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LEADING LESSONS

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CENTERING EQUITY



IN PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES



National Association of
Elementary School
Principals

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LEADING LESSONS

CENTERING EQUITY

in Professional Learning Communities



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SHARPEN YOUR EQUITY LENS

School leaders face the critical challenge of creating learning environments where all students feel valued and supported. Culturally responsive school leadership goes beyond resources; it's about embracing students' diverse identities and addressing barriers to success.

This *Leading Lessons* guide provides strategies to foster a culture of equity and inclusion, drawing on insights from The Wallace Foundation-commissioned report, “A Culturally Responsive School Leadership Approach to Developing Equity-Centered Principals: Considerations for Principal Pipelines,” by Mark Anthony Gooden et al, and other insightful NAESP-produced content. Use this guide with your team to assess current practices and collaboratively develop an equity vision.





When the **FIGHT FOR EQUITY** Becomes an Ethical Dilemma

**More educators are
being asked to defend
their school's choice of
curriculum and content**

BY MARK ANTHONY GOODEN

Strength, courage, and kindness are attributes moral and ethical leaders exhibit, according to Peter G. Northouse's book *Leadership: Theory & Practice*. And people are awestruck when leaders selflessly take a moral or ethical stance in response to a difficult situation and in service to others.

Ethics are values and morals that society finds suitable or appropriate. Ethical leadership is present when leaders deemphasize their personal self-interest and put others' interests first in ways that require courage, strength, and kindness. An ethical leader "must be sensitive to the needs of others, treat others in ways that are just, and care for others," Northouse writes.

Principals sensitive to the needs of historically marginalized students often find themselves called to fight for equity. These principals are ethical leaders, but what does it mean to fight for equity? Moreover, how can principals be sure they are doing the right thing when there are people who argue that it's wrong to champion equity?

I present these questions because the fight for equity is being challenged down to the term's definition and its value to American schools. Anti-equity voices have misdefined or twisted the meanings of a number of terms, detracting from the work equity-focused principals need to do.

Inequities and structural barriers have deep histories in America, and they remain today.

Defining Educational Equity

What follows is a definition of educational equity we developed to help guide an ethical leader's moral compass, and it aligns with being sensitive to needs of others and treating each student in ways that are just and demonstrate care:

"Educational equity happens when each student learns and flourishes in a welcoming, caring, and inclusive environment. Equity requires a commitment to [the] fair and just treatment of every student, a willingness to address structural barriers to their success, and the delivery of resources aimed at providing equitable outcomes."

No definition of equity is perfect, and this one is no exception. But it reminds the principal to center the experiences of each student and reconstruct the educational environment to fit the needs of each student, paying attention to structural barriers. Doing so raises the need to recognize each student and meet them where they are, especially students from historically marginalized groups. Inequities might not always have been caused by the school, but they are

often supported by longstanding unfair practices that go unquestioned.

Inequities and structural barriers have deep histories in America, and they remain today. Yet, the nation is ripe with opportunity. The impact of history calls upon ethical leaders to acknowledge those inequities and disrupt them in support of providing opportunity to everyone.

Principals can use their strength, courage, and kindness to set a moral compass for their schools by boldly modeling the creation of a more inclusive and culturally responsive curriculum for all students—especially marginalized students who are often sparsely represented.

Ethics vs. Backlash

To illustrate how this might look in practice, I submit the following case study: A teacher—let's call her Ms. Parker—recently decided to present the children in her classes with a relevant lesson using an age-appropriate New York Times bestselling book, *Ghost Boys* by Jewell Parker Rhodes, which tells the story of Jerome, a 12-year-old Black boy who is shot and killed by a white police officer when his toy gun is mistaken for a real weapon. The story is told from the point of view of Jerome's ghost and has parallels with the tragic shooting of Tamir Rice.

In the book, Jerome's ghost recalls the story of Emmett Till, another Black boy who was abducted, tortured, and lynched in the 1950s. The author, a Black woman, adroitly presents powerful themes of historical racism skillfully and in ways elementary students can understand. That fact is especially important given the lack of diverse authors included in the district's curriculum.

Ms. Parker, an experienced white teacher, alerted parents about the book's content, expecting some to consider it too sensitive for their children's study. She reminded parents that they could opt their children out of the lesson under school policy, but she emphasized the thesis of the book, how well its content covers curricular standards, and how engaging students might find it. Ms. Parker also informed her principal of the lesson plan ahead of time.

Most parents knew Ms. Parker to be a thoughtful, engaging, and caring teacher and trusted her to teach the book, but a few objected completely to the book being taught at all. Rather than opting their children out and requesting an alternate assignment, they charged that the book was inappropriate and was being used to criticize the police unfairly.

As principal, "Dr. Lamp" reviewed the district's relevant policies so that her ethical decision would not run afoul of the rules. She knew Ms. Parker needed her support and that there was some rapidly growing misinformation



Read More

For more on making the ethical case for equity, check out "Five Practices for Equity-Focused School Leadership" by Sharon I. Radd, Gretchen Givens Generett, Mark Anthony Gooden, and George Theoharis at bit.ly/47fPJ9H.



circulating about the book, fomented loudly by anti-equity voices in the community.

This is a difficult juncture for ethical leaders, because a personal commitment to equity can appear to be misaligned with members of the community who argue loudly to maintain the status quo and may even cite unjust rules to support their viewpoints. In such situations, ethical leaders can benefit by emphasizing points where their values match the district's curriculum standards but appear to be in tension with unjust rules or understood beliefs. History teaches us that there are times when unjust rules must be challenged by ethical leaders.

In this district, the standards called for the inclusion of diverse authors and viewpoints, and Dr. Lamp was aware of that fact. After reviewing the policy, she spoke with each parent who demanded that the book be banned. As principal, Dr. Lamp felt it was important to let those parents voice their concerns while correcting misinformation, and she took advantage of every opportunity to do so.

Dr. Lamp found that even the most disagreeable parents were less so when she spoke with them on the phone or met them in person, as opposed to using email or social media to communicate. She made sure to greet each parent with kindness but stood firmly and courageously on her reputation, district policy, and the curriculum standards. Dr. Lamp felt that her rationale was morally sound and argued for a solution that focused on the betterment of others, and especially her teacher, Ms. Parker. Ethical leaders put the interests of others first.

Disgruntled parents listened and learned more about the book and the relevance of its content; not one continued to argue to ban the book from being taught. Importantly, they saw Dr. Lamp fight for equity in a way that amplified her expertise as an ethical leader whose approach could raise awareness about the historical and ongoing inequities found in the curriculum.

Questioning the Status Quo

Because challenges like this one are impossible to address without working through people's values, beliefs, and assumptions, says Sharon I. Radd, co-author of *Five Practices for Equity-Focused School Leadership*, they require special care. The ethical principal must address individual (self) and collective (systemic) paradigms.

In addition to addressing policy issues, values, and beliefs, the principal must also be ready to set the moral compass for the school. They have to be willing to question the status quo and the work that's being done, as well as whether it supports children in being their best selves.

Setting a moral compass is difficult these days, because a large—or at least vocal—group of noneducators is weighing in to tell principals and teachers that they

CORE CONCEPTS

Ethics and Equity

- The fight for equity is being challenged—often loudly—by regressive forces. Ethical leaders must prepare themselves to defend the school's staff and curriculum using their own moral compass.
- Educational equity occurs when each student learns and flourishes in a welcoming, caring, and inclusive environment that's committed to fairness and justice.
- One principal recently prevailed against the backlash that arose surrounding a proposed lesson, using personal meetings to stand firmly behind a diverse lesson plan.
- Principals' actions can be judged moral if their primary purpose puts the needs of others first.

should not fight for equity. Their actions and threats put pressure on principals to comply with their wish to deemphasize equity, stop teaching “CRT,” or put an end to being “woke,” whatever they think those terms mean.

Beyond character is conduct, however, which comes into play when principals consider the consequences of their behaviors. According to Northouse, there are three approaches that can drive action: ethical egoism, in which the leader believes it is morally right to emphasize the pursuit of personal interests as the greater good; utilitarianism, when the leader believes it is morally right to search beyond personal self-interest in seeking to create the greatest good for the greatest number; and altruism, which suggests that actions are moral if the primary purpose is to help others, even when such actions run counter to the leader's self-interests.

Our hope is that principals lean toward the altruistic approach to leadership. Doing so will ensure that the organization is more ethical—and that more ethical leaders will continue the fight for equity. ●

Mark Anthony Gooden is *Christian A. Johnson Endeavor Professor in Education Leadership, director of the Endeavor Antiracist & Restorative Leadership Initiative, and chair of the Department of Organization & Leadership at the Teachers College of Columbia University in New York City.*

This article originally appeared in the November/December 2023 issue of *Principal* magazine.

1. What values do I want my school community to see in my actions when I support inclusive, equitable curriculum choices, especially in challenging situations?

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2. How can I communicate with and support my teachers when they bring up important but potentially controversial topics, so they feel empowered to make equity-centered choices?

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3. When faced with opposition to our school’s equity efforts, how can I effectively address concerns while remaining committed to creating an inclusive learning environment?

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WHAT IS CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE SCHOOL LEADERSHIP?

How to write an equity vision statement with your leadership team or professional learning community.

**BY NATALIE NELSON AND
KAYLEN TUCKER**

“Principals cannot solve all the societal problems that lead to educational inequities, but they can address key factors in schools that perpetuate inequities,” write Mark Anthony Gooden, et al., in “A Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL) Approach to Building Equity-Centered Principals,” a scholarship review published in 2023 by The Wallace Foundation.

Common inequities in education include disparate disciplinary practices, differential enrollment in advanced coursework, uneven distribution of resources, implicit biases and stereotyping, and underrepresentation or misrepresentation of marginalized students in reading materials. These inequities contribute to widening academic and opportunity gaps and can result in significant harm to the social and emotional well-being of all students.

School leaders who have addressed these school inequities successfully have done so by:

- Implementing restorative practices;
- Disaggregating data by subgroups;
- Conducting “belonging” surveys;
- Utilizing title funds;
- Providing bias training; and
- Adopting culturally responsive curricula to meet the unique needs of all students.

The Gooden et al. review seeks ways in which systems can be designed to produce and support equity-centered school leaders “who can meet one of today’s most pressing educational challenges.” These questions are apropos given the vastness of student diversity arising from ability, gender, religious affiliation, race, culture, economic background, and immigration status.

Equity challenges are documented in the Leaders We Need Now series, published by NAESP and the American Institutes for Research. The series explains the principal’s perspective on how schools and the principal profession changed postpandemic and what policy supports principals believe are necessary to support schools.

“Although some principals’ awareness of, and concerns about, equity were heightened, most principals had not launched professional learning, curriculum review, equity audits, or other efforts to improve equitable access to services, eliminate nondiscriminatory practices, or promote culturally responsive instruction, or they had put related programs on hold,” Leaders We Need Now says, due to lack of bandwidth and staying in tune with a rapidly changing political context.

An Equity Framework

Now that we have entered a new phase of postpandemic schooling, many school leaders are recommitting to leading with an equity lens. “A Culturally Responsive School Leadership Approach” offers a framework for addressing the essential question of what it can look like to lead with an equity lens. Its components are having a “critical consciousness,” ensuring that schools are inclusive places where all can feel welcomed, supporting teachers to provide culturally responsive classrooms,

4 Strands for Culturally Responsive School Leadership

1. Having a critical consciousness. This is an understanding of historical oppression to inform how to achieve equity today.
2. Ensuring that schools are inclusive places where all feel welcomed.
3. Supporting teachers to provide culturally responsive classrooms.
4. Engaging with a range of community members to define what educational justice can mean for a school’s students.

and engaging with a range of community members to define what educational justice can mean for a school’s students (see “Equity-Centered Leadership Strands” on the worksheet on pg. 13).

In reviewing the CRSL framework, we have found that many educators have the skills and behaviors necessary to having a critical consciousness, ensuring that schools are inclusive, and engaging with a range of community members to define the context for educational justice. But when it comes to supporting teachers to provide culturally responsive classrooms, a majority express a need for more guidance and support.

In order for school leaders to guide their teachers and staff through a changing landscape of equity issues, they first must commit to continual professional growth themselves. Whether it is by listening to podcasts, reading, participating in self-reflective work, or joining equity leadership groups, staying abreast of trends in educational equity is crucial to supporting staff on their equity journey. Use the curated list of Equity-Centered Leaders’ Must Reads to get started.

Leadership teams can start leveraging the CRSL framework to help support teachers in providing culturally responsive learning environments. Leadership teams and professional learning communities can begin by reading the framework, understanding the language, and using the terms to write an equity vision statement that’s customized to their own school context (see Word Bank on the worksheet on pg. 14).

Intentional Effort

The process of creating an equity vision statement matters, and it is intentional work. Leadership teams



Read More

To download “A Culturally Responsive School Leadership Approach to Developing Equity-Centered Principals: Considerations for Principal Pipelines,” visit bit.ly/3WPGRU4.



should therefore plan a beginning-of-the-year faculty or professional learning committee meeting to analyze and reflect on the language of the CRSL framework in a collaborative setting. School leaders should then allocate time for staff to read sample equity vision statements (see example on pg. 14) and use CRSL framework terms to formulate their own. Establishing a common language at the outset can promote understanding of key terms and enables staff to effectively implement action steps toward the realization of a vision.

By leveraging the CRSL framework to center equity in professional learning communities, school leaders can create a customized, actionable equity vision

statement that helps transform their school. This comprehensive approach not only addresses systemic inequities but also fosters a culture of inclusion, empowerment, and continuous growth. It ensures that equity is not just a buzzword, but a living, breathing aspect of school culture that informs every decision and action. ●

Natalie Nelson is director of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Belonging, and Special Programs at the Westbury Union Free School District in Old Westbury, New York.

Kaylen Tucker is associate executive director of communications for NAESP and editor-in-chief of *Principal* magazine.

This article originally appeared in the November/December 2024 issue of *Principal* magazine.

Writing an Equity Vision Statement

Writing an equity vision statement as a leadership team offers several significant benefits. First and foremost, it fosters shared accountability across all staff levels. By establishing a common understanding of equity goals, it encourages every staff member to take ownership of equity initiatives and their implementation.

The statement provides a clear, concise, and actionable framework for the entire school community—a straightforward guide for decision-making that ensures easy understanding and application of equity considerations. This facilitates the translation of a vision into concrete actions and serves as a reference point for evaluating progress and initiatives.

1 An equity vision statement should address the specific needs and challenges of the school community. It customizes equity efforts to the unique context of the school, identifying and prioritizing the most pressing equity issues. This helps allocate resources to the areas of greatest need and demonstrates responsiveness to the school's demographic and cultural makeup.

2 The process of developing the statement incorporates diverse perspectives through stakeholder engagement. By including input from teachers, students, parents, and community members, it ensures that traditionally marginalized voices are heard and valued. This approach builds buy-in and support for equity initiatives across the school community and leverages the collective wisdom and experiences of various groups.

3 Finally, the equity vision statement serves as a foundation for goal-setting and strategic planning. It provides a clear direction for developing specific, measurable equity goals and informs the creation of action plans and initiatives. The statement guides the allocation of resources and efforts toward equity priorities, establishing a benchmark against which progress can be measured and evaluated. By preceding goals and action plans, the equity vision statement ensures that all subsequent efforts are aligned with the overarching equity vision. Shared with and including input from parents, community partners, and students, the statement sends a clear message of the school's commitment to the success of each and every learner.



Read More

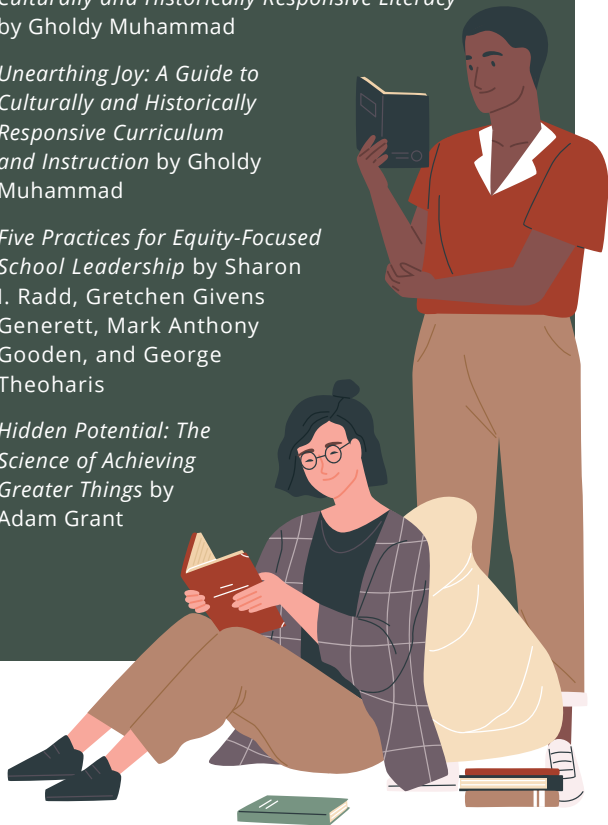
Check out *Responsive & Resourceful: A School Leader's Guide to Advancing Equity*, to learn more about the school leader's role in advancing equity. Download the free ebook:



Equity-Centered Leaders’ Must-Reads

Add these suggested resources to your library:

- *The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children* by Gloria Ladson-Billings
- *Collaboration and Co-Teaching for Dual-Language Learners* by Joan Lachance and Andrea Honigfeld
- *Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, Research, and Practice* by Geneva Gay
- *Belonging Through a Culture of Dignity: The Keys to Successful Equity Implementation* by Floyd Cobb and John Krownapple
- *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain: Promoting Authentic Engagement and Rigor Among Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students* by Zaretta Hammond
- *Courageous Conversations About Race: A Field Guide for Achieving Equity in Schools and Beyond* by Glenn E. Singleton
- *Cultivating Genius: An Equity Framework for Culturally and Historically Responsive Literacy* by Gholdy Muhammad
- *Unearthing Joy: A Guide to Culturally and Historically Responsive Curriculum and Instruction* by Gholdy Muhammad
- *Five Practices for Equity-Focused School Leadership* by Sharon I. Radd, Gretchen Givens Generett, Mark Anthony Gooden, and George Theoharis
- *Hidden Potential: The Science of Achieving Greater Things* by Adam Grant



1. Which of these resources have we used at our school?

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2. What resources would we add to the list?

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3. What areas of focus are most important for our leadership team?

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Learn More

Visit the website of MAEC (Mid-Atlantic Equity Consortium, Inc.) for equity resources, technical assistance, and professional learning. maec.org.



4. How do the unique challenges and resources at our school impact our ability to address equity issues effectively?

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5. What steps could we take to ensure that everyone—students, teachers, and families—sees and feels progress in our school’s equity goals?

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6. Who in our school community needs to be included in creating our equity vision, and what might we miss if certain voices aren’t involved?

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WRITING AN EQUITY VISION STATEMENT

BY KAYLEN TUCKER AND NATALIE NELSON

An equity vision statement should address the specific needs and challenges of your school community. The process matters—it is intentional work. Because a school vision statement should include diverse perspectives, setting discussion norms with your leadership team can help structure the process.

Review the Culturally Responsive School Leadership Strands (CSLR) to prepare to write the equity vision statement.

CSLR Strands	Reflection
1. Having a critical consciousness. This is an understanding of historical oppression to inform how to achieve equity today.	What strategies have you used to develop your own or your staff’s critical consciousness?
2. Ensuring that schools are inclusive places where all feel welcomed.	How do you assess school climate, inclusivity, and belonging in your school?
3. Supporting teachers to provide culturally responsive classrooms.	What culturally responsive teaching strategies have you seen employed in your building?
4. Engaging with a range of community members to define what educational justice can mean for a school’s students.	How do you leverage relationships with local and community partners on behalf of your students and parents?

Sample Network Norms

- Come with a spirit of curiosity
- Speak your truth
- Confidentiality
- Stay engaged (be present, with minimal distractions)
- Expect and accept a lack of closure
- Take care of yourself (take breaks as needed)
- Expect to experience discomfort
- Share the air (people who speak frequently and first should step back and allow others to speak)

Identify additional supportive conditions

Word Bank: Empowering Equity School Leaders

The following terms and phrases are culled from the Culturally Responsive School Leadership Framework. Use the terms—as they apply to your school community—to write an equity vision statement.

- | | |
|---|-------------------------------------|
| 1. Access | 12. Inclusive school environments |
| 2. Biases | 13. Minoritized communities |
| 3. Community of practice | 14. Needs of marginalized students |
| 4. Confront racism | 15. Networking |
| 5. Critical consciousness | 16. Personal identity work |
| 6. Cultural competence | 17. Power dynamics |
| 7. Culturally responsive assessments | 18. Problem of practice |
| 8. Culturally responsive community engagement | 19. Professional development |
| 9. Culturally responsive instructional leadership | 20. Professional learning community |
| 10. Equitable educational experiences | 21. Student achievement |
| 11. Equity-focused instruction | 22. Systemic inequities |

Sample Equity Statement

Our elementary school is committed to creating an inclusive school environment that fosters and supports systemic equity and improved student achievement for all scholars while narrowing current and predictable achievement gaps. We will achieve our vision by encouraging teachers to collaborate and share culturally responsive instructional strategies to benefit student achievement in professional learning communities.

Write Your Own Statement

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Seeking **EQUITABLE SOLUTIONS** in Discipline



**Short-circuit the biases
that target students of
color more often and
more harshly**

BY JESSICA B. HODGE

Statistics from the U.S. Government Accountability Office found that Black students, boys, and students with disabilities were disproportionately disciplined in K–12 public schools during the 2013–2014 school year, regardless of the type of disciplinary action, level of school poverty, or type of school students attended. And more recent studies indicate that Black students experience more punitive school discipline than any other racial group.

This is an ongoing, nationwide problem that demands to be addressed. The lasting consequences of being excluded from school through suspension or expulsion can affect a child into adulthood, increasing the likelihood of grade retention, dropping out, and prison time. Black students caught in the school-to-prison pipeline easily go from perceived troublemaker to felon. We owe it to students to break the cycle of inequity early.

Bias in Referrals

Research suggests that part of inequity in discipline might be a result of referral practices affected by teachers' implicit bias—an automatic and unintentional bias that affects judgments, decisions, and behaviors, the National Institutes of Health says.

When taking an implicit association test administered by the Pew Research Center, most people favor the group of which they are a member, with about three-quarters of respondents in each of five defined racial groups demonstrating some degree of implicit racial bias.

The majority of U.S. teachers are white, female, and middle class. They tend to create classroom expectations based on their own cultural norms, which can lead to interpretations of behavior that are disadvantageous to students of color.

Stereotypes that have been around for centuries continue to reinforce bias, conscious and not. And negative racial stereotypes associated with Black students increase the likelihood that teachers view infractions over time as a pattern.

It's one thing to become aware of a problem, but it's another to discuss it. Conversations about race, stereotypes, and implicit bias can help us reflect on our own views and interactions, as well as seek out solutions.

Overcoming Implicit Bias

The first step in confronting bias is to become aware of it. Research suggests that people can recognize implicit bias in themselves and their schools and learn techniques to overcome it. Schools and districts can start the discussion by examining discipline data for disproportionality.

Leaders should establish structures for staff discussions on the topic. The goal is to identify disparities and create a race-conscious analysis of the causes behind them. This might lead to the development and implementation of interventions and the monitoring of their effectiveness.

Discussion groups must agree on principles ahead of these conversations to keep the discourse nonaccusatory. I suggest keeping conversations surrounding implicit bias and racism to groups of no more than six at first; groups might expand with more experience.

Having teachers watch videos of their interactions with students can help unpack disciplinary incidents and avoid repeating stereotypes and scripted analysis. At least one study has shown that educators work more effectively with students of color when they reframe "deficit" viewpoints.

**It's one thing to
become aware of
a problem, but it's
another to discuss it.**

Diversifying the Profession

Another part of the suggested solution is to diversify the education profession. Teachers of color can serve as role models for students of color, boosting self-worth and motivating them to strive for academic success. Role models show students of color that professional success is attainable.

While supportive of diversifying the teaching profession, Montclair State University researcher Ana Maria Villegas says in "Closing the Racial/Ethnic Gap Between Students of Color and Their Teachers: An Elusive Goal" that "the presence of teachers of color alone is not sufficient to improve the education of students of color."

While teachers who share the same cultural backgrounds as their students might have an advantage over teachers who do not, studies show that white teachers can overcome racial barriers to support students of color by building their awareness of students' culture and its effect on student behavior.

Getting to know students and finding the similarities you have with them can help build relationships and replace negative associations with positive ones. This breaks down implicitly biased, automatic reflexes and builds empathy.

An equity-focused framework of positive behavior interventions and supports has been shown to reduce racial disproportionalities in exclusionary discipline. A schoolwide framework appears to be more effective and consistent than interventions that focus on individual educators.

Research suggests that people can recognize implicit bias in themselves and their schools and learn techniques to overcome it.



Checking the Data

No matter which actions are chosen to disrupt patterns in disciplinary disproportionality, accountability and evaluation are an important part of the process. You can't assume that interventions are closing gaps; they must be tested and measured.

This means monitoring behavior data for patterns continually, and it might extend to peer data collection, which can help educators understand how bias might be affecting their interactions with students. As you examine the data, ask if there is evidence that you're reducing disparities, if supports are more effective with certain groups than others, and what changes might make discipline more effective and equitable for all students.

Realizing that there's a nationwide problem with equity of discipline is an important first step, but schools must follow with actions that combat immediate and lasting consequences. This should include an

examination of the data, conversations about racial stereotypes and implicit bias, and interventions and the evaluation of their impact.

It's a cause that demands our attention and efforts, and there are promising solutions. School leaders have a responsibility to ensure more equitable practices and outcomes for all students. ●

Jessica B. Hodge is an instructional coach at Fulton County Schools in Atlanta.

This article originally appeared in the January/February 2024 issue of *Principal* magazine.

1. How might referral practices at our school unintentionally reflect implicit biases?

- Are we seeing patterns in which groups of students are referred more frequently or receive more severe disciplinary actions?

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2. How inclusive are our school’s current discipline practices?

- In what ways do they encourage positive behavior while addressing behavior concerns equitably across student groups?

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3. How often do we review discipline data, and what does it reveal about potential disparities?

- Are there trends in how different student groups are disciplined, and if so, how are we addressing them?

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Centering **EQUITY** in the **PRINCIPAL PIPELINE**



Help staff develop a critical consciousness to build inclusive school cultures and realize lasting improvements

BY NAESP STAFF

School leaders must develop a deep understanding of historical systems of oppression to create educational equity in their own school settings, said lead author Mark Anthony Gooden when he presented on his recent report commissioned by The Wallace Foundation during his NAESP Pre-K-8 Leadership Conference session, “Culturally Responsive School Leadership and Principal Pipelines.”

Seven Domains of a Comprehensive, Aligned Principal Pipeline



From *A Culturally Responsive School Leadership Approach to Developing Equity-Centered Principals: Considerations for Principal Pipelines* (2023), p. 4, available for free at www.wallacefoundation.org

Gooden said self-reflection is the starting point, before going on to invite session participants to draft a personal story of racial reflection. He asked them to identify moments in their lives when race factored into a formative experience of personal identity, including moments of privilege and marginalization.

Once leaders develop a critical consciousness surrounding the ways in which race and racism create inequitable environments for student learning through exercises such as these, he said, they can begin to build more inclusive school cultures that respect differences across multiple sociocultural markers. They can:

- Support teachers in reimagining existing pedagogy and curriculum to honor knowledge associated with people of color and challenge systems that exacerbate inequities through marginalization;
- Cultivate a more culturally affirming educational context that welcomes everyone through collaboration with individuals facing historical barriers to inclusion; and
- Establish partnerships to collaboratively define what educational justice looks like for the school community by sharing power with parents and other stakeholders.

Cultivating New Leaders in the Pipeline

Using a Culturally Responsive School Leadership framework, school leaders and principal preparation programs can extend efforts into the principal pipeline to realize lasting improvements to educational equity, Gooden said. Among the steps that can be taken to identify candidates with the robust critical consciousness required are:

- Reviewing hiring criteria to eliminate or reduce the weight of requirements that might screen out BIPOC candidates but have little correlation with leadership;
- Including interview questions in the hiring process to learn about candidates' capacities to identify and confront oppressive practices and their own implicit biases;
- Teaching candidates to assess inequities through school climate surveys, focus groups, and equity audits;
- Evaluating whether candidates have the understanding to effectively assess cultural responsiveness in the school;
- Preparing candidates to identify sustainable, equity-focused instructional practices and culturally relevant pedagogies; and
- Assessing how candidates intend to learn from the community and apply that learning to improve the lives of students.

Instructional leaders must also provide ongoing on-the-job support and evaluation to promote their vision of equity-focused instruction. Professional development can help fine-tune equity efforts in the school and district, and help aspiring BIPOC leaders rise through the ranks into leadership.

It's a big job, but one that leaders should be eager to take on. "We hope this report adds to the excitement of making schools more equity-centered by recognizing that indeed, leaders and those who support them have a great deal of work to do," Gooden said. ●

This article originally appeared in the November/December 2023 issue of *Principal* magazine.

- 1. How has my own personal story and experiences with race shaped the way I view equity, and how might this perspective impact the culture I create within my school?**

- 2. What steps can I take to support my teachers in reimagining their teaching practices so that all students feel included and respected, especially those from marginalized backgrounds?**

- 3. When preparing to hire or promote future leaders, how can I prioritize candidates' understanding of equity and cultural responsiveness to strengthen our school's commitment to inclusion?**

RESOURCES

Use these resources to guide you on your equity journey.

[A Culturally Responsive School Leadership Approach to Developing Equity-Centered Principals: Considerations for Principal Pipelines](#)
by Mark Anthony Gooden, Muhammad Khalifa,
Noelle W. Arnold, Keffrelyn D. Brown, Coby V.
Meyers, Richard O. Welsh, commissioned by
[The Wallace Foundation](#).

[NAESP's Principal magazine](#), November/
December 2024: The Principal and the Pipeline.

NAESP ebook: [Responsive & Resourceful: A School Leader's Guide to Advancing Equity](#)

[The NAESP Principal Podcast: Fighting for Equity](#)

The Mid-Atlantic Equity Consortium Inc.

[“Five Practices for Equity-Focused School Leadership”](#) by Sharon I. Radd, Gretchen Givens Generett, Mark Anthony Gooden, and George Theoharis

[“Closing the Racial/Ethnic Gap Between Students of Color and Their Teachers: An Elusive Goal”](#) by Ana Maria Villegas, Kathryn Strom, and Tamara Lucas