth gaps, teachers of color less often possess generational and family assets that cushion the economic disadvantages that all teachers face. The accumulated professional costs, exacerbated by the last several years of the COVID pandemic, can push teachers of color more quickly to burnout.

Principals working to retain teachers of color first and foremost must address the culture of the school. Establishing an environment devoted to removal of barriers to the success of historically marginalized students can be equally valuable to the retention of teachers of color.

Creating an environment where there are no constraints in expressing one's racial identity and humanity is important for both students and teachers of color. It can mean eliminating the pressure to conform to a Eurocentric image of a teacher in appearance and personality. It also includes the freedom to experiment and implement culturally and racially affirming instruction. It is critical that there are safe spaces to openly discuss often uncomfortable realities about how school attitudes, practices, and structures are excluding students. These conversations allow teachers of color to contribute perspectives not seen or understood by White colleagues. The insights can ultimately lead to

improved learning environments for students of color.

Most of all, creating a culture of retention of teachers of color means intentional efforts to invest in them, particularly in ways that counteract the accelerated pressures they face because of their backgrounds.

Mentoring, especially from those who have experience and understand the challenges they face as teachers of color, is critical. Mentoring can also go beyond professional life in the school, especially if the teacher lives in a surrounding community where there may be few others of their cultural and racial background.

Supportive school leaders build confidence and capacity for teachers of color to do their best work for the students they serve. Educators of color often are unsure of how safe it is to discuss matters related to race and as a result, are apprehensive about airing them. School leaders can make a difference by checking in with staff of color and deeply listening when concerns are expressed. They create an invitational and welcome space and climate to discuss equity issues. School leaders also need to intentionally give the proverbial "tap on the shoulder" to educators of color that show leadership potential and provide access to opportunities to advance their development.

AWSP recognizes that much more work needs to be done to support the success of teachers and leaders who bring their unique and diverse identities to the profession. For example, developing the specific knowledge and skills for navigating implicit bias and microaggressions, communicating effectively about serving the needs of students, and understanding the role that racial identity plays in education are only some of the topics staff of color could discuss.

However, it is not the sole responsibility of educators of color to address equity issues important to their success. Ultimately, the most important condition for retaining staff of color is for all school and district leaders, most importantly White leaders, to take on the responsibility to work diligently to shift the overall culture so that it is based on justice and equity.

Equitably allocate resources, redistributing and prioritizing financial, material, time, and human resources to support teaching and learning for students historically underserved due to their race, class, home language, ability, or any other marginalizing condition.

Schools are not strangers to resource limitations. However, tight times do not absolve leaders from decisions that impact equity. Resource allocation is not simply a technical matter but is undergirded by a school leader's values. A fair distribution of resources to students brings into clear focus the difference between equal (principle of everyone getting the same share) vs. equitable (prioritizing by actual needs) and is a test of how committed schools are to equity values (Plecki, et. al. 2006).

While resources are commonly conceptualized as money, they also involve human resources such as staffing, levels of expertise and experience, time (in schedules and agendas), facility quality and space, instructional and other materials for students, and access to opportunities (such as advanced learning courses). Genuinely equitable distribution and access of resources means: high-quality administrators, teachers, and other school personnel; funding; high-quality materials and equipment; technology; facilities; and community resources or partnerships—all

targeted and prioritized toward disparities in learning and the students that need them the most.

The school's inquiry process should guide how resources are prioritized. A resource allocation plan should align with the theory of action, action plan and goals set through the purposeful analysis of data and framing of problems of learning and practice.

Equitable access to resources in the classroom and effective educators is crucial to ensuring that each student, especially from historically marginalized communities, has the opportunity to succeed academically.

Connect and Reflect:

AWSP LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK CRITERION 1: CREATING A CULTURE

- How does the school leader create and sustain a culture that guarantees each member of the school is provided fair, just, and individualized learning and growth opportunities?

AWSP LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK CRITERION 2: ENSURING SCHOOL SAFETY

- Have you established expectations and/or norms around safe classroom discussion for all students?

- What support do you and/or your staff need to be successful within this criterion?

AWSP LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK CRITERION 6: MANAGING RESOURCES

- What steps can you take to learn more about family and community resources?

- Do staff demographics reflect the diversity of the students and community? What opportunities are you and your team looking to provide to bridge any gaps?

SCHOOL LEADER PARADIGM: SYSTEMS DOMAIN

- What will you notice now about systems in your school? What systems are still in need of your attention? What are your next leadership moves?

- What are ways you will encourage/add more accountability, reflection, innovation, student discourse, etc. into this domain?
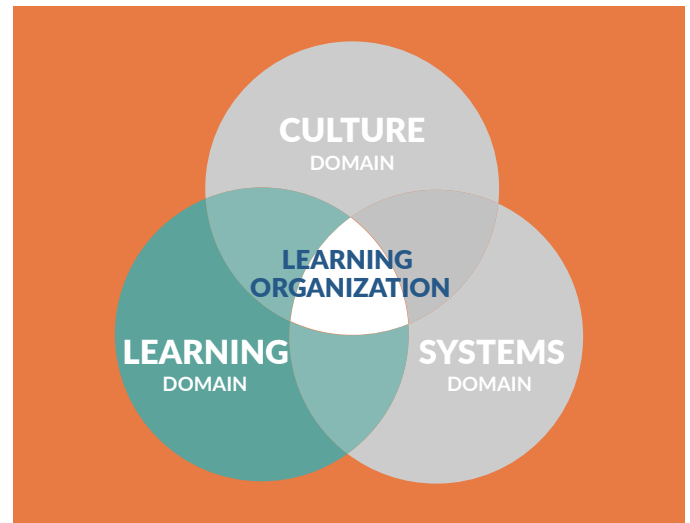
Learning Domain

Lead collaborative teams to develop action plans based on inquiry to attack bias and institute more equitable instructional practices in the school and classroom.

In many ways, this is a core section for building a school with equitable outcomes for all. It would take volumes to cover all that would be necessary in curriculum and instructional design to accomplish this. Here, several essential areas will be highlighted in academics, the building of a strong learner identity, and social emotional growth. These selected themes are component parts of culturally responsive teaching (Gay 2018; Ladson-Billings 2021; McCardle & Berninger 2015: España & Herrera 2020; Moore, et. al. 2018) and are counterposed to traditional approaches that have historically reproduced inequity and marginalization.

As these are only selective and brief descriptions of important aspects of equity learning, we strongly encourage users of this guide to use this section as a launching pad for deeper exploration into building knowledge and skill around equitable instructional practices.

Academics

Students from historically underserved backgrounds need access to high-level, rigorous content via acceleration, explicit instruction, scaffolding of both surface and deep transferable skills in a multi-tiered system of support. Access represents a departure from traditional and exclusionary approaches of "tracking"; limiting underserved students to memorization of facts, procedures; "remediation" (simple repetition of failed low-level content); "mastering basic skills first" instead of scaffolding students into accelerated core learning standards.

Learner Identity

One of the key elements to combating stereotype threat, with its confirmation of a stigmatizing identity, is for students to "see" themselves in the curriculum. "Seeing" themselves in the curricu-

lum means more than having a few brown faces in instructional materials. It means honest histories and accounts of racism and colonization, and resisting attempts to make the heritage of students from oppressed communities invisible. Students of color are not blind to societal realities of their own communities; nor should their histories be hidden from them in school.

The reason why "seeing" their historical accounts and current-day issues is an essential part of building a strong student learner identity is that it provides the backdrop for authentic stories of resilience and success in the face of obstacles such as racism and other forms of domination that students see in their daily lives. The powerful images of historical and current-day figures resisting societal obstacles familiar to their own communities are important for students to internalize in order for them to see that productive struggle in education is a pathway for their own success.

These stories and messages are a positive part of learning for students of all backgrounds, including White students, as it reinforces the ideal that the fight for equality is a core part of American democracy that benefits everyone (Sleeter & Zavala 2020).

Social Emotional Growth

A lack of connection and belonging to school, and the often hidden message that "those" students are not expected to succeed represent social-emotional barriers for students of color and other marginalized students. As well, the subtle communication that intelligence and ability is "fixed" is a de-motivating element.

Schools that succeed in empowering and engaging students have adults that function as "warm demanders". As the word "warm" implies, adults are explicit in creating positive relationships and connections with students. But this is not all. "Warm demanders" are teachers who, in the words of author Lisa Delpit (2012), "expect a great deal of their students, convince them of their own brilliance, and help them to reach their potential in a disciplined and structured environment." They communicate constantly the truth that ability and intelligence is malleable with engagement and effort (Dweck 2007).

Discipline is another critical area for inclusion. There is a vast amount of evidence that students impacted by racism, ableism and classism suffer disproportionate discipline rates (Bireda 2007; Harry & Klingner 2014; Khalifa 2018), and the "school-to-prison pipeline" is a reality for Black, Latinx and Native American students (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights 2019). School-wide efforts to transform discipline from a punitive emphasis to a more restorative and growth-oriented approach are essential if students are to succeed in learning.

Inquiry as Action to Benefit ALL Students

The good news is that there are broad possibilities to create a more equitable school. The approaches discussed in this section in working for equity do not just benefit a few subgroups at the expense of others. They follow the more just and inclusive principle of targeted universalism–by focused efforts to make school effective for the populations who are least served (targeted), ALL students benefit and the quality of learning improves for *everyone* (universally)—"a rising tide lifts all boats."

The challenge is often where to start. It is most important here to remember the inquiry process—letting the defined problem of student learning and the accompanying problem of adult practice guide the building of collaborative action plans.

A key feature of a cycle of inquiry is evaluating progress, reflecting, and continuing the next round of the improvement process. Without this important step, leaders run the risk of losing focus. Progress monitoring is a core tenet for responsibility and accountability.

How do we know that a school's equity efforts are making a difference? Measures such as the Smarter Balanced Assessment are lagging indicators, rear-view mirrors that assess the distant past, and are too "large-grained" (evaluating an aggregate mix of thousands of instructional interactions). Further, our typical interim and formative assessments are limited to solely measuring academic progress and are blind to important equity elements such as whether microaggressions, stereotype threat, or disregard of racial or cultural identity are occurring. Or, more importantly, whether equity efforts are helping create a safer and more inclusive learning environment, which in turn impacts academic engagement and success.

Many of the quantitative and qualitative data that form the problems of student learning and adult practice, used in a longitudinal, pre- and post-fashion, can be helpful indicators. Assessing improvement of school-wide and classroom adult practice as critical inputs may be an initial precursor to student assessment in equity initiatives. Tools such as *equity walkthroughs* and *equity audits* can be used to get a system-wide view of adult practices that can inform both problem-identification as well as progress. Hanover Research (2019) is one source of tools for examining school factors for equity.

Progress in shifting equity problems of student learning are also an area to monitor. An equity school leader acquires and refines tools that capture data on important questions about whether students encounter barriers in the classroom or face obstacles in their identity development. Qualitative tools such as surveys, focus groups, and selective in-depth interviews are means to capture the voices of historically underserved students. These methods provide valuable and ongoing information about how students perceive and feel about their learning environment and how their racial and cultural identities interact within it.

As with all progress monitoring, the most important step is finding time and space to reflect on the data, and to purposefully evaluate and adjust professional learning, capacity building, and shifts in adult practices to continue the process of building a more inclusive school for all students.

Conclusion, and a Call to Action

To make a difference for our students, school leaders must lead by example, demonstrating integrity, advocacy, conviction, transparency, and persistence for accomplishing justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion.

A consistent finding in research on effective principal leadership highlights the fact that along with instructional capacity and creating a collaborative professional climate, a leader's ability to develop shared beliefs in the entire school community is a critical factor for student success (Leithwood, et al., 2004, 2010; Fullan & Quinn 2016). Building the sense that equitable outcomes is a preeminent goal for the entire school community is a major motivational factor for collective action.

Throughout this document, we have repeatedly spoken about how important it is for school leaders to be a model of ongoing learning regarding racial equity and social justice. Our AWSP authors frequently encounter a significant underestimation of the depth of knowledge needed to uproot inequities among our students, and the misconception that reading a few books on

equity means that "I'm done". But when leaders take a serious and humble attitude toward their continuous learning about how racism, gender inequality, homophobia and ableism cause great damage to schooling, their actions become more focused, thoughtful and effective—they make a difference in the lives of students.

More importantly, as the *AWSP School Leader Collaborative: School Leader Paradigm* document (p. 9) points out, school leaders must model hope:

> "This begins with the hopeful belief that all students can and will be successful, no exceptions. Hope inspires. Hope motivates. Hope solidifies trust...Leadership that creates hope connects followers emotionally to their leader and their school. Hope-filled leaders and organizations make the impossible possible."

As has been pointed out many times, this is difficult, complex but uplifting work. A central purpose of the *AWSP Equity Guide* is to not only provide hope but foster the deep learning and collaboration in action that will make the goals of justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion attainable.

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Notes

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