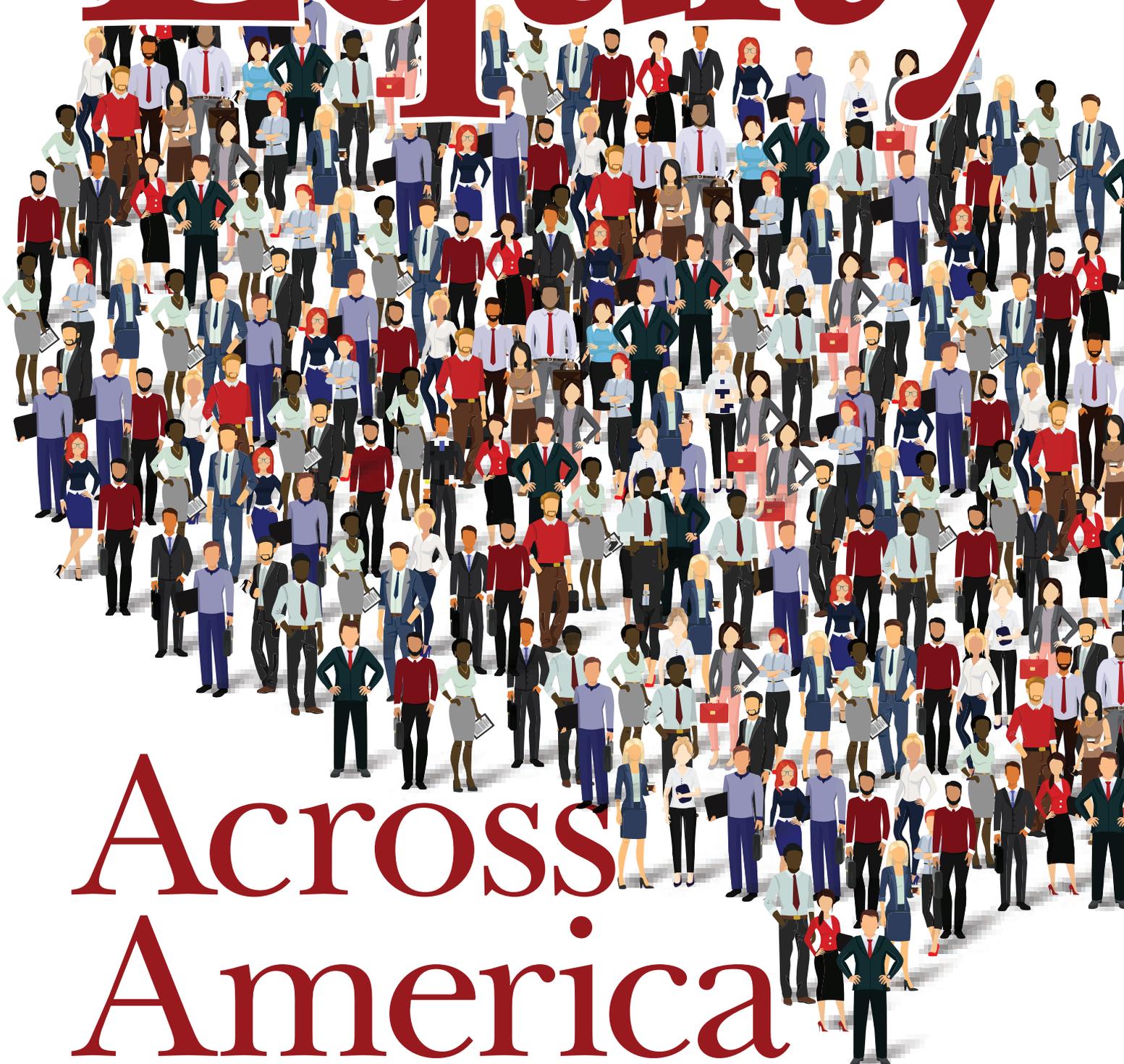


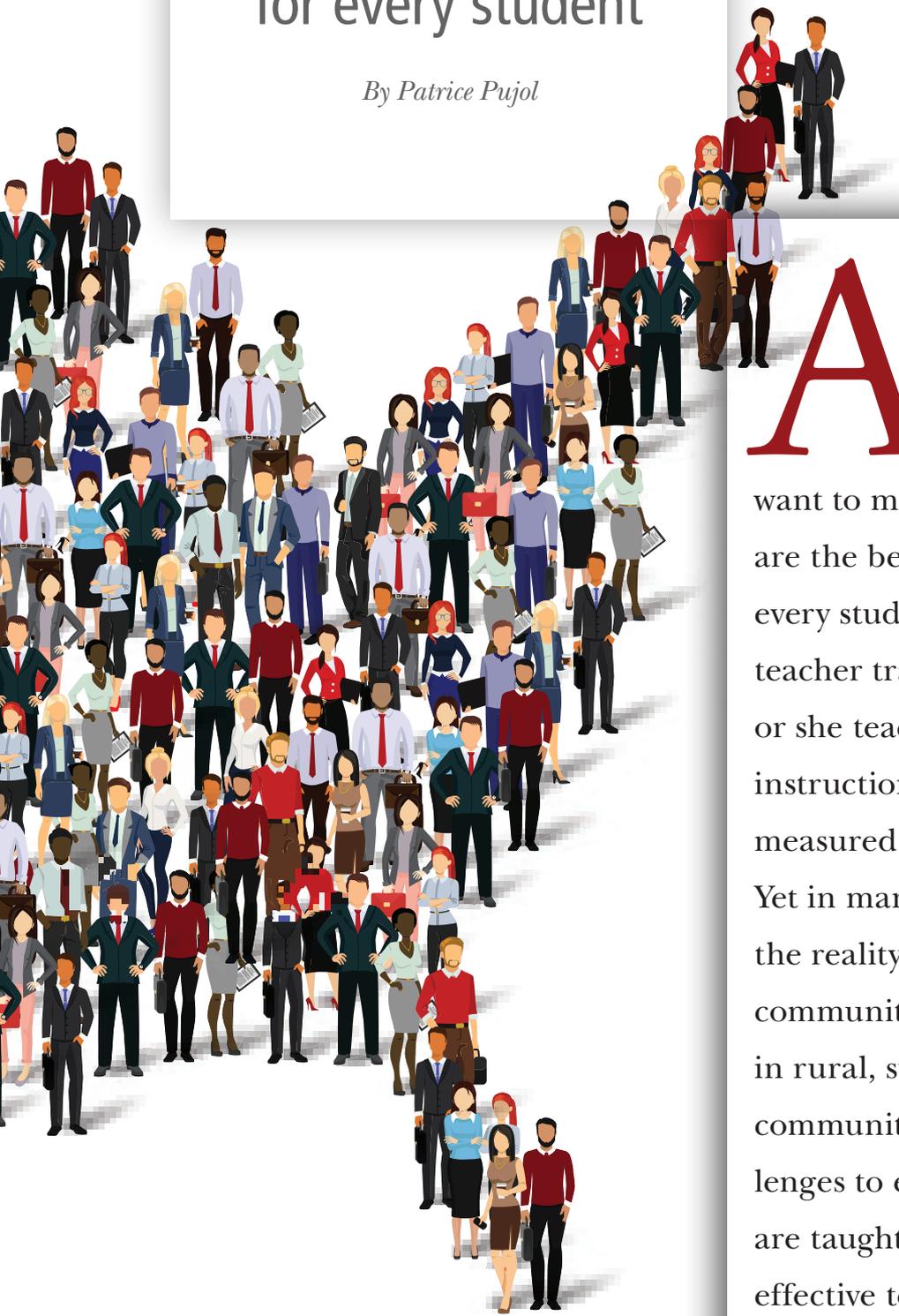
# Equity



# Across America

# How principals can ensure a great teacher for every student

*By Patrice Pujol*



**A**s principals, we want the best for our students, which means we want to make sure their teachers are the best they can be. Ideally, every student would have a teacher trained in the subject he or she teaches, whose classroom instruction is highly effective as measured by rigorous standards. Yet in many places, this is not the reality. Regardless of the community type, every school in rural, suburban, and urban communities faces unique challenges to ensure all students are taught by effective or highly effective teachers.

Principals bear a great responsibility to equitably distribute teaching staff so the most effective teachers work with students who need the most support. Principals must make critical and consequential decisions about which teachers should be assigned to certain courses and students.

In my experience as a principal, superintendent, and president of the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching (NIET), I've learned that a principal's plan for equitably distributing teachers should rely on a two-pronged strategy: to raise the instructional quality of every teacher in the building, while making sure the most effective teachers are placed where they are needed most. The following best practices offer targeted advice to help principals in rural, suburban, and urban schools advance equity in their buildings:



## RECOMMENDED READING

*Excellence Through Equity: Five Principles of Courageous Leadership to Guide Achievement for Every Student*, by Alan M. Blankstein, Pedro Noguera, and Lorena Kelly

*Learning Time: In Pursuit of Educational Equity*, by Marisa Saunders, Jorge Ruiz de Velasco, and Jeannie Oakes

*Solving Disproportionality and Achieving Equity: A Leader's Guide to Using Data to Change Hearts and Minds*, by Edward A. Fergus

### **Principals must match their strongest teachers with the students who need them the most.**

The analysis of teacher effectiveness data, including both teacher observation data and student growth data, is essential in this decision-making process. Beyond looking at overall effectiveness in assigning teachers, principals should determine which teachers can help students who lag academically and which teachers connect best with certain subgroups of students, such as students of color, English-language learners, or students with learning disabilities.

**Rural schools:** Principals in schools with a small staff do not have as much flexibility as principals in larger schools to move teachers around to different classes. In a grades 5–8 middle school with only two English teachers, a principal can make the decision to have her more effective teacher loop with groups of high-need students throughout middle school. By doing so, she can individualize their instruction and accelerate students' learning so they begin high school on level and ready for success. Additionally, if there is a wide range of proficiency levels in a critical subject area such as English, a principal may consider assigning students based on proficiency rather than grade level.

**Suburban schools:** In suburban schools with diverse course offerings and honors tracks, many successful teachers are rewarded by their principals with the opportunity to teach the advanced or honors classes. Being assigned to work with the “best” kids in the school is considered a badge of honor and a symbol of

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status in the school. Involved parents may also insist that their high-achieving students have the best teachers. In such scenarios, identifying effective teachers and assigning them where they are needed most could be a disruptive change to the school culture.

Principals can get ahead of this challenge by creating incentives, such as additional planning time, and providing additional supports for teachers who agree to work with high-need students. At the end of the day, principals must build a culture in which the most effective teachers are recognized for their strengths. The real badge of honor is the opportunity to work with students with the greatest academic needs.

**Urban schools:** In urban schools especially, principals may need to focus on additional qualities beyond effectiveness when placing teachers where they are needed most. For instance, research shows that students of color tend to achieve more when they are taught by teachers who look like them. When possible and without compromising teacher effectiveness, a principal may consider deploying staff members who are most reflective of the student body to the most critical areas of academic need in the school. Use educator effectiveness data to help make these decisions and provide systems of support for urban school teachers.

### **Principals must hire highly effective teachers.**

Nothing else is as important to student success, so great principals are always on the lookout for potential candidates. They develop relationships with teacher preparation providers and create a network of professionals who can recommend high-quality teachers for their schools. Successful principals engage their current teachers in recruiting new teachers and use them as cheerleaders for the school so that other strong teachers want to come there. Seeking out and attracting talent is a continuous process that presents different challenges depending on the school's location and culture.



**Rural schools:** Since rural schools are often located far away from the largest teacher prep programs in their state or region, rural principals must be more proactive in creating their teacher pipelines. For example, Amy Whittington leads North and South Elementary Schools in the rural community of Leon, Iowa, which has struggled to recruit new teachers. The Central Decatur Community School District worked to strengthen its relationship with its local teachers college, providing significantly more support for teacher candidates during their student teaching. Whittington also works with the high school principal to identify and encourage students to become teachers and remain in the community.

**Suburban schools:** While suburban schools have access to a larger pool of potential hires, there are often gaps in the distribution of effective teachers among schools. In Ascension Parish, Louisiana, a suburban district just south of Baton Rouge, district and school leaders use data on teacher effectiveness with students to analyze strategies, both within and across schools, to ensure that high-need students are taught by effective educators. The district makes it clear that it values teachers who demonstrate their ability to be successful in a lower-performing school, and incorporates this factor in making promotion decisions. A principal of a school with a greater number of struggling students might engage with district leaders to create incentives that encourage effective teachers to transfer to her school.

**Urban schools:** Although there are larger numbers of teacher candidates in metro areas, many are attracted to schools serving students with fewer barriers to learning. Danijela Duvnjak, director of teaching and learning at Hmong College Prep Academy in St. Paul, Minnesota, struggled to hire and retain teachers to serve the school's English-language learner student population. Duvnjak worked to develop strong recruitment networks using

her current faculty to reach out to prospective teachers and support them once they were hired. She also created teacher leadership roles and put in place weekly collaborative learning led by those teacher leaders. These practices have helped with the hiring and retention of quality teachers by creating a collaborative, supportive, and attractive environment to motivate them to stay. Teachers know that they will not only receive the support they need to be successful with their students, but they will also have an opportunity along their career path to take on the role of a teacher leader.

While each of these strategies can improve the equitable distribution of effective teachers within schools, it is equally important—if not more important—for every principal to create systems and processes that support high standards and continuous improvement for all teachers.

An important step in developing a system for ongoing improvement is for principals to engage the most effective teachers in instructional decision-making, and leverage the talents of the most effective teacher leaders to improve the practice of other teachers. This step requires setting up training, support, and dedicated time for teacher leaders to plan and lead professional learning, and to provide individualized feedback and coaching in classrooms to ensure that best practices transfer to the classroom.

Building a culture of continuous improvement creates the expectation that all teachers will improve, and this expectation must be coupled with high-quality support and collaboration. By recognizing the work teachers do to help students with the greatest barriers to learning, allocating resources and time to support teachers working with high-need students, and building the professional skills and knowledge of every teacher, principals can create a learning culture that fosters equity for all. **■**

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