Educational equity leads to greater opportunity for students of color. For the first time in the history of the U.S., a majority of public school students are children of color—but data shows that a majority of their teachers aren’t. It’s up to principals—the leaders whom students, teachers, and the community look to in times of change and challenge—to overcome unconscious bias, engage and employ more teachers of color, and teach students how to navigate a society that’s becoming more racially, ethnically, and socioeconomically diverse. In light of this, NAESP recently formed a National Task Force on Race and Equity to advise the association on issues related to racial equity in school communities, reveal schools’ common challenges and solutions, and support a peer-to-peer network of support for school leaders. The first matters the task force will tackle are to help principals recognize unconscious bias and perform a schoolwide equity audit. Stay tuned for the recommendations of the Race and Equity Task Force, and know that as you continue your equity journey—both strengthening your own leadership and making impactful, strategic decisions for your school community—NAESP will be right there with you along the way.

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School equity is essential for all students to thrive. The time is now for us to work collaboratively to ensure diversity is welcomed into the classroom in a way that gives all students—no matter their socioeconomic standing, race, gender, or ability—a chance to succeed. But ensuring equity in education isn’t a simple process. It takes an all-hands-on-deck approach, with the principal at the helm, highly trained teachers and support staff in classrooms with the students, and family involvement at home. Lifelong learners by nature, principals have what it takes to understand the issues at hand and make a real difference. But a recent report NAESP released with the Learning Policy Institute shows that principals face barriers to accessing professional learning on equity in the classroom.

The report, “Professional Learning: What Principals Get, What They Want More of, and What Gets in the Way,” offers key findings such as the fact that while most principals have access to professional learning content identified as important for building leadership capacity, including information on topics addressing race and equity, 4 out of 5 principals indicated they face obstacles to pursuing such professional learning. Further, most principals reported that their districts can play a role in helping overcome obstacles to professional learning and support principals’ continuous improvement, but this varied by the proportion of students in poverty and students of color in schools.

It comes down to this: Professional learning opportunities go hand-in-hand with improving school outcomes related to equity in the classroom. Another piece of the equity puzzle is ensuring high-quality literacy instruction for all students. Simply put, students have the right to read. The International Literacy Association has created a Bill of Rights of sorts called “Children’s Rights to Read” to highlight the crucial elements of an equitable literacy program, and it goes far beyond just giving students access to books and choice in what they read. Through an equity lens, literacy instruction needs to include opportunities for children to:

- Read books that mirror their experiences and languages and provide insight into the lives of other students;
- Share with others what they’ve learned through reading;
- Read for pleasure and for extended periods of time;
- Use literacy to improve in other forms of communication, such as writing and speaking; and
- Experience supportive reading environments with knowledgeable literacy advocates.

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