Excellence Through Equity

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Equality vs. Equity

The truth is – freedom should be normal for ALL our children.
I. The equity imperative

- Equity is: Giving students what they need to be successful
  - Academic and social
  - Recognizing that not all students are the same
    - They learn in different ways and at different paces
- The reproduction dilemma: Pervasive inequality makes it most likely that the backgrounds of kids will determine academic outcomes
- A commitment to equity requires us to stay focused on outcomes – academic and developmental
Equity is not:

- Lowering standards
- Treating all children the same
- Something only schools serving poor children or kids of color should be concerned about
- Choosing which students to serve – disadvantaged or affluent
Child Development – a holistic approach to learning (social and emotional factors) and the need for differentiation

Neuroscience – elasticity of brain requires the use of strategies to promote cognitive development and mitigate harmful factors in the environment

A Framework for Pursuing Equity

Relationships – Understanding and responding to the way students are affected by family, peers, community, and society
Obstacles to Pursuing Equity and excellence

- **Politics** – Lack of will to ensure that learning opportunities are available for *all* students
  - Access to good teachers, zero-sum perceptions
- **Traditions** – Practices that contribute to race/class disparities – tracking, special ed placements, discipline practices
- **Beliefs** – Low expectations, normalization of patterns, lack of internal accountability
Policy has been based on misunderstanding of causes of educational disparities

- The achievement gap is framed in terms of deficits rather than a lack of opportunity
- Schools must address internal obstacles to opportunity
- Schools must attempt to mitigate the effects of social inequality
  - Intergenerational poverty, unmet social needs
Key Questions:
1) What are the primary obstacles to educational opportunity in your school/district?
2) What are you doing to mitigate risks and expand opportunities for children in need?
Helping schools to improve

Capacity Building - a process that requires focus on measurable areas of improvement
- 5 essential ingredients serve as a guide for school improvement
  - A coherent instructional guidance system
  - Ongoing development of the professional capacity of staff
  - Strong parent-community-school ties
  - A student-centered learning climate/culture
  - Shared leadership to drive change
Reflection

- Rate how well is your school (or the schools you work with) doing on each of the five essential ingredients using a 1 – 5 scale (1 being the lowest).

- Discuss your ratings with your colleagues at the table.
Capacity building requires a balance between technical and adaptive work

- Technical work - A focus on managing the operations of the system, insuring that procedures are working and that employees are in compliance with policy.

- Adaptive work - A focus on the dynamic and complex nature of the work, its substance, meaning and purpose. Work guided by a long term vision, with medium and short term goals. An awareness that we are trying to achieve our goals in a constantly changing environment.

  - Ron Hiefitz - Leadership on the Line
Principle #1

The primary responsibility of leaders is to ensure that conditions conducive to good teaching and learning are in place and that all children have the opportunity to learn.
Essential Conditions for Teaching and Learning

- Safety and order – byproduct of relationships
- Respect, positive relationships – culture
- Clarity of purpose, shared mission
- Clarity about “effective teaching” – student-centered
- High morale
- Student buy-in/engagement
Students in control of learning at Hollenbeck Middle School, LA
We Must Focus on Engagement

Affective Engagement
• Interest
• Value

Behavioral Engagement
• Preparation
• Persistence
• Instrumental Help Seeking

Cognitive Engagement
• Deep Processing
• Meta-Cognition

Affective Engagement
Focus on Engagement

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The Learning Pyramid

- Lecture: 5%
- Reading: 10%
- Audio Visual: 20%
- Demonstration: 30%
- Discussion Group: 50%
- Practice By Doing: 75%
- Teaching Others: 90%

Average Learning Retention Rates

"Tell me, and I will forget. Teach me, and I will remember. Involve me, and I will learn."
Access to Deeper Learning is an equity issue

- Opportunity to utilize higher order thinking skills
  - Analysis, evaluation, application, creativity
- To undertake and learn through complex tasks and challenging texts
- To acquire skills needed for college
  - Independent research
  - Critical/analytical thinking
- To produce high-quality work that can serve as a reflection and proof of what a student has learned — mastery
Teachers focus on evidence of learning

- Make expectations clear and standards explicit
- Model and expose students to high-quality work
- Utilize diagnostic tools to check for understanding
- Learn about their students’ interests in order to make lessons culturally relevant
- Expect students to revise and resubmit work
- Solicit feedback and questions from students
- Analyze student work with a focus on evidence of competence and mastery, and with a willingness to reflect on efficacy of methods
Discussion:

- What is your school doing to motivate and engage students? What should it do?
- What is your school doing to support excellence in teaching?
- How do you address teaching across racial, cultural and socio-economic boundaries?
Principle # 2

- The skills of the staff and resources available to the schools must match the needs of students.
Working toward alignment

Student Needs
- Weak literacy
- Lack guidance and mentorship
- Growing population of ELL
- Many first generation pre-college students
- Transient, undocumented, etc.

Skills and Resources
- Literacy across curriculum
- Pro-active mentoring
- Trained staff in core subjects
- Intensive focus on college readiness and counseling
- Case management
Key Elements of the Brockton Strategy

- Shared leadership
- Concerted effort to obtain buy-in around the strategy
- A coherent strategy focused on student needs
- Differentiated professional development
- Follow through, examining the evidence, sticking with it
Key Questions in Brockton

- What are we teaching, how are we teaching it, and how do we know the students are actually learning it?
- What do our students need to know and be able to do to be successful on the MCAS, in their classes, and in their lives beyond school?
- We are not likely to get any additional staffing or resources, so what resources do we have now that we can use more effectively?
- What can we control, and what can’t we control?
“Brockton High School has every excuse for failure, serving a city plagued by crime, poverty, housing foreclosures, and homelessness… But Brockton High, by far the state’s largest public high school with 4,200 students, has found a success in recent years that has eluded many of the state’s urban schools: MCAS scores are soaring, earning the school state recognition as a symbol of urban hope.”

High leverage strategies

- 3rd grade reading proficiency with target interventions for students who fall below.
- College prep literacy and math for high school students to prevent remediation taught by teachers with track record of effectiveness.
- Grade level performance standards created with input from teachers.
Discussion

- Do the skills of your staff match the needs of your students? How do you know?
- How does your staff understand/explain race/class disparities among students?
- What high leverage strategies/interventions should be pursued?
Principle #3

- We know we are succeeding in closing the gap when the backgrounds of students (race and class) cease to be predictors of achievement.
PS 28 obtains highest gains in literacy and math in Brooklyn -2012
Key Elements of PS 28 Strategy

- Instructional leadership
- Parental support
- Community partnerships
- Ongoing focus on building the capacity of teachers
- Individualized support for students
Creating Partnerships with Parents

- Recognition of shared interests makes it possible to overcome these differences
  - Parents want the best for their children
  - Schools want to see students succeed
  - Need to clarify roles, rights and responsibilities in the partnership

- Social closure – Coleman’s research shows that students benefit most when parents and schools work together
  - Reinforcing the importance of education
Basic Requirements for Improving Relationships Between Parents and Schools

- Must be based on a recognition of mutual need, responsibility and respect
- Must be based on the recognition that all parents can help their children
- Must be based upon understanding and empathy for the situation confronting parents and families
- Schools need personnel who can communicate effectively with parents – language and cultural skills
- Are We Ready for Parental Involvement?
  - Are educators willing to engage in critical conversations about school quality?
Developing the Partnership

- Provide early opportunities for teachers and parents to meet on equal terms
  - Conversations about discipline problems should not be first encounter
- Provide support staff training in basic customer service – how to interact with parents and the public
- Effective use of the Parent–Teacher Conference
  - Provide staff with training on how to conduct productive meetings with parents
  - Sharing results of diagnostic assessments
  - Provide concrete information on how they can help their children
- Back-to-School Night
  - Creative strategies for explaining the goals and mission of the school and providing useful feedback on student performance
- In-take interviews with parent and student
  - Rights, responsibilities and opportunities
Discussion

- What are you doing to build stronger partnerships with parents? What kind of training does the staff need to build partnerships? Do parents of color trust your staff?

- Come up with three activities (or more) that could be undertaken to increase the knowledge of the staff about the needs and culture of children, parents and the community?
Closing the Gap in Abington, PA

- **Elements of the strategy**
  - Access to and support in advanced courses
  - Data-based decision making – what’s working, what’s not?
  - Focus on getting interventions right
  - Continuous professional development
  - Engaging students through extra curricular activities and electives
District leadership in Abington

- Collaborative problem solving (not pressure) with principals
- Leadership development through mentorship
- Embracing an equity vision with support from school board (moving beyond zero-sum scenarios)
  - De-tracking, expanded access to advanced courses
Incremental Progress
Implementing an equity agenda: Research Shows What Works

- Assign students who are behind academically to effective teachers
- Provide access to rigorous courses and increase academic support
  - AVID, MESA, double period classes, reduced emphasis on homework
- Develop early intervention systems to identify struggling students
- Provide extended learning time - after school (but not more of the same) and summer school
More of What Works

- Use extra curricular activities to build relationships and engage students in school
- Create advisories for all students
- Implement a discipline plan that promotes character, moral development and clear educational goals
- Develop a school year plan for parental involvement
  - Provide staff with training on how to work effectively with parents
Discussion

- What are you doing that evidence shows works at reducing disparities?
- What more should the district do to ensure a coherent strategy is in place at all schools?
- What more can the central office do to support school sites?
Principle #4

- The more you know about the children you serve the better you will be at meeting their needs and supporting their success.
What do you know about your students? Beyond stereotypes. Key questions:

- What are their lives like outside of school?
- How do they learn outside of school?
- What motivates and interests them?
- What challenges do they and their parents face?
- What are their unmet needs that may impact learning?
Creating powerful school cultures

- Beliefs, attitudes, norms, expectations and assumptions that guide actions
  - Ethos - the character, customs, habits that distinguish a school/community

- Sarason’s axiom: If you attempt to implement reforms w/o changing culture, nothing will change

- Highly successful schools have a culture that reinforces core values and promotes academic success
Creating a Student Centered Culture at SJHS

- Community building
- Collective decision making
- School-community partnerships
- Teacher empowerment
- Students evaluate teachers
- Results: 4th highest grad rate in LA, 95% college enrollment, no fights in 6 years
Creating a culture to counter the streets:
David Banks – Founder of Eagle Academy
Extended Learning at Eagle Academy
Engaged learners at Eagle
Every boy learns to play violin
Signs of a healthy school culture:

- Staff takes responsibility for student achievement
  - Does not blame students and parents for low performance
  - See teaching and learning connected
  - School has a coherent strategy for delivering instruction
- Staff is willing to collaborate and open to change
- Relations with parents are strong, genuine partnership
  - Based on respect and empathy. Educational goals are reinforced at home
- School rules and procedures are aligned with educational goals
  - Discipline is rooted in values, focus is on changing behavior
Normative patterns among students reinforce academic achievement

- Students “buy in”, think it’s cool to be smart
- Strong relationships between adults and students
- Deliberate strategies to counter stereotypes related to race, class, gender and academic achievement—“stereotype threats” addressed
- Disruption and defiance from students is rare
  - Numerous adults with moral authority
Safety and order cannot be disconnected from the academic mission

- Safety is a by-product of social relationships, not advanced security
  - Need to personalize learning environment
  - “At-risk” students must be connected to supportive adults
- Need to help students set goals for the future early
- Need to help students see the relevance and applicability of what they learn to “real life” concerns - career academies
- Student success more likely when:
  - Students are challenged
  - Receive guidance and have access to support
  - Can explore interests and identity within a supportive structure
Reactive vs. Preventative Discipline Practices

- **Reactive**
  - Rely heavily on isolation and exclusion
  - Engage parents after behavior problems are exhibited, not before
  - Focus on behavior infractions while overlooking underlying causes
  - Fail to respond to early indicators of serious behavior problems

- **Preventative**
  - School values and norms are clearly articulated and actively reinforced
  - Character development viewed as central to school mission
  - Attempt is made to ascertain causes of behavior problems
  - Interventions and punishments are designed to reinforce ethical behavior and reconnect students to learning
  - Parents and community are partners
Steps to Take to Transform School Culture

- Shared ownership of challenges - Use achievement data to make it clear why change is necessary
  - Set bench marks
  - Analyze patterns
- Hold a retreat with staff for team building, to set goals and devise plans on how to achieve them
  - Must find ways to win “buy-in”, consistency
- Agree upon shared practices, norms, rituals
- Engage all staff, parents and students in building the culture
  - Town hall meetings
Agency vs. Grit

**Grit**
- Hard work, persistence
- Individual attribute
- Ignores contextual barriers
- Hard to measure except after outcomes are achieved

**Agency**
- Based on critical thinking
- Includes help seeking, social capital
- Can be individual or collective in form
- Recognizes barriers and strategizes to confront
- Measureable through observation of actions and attitudes
Discussion

- How would you characterize the culture of your school? What adjectives would visitors use?
- Does your staff collaborate?
- Are students motivated to excel?
- How do you characterize relations between teachers and students, among staff, between staff and administration?
Principle #5

- Leaders must generate a sense of urgency about addressing the needs of all students and get buy-in from their staff about the need to improve outcomes.
Skills Needed by Principals

- Instructional leadership - adaptive
- Knowledge of finance and budget management - technical
- Public relations - adaptive
- Human Resources - both
- Data management/analysis - technical
- Strategic planning - both
- Knowledge of social welfare service delivery – both
- How to build a high functioning team - adaptive
What kind of leader are you?

1. Do you listen and figure out ways to get your employees and other stakeholders talking and sharing ideas?

2. Do you leverage strengths to achieve your team's goals?

3. Do you grant employees autonomy and let them take ownership of work outcomes?

4. Are you transparent and do you communicate everything you can to your people? Do you keep your team up-to-date, let them know why decisions are being made?
More questions

- 5. Do you take an active interest in others and make everyone feel included?
- 6. Do you provide ongoing feedback and let people know how well they're doing?
- 7. Do you help others grow and learn new skills? Do you know your employees' personal and professional needs?
- 8. How do you make sure that people understand the vision and do everything possible to support it?
Reflections

- What are your thoughts about your role as a leader based on these questions?
- What do you find most challenging about your leadership role?
Five Principles of Courageous Leadership

- Courage to act
- Getting to your core
- Making organizational meaning
- Assuring constancy of purpose
- Building sustainable relationships
Need for a Paradigm Shift

**Old Paradigm**
- Intelligence is innate
- Job of schools is to measure intelligence and sort accordingly
- Inequity in resource allocation: give the best resources to highest achievers
- Discipline used to weed out the “bad” kids

**New Paradigm**
- Intelligence and ability are influenced by opportunity
- It is the job of school to cultivate talent and ability among students
- Resources allocated based on student need
- Discipline used to reinforce school values and norms
Focus on the Right Questions:

- Instead of focusing on how to raise achievement we should ask: How can we get our students excited about learning?
- Instead of focusing on how to prepare our students for state exams we should ask: how do we prepare our students to be independent learners? What will they need to know to be successful in life?
- Instead of asking how to cover the curriculum we should ask: How will I make what I teach relevant and meaningful to students?
Embrace a vision for pursuing excellence through equity
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