

More than Grit



“If we manage our diversity well, it will enrich us. If we don’t manage it well, it will divide us.” This is the prediction of Gary Marx, who penned a forecast for the future of education in this issue of *Principal* magazine (see page 32). Marx, who is a noted futurist and scholar, goes on to write, “Gross inequity will be increasingly seen as unfair, unconscionable, and unsustainable.” But gross inequity is what many schools

and principals contend with. Wide disparities in school funding exist, not to mention inequities in access to high-quality early education, technology, art-infused instruction, and other levers that we know lead to academic success.

While the funding issue looms large, there are research-based strategies that educators can employ to mitigate the barriers to school success. We can

look to professional standards to contextualize the crucial undertaking of ensuring access and equity for diverse learners. For example, the third element of the 2015 Professional Standards for Education Leaders (PSEL) calls on leaders to “strive for equity of educational opportunity and culturally responsive practices to promote each student’s academic success and well-being.” Specifically, PSEL defines effectiveness in this area as ensuring that students have equitable access to effective teachers and supports, developing policies that fairly address student misconduct, and confronting biases and “low expectations associated with race, class, culture and language, gender and sexual orientation, and disability or special status,” among other tenets.

Many educators have rallied around this last point of addressing low expectations, taking up the call to instill grit and agency in low-achieving students, rightly digging in to empower students to take ownership and pride in their own learning. Education researcher Jon Saphier speaks to this topic in “The Principal’s Role in High Expectations Teaching,” urging educators to first reflect on their own beliefs about students’ abilities and their capacity for growth as a start to closing the achievement gap for diverse learners (see page 8). In addition to changing mind-

sets—for students *and* educators—Saphier argues that “we have to change our language, our behavior, and our instructional decision-making as we handle daily events.”

The articles in this issue of *Principal* magazine begin with grit, but go on to address the breadth of instructional decisions school leaders make each day, from curating a library collection to hiring and retaining diverse staff to integrating culturally responsive and art-infused teaching. I hope that this issue of *Principal* facilitates both capacity-stretching reflection and strategic growth to benefit the students you serve. 

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REFLECT ON THIS

With your leadership team, assess your school’s approach to achieving equity. Begin by using these prompts, which are informed by the Center for Public Education’s 2016 research brief, “Education Equity: What Does It Mean? How Do We Know When We Reach It?”

High-quality and diverse teaching staff. Do all student groups have equitable access to high-performing teachers? What strategies do we use to recruit and retain teachers of color?

Culturally responsive strategies. Do our library resources reflect the student demographics? Do our discipline policies result in disproportionate suspension rates? Are we effective in supporting students and working in partnership with families?

High-level curriculum and access to resources. Does our curriculum prepare *all* students for the progression of high-level courses in high school, such as calculus and physics? Do our students have access to technology and Wi-Fi—both at school and home?