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STEINHARDT

Metropolitan Center for Research
on Equity and the Transformation of Schools

District-Wide Equity Committees and School-Based Committees

Research tells us that, for districts most effective in promoting responsive and equitable climates across buildings, stakeholder buy-in is essential (Childress et al., 2009; Milner, 2015; Strand et al., 2011; Smith & Brazer, 2016). Establishing district-wide equity committees supports building capacity, developing shared goals and ideas about addressing inequity, and operationalizing strategic plans to enact those goals. The district-wide committee should include district and school leaders, BOE members, educators and staff, students, families, alumni and community members. The committee can powerfully serve to: promote community that shares a language and commitment to equity; afford representative stakeholders a voice in school/district climate; serve as an accountability mechanism for monitoring and addressing disparities in attendance, achievement, discipline, access, opportunity, and lived experience in the school/district; and audit current curriculum, resources, policies, and practices for bias. CSS facilitates committees nationwide to leverage stakeholder experience and voice to inform the specific actionable steps that must be implemented across the system to foster equity and inclusivity, assess impact, and continuously strive to improve in these efforts. Typically, districts first establish a district-wide committee responsible for recommending to the Board of Education how to manifest commitments across all buildings. It is then essential that the work be localized to each building where building committees are established to tailor commitments specifically to the needs of each school.

These school-based teams serve to function as localized efforts that leverage diverse stakeholder voice to: (1) build staff capacity to understand and share language around promoting equity in school, (2) review and analyze complexified data points to understand the equity narrative at the school, and (3) support professional learning to foster culturally responsive-sustaining practices in the classroom and beyond. CSS approaches culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogy (CR-S) as “grounded in a cultural view of learning + human development in which multiple expressions of diversity (e.g. race, social class, gender, language,, sexual orientation, nationality, religion, dis/ability) are recognized + regarded as assets for learning. CR-S education shifts from a focus of historical conditions of inequality to ideas that shape access, participation, + outcomes of learners.” (NYSED CR-S Framework, 2019). This approach requires leadership to drive the work forward, ensuring they foster the conditions to promote CR-S practices by modeling them with staff. CR-S leaders are consistently (1) engaging in critical self-awareness and seeking to grow in their cultural competence; (2) promoting + working to sustain culturally responsive curriculum + teacher preparation, and (3) enacting practices and policies that reach beyond just the classroom.

By convening school-based equity committees and empowering its members to plan strategically, these efforts will not only be universal but also sustainable. Sustainability is fortified as these equity committees serve to keep school leaders accountable to their critical role of establishing routines to support the development of their own capacity and the capacity of others to sustain equitable practices (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2020). A school-based equity committee should have representatives from most, if not all, grade levels, content areas and stakeholder roles (Childress et al., 2009; Smith & Brazer, 2016). Building equity

committees generally engage in activities such as: offering professional development for staff, processing feedback from professional development sessions related to equity; applying more of what they heard in the professional development sessions specifically to disparities they see at their own school; hosting equity-related book study groups; and looking at school-specific data in order to identify root causes of inequity. The committee's work should be transparent and shared with the school community on a regular basis (Childress et al., 2009; Smith & Brazer, 2016). Its successes should be promoted, and it should establish a regular agenda format such that a facilitator can easily design session plans. It is recommended the committee meet at least monthly during its first year to ensure that members have enough time to train and develop a level-set understanding of foundational issues in promoting equity. In year two and beyond, meetings can be less frequent, but should still follow the same agenda outline by providing opportunities for data analysis (Irby, 2018), discussing the impact of sociopolitical context (Khalifa et al., 2016), developing systems to monitor progress (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015), and building community (Green, 2017). Promoting an equitable school climate requires authentic partnerships amongst community members, with the committee acting in solidarity with minoritized and underserved students and families (Green, 2017; Ishimaru, 2018; Khalifa et al., 2016). Committee members should include the following: school leaders, teachers, guidance counselors, social workers, students and their families, staff and other appropriate community members (Childress et al., 2009; Smith & Brazer, 2016).

An important aspect of school-based equity committees is the formation of a student-led equity leadership team (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2020). Student equity leaders can serve as models for adult equity work (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Gregory et al., 2016). These teams empower student voice by directly involving them in the direction of a school's equity work. Students on a committee are in an environment in which they can develop racial literacy skills and strategies for breaking the habit of bias, explore the interconnectedness of race, power, and privilege, grow as advocates and activists for justice, grow skills as peer facilitators of intergroup dialogues, and co-design topics to be covered in a district-wide climate surveys. Having their pulse on the climate, students and their perspectives are an invaluable resource to the work of promoting equity. Students also serve as accountability monitors for district progress; the surest way to understand the impact of equity initiatives is to listen to those most impacted by inequity. Including students in an equity committee or establishing a student-led equity leadership team fosters this line of communication.

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