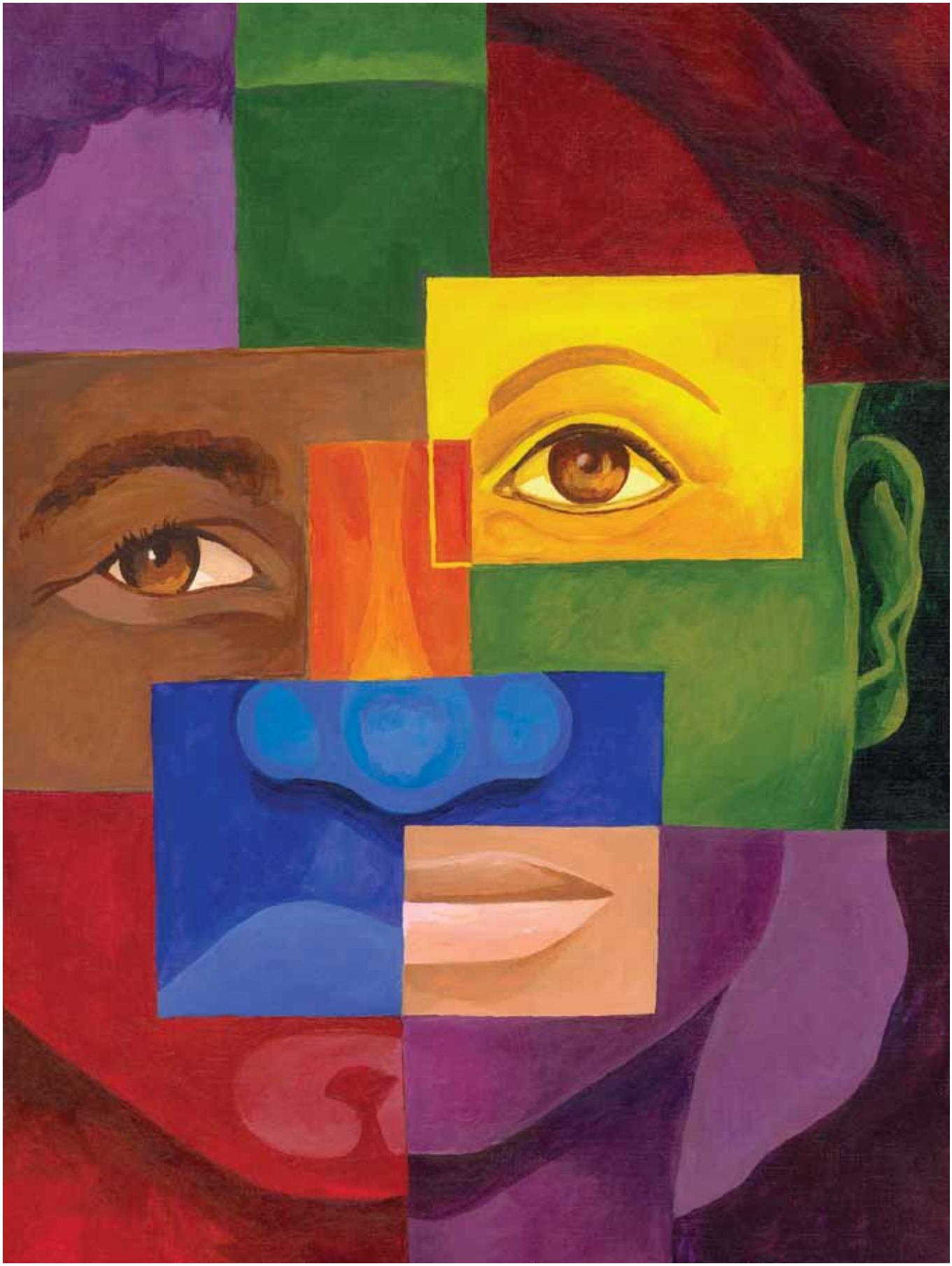

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LESSONS ON LEADING FOR EQUITY

Rob Larson and Rhonda Barton

Beaverton—a suburb of Portland, OR—is best known as the world headquarters of the sports apparel behemoth Nike. In his state of the city address, Mayor Denny Doyle described the community as "vibrant, friendly, welcoming, athletic, and responsible." Like many suburban communities across the country, however, Beaverton has been undergoing a steady transformation from a homogeneous, middle-income population to one that's increasingly ethnically and economically diverse. Nowhere is that more apparent than in Beaverton's classrooms.

Jeff Rose, the superintendent of the Beaverton School District, pointed out that when he first came to the district as a teacher in the early 1990s, most students were White. Hispanic students made up 6%–7% of the population and were the largest minority group. Today, Hispanics make up more than a quarter of the student body and Beaverton is on the verge of becoming a "minority majority" district, with almost half of all students coming from different racial and ethnic backgrounds. "That surprises many people," said Rose. "We have over 93 languages spoken in the district. We have some schools that have 6% poverty and some 90%; even some of our low-poverty schools often have 14 to 20 languages spoken, while some of our high-poverty schools may have 3 or 4 languages spoken."

Although student demographics have shifted, staff member demographics have not. To support school leaders and teachers in serving students of diverse backgrounds better, Beaverton has taken a number of steps, including joining with other Oregon school districts that are facing similar challenges in providing equitable educational opportunities for all students. Sixteen districts that serve more than a third of the state's students have formed the Oregon Leadership Network (OLN), the nation's only comprehensive education leadership development network with equity at its core (http://oln.educationnorthwest.org/).

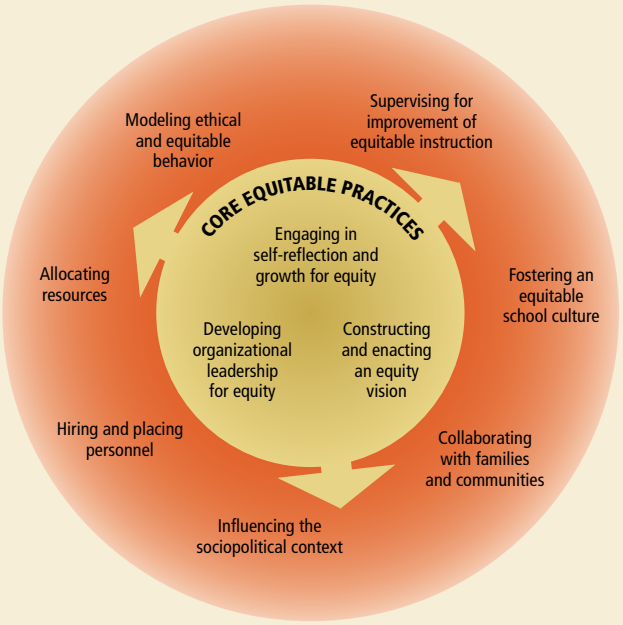
Founded about a dozen years ago, the OLN provides networking opportunities, professional development institutes, technical assistance, and other resources. It helps inform changes in state policy, including revisions to Oregon's

Equitable education begins with district and school leaders educating themselves about racial and cultural biases.

Understanding the difference between equality and equity and using disaggregated data to support decisions are key elements.

Staff development must be thorough and ongoing to result in real change.

Figure 1 **High-Leverage Equitable Practices**



administrator licensure programs and standards that now require evidence of demonstrating equitable practices. The group, which includes members of educational service districts, representatives of higher education, and community and business partners, also conducts research on issues, such as racially based disparities in disciplinary practices and graduation rates.

Most recently the OLN has collaborated on the development of the Leadership for Equity Assessment & Development (LEAD) Tool (http://leadtool.educationnorthwest.org/).

Now being tested by OLN members, the LEAD Tool is a research-based series of rubrics to guide school-based equity practices. Through the rubrics, members of a leadership team collectively examine their practices and enact the 10 high-leverage equitable practices most likely to eliminate race-, class-, and other group-based disparities in student opportunities and outcomes. (See figure 1.)

All of those activities have contributed to a few broad "lessons" for principals and other leaders who seek to address practices that marginalize students from underrepresented groups:

- Start with the leaders
- Understand the difference between equal and equitable
- Use disaggregated data to drive all decisions
- Provide high-quality staff development in equitable practices.

START WITH THE LEADERS

As in other areas of school improvement, efforts to address equity are driven by leaders at every level of the education system. Education leaders exert influence over key drivers of change: curricula, instructional practices, assessment and evaluation, and community involvement. Teacher leaders design and mobilize staff members for equity. School board members create policy structures to support implementation of equitable practices. By modeling equity beliefs in those areas, school and district leaders signal to the entire staff the importance of viewing policy and practice through a lens of equity.

In leading the change process, education leaders must be willing to confront racist language and racial stereotypes that are all too easily accepted in society. Too often, however, educators have no training or background in conducting the honest conversations that are essential to making real progress. If administrators attempt to engage all stakeholders in those conversations but do not yet have the skills to handle the sometimes-heated emotions and strong opinions that arise, they may actually do more harm than good.

Oregon's Tigard-Tualatin School District—an OLN member—began its journey toward equity by involving all administrators in a yearlong series of trainings focused on racial equity. The district established an equity leadership team to develop a framework for transformational change. Members included administrators from all levels, as well as teacher leaders of color. This group continues to meet monthly to examine district policies, structures, and systems through a lens of racial equity. The team's structure has been replicated within each school in the district, and each school-based team includes staff members who have the will and the skill to successfully teach students of all cultures. Six years later, those teams function at all levels and are realizing a slow but steady closing of the racial achievement gap.

Another OLN member, Portland Public Schools, now tests all principal applicants for their racial awareness and will not hire candidates who appear to lack the capacity to be leaders for equity. The 25-minute test is administered by a person of color, and applicants are asked about their first racially related experience and about specific experiences that have influenced their personal and professional thinking about race.

The tests are scored by several people at the highest levels of the district who are involved in supervising principals. "We're sending a clear message that you don't get hired as a principal in Portland Public Schools unless you can demonstrate that you're on a personal journey of developing a racial consciousness," said a senior district administrator. "You need to be far enough along in that journey to lead this work in our schools."

UNDERSTAND THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN *EQUAL* AND *EQUITABLE*

Equality and equity are closely related, but different, concepts. To understand their relationship, it may be helpful to think in terms of inputs (resources) and outputs (outcomes).

Equality emphasizes providing the same (or equal) resources to all. If all students get the same resources, justice is served through equal treatment and equal opportunity. Such a view may not address the fact that not all students start at the same place in terms of cognitive development and access to resources and supports. Nor do all educators start at the same place in terms of cultural awareness, racial consciousness, or understanding poverty. Although well-meaning, this approach often leads to disproportionate outputs and predictable results by race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status.

In an equity-based model, on the other hand, policymakers and educators intentionally adjust a variety of resources to better serve the highest-need students. The allocation of resources at the school and district level must go further to address inequality. That requires bold and intentional conversations about school structures, student supports, data use, professional learning, and instructional improvement that help meet individual student needs. Those conversations encourage schools to view each student—and each staff member—as an individual with needs,

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Resources

Equality and Justice for All? Examining Race in Education Scholarship. B. M. J. Brayboy, A. E. Castagno, & E. Maughan. 2007. *Review of Research in Education, 31*(1), 159–194.

The Importance of Disaggregating Student Data. National Center for Mental Health Promotion and Youth Violence Prevention. 2012. Retrieved from www.promoteprevent.org/publications/prevention-briefs/importance-disaggregating-student-data

Making Sense of All Your Data. M. A. Lachat, M. Williams, & S. C. Smith. 2006. *Principal Leadership, 7*(2), 16–21. Retrieved from www.nassp.org/portals/0/content/54342.pdf

National Equity Project http://nationalequityproject.org/

Oregon Leadership Network
http://oln.educationnorthwest.org/events

Pacific Education Group
www.pacificeducationalgroup.com/public/pages/home

The Principal's Role in Professional Development for Social Justice: An Empirically-Based Transformative Framework. B. W. Kose. 2009. *Urban Education, 44*(6), 628–663

Solving the Equity-Equality Conceptual Dilemma: A New Model for Analysis of the Educational Process. O. Espinoza. 2007. *Educational Research, 49*(4), 343–363.

The Third Annual Brown Lecture in Education Research—The Flat Earth and Education: How America's Commitment to Equity Will Determine Our Future. L. Darling-Hammond. 2007. *Educational Researcher, 36*(6), 318–334.

skills, and a background that is unique to him or her. When implemented effectively, equitable practices can create greater equality of outcomes. For example, Portland Public Schools is intentional and systematic in reviewing their policies and practices, which are rooted in a board-adopted racial educational equity policy (www.pps.k12.or.us/news/6097.htm).

USE DISAGGREGATED DATA TO DRIVE ALL DECISIONS

Although data use is now embedded in the practice of most schools and districts, school leaders struggle to explicitly examine and act on data that have been disaggregated by race and ethnicity. Achieving educational equity demands that we do just that. To intentionally adjust school practices, which is fundamental to creating more equitable

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practices and outcomes, educators must be willing to look at the hard facts of disparities in outcomes that are related to race, ethnicity, culture, and poverty.

For example, newly released data from the US Department of Education show that from 2009 to 2010, Black students, especially boys, were more likely to be suspended or expelled than White students. One in five Black boys and more than 1 in 10 Black girls received an out-of-school suspension. Overall, Black students were three and a half times more likely to be suspended or expelled than their White peers.

The following questions may be useful in beginning an equity-focused, data-based inquiry:

- Have we engaged the voices of diverse participants and stakeholders in planning and implementing this initiative?
- How do we show that we believe that all students can learn?
- What evidence accounts for the disparities among student subgroups?
- Can we articulate what we need to do to more effectively teach those students with whom we have been least successful?
- Why do disparities among student subgroups persist?

PROVIDE HIGH-QUALITY STAFF DEVELOPMENT IN EQUITABLE PRACTICES

Directly confronting issues of race, ethnicity, and social class encourages educators to consider whether student failure is the result of fundamental injustices within the system itself. Although raising consciousness is a first step, it must be followed by high-quality professional development that can help educators bring equity practices into the classroom.

One example of a classroom-focused effort is developing culturally relevant lessons that connect to students' diverse traditions. Unlike multicultural education that incorporates all of the world's cultural and ethnic diversity into lessons, culturally

Leading for equity is hard, yet inspiring, work.

relevant teaching specifically draws on the understanding, views, concepts, and ways of knowing of the students who are in a particular class or school.

As a first step in implementing culturally relevant teaching, teachers and administrators must understand that everyone views the world through a cultural lens. Each staff member must examine how his or her cultural perspective affects the way he or she sees students and their families. Each must ask, What self-exploration do I need to do?

After probing their personal beliefs, staff members must think about what additional information they need to learn about their students, such as their cultural backgrounds and perspectives and their personal and family values. Staff members must also think about how they can demonstrate that students', families', and community members' cultural framing and knowledge are important to the school community. Staff members must know how they can tap their students' cultural strengths and ensure that they are not teaching on the basis of stereotypes.

Once they've explored their own cultural lenses and those of their students, staff members can begin to build relationships and communities in their classrooms using activities that help staff members and students know one another better and learn from each other. This process takes time. Experience shows that it's best to start small and then build up to larger activities and projects.

In the Beaverton School District, for example, teachers regularly meet to share classroom action-research projects that focus on equity issues and the implementation of solutions to meet the needs of each student. Other areas for professional development might include how to provide conceptual scaffolding for students who need it and how to ensure that assessments do not contain items that call for background knowledge that certain students may lack. Those efforts can also include rethinking schoolwide practices that lead to placing racial and cultural minority students in low-rigor curricular tracks. Many schools have embedded equity practices into their models for identifying individual student interventions and for determining which students need special education services.

Conclusion

Leading for equity is hard, yet inspiring, work. It requires thoughtful and bold conversations about race and poverty; close examination of policies and practices; and astute attention paid to a variety of data and evidence of student achievement, progress, and success. Above all, it requires a willingness to look deeply at one's beliefs and attitudes and to reflect on how those attitudes play out in daily practice.

Viewing practice through a lens of equity challenges educators to acknowledge that the need to close achievement gaps and address disparities that continue to undermine education systems isn't driven simply by federal or state mandates. Rather, it comes from personal and organizational transformation that is focused on leadership development and data-infused equitable practices. **PL**

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