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System-Leadership Equity Dispositions

System leaders play the most crucial role in identifying and addressing inequities in schools and school systems. Advancing educational equity, requires that systems be designed to support young people, of all identities and backgrounds, in realizing their full potential. A school system that organizes around this goal must work differently to foster school leadership for equitable experiences and outcomes. System leaders must also develop and strengthen a critical lens for seeing the inequities that exist within their organizations, so that they can address barriers to progress and their root causes directly.

1

Reflect on personal assumptions, beliefs and behaviors, and publicly model a personal belief system that is grounded in equity *

Personal beliefs determine how an individual sees the world, other people, and oneself. Our beliefs and unconscious biases also determine our actions and practices, and these actions inform how systems develop and operate, including our current education system. For system leaders to feel comfortable addressing issues of bias, inequity, and race, they first need to have a heightened understanding of their own identities, values, assumptions, and biases. They also must have a deep understanding of how power and privilege operate, historically and currently, in our society. Without a firm self-examination of their own identity and role in historically inequitable structures, system leaders risk reproducing inequities inside and outside of their districts. To help others build the skills and will to value equity as a shared goal, system leaders must publicly model their own learning, self-disclosing and acknowledging personal biases, fears, and anxieties. By publicly modeling vulnerability, and emphasizing that mistakes will be made, leaders help others overcome their fears and encourage them to take risks. Critical self-reflection and disclosure should be an ongoing, lifelong process.

Live this disposition by

- Continuously examining and reflecting on how your role in the system might contribute to or support inequitable practices.
- Actively seeking to learn how privilege, power, and oppression operate historically and currently in education.
- Recognizing the privileges, you might hold based on position, identity, or background. Seeking feedback and looking for low-inference evidence to help reflect on how you are leading for equity.



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- Using language that promotes a belief in the ability of each student and adult to achieve, particularly those from groups that have been historically marginalized.
- Clearly demonstrating that you believe in eliminating inequities and providing each student with what they need to be successful.
- Publicly discussing the work, you are doing to become more aware of your own identity, privilege, and biases.
- Modeling vulnerability by acknowledging where there are gaps in your knowledge and skills related to equity.
- Modeling courageous leadership by naming issues of inequity, race, dominant culture and structural racism both inside and outside of the organization, even in the face of risk and pushback.
- Openly valuing the diversity of all members of our community.
- Encouraging risk-taking and create space for others to have open dialogue about race and address hard-to-discuss topics.

Questions for reflection

- How has race intersected with your leadership journey?
- How are your experiences different from or similar to the students you serve?
- What is your personal vision and belief system around race and equity?
- What have you said and done in your career to address inequities?
- What are your beliefs around growth mindset, and how, if at all, have you talked about mindset with your teams?
- How does equity leadership practice in the central office inspire and compel others in the system to interrupt inequities?



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Act with cultural competence and responsiveness in interactions, decision-making, and practice. *

Racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse students and families experience school differently, making it essential to examine the norms and interactions around race, ethnicity, and diversity within the district, school, and classroom environment. Those leading for equity must demonstrate that addressing inequity is a priority. System leaders accomplish this by consistently naming equity as a driving force behind leadership actions and decisions. They must also exhibit culturally responsive and linguistically affirming practices, assess the equity impacts of their decisions, model inclusive leadership, and recognize that if a strategy, practice, policy, or procedure works for the most vulnerable communities, it works for everyone. Leaders must work with parents and families as valued and respected partners. Stronger partnerships and collaboration between leaders and families improve family engagement and increases the sense of trust between students, families, and schools. It can also reduce cultural misunderstandings and further understanding of the diversity of beliefs and values in the community.

Live this disposition by

- Actively seeking and making use of diverse perspectives in decision-making.
- Considering the intended and unintended consequences and impact of decisions on all stakeholder groups.
- In group discussions, paying close attention to which voices aren't being heard and invite them to express their perspective.
- Actively seeking to learn about the identities and communities of the students and families in your school(s).
- When decisions are being made, pushing the decision maker to question which groups are benefitting or being left out, and why.

Questions for reflection

- What is your educational vision in general, and for your district, school, or classroom specifically? Where does equity fit into that vision?



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- What assumptions are you making about the needs or priorities of students and families? How did you check those assumptions during the decision-making process?
- Are the decisions you are making reflecting the needs and priorities of students and families? If so, how? If not, how do you need to change your decision-making process to better reflect the needs of different stakeholders?
- How are all perspectives, especially from those furthest from opportunity, included in the problem solving, decision-making, priority identification, and goal assessment processes?

3

Foster an inclusive leadership culture focused on creating equitable experiences and outcomes. **

System leaders create and grow a culture in which all stakeholders see themselves as a team of learners and problem-solvers with agency and accountability for student growth and development. System leaders must also create the conditions for, model, and sustain ways of learning and working that allow school leaders to lead equitable school communities on behalf of all students, especially those furthest from equality. This includes ensuring that all schools have equitable environments that are responsive to, and inclusive of, the cultural identities of students, staff, and the surrounding community. This includes ensuring that high expectations are present for all students; designing curriculum that incorporates students' backgrounds, languages and learning styles, and delivering student-centered instruction, and assessing student mastery of standards, via multiple modalities (cooperative learning, project-based learning, etc.).

Live this disposition by

- Ensuring that equity is at the forefront of the district and schools' strategic vision, and demonstrating a clear commitment to the system's vision for equitable student experiences and outcomes by ensuring sponsorship throughout the system.
- Purposefully and intentionally deconstructing negative stereotypes about students' identities; and challenging deficit commentary that minoritized students are less than, and incapable of exhibiting the skills and abilities required to achieve at high levels.
- Ensuring that new policies and practices (e.g., curriculum, discipline, funding) prioritize student need and promote equity for minoritized populations.



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- Regularly reviewing policies, practices, and structures and removing potential barriers that disadvantage students on the basis of race or ethnicity, gender, ability, sexual orientation, and other characteristics.
- Fostering a welcoming and affirming environment that incorporates the full range of assets (perspectives, languages, cultures, skills, networks) present in the district and school community.
- Building authentic and trusting relationships with members of the school system and local community, particularly those with different lived experiences.
- Regularly examining system, and school, data, disaggregated by race, ethnicity, and other characteristics for signs of inequity; conducting an equity audit; and engaging in a process of collaborative inquiry.
- Collaborating with members of the broader community, especially those furthest from justice, to routinely analyze and revise structures, policies and practices that uphold institutional racism and other systemic inequities.
- Creating structures and processes that sustain inclusive, student-centered decision-making, planning, learning and feedback.

Questions for reflection

- How do you build understanding and agency towards a vision of equity?
- How do the district's vision and mission drive strategic planning to ensure equitable opportunities and outcomes for students?
- How do you create the conditions for courageous conversations about systems, policies and practices that perpetuate inequities?
- How do you respond when challenged on issues of equity, bias and structural racism?



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Create a system of support for principals to grow as leaders of equitable schools. **

System leaders create a coherent approach to help principals continuously develop knowledge, mindsets and practices for equity leadership. They allow principals to develop their practice in a growth-oriented system that provides differentiated resources, experiences and support to lead equitable school communities.

Live this disposition by

- Responding with the tools, differentiated professional learning, job-embedded coaching and other supports principals need to be able to apply high-priority equity leadership practices.
- Ensuring principals experience professional learning that is coherently aligned to high-priority equity leadership practices.
- Ensuring professional learning, coaching and collaboration identifies inequities, addresses root causes and ultimately disrupts their existence.
- Fostering principal ownership of their own growth and improvement as equity-driven leaders.
- Developing and sustain structures for principals to collaborate to improve practice and rely on each other as support and resources.
- Ensuring principal supervisors are organized and work as part of a research-based approach to developing school leaders.

Questions for reflection

- How do principal professional learning opportunities ensure that intended changes in leader practice are responsive to the social, emotional and academic well-being of students in their schools, particularly those students furthest from justice?



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- How well does principal professional learning support examination of personal identities, experiences and biases that influence their collective leadership?
- In what ways do high-priority equity leadership practices drive principal goal-setting? To what extent do principals receive differentiated support focused on their development as leaders of equitable schools?
- How do you ensure that principal supervisors develop the requisite knowledge, skills and dispositions—and prioritize time appropriately—to support an equity-driven principal's growth?

5

Ensure equitable resource management. ***

Systems leaders analyze information and data to improve the effectiveness of programs, processes and the equitable use of resources. Systems leaders also work to ensure that principals use data on student learning and well-being, plus teaching practice, to determine strengths, needs and priorities aligned with the district's vision and mission. System leaders support principals in establishing measurable growth goals for school climate, student academic development, and student social and emotional development. They also ensure that the appropriate resources are available to achieve these goals.

Live this disposition by

- Analyzing data to inform reflection on progress towards goals, strengths, and priorities.
- Leveraging central office resources (e.g., people, expertise, time, space) to create equitable experiences and outcomes.
- Critically examining the mindsets, policies and practices that hinder leaders from attracting, hiring, and retaining a diverse staff that possesses understanding of the developmental needs of every student.
- Creating processes that promote the recruitment, support, and retention of diverse staff.
- Seeking, allocating, and managing resources to directly support minoritized populations.
- Strengthening partnerships with the community to inform and generate support for strategic priorities.
- Ensuring that staff learning is differentiated and responsive to the needs of students.



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- Providing multiple types of professional learning opportunities that support the goals and development of each staff member.
- Instituting processes for reflection and feedback that are strengths-based and focused on growth.

Questions for reflection

- How do you determine the needs of different subgroups of students across your district? And then, how do you decide how district resources are allocated?
- What evidence exists that the needs of those furthest from opportunity are prioritized when allocating resources (e.g., staff assignments and school funding)?
- What are your staff assignment policies? How are those policies, as well as your initiative for recruiting and retaining teachers, helping your district better reflect the diversity of your student population?

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Develop a strategic partnership between the central office and principals that is rooted in equity. ***

System leaders develop effective, integrated processes and services from the central office that ensure the primary role of principals is leading equitable schools. Principals are intentionally supported to develop equitable school communities, strengthen learning and teaching environments, build collective leadership and manage resources through an equity lens.

Live this disposition by

- Designing central office services to proactively understand, anticipate and respond to the context of each school.
- Providing schools with differentiated and integrated services rooted in an understanding of the strengths and goals for each school, particularly focusing on students furthest from justice.
- Taking an asset-based approach to systemwide planning involving schools, their leaders and the communities they serve.



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- Strengthening relationships within the central office that enable collaboration on behalf of school leaders and the creation of equitable schools.
- Developing and sustaining a culture of continuous improvement in the central office that promotes learning, adapting and responding to the context of schools and communities.
- Analyzing, reflecting, and acting on ways the actions of the central office perpetuate institutional racism, promote inequitable practices and establish barriers to addressing inequities.

Questions for reflection

- How well can central office staff explain the connection between their work and supporting principals as equity-driven leaders?
- To what extent do system leaders privilege the voice and experiences of students, particularly those students who are the furthest from justice, in their support of schools
- How do members of the central office learn about the assets, goals and context of schools – and use that knowledge to inform the design of differentiated and integrated services?
- How do high-priority equity leadership practices and an underlying theory of action for supporting principals inform what system leaders and team members do and don't ask of principals?
- In what ways do central office staff assess how well they make it possible for principals to focus time on learning for equitable experiences and outcomes for students?
- How do school system leaders invest in developing the skills, mindsets and dispositions of an equity-driven central office staff?

This document was created by Dr. Tauheedah F. Baker-Jones, Ed.L.D. for Teacher Impact Collaborative based on the work adapted from:

** The Leadership Academy's Equity Leadership Dispositions*

*** University of Washington, Center for Educational Leadership, Principal Support Framework*

**** University of Washington, Center for Educational Leadership, 4 Dimensions of School Leadership*