



# Tackling Inequitable Educational Policies & Practices: The Design & Implementation of the District-Level Diagnostic

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**Tackling Inequitable Educational Policies & Practices:**  
*The Design & Implementation of The District-Level Diagnostic*

**Doctor of Education Leadership (Ed.L.D.) Capstone**

**Submitted by**

**Carole Learned-Miller**

**To the Harvard Graduate School of Education in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education Leadership.**

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## I. Abstract

Throughout the nation, enormous racial and socio-economic achievement and opportunity gaps endure in rural, urban and suburban communities. During the course of my residency, I sought to uncover what leadership attributes and strategies allow some superintendents to effectively close those gaps and make their districts more equitable. I then used that information to design a district-level equity diagnostic for the NYC Leadership Academy (NYCLA). NYCLA specializes in preparing and supporting leaders across the country who are committed to breaking down academic barriers for historically marginalized students and to creating enriching and inclusive schools for students.

The tool is designed to help superintendents who are interested in forwarding equity work, but who need guidance to diagnose and address their districts' most urgent inequities. The district-level diagnostic establishes a process for analyzing data and policies for inequities districts are perpetuating and developing an action plan to address those inequities. It includes *The Guidebook*, which details every step of the process as well as political considerations for leading the work strategically, and *The Playbook*, which has specific examples of what an equitable district would ideally look like. Superintendents who reviewed the diagnostic agreed it provides an effective pathway for unpacking inequities and for designing an action plan to address them. A pilot has shown that coaching around political context and leadership of challenging conversations about race are critical to the successful implementation of the diagnostic.

## **II. Introduction**

This capstone will introduce you to the New York City Leadership Academy, the site of my leadership “strategic project” as well as to the problems of practice the strategic project was designed to address. Next there will be a summary of the literature and research needed to lead this project. Finally this capstone will address the strategic project’s outcomes as well as the implications those outcomes have for the site, the New York City Leadership Academy, for the education sector and for my own leadership. The ambidextrous organizations framework will be used to analyze the site’s ability to support the development of standardized tools and services, such as my strategic project. Major findings include 1) the importance of political and strategic coaching when engaging in equity work and 2) the critical need for organizations to design their services around the stated needs of their clients.

### **Overview of The New York City Leadership Academy**

My residency site is the New York City Leadership Academy (NYCLA), a non-profit located in Long Island City, New York. NYCLA was founded in 2003 by the New York City Department of Education under the leadership of Chancellor Joel Klein. It was funded by foundation and corporate support as well as a grant from the Wallace Foundation (I. Zardoya, personal communication, March 23, 2018). Originally, NYCLA was designed to train a large number of highly effective New York City principals through the Aspiring Principals Program (APP) (New York City Department of Education, 2003).

Over the last ten years, NYCLA has become an ambidextrous organization. Ambidextrous organizations, explained in more depth later in this paper, continue to

market and profit from their traditional services, while also developing entirely new services (O'Reilly & Tushman, 2004). While continuing to develop and coach principals, the organization has also pivoted and expanded its market in new directions. NYCLA is still coaching principals in New York City, but it has also scaled its work and now prepares leaders across the country. NYCLA has now trained principal supervisors, central office administrators and superintendents in 32 states. The organization is also developing standardized tools that leaders can use, with limited support from NYCLA, to improve their practice and make their districts more equitable. My strategic project, the design of a district-level diagnostic process, is an example of this work stream.

NYCLA's shift in strategy happened in part because the current leader of the New York City public schools, Chancellor Carmen Fariña, is now relying on principal preparation programs housed at the NYCDOE's Office of Leadership (Benavides, 2016; Zimmerman, 2017; D. Hay, personal communication, January 31, 2018) as opposed to external organizations like NYCLA. She recently cancelled a partnership with a non-profit, TNTP, engaged in training New York City teachers as well (Zimmerman, 2017). In addition, the Chancellor has also slowed the number of school closings and new school openings. The decrease of new school openings combined with the decrease of school closings reduced the need for aspiring principals, especially founding principals (Benavides, 2016; M. Rice-Boothe, personal communication, December 5, 2017; D. Hay, personal communication, January 31, 2018). As a result, NYCLA has graduated fewer and fewer new leaders from the APP program. While there were 90 aspiring principals in the first APP class, only 13 graduated in the final class of 2017 (New York City Department of Education, 2003; Zimmerman, 2017).



At the helm of NYCLA is President and CEO, Irma Zardoya. Ms. Zardoya began her career in education as a bilingual teacher and was the principal of The Bilingual School in New York City for nine years. She later served as a superintendent in the Bronx, where she supervised 134 schools. Ms. Zardoya also worked as the Executive Director of the New York City Department of Education's Office of Achievement before leading NYCLA (New York City Leadership Academy, 2017c).

NYCLA has three divisions: client services, innovation and organizational development, and operations (M. Rice-Boothe, personal communication, December 5, 2017). Its leadership is made up of 8 cabinet members who represent the organization's major areas of focus: client engagement, school leadership, strategy, leadership coaching, finance and district leadership. There are approximately sixty staff members with the largest number working as leadership coaches (New York City Leadership Academy, 2017c).

Seventy-five percent of NYCLA's work is "fee for service" and is paid by the districts it serves. The remaining twenty-five percent of its services are funded by philanthropy (N. Gutierrez, personal communication, October 20, 2017). During the 2016 fiscal year, NYCLA's work was underwritten by American Express, the Booth Ferris Foundation, the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the New York Community Trust, the RGK Foundation, the US Department of Education and the Wallace Foundation (New York City Leadership Academy, 2017a).

### **NYCLA's Equity Focus**

While NYCLA always has been committed to equity, the organization has further articulated this commitment both internally and externally. NYCLA is now focused on

developing leaders who see racial equity as the path to excellence for all children (M. Rice-Boothe, personal communication, December 5, 2017). According to CEO Irma Zardoya, this more intentional focus on racial equity came out of the strategic planning process that took place when NYCLA shifted from a principal training program in New York City to a national systems-level leadership organization. NYCLA’s leadership recognized that, in order to effectively train district leaders, they would have to address racial equity specifically. Ms. Zardoya explained that, while racial equity had long been “embedded in their curricula”, it now had to “become transparent” (I. Zardoya, personal communication, March 23, 2018). Evidence of this shift can be found in their revised mission and vision statement.

#### *Vision*

*At NYCLA, we envision a nation where every school and school system is led by transformational leaders who prepare all children, especially the traditionally underserved, for success.*

#### *Mission*

*We build the capacity of educational leaders, at every level of the system, to confront inequities and create the conditions necessary for all students to thrive.*

Other evidence of their increased focus on equity was the *Leading for Equity Convening* that NYCLA led in December of 2016. This conference, sponsored by the Carnegie Corporation, brought 60 district-level leaders, including 12 superintendents, from 28 districts across the country (New York City Leadership Academy, 2017a). There is also a strategic plan focused on equity. Additionally, the organization’s whole staff

meetings include trainings on how to “support staff members in their journey to racial awareness while building their skills to facilitate conversations about race” (M. Rice-Boothe, personal communication, March 1, 2018).

NYCLA updated their principal standards and the principal supervisor standards so that they more comprehensively include “equity leadership practices.” This means that NYCLA coaches leaders to identify their own biases and use an equity lens when examining data with staff and creating policies. The Leadership Performance Planning Worksheet (LPPW) that is used by NYCLA’s coaches now has an equity component as well.

NYCLA designed a “Leading for Equity” school-level diagnostic tool, the predecessor to my strategic project, to assist principals in reflecting on their own practices and how they can make their schools more equitable. It involves a self-assessment as well as an assessment for the school’s stakeholders to complete in order to analyze how effectively the principal prioritizes and forward issues of equity. Leading for Equity also provides coaching support to help the principal improve her practice based on the results of the assessments.

The organization also developed a series of “Equity Sims,” or equity-related simulations. These were designed for school and district leaders to use with their colleagues in order to experience and discuss challenging questions of equity, especially racial equity. NYCLA staff also developed an Equity Logic Model that illustrates the long and short-term impacts NYCLA plans to make on educators and students.

Additionally, in November 2016, NYCLA launched a new blog on leadership and equity called *Leadership Insights*. The blog gives NYCLA’s practitioners and experts a

venue in which to share their personal narratives and success stories forwarding equity in their districts.

NYCLA developed an organizational definition of equity as well. It reads, “Equity for us means that children and adults receive what they each need to achieve their potential, and that their race, culture, and other characteristics of their identity do not prevent access to opportunities and resources” (New York City Leadership Academy Client Services, 2017). Additionally, NYCLA designed its own “Equity Theory of Action” (see below) for the organization.

**IF: NYCLA partners with district and school leaders to**

- Develop will, skill, knowledge, and capacity to eliminate racial disparities among students
- Examine race and address racism in districts, schools, classrooms, and the communities they serve
- Courageously and strategically challenge their students, school staff, educators, and communities to examine a) their own and others’ racial biases, b) the inequities affecting students’ well-being and academic success, and c) institutional racism
- Implement social, emotional, instructional, and assessment practices that improve students’ educational outcomes and experiences

**THEN: District and school leaders with whom NYCLA partners will:**

- Take intentional steps to eliminate personal bias, institutional racism, & racial disparities among students

- Promote each student’s well-being and academic success
- Create and lead equitable, intellectually rigorous, and culturally responsive learning environments

In all of these ways, NYCLA has made clear in the last two years their commitment to equity, specifically racial equity. My charge as resident has been to create a service that helps NYCLA test this theory of action and assists NYCLA in coming closer to meeting its equity goals.

### **NYCLA’s Problems of Practice**

During the spring and summer months of 2017, I spoke with senior members of NYCLA’s staff about the problems of practice they wanted my strategic project to address. During a meeting with Dr. Kathleen Drucker, Associate Vice President, Research, Evaluation and Impact, she said, “We want to encourage districts to grapple and find entry points [into equity conversations]” (K. Drucker, personal communication, August 23, 2017). She believed NYCLA could meet this need by “providing leaders with a structure through which to tackle overwhelming problems, to help wade through murky issues and to help with narrowing [the topics to focus on at one time]” (K. Drucker, personal communication, August 23, 2017).

Kathy Nadurak, NYCLA’s Executive Vice President, explained the problems NYCLA sought to address as, “A road map for taking this [equity] work on” (K. Nadurak, personal communication, August 24, 2017). Ms. Nadurak hoped that NYCLA could create a “do it yourself manual so superintendents are not flying blind” and that it will be “really off the shelf so that people can access it” (K. Nadurak, personal communication, August 24, 2017). My supervisor, Mary Rice-Boothe, Vice President of District Leadership Support,

said she hoped that the diagnostic would assist leaders in “doing a deep dive into the permanent structures that promote racism” (M. Rice-Boothe, personal communication, June 3, 2017). As a result, we developed the following problems of practice for the site and for the sector.

### **Problems of Practice for the Sector**

I. Significant progress diminishing achievement and opportunity gaps in districts is rarely made because the underlying policies promote institutional racism and inequities for children of color, low-income children and their families.

II. Superintendents do not have sufficient research-based tools or training for 1) examining their district’s policies and practices, 2) identifying those that promote inequities and 3) redesigning those policies and practices so that they increase access and equity.

III. Superintendents lack support engaging in difficult equity conversations with communities that may be suspicious of and/or resistant to change.

### **Problems of Practice for Site**

I. As NYCLA has pivoted to become a national organization, the capacity of the team has been stretched and many staff members are spending large amounts of time traveling.

II. While our mission at NYCLA is to use leadership as a lever for equity, staff members across our organization have a varying level of competence in discussing racial equity.

III. NYCLA hopes to have impact across the country, however, the cost of NYCLA’s customized services, which include travel costs for NYCLA’s facilitators, is too expensive for many districts. Therefore, the tool developed needs to be useful without requiring substantial in-person support by NYCLA.

## **Strategic Project**

The strategic project, the development of a district-level diagnostic and accompanying training and coaching, has been designed to solve these problems of practice for the sector and for NYCLA. As for the sector's problems of practice, the diagnostic is a process for superintendents and their committees to use in order to analyze their data and policies. The objective is to locate inequities their practices and policies are perpetuating and develop an action plan to address those inequities. The diagnostic also supports districts in choosing to change the areas of greatest leverage within their particular districts.

The diagnostic has four components. It includes two guides, *The Guidebook* and *The Playbook*, as well as an initial training and ongoing coaching. *The Guidebook*, details every step of the process as well as political advice for leading the work strategically. *The Playbook* has specific, researched-based examples, "exemplars", of what an equitable district would ideally look like. *The Guidebook* and *The Playbook* can be found in the Appendices B and E.

The district-level equity diagnostic is based on current literature as well as extensive interviews with superintendents from around the country who have successfully closed achievement and opportunity gaps in their districts. The diagnostic also walks the superintendent and her team through the process of determining an action plan with a timeline and accountability measures. The action plan charts out both short term "quick wins" and long term projects.

A NYCLA facilitator will offer support to superintendents (or their designees) on how to use the diagnostic as well as how to facilitate courageous conversations about inequities as they arise. Additionally, the facilitator will offer ongoing political coaching throughout the process. For all of these reasons, this diagnostic will provide the sector

with a solution to its problem of practice by 1) gathering the research for closing gaps in one place, 2) by providing superintendents with a process for analyzing their data and policies and 3) the necessary political guidance to target and eliminate their districts' inequities. NYCLA will develop the capacity to give this political support by spending the necessary time, through a pre-diagnostic meeting and virtual coaching, to understand the local district's context and political challenges.

Additionally, the diagnostic will provide a solution for the NYCLA's problem of practice. It will do this by 1) creating a standardized tool that does not require a NYCLA facilitator to travel, 2) training a cross-functional team at NYCLA how to use the diagnostic and, hence, discuss racial equity, with districts and 3) being affordable and, thus, accessible to districts across the nation.

As the leader of this project at NYCLA, it was my responsibility to locate and interview superintendents who have been successful eliminating inequities, to gather the research necessary to design the tool and the training, to lead groups of expert colleagues in and outside of NYCLA to review it, and to revise it based on feedback. It has also been my responsibility to run the pilot and act as the facilitator and coach for the pilot district as they engage in the diagnostic process. I am responsible for assessing the successes and failures of the pilot and using those to revise the final diagnostic. Finally, I am responsible for working with the Finance Department at NYCLA to assist them in marketing the diagnostic.

### **Value Proposition**

There was a clear value proposition for the development of my strategic project. Across the country, superintendents attempting to engage in equity work often find



themselves struggling to maintain community support. The political ramifications for addressing issues of excellence and racial equity can be very costly, often leading to serious conflicts with members of school committees and communities. [For this reason, a solid understanding of the local context when coaching superintendents through the diagnostic, became more and more apparent throughout the course of its development.]

The average length of a superintendency is already a short 5.5 years with fifteen percent of all superintendencies turning over annually (American Association of School Administrators, 2017). Urban superintendents have an even shorter tenure of just over three years (3.18 years) according to a report by the Council of Great City Schools (Council of Great City Schools, 2014). In California, between the years of 2006 – 2009, more than 70% of all superintendents in the biggest districts resigned or were fired. In California's smaller districts, there was also a staggering turnover rate of 45% (Hackett, 2015).

During my interviews with superintendents across the country, many discussed how one's tenure was even more at risk when one takes on issues of equity. As Valeria Silva, who was successful in forwarding equity work as superintendent of the St. Paul, MN, Public Schools but who then did not have her contract renewed, explained, "Equity is a very sexy word, but it requires changes that will eventually probably make you lose your job". Additionally she said, "When you're a change agent, your time is going to be limited. You'll push and push until people get rid of you--but they can't go back [on equity after you leave]" (V. Silva, personal communication, October 17, 2017). The goal of my strategic project is to develop a diagnostic tool that offers superintendents guidance about how to analyze the root causes behind their district's inequities and to be strategic in addressing them. The diagnostic and the coaching that accompanies it also offer advice for involving

the community in this important work. As a result, I also developed an additional political theory of action during the development of this diagnostic. It is, “If the community is involved in and supports the work, superintendents will be better able to stay in their leadership positions long term and accomplish more sustainable equity work.”

### **III. Review of Knowledge for Action (RKA)**

#### **Overview**

My RKA has three components. These areas of research were necessary for the development of my strategic project, the district-level equity diagnostic. The first component of the RKA details what the literature indicates are the most effective ways to minimize disparities. The second component reviews other tools available for districts engaging in equity work and why those tools were not sufficient. The third area is a description of ambidextrous organizations, which I use as a framework for examining the ways NYCLA is structured to support new standardized services such as the diagnostic.

#### **A. Content Literature**

An investigation of the literature shows that there are research-based practices that consistently make districts more equitable by closing opportunity and achievement gaps. The importance of many of these same practices (e.g. replacing ‘zero tolerance’ discipline policies with restorative practices) was reinforced in the superintendent interviews I conducted during the development of the diagnostic. Additionally, my own experiences as a leader and my work at the Massachusetts Department of Education furthered my beliefs in these practices. As a result, these practices are listed as “exemplars” *The Playbook* [See Appendix E]. These practices are grouped into “focus topics” [See Figure One] in the district-level equity diagnostic, my strategic project. The literature research base for each of

the exemplars and their associated focus topics is detailed below and in *The Playbook* [See Appendix E].

I originally started with a larger list of focus topics. However, the final ten focus topics were the ones most regularly raised by superintendents in my interviews and found in the literature as the most critical areas in which to address inequities. There were also additional important topics that I was able to weave into the diagnostic in other ways. For example, I made “early childhood” and “budgeting” subtopics [called “commitments” in *The Guidebook*] within each of the focus topics. Additionally, as I was writing the exemplars, I found there were many redundancies so I folded multiple areas together such as the “development of a respectful, culturally responsive curriculum” with “cultural competency” training. I also folded “developing a leadership pipeline” into “personnel”. Topics related to political strategy, such as working with members of the school board, are incorporated into *The Guidebook*. This made the set of exemplars in *The Playbook* much tighter while avoiding redundancy and loss of content.

Please see Figure One below for the experts in the field and the literature that most impacted the inclusion of each of the focus topics.

**Figure One. Focus Topics Chart.**

Focus Topic	Literature	Expert in Field
1. Cultural Competency, Understanding of Bias and the Development of a Respectful Curriculum.	Fergus, E. (2017). <i>Solving disproportionality and achieving equity: A leader’s guide to using data to change hearts and minds</i> . Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Publishing.  Gay, G. (2002). Preparing for culturally responsive teaching. <i>Journal of Teacher Education</i> , 53, 106–116. doi:10.1177/0022487102053002003	Newton, MA, Public Schools, Former Superintendent, Dr. Irwin Blumer.
2. Pedagogical Skill and High Standards for All Students	Peterkin, R., Jewell-Sherman, D., Kelley, L. & Boozer, L. (2011). <i>Every child, every classroom, every day: School leaders who are making equity a reality</i> . San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.  Fergus, E. (2017). <i>Solving disproportionality and achieving equity: A leader’s guide to using data to change hearts and minds</i> . Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Publishing.	Harvard University, Graduate School of Education, Professors, Dr. Richard Elmore, Dr. Jewell-Sherman, Dr. Liz City and Dr. Andres Alonso

	Smith, R. & Brazer, S.D. (2016) <i>Striving for equity: District leadership for narrowing opportunity and achievement gaps</i> . Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.	
3. Collective Action with Community Organizations with Shared Focuses	Kania, J. & Kramer, M. (2011). Collective Impact. <i>Stanford Social Innovation Review</i> . Winter.  Ferguson, R. & Lamback, S. (2014) Creating pathways to prosperity: A blueprint for action. The Harvard Achievement Gap Initiative. June 2014.	Harvard University, Kennedy School of Government, Professor, Dr. Ronald Ferguson
4. Respectful and inclusive parent involvement	Thiers, N. (2017). Unlocking families' potential: A conversation with Karen L. Mapp. <i>Educational Leadership</i> , 75(1), 40-44.	Harvard University, Graduate School of Education, Professor, Dr. Karen Mapp
5. Transportation	In my own 2016 interviews with 20 of the METCO directors in Massachusetts, transportation was mentioned as key for ensuring equity in every interview.	Massachusetts Department of Education, Senior Associate Commissioner, Cliff Chuang
6. Enrollment	See Equity Reporting in ESSA which refers to ESEA section 1111(g)(1)(B). Retrieved at <a href="https://www.ed.gov/essa?src=rn">https://www.ed.gov/essa?src=rn</a>  My own research, including that for the following article: Learned-Miller, C. (2016) Dallas Independent School District: Integration as innovation. The Century Foundation. Retrieved at <a href="https://tcf.org/content/report/dallas-independent-school-district/">https://tcf.org/content/report/dallas-independent-school-district/</a>	Senior Fellow, The Century Foundation, Richard Kahlenburg
7. Special Education	Ferguson, R., Ballantine, A., Bradshaw, R., & Krontiris, C. (2015). Narrowing achievement gaps in Lexington public schools. Report of the Achievement Gap Initiative at Harvard University.  Fergus, E. (2017). <i>Solving disproportionality and achieving equity: A leader's guide to using data to change hearts and minds</i> . Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Publishing.	Saint Paul, MN, Public Schools, Former Superintendent, Valeria Silva and Lexington, MA Former Superintendent of Schools, Paul Ash
8. Personnel & Leadership Pipeline	Padamsee, X. & Crowe, B. (2017) Unrealized impact: The case for diversity, equity and inclusion. Promise54. Retrieved at <a href="http://www.unrealizedimpact.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Unrealized_Impact-Final-072017.pdf">http://www.unrealizedimpact.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Unrealized_Impact-Final-072017.pdf</a>	Senior Associate Commissioner Chuang, Massachusetts Department of Education
9. Discipline	Massachusetts law and regulations regarding discipline disparities. These were enacted while I was working at ESE so I was able to be involved in the implementation: <a href="http://www.doe.mass.edu/lawsregs/advisory/discipline/StudentDiscipline.html">http://www.doe.mass.edu/lawsregs/advisory/discipline/StudentDiscipline.html</a>  Fergus, E. (2017). <i>Solving disproportionality and achieving equity: A leader's guide to using data to change hearts and minds</i> . Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Publishing.	Former Commissioner Chester, Senior Associate Commissioner Chuang, Massachusetts Department of Education
10. Scheduling	Johnson, K. & Williams, L. (2015) <i>When treating all the kids the same is the real problem: Educational leadership and the 21<sup>st</sup> century dilemma of difference</i> . Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Publishing.	Superintendent of Andover, MA, Public Schools, Sheldon Berman

At this point, it is impossible to know if these focus topics are comprehensive and they may need to be updated over time. However, early evidence is encouraging. All data sets and policies, highlighting leaders' most urgent equity concerns (that have been

brought to us since the diagnostic has been developed) have been addressed by the ten focus topics and their corresponding exemplars (best practices) in *The Playbook*.

The following section will address five of the focus topics in detail. I choose five very different areas to show the breadth of the research that was conducted. For each, I will share both the common inequities related to each topic as well as the practices that research indicates are viable solutions.

### **Adult Growth & Development: Cultural Competency, Understanding of Bias and the Development of a Respectful Curriculum.**

Improving the cultural competence of one's educators is one critical step leaders can take to make their districts more equitable. Culturally competent educators have been trained to understand their own biases and have an awareness of how those biases could potentially, if not interrupted, impact their teaching. "Research suggests that whether a teacher is aware of his or her own bias, or it is embedded subconsciously within cognitive or affective schema, there may well be implications for children's education. Self-awareness of implicit bias, therefore, surfaces as critically important for teachers, in order to rectify the potential for inequitable interaction and practice" (Clark & Zygmunt, 2014, p. 148).

While educators may hold beliefs that all children are the same and should be treated as such or that children of color need stricter oversight, both of these approaches have now been proven faulty. In fact, these approaches illustrate biases frequently held by educators. Three biases that are especially important for teachers and principals to be aware of, according to researcher Edward Fergus, are colorblindness, poverty disciplining and deficit thinking. **Colorblindness** "dangerously sustains a white cultural frame as the mode of looking at everything" and ignores the rich and varied cultural backgrounds as well as the

lived experiences of people of color (Fergus, 2017, p. 32). The white cultural frame views experiences through a lens of individualism and minimizes the impact that racist and oppressive practices and policies have had on people of color. Fergus explains the white cultural frame as being a way of looking at the world from the lived experience of a white person and ignoring the reality of living as a person of color. **Poverty disciplining** can be found in many schools across the country with zero tolerance behavior policies that often result in high rates of suspension. The theory behind poverty disciplining is that the behavior of low-income children must be adjusted so that they can be productive adults. Similar to colorblindness, people exhibiting this bias, believe that their students and their families live in poverty because of individual choices and behaviors rather than institutional racism. Finally, a “**deficit ideology** blames the group for the conditions they find themselves experiencing” (Fergus, 2017, p. 38). This bias can be seen when leaders are unconcerned by disparities in achievement data because they believe children of color or low-income children cannot be expected to achieve at high levels (Fergus, 2017). While not all administrators harbor these biases, it is critical that leaders be able to recognize them when they do exist in their teachers and in themselves. While addressing disruptive or disrespectful behavior is necessary to ensure a safe school, educators should strive to do so in a bias-free manner.

Culturally competent educators avoid the use of “coded language”, such as the word “minority” and instead use language that respectfully and accurately addresses students’ race and ethnicity (Johnson & Williams, 2015, p. 4). “When we continue to use terms like ‘minority’ without challenging our thinking and assumptions, we are less critical of standing policies, practices and procedures” (Johnson & Williams, 2015, p. 5). The use of this coded

language allows us to be comfortable with “the normalization of failure” (Johnson & Williams, 2015; Boykin & Noguera, 2011). More specific, accurate terms such as African American and Latino demonstrate a respectful awareness of students’ identities. Some students also will identify with their families original country of heritage and prefer terms such as Dominican, Jamaican or Mexican.

Teachers must also understand stereotype threat and how it can impact their students’ achievement. Stereotype threat is the awareness children and adults have of the stereotypes the society has about their identity groups including their gender, race and/or ethnic groups (Steele, 2010). This awareness is draining and demoralizing for students and can negatively impact their achievement. (Steele, 2010). Culturally competent teachers can employ strategies to minimize any negative effects of stereotype threat in their classrooms. Some of these strategies include telling students of color that they hold them to the highest standards and offering specific guidance about how students can meet those high standards (Steele, 2010). “Affirmation interventions”, such as having students write about their personal values at the beginning of a new school term, or – for students of color - hearing from older, successful students of color, has also been found to reduce the negative impact of stereotype threat and significantly decrease the achievement gap between white students and students of color (Steele, 2010).

Closely related to these approaches for reducing stereotype threat are culturally responsive teaching practices. Culturally responsive teaching has five critical components, including, “developing a knowledge base about cultural diversity, including ethnic and cultural diversity content in the curriculum, demonstrating caring and building learning communities, communicating with ethnically diverse students and responding to ethnic

diversity in the delivery of instruction” (Geneva, 2002, p. 106). Ensuring teachers have such a skillset is not only an ethical imperative, but the research also shows children who feel included and see themselves in a multi-cultural curriculum will achieve at higher rates (Zirkel, 2008). Originally conceived by J.A. Banks in 2004, a multi-cultural curriculum includes books, histories and other materials that are written by or about diverse groups. Such a curriculum should also offer a wide range of perspectives on both current and historical events. (Zirkel, 2008). An ideal curriculum is also anti-racist and teaches children the importance of social justice and confronting prejudice (Zirkel, 2008). Schools have been found to more effectively close achievement gaps when the community openly discusses racism and its potential for negatively impacting perceptions and learning (Howard, 2010). Once these ideas have been discussed, the community then can make a plan for addressing racism both inside and outside their school.

Teachers can deepen their cultural competency and their overall effectiveness by asking their students for their opinions on their own education. What type of teaching truly engages them? What experiences feel meaningful to their lives? And, after they graduate, what instruction did and did not prepare them for college and other post-secondary training and career (Johnson & Williams, 2015)?

Schools that have created ethnic studies courses, focusing on the cultures of historically underserved groups of students, have had a dramatic effect on student achievement. Students who took such a course in San Francisco showed significant gains in multiple areas of performance including their attendance, GPA as well as the number of courses they completed (Dee & Penner, 2016).



Teachers who have participated in trainings that increase their cultural competency and make them aware of their biases may be better able to think more objectively when placing students in higher-level classes. Across the country, huge racial disparities exist between regular classes and more rigorous courses (e.g. AP, honors, gifted) (Ferguson, 2008). In fact, the U.S. Office of Civil Rights has found that more than 50% of the country's schools have a "racially identifiable" classroom (Ferguson, 2008). "A racially identifiable" classroom is one in which the ratio of students of specific racial groups within a specific class varies significantly from the ratio in the school overall (Ferguson, 2008; Braddock & Slavin, 1993). According to researcher Edward Fergus, not all higher level classes result in greater achievement, but those higher level classes where teachers differentiate their instruction do have a significant impact on learning. So, in the cases where bias prevents students of color from enrolling in higher level classes where the instruction is differentiated, they are missing an opportunity for increased achievement (Ferguson, 2008). As a result, the solution is twofold. Leaders must ensure their teachers have both anti-bias and cultural competency training as well as solid understanding of how to individualize and scaffold academic content.

### **Policies & Practices: Discipline**

Discipline is one of the most important areas to examine for district wide inequities. Across the country, students of color, especially boys, are disciplined at higher rates than white students (Carter, Skiba, Arredondo & Pollock, 2017). This discipline often involves being sent out of class or, in the case of suspension or expulsion, out of school. Zero tolerance policies that supported the frequent use of removal and suspension have been found to be ineffective and harmful. "Zero tolerance policies do not promote or teach

desirable behaviors; rather, fortress tactics and punishments encourage more aggressive behavior...labeling students as delinquents or future prisoners in need of exclusion or coercive control creates a self-fulfilling prophecy” (Brown, 2015, p. 3).

Missing class means a loss of instruction and learning for students. In addition to the learning that is lost, students who are suspended are more likely not to graduate and to spend time in prison (Carter, Skiba, Arredondo & Pollock, 2017). While teaching students to engage in safe and productive behaviors, educators must simultaneously work to dismantle the mindsets and practices that have resulted in decades of negative outcomes for students of color.

Exclusionary disciplinary practices stem from America’s history of slavery and racism. Americans have deep-rooted prejudices towards black males (Carter, Skiba, Arredondo & Pollock, 2017). In order to ensure our boys of color stay in school and achieve, educators must make themselves aware of their biases (see *Adult Growth & Development: Cultural Competency*) and look at disciplinary data broken down by race (Carter, Skiba, Arredondo & Pollock, 2017; Fergus, 2017).

Teachers and principals must be trained in practices that avoid exclusion. Research shows that educators can be trained to de-escalate tense situations (Duggan & Dawson, 2004). Watching videos of their interactions with students can be useful when learning such techniques (Howard, 2012). Researchers and district leaders have also found restorative justice practices decrease the amount of time students spend out of the classroom and increase students’ feelings of safety in their schools (Goldys, 2016). Shifting from a punitive structure to a restorative one requires shifts in mindset (Goldys, 2016). Such practices have

been proven effective in districts around the country including Baltimore, MD (Goldys, 2016), Pittsburgh, PA (Chute, 2015) and Oakland, CA (Brown, 2015).

Leaders must help their teachers to see students' misbehaviors as teachable moments rather than just behaviors requiring punishment. In order to be effective at helping children in this way, educators must look not just at the behavior but what is causing that behavior (Fergus, 2017). This is also a shift in mindset which requires time and training.

While zero tolerance policies have been shown to be ineffective in general, they can be especially damaging for students who have experienced trauma (Brown, 2015; McInerney & McKlindon, 2015). Research shows that the majority - 72% - of our students will experience trauma by the age of eighteen (National Resilience Institute, 2017).

Trauma can be caused by abuse, neglect or severe poverty. Children who have experienced trauma may be triggered by social or academic challenges at school. These triggers may make it difficult for them to follow typical school rules. It is critical for teachers to understand the signs and impact of trauma (National Resilience Institute, 2017; American Psychological Association, Presidential Task Force on Posttraumatic Stress Syndrome and Trauma in Children and Adolescents, 2008; McInerney & McKlindon, 2015). While educators must maintain high expectations for safe and respectable school behavior for all students, children who have suffered trauma may need additional support and instruction (e.g. extra reminders, small social groups with a counselor) in order to follow those rules appropriately.

### **Policies & Practice: Special Education**

There is a great deal that district leaders can do to make their special education policies and practices more equitable. Research supports a district wide inclusive approach to special

education. Inclusive classrooms and schools benefit all children. Central office administrators can support inclusion by budgeting for the technology and resources necessary to ensure students' full participation. Superintendents can speak about the importance of technology as a tool for inclusion rather than an unnecessary crutch (Hehir, 2012). Programs are now available that aid students with their speech, reading and writing. On-line programs, originally designed for the blind, are now available for all children with learning disabilities.

A robust Response to Intervention (RTI) program is needed to ensure an equitable referral process is in place. Such a program ensures that students have had high quality tier one and tier two instruction and interventions before being considered for special education (Johnson & Williams, 2015). In one district, a superintendent found a disproportionate number of his students of color were enrolled in special education. In fact, the students of color, largely part of a regional desegregation program, were being referred three times as often as white students in the district. After further analysis he learned that in the early grades, many had needed tier two reading support but because it was not available teachers referred these struggling readers to special education. Rather than having a one or two year reading intervention, this superintendent discovered students had unnecessarily had five to ten years of special education services (Ferguson, Ballantine, Bradshaw & Krontiris, 2015).

One of the most critical ways that equity can be achieved for special education students is by ensuring that rigor is not diminished. In my experience as a teacher, principal, central office administrator and parent of a student with an IEP, special education students are often taught concepts and standards that are not appropriate for their grade or age. Well-intentioned teachers focus on re-teaching skills and concepts from earlier years, rather than

scaffolding more advanced topics. This results in wider and wider gaps in understanding for these students. It may also result in their physical and/or social separation from same-age peers. We must “dispel the belief that doing equity work means lowering our standards” (Johnson & Williams, 2015, p. 23). Pulling special education students out of their classes, teaching them something different than their peers are experiencing and then returning them to their class can be disorienting. In an example of this classic model, researchers Kendra Johnson and Lisa William (2015) write,

Students removed from the general education setting were denied access to the core curriculum for which they were also held responsible. The interventions often were not coordinated with the pacing of the curriculum so that students were challenged to connect skills taught in isolation with the larger concepts that the skills were intended to support. It was like arriving late at a movie and trying to fill in the earlier scenes based on the current conversation - a difficult task for already struggling students. (p. 33)

Central office administrators can support the teaching of high standards by sending the special education teachers to general education curricular trainings and by offering time for them to meet with their general education colleagues. Such collaborations, especially when facilitated by a coach or principal, can ensure both the general and special education teachers are working towards the same grade level standards. Equity-minded superintendents must also hold their principals accountable for ensuring special education students are being taught grade level concepts.

## **Policies & Practices: Scheduling**

Scheduling can be used as a tool for making a district more equitable. After finding its students of color were vastly underperforming the white students in their district, one town implemented intervention blocks. These blocks of time offer literacy and math experts one to two additional hours a day to teach reading and math (Ferguson, Ballantine, Bradshaw & Krontiris, 2015). Equity-minded districts ensure teachers have sufficient time to reteach and to extend lessons as needed (Johnson & Williams, 2015). While these small groups, with a targeted focus on students' needs, will be a critical tool for eliminating gaps, leaders must be mindful that they are not inadvertently creating a segregated, tracked system of instruction. Student groups should be flexible and they should be reconfigured regularly.

Although this is often not the case, scheduling should be done first for those students who need the most support. Special education students and English Language Learners (ELLs) needs, for example, should be met first guaranteeing they have access to the strongest teachers (Johnson & Williams, 2015).

Scheduling should also guarantee teachers have time to collaborate. Teachers working together to meet the needs of students need time to co-create lessons with varied access points. Teachers must also have time to share student work and assessments and to learn and grow from one another. At the secondary level, the strategic planning process should offer educators time to discuss the overall schedule. Block, rotating and dropped schedules should be examined to determine the structure that best meets students' needs (Johnson & Williams, 2015).

While expanded learning time can be costly, it can be extremely useful if used well for re-teaching or enrichment. If a longer school day is not possible, tutoring before and after

school or on the weekend may be possible as well as more affordable. As a principal in Cambridge, we won a grant to expand the school time by two hours each day. This allowed me to offer regular collaboration time for teaching, daily enrichment (e.g. marine biology, fencing) and time for re-teaching. Such flexibility allows educators to design instruction that carefully meets students' needs.

Another scheduling strategy is to flex teachers' hours. If before school is a good time for pre-teaching or re-teaching, consider having some teachers start one hour earlier and end one hour earlier. I did this in Cambridge as well as a way to extend the number of hours of instruction without any additional cost.

### **Policies & Practices: Personnel**

Equity-minded districts should ensure that students with the greatest need and those from historically marginalized groups (by race, ethnicity and socioeconomic status) are given the district's strongest teachers. Historically the opposite has taken place nationally. Across the country, students of color and students from low-income backgrounds are most likely to have the least experienced and least effective teachers (Haycock & Crawford, 2008). Districts focused on equity can have an enormous impact on this through the recruitment, hiring, placement and evaluation of their teachers and staff.

Districts committed to equity must ensure all of their teachers are highly effective. One way to accomplish this is to triangulate the evaluation data. Examine "value added" data (Haycock & Crawford, 2008), principal observations and parent and student survey data to gain a complete picture of educators' impact on students.

While ineffective teachers should be removed through the evaluation process, superintendents may consider transferring these teachers to more high-achieving schools

in the interim. Superintendents with extremely low-performing schools may also be able to have all teachers re-apply for their jobs and only select those who have been effective (Haycock & Crawford, 2008). Relatedly, allowing principals of schools with students who have historically been marginalized to choose their own highly effective teachers is critical. It is also important to dismantle policies that allow low-performing teachers to be transferred to these schools.

It is important for both students of color and white students to have teachers and principals of color. Districts should strive to ensure that the teaching and administrative staff reflects the demographic diversity of the students in the district. In districts where the majority of the students are white, the human resources department should work to ensure the racial and ethnic diversity of the teaching and administrative staff is greater than that of the student body.

While districts across the nation report having difficulty finding enough qualified teachers of color, districts that are innovative can have strong results. Alternative pathways to teaching can be provided within districts to support the growth of paraprofessionals, substitute teachers and other staff of color who enter the district in non-teaching roles (Learned-Miller, 2017).

Superintendents can also consider adjusting barriers that may prevent teachers of color from rising to the top of the candidate pool, such as years of experience (Ferguson, Ballantine, Bradshaw & Krontiris, 2015). To make up for their reduced amount of experience without diminishing the quality of the teaching force, districts can offer comprehensive training and support on site (Ferguson, Ballantine, Bradshaw & Krontiris,



2015). Such supports may include time in their schedules to observe, be observed by and debrief lessons with master teachers.

Some districts recruit teachers at Historically Black Colleges and Universities and others travel to locations where more teachers of color may be available. Rochester, New York, for example, participates in recruitment fairs in Florida.

Once teachers of color are brought on board, it is critical that they feel welcomed and supported in the community. Affinity groups and mentors of color should be provided for staff of color to ensure they feel valued and receive all necessary supports. Once affinity groups are up and running, these groups can be invited to recommend friends and colleagues from their personal networks to apply for open positions. This will continue to diversify the teaching staff (Learned-Miller, 2017; Ferguson, Ballantine, Bradshaw & Krontiris, 2015).

Personnel policies can also ensure that those leading interviews have participated in anti-bias training (Learned-Miller, 2017). Additionally, white candidates can be screened for their completion of coursework in diversity and multicultural education, as this has been shown to impact new teachers' biases (Fergus, 2017). Interview questions can drill down on candidates' experiences and beliefs asking, as the Newton, MA, public schools once did, "What is your commitment to anti-racist education?" (I. Blumer, personal communication, July 27, 2017). Policies should also ensure that there are measures in place to prevent a biased process.

For brevity, the literature that was used to inform the diagnostic's additional focus topics is listed here in Figure Two.

**Figure Two: Literature Used to Inform Diagnostic**

<b>Focus Topics</b>	<b>Literature</b>
<b>Cultural Competency</b>	Detailed above in text.
<b>Pedagogy</b>	Danielson, C. (2013) The framework for teaching evaluation instrument. The Danielson Group. Retrieved at <a href="http://www.danielsongroup.org/framework/">http://www.danielsongroup.org/framework/</a> Johnson, K. & Williams, L. (2015) <i>When treating all the kids the same is the real problem: Educational leadership and the 21<sup>st</sup> century dilemma of difference</i> . Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Publishing. Novak, K. & Rose, D. (2016) <i>UDL now! A teacher's guide to applying universal design for learning in today's classrooms</i> . Chicago: CAST Professional Publishing. Steele, C. (2010) <i>Whistling Vivaldi: How stereotypes affect us and what we can do</i> . NY: Norton & Co.
<b>Collective Action</b>	Ferguson, R. & Lamback, S. (2014) Creating pathways to prosperity: A blueprint for action. The Harvard Achievement Gap Initiative. June 2014. Kania, J. & Kramer, M. (2011). <i>Collective Impact</i> . <i>Stanford Social Innovation Review</i> . Winter.
<b>Parent Engagement</b>	Ferguson, R., Ballantine, A., Bradshaw, R. & Krontiris, C. (2015) Narrowing Achievement Gaps in Lexington Public Schools. Achievement Gap Initiative at Harvard University. Grolnick, W. S., Friendly, R. W., & Bellas, V. M. (2009). Parenting and children's motivation at school. In K. R. Wentzel & A. Wigfield (Eds.), <i>Handbook of motivation at school</i> . New York & London: Routledge. Thiers, N. (2017) Unlocking: A conversation with Karen L. Mapp. <i>Educational Leadership</i> . September 1 <sup>st</sup> , 2017.
<b>Discipline</b>	Detailed above in text.
<b>Enrollment</b>	See Equity Reporting in ESSA which refers to ESEA section 1111(g)(1)(B). Retrieved at <a href="https://www.ed.gov/essa?src=rn">https://www.ed.gov/essa?src=rn</a> Learned-Miller, C. (2016) Dallas Independent School District: Integration as innovation. The Century Foundation. Retrieved at <a href="https://tcf.org/content/report/dallas-independent-school-district/">https://tcf.org/content/report/dallas-independent-school-district/</a> Stuart Wells, A., Fox, L. & Cordova-Cobo, D. (2016) How racially diverse schools and classrooms can benefit all students. The Century Foundation. Retrieved at <a href="https://tcf.org/content/report/how-racially-diverse-schools-and-classrooms-can-benefit-all-students/">https://tcf.org/content/report/how-racially-diverse-schools-and-classrooms-can-benefit-all-students/</a>
<b>Personnel</b>	Detailed above in text.
<b>Scheduling</b>	Detailed above in text.
<b>Special Education</b>	Detailed above in text.
<b>Transportation</b>	Marguerite Casey Foundation (2016) Transportation for all: Good for families, communities and the economy. Policy Link. Retrieved at <a href="https://issuu.com/policylink/docs/transportation-for-all-final-05-10-">https://issuu.com/policylink/docs/transportation-for-all-final-05-10-</a>

**B. Equity Tools in The Field: Why Is This Diagnostic Needed?**

The education sector is rich with tools. However, after a thorough search, no other district-level equity diagnostic for educational leaders was found. In order to investigate what's already been developed I read through all of the existing tools in the sector that NYCLA has compiled into a database. One of my interview questions for superintendents in the formal interviews as well as in the pre-pilots was whether they had ever seen such a tool and no one had. Additionally, using Harvard's research database, Hollis, and working with the research librarian at the Graduate School of Education, I did

an on-line review of equity tools. I also spoke to colleagues and looked at organizations' web sites that have a similar mission and vision to that of NYCLA. Below are some tools that I found along the way that had similar objectives.

The Local and Regional Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE) has developed *Racial Equity Action Plans: A How-To Manual* (Curren, Nelson, Marsh, Noor, & Liu, 2016). Similar to the diagnostic, the goal is to do an in-depth examination of the policies and practices that are perpetuating racism. Also similar to the diagnostic, the *Manual* guides participants through a data analysis followed by action planning. Another similarity is that the *Manual* was built off of the successes of cities around the country in the same way that the diagnostic is based on what we learned from successful superintendents. There are also similarities in the recommendations for tracking the progress of the action plans. Both tools recommend frequent communication with the community. Both also offer regular lists of questions to push the committee's thinking deeper. A final similarity is the emphasis on truly understanding the lived experiences of people of color in the community either through surveys or focus groups (Curren, Nelson, Marsh, Noor, & Liu, 2016).

Some differences include the *Manual's* focus on the city or town rather than a school district specifically. *The Manual* has a repeated emphasis on setting funds aside for the action plans, whereas much of the work recommended by the exemplars in the diagnostic do not require much if any additional funding. Another difference is that the diagnostic is far more detailed; it specifies exactly how to coordinate each meeting. The examples and researched best practices in *The Playbook* are all based on district work so

I believe it is far more useful to a superintendent. *The Manual* would be a better choice for a governor or mayor.

Another tool I found with similar objectives is the All Hands Raised and Coalition of Communities of Color's *Tool for Organizational Self-Assessment Related to Racial Equity* (Coalition of Communities of Color, 2013). Like the diagnostic, it is a process for analyzing how equitable an organization is. Questions for reflection are wide-ranging and address topics such as "organizational commitment" to racial equity and "implementation of practices" to support racial equity. Unlike the diagnostic, however, the *Tool for Organizational Self-Assessment Related to Racial Equity* is a self-assessment for the chief executive rather than an analysis of data involving a range of stakeholders. In fact, the *Tool for Organizational Self-Assessment Related to Racial Equity* could be an independent process that a superintendent could go through before engaging in the diagnostic. Having thought through these issues independently first could be a great way to prepare for engagement with the diagnostic. The *Tool for Organizational Self-Assessment Related to Racial Equity* also does not involve any recommendations for best practices or action planning (Coalition of Communities of Color, 2014).

A more well-known racial equity tool is the *Leadership for Equity Assessment and Development (LEAD) Tool* (Larson, Galloway, Ishimaru, Lenssen, & Carr, 2016) developed by Education Northwest. Similar to NYCLA, Education Northwest is a non-profit that provides training and facilitation support for leaders. The *LEAD Tool* is a rubric more similar to the exemplars in the diagnostic. The *LEAD Tool* asks participants to rate themselves, using the rubric, in the following areas: engaging in self-reflection and growth for equity; constructing and enacting an equity vision; developing organizational leadership

for equity; modeling ethical and equitable behavior; allocating resources; fostering an equitable school culture; collaborating with families and communities; influencing the sociopolitical context; hiring and placing personnel and supervising for improvement of equitable instruction. Some of the categories are the same as the ones in the diagnostic, but the diagnostic goes into greater detail. For each area, the *LEAD Tool* has three or four descriptions of the ideal state, whereas the diagnostic has approximately twenty-five. The *LEAD Tool* offers resources such as racial equity articles to support their learning although some of the links are no longer accurate. So, similar to the *Tool for Organizational Self-Assessment Related to Racial Equity*, the *LEAD Tool* is a useful self-assessment for a leader or team of leaders but does not offer the specific advice for deeply analyzing data and using it to action plan that the diagnostic offers (Larson, Galloway, Ishimaru, Lenssen, & Carr, 2016).

Overall, research shows that there are many tools for assessing the racial equity of one's own organization. What the diagnostic brings is a more robust process for district leaders. In addition to an organizational assessment, based on data, the diagnostic involves stakeholders, offers research based exemplars to shoot for as well as an action planning process for leaders to follow. For this reason, we felt that the sector needed an additional tool such as the diagnostic.

### **C. Process Literature: Organizational Change**

#### **Shifting Political & Policy Environments**

NYCLA is not operating in a vacuum. It must shift in the face of political and policy changes in the local and national environments. Since its inception, there have been several major shifts in local politics including a transfer of power from Mayor Bloomberg to

Mayor de Blasio, which resulted in a change in chancellors from Joel Klein, to Cathie Black, to Dennis Walcott to Carmen Fariña. While NYCLA embodied the vision Chancellor Klein had for leadership development in New York City, the shift in power to Chancellor Fariña resulted in a loss of funding and political support for NYCLA.

Shifts in national politics have also resulted in federal policies changes that impact NYCLA. The U.S. Elementary and Secondary Education Act (also known as the Every Student Succeeds Act) was reauthorized by Congress in 2015. ESSA, like No Child Left Behind (NCLB) before it, prioritizes leadership. “ESSA expands opportunities for states and districts to use federal funding for initiatives that strive to improve the quality of school leaders” (Herman et al., 2016, p. 1). Districts are encouraged to use their federal funding for leadership development, such as NYCLA provides. Funds that can be directed towards leadership training are Title I, Title IIA and Title IIB. As they did under NCLB, states must be able to show that the training they are funding has a strong research base. Under ESSA there are more leadership development options for states and districts, including trainings they have designed themselves (Herman et al., 2016). Another major difference is that NCLB called for principals in chronically underperforming schools to be terminated. States and districts under ESSA may now choose to continue to support and help improve the practice of these principals.

States are encouraged to use their federal funds in support of enhancing principal certification, preparatory coursework, training for evaluating and improving the cultural competency of teachers and leadership mentors. States may also fund training to support principals learning about innovative programs and pedagogy, such as restorative justice and technical education. While some of these areas are not NYCLA’s areas of expertise, others,

such as preparing principals and helping them support the teachers in their schools through observations, are NYCLA's specialty.

These policy changes have a direct impact on NYCLA as the organization's funding depends on both contracts with districts, such as the New York City Department of Education, as well as grant funding that is derived from federal funding, such as Title IIA and ESSA funds, which wax and wane depending on the commitment to leadership in those policies. As a result, NYCLA must continue to innovate so that they have products and services ready for whatever political and policy environment they find themselves in.

### **Market Urgency for Non-Profits**

In addition to the pressures organizations such as NYCLA face from shifting policy and political changes, organizations are also finding it more and more challenging to maintain financial stability and stay in business over time. While companies once survived for an average of fifty years, the average now is twelve (O'Reilly & Tushman, 2016). According to the National Center for Charitable Statistics, there are more than 1.5 million tax-exempt organizations and almost 370,000 of them are non-profits (National Center for Charitable Statistics, 2017). This is 25% more non-profits than were in business in 2004 (Callanan, Mendonca & Scott, 2014). Almost 12,000 of those non-profits are in New York, more than any other state (National Center for Charitable Statistics, 2017). There are also quite a few non-profits with a similar focus on educational leadership including CEL, Relay, New Leaders, Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL), HGSE (Principals Center and various institutes), Friday Institute for Educational Innovation, TNTP, WestEd, The New Teacher Center, University of Florida's Lastinger Center, Learning Forward, National Institute for School Leadership, Generation Ready and Mass Insight.

For this reason, NYCLA faces fierce competition for resources and has to be as strategic as possible in order to stay in business.

To remain competitive, non-profits and for-profits must engage in “disruptive change”, which creates entirely new markets. Such disruptive change, such as that posed by iTunes and Uber, is quickly transforming industries so businesses must innovate rapidly or else put themselves at great risk of failure (O’Reilly & Tushman, 2016). A classic example of this is the story of Blockbuster and Netflix. For years, Blockbuster was the movie rental giant. However, even as leaders at Blockbuster could see the developing popularity of streaming services, they stayed focused on scaling their original product by purchasing more and more DVD stores. Meanwhile, Netflix took over the market by competing with DVD rentals until they had their streaming service working well. By offering both DVD by mail and streaming services, customers no longer had any need for DVD stores. Netflix has continued to expand their market share by continuing their movie rental business but now also creating their own original series (O’Reilly & Tushman, 2016).

Examples of disruptive innovation exist in the non-profit sector as well. Wikipedia is a free on-line tool that utilizes unpaid citizen writers and editors to develop and continuously revise its content and has disrupted the way we access information (Pawlucz, 2016). Kiva, a non-profit that provides small microloans to workers in impoverished countries, has transformed how Americans donate to charities (Majno, 2011). NYCLA must participate in this same type of disruptive innovation in order to survive.

### **Framework: Ambidextrous organizations**

For the reasons detailed above, NYCLA has to be poised to shift in the ever changing political and policy environment. Research in the field of organizational change



yields many theoretical frames. However, as I indicated in the Introduction, the research on ambidextrous organizations seems the most useful to NYCLA. The political and policy environment has forced the organization to take on an ambidextrous stance and NYCLA can now become an even more robust organization by fully adopting this framework as it scales further. Its greatest organizational challenge will be to innovate in ways that meet an urgent need in districts now and in future years. In this section, I will offer a more detailed explanation of ambidexterity.

“Ambidextrous organizations”, as described by Charles O’Reilly and Michael Tushman (2004) of the Harvard Business School, are for-profit and non-profit organizations that are able to adeptly respond to changing environments. These ambidextrous organizations are able to continue their primary source of business while continuing to innovate (O’Reilly & Tushman, 2004). The authors refer to continuing to build on and profit from their primary source of business as “exploiting” and the innovative work to develop new products and services as “exploring” (O’Reilly & Tushman, 2004). [Note: For the purposes of this paper, due to the negative connotations of the word “exploit”, I will use the word “engage”.]

O’Reilly and Tushman followed companies who approached innovation in four different ways. Some companies used “functional designs” meaning that the innovations became the focus of the entire organization; “cross-functional teams” where the innovations were part of the organization’s main focus but had different leadership; “unsupported teams” that operated entirely independently from the organization and “ambidextrous organizations” that encouraged separate processes but had shared leadership (O’Reilly & Tushman, 2004). The researchers followed the progress of the organizations and found that

the ambidextrous organizations were much better able to develop their innovations and continue to profit from their original products and services than any of the other organizational models (O'Reilly & Tushman, 2004). In fact the other structures were successful in developing their new innovations no more than 25% of the time, while ambidextrous organizations were successful 90% of the time (O'Reilly & Tushman, 2004). This is not news to CEOs in the non-profit sector. A McKinsey study recently found that, more than any other characteristic, CEOs in the non-profit sector rated the ability to simultaneously innovate and implement as their most important skill (Callanan, Mendonca & Scott, 2014). In the analysis section I will discuss ways that NYCLA exhibits ambidextrous features and ways that, if it became even more ambidextrous, it could be even more effective in the development of standardized services such as the diagnostic.

## **IV. Strategic Project**

Based on the literature review as well as interviews with faculty at Harvard and colleagues at NYCLA, this is the Theory of Action that drove the strategic project.

### **The Theory of Action**

If I....

- Come to understand how, through interviews and research, superintendents across the country effectively make their districts more equitable, decrease disparities and close achievement and opportunity gaps for low income children and children of color;
- Devise a tool and training based on that research;
- Test that tool and training, gather data and continuous feedback from my colleagues at NYCLA and those in the field and use that feedback to refine the tool.

Then...

- I will create a tool superintendents can use to effectively diagnose and diminish their district's inequities.

### **Strategic Project Development Process – The How**

I began the development of the diagnostic in May 2017 and it will be complete by June 2018. Please see the timeline below in Figure Three.

**Figure Three: Timeline for Development of District-Level Equity Diagnostic**

Time	Action Taken
<b>May 2017</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Interviewed NYCLA leadership to determine problems of practice for diagnostic.</li> <li>* Researched lessons learned from school-level diagnostic.</li> </ul>
<b>June 2017</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Developed project scope and timeline.</li> <li>* Created and vetted list of superintendents around the country who had effectively closed achievement and opportunity gaps.</li> <li>* Developed, gathered feedback on and revised interview questions for superintendents.</li> <li>* Researched other available equity tools.</li> </ul>
<b>July 2017</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Began superintendent interviews.</li> <li>* Started literature review.</li> <li>* Researched other available equity tools.</li> </ul>
<b>August 2017</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Continued superintendent interviews.</li> <li>* Began coding interviews for patterns in focus and strategy.</li> <li>* Developed first draft of diagnostic for feedback.</li> </ul>
<b>September 2017</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Finished superintendent interviews.</li> <li>* Continued coding interviews for patterns in focus and strategy.</li> <li>*Continued feedback loop and revision of diagnostic design.</li> <li>*Began development of exemplars.</li> </ul>
<b>October 2017</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Continued literature review.</li> <li>*Completed diagnostic design.</li> <li>*Continued development of exemplars.</li> </ul>
<b>November 2017</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Finished coding interviews for patterns in focus and strategy.</li> <li>*Continued literature review.</li> <li>*Continued development of exemplars.</li> <li>*Conducted two pre-pilots and used feedback to revise diagnostic.</li> <li>*Pitched pilot to three districts.</li> </ul>
<b>December 2017</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Located pilot site.</li> <li>*Planned one equity committee meeting with deputy superintendent at pilot site.</li> <li>*Shared diagnostic with MA urban superintendents.</li> <li>* Completed exemplars.</li> <li>*Vetted exemplars with experts.</li> <li>*Developed superintendent training.</li> </ul>

<b>January</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Completed vetting of exemplars.</li> <li>*Conducted pre-survey of equity committee.</li> <li>*Ran superintendent training.</li> <li>*Began pilot.</li> </ul>
<b>February 2018</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Continued pilot.</li> <li>*Coached leadership team.</li> </ul>
<b>March 2018</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Continued pilot.</li> <li>*Coached leadership team.</li> <li>*Interviewed facilitation team on progress.</li> <li>*Participated in the design and implementation of <i>Equity: From Inquiry to Action</i>.</li> <li>*Began working with finance to create a marketing strategy.</li> </ul>
<b>April 2018</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Planning to:</li> <li>*Complete pilot.</li> <li>*Conduct post-survey of equity committee.</li> <li>*Interview superintendent on effectiveness of diagnostic for locating and addressing district's most urgent inequities.</li> </ul>
<b>May 2018</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Evaluate pilot and use what is learned to update diagnostic.</li> </ul>
<b>June 2018</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Complete diagnostic.</li> </ul>
<b>July 2018</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Market diagnostic.</li> </ul>

### **Design Process**

I began my strategic project by interviewing all members of NYCLA's cabinet to develop a full understanding of the organization and their goals. In addition, I interviewed everyone who had been involved in the development and ongoing pilot of the school-level diagnostic, the predecessor to my tool. Our discussions addressed the problem of practice they hoped the district-level diagnostic would solve. Once I had a sense of the problem, together with several members of cabinet, we developed a list of superintendents who had successfully closed achievement and opportunity gaps in their districts. After developing a list of questions, I revised it with feedback from colleagues in my team as well as those from other areas of the organization, such as business

development and measurement and evaluation. I then engaged in the interviews, recording and transcribing each and coded their answers for patterns in their strategies.

At the same time I engaged in research to determine the areas of the equity diagnostic as well as best practices within each. These findings can be found in the RKA and are what I used to develop the exemplars in *The Playbook*. For each focus area there is an exemplar that details the desired state. The exemplars will be used to guide superintendents and their teams. [See Appendix E for *The Playbook*.]

### **Superintendent Interviews**

Throughout July and August 2017, I interviewed seven diverse superintendents from around the country whom my colleagues at NYCLA and I knew had made significant strides in developing more equitable districts. These superintendents were all able to make dents in achievement gaps and/or more equitable, inclusive environments in their schools. Successes included increased graduation rates, diminished achievement gaps, increased access to rigorous coursework including AP and IB courses, new policies to forward equity, a more diverse staff and shifted mindsets. The goal of these interviews was to determine the strategies of leaders who have effectively conducted equity work. These strategies have been incorporated into the diagnostic process and are woven into the training and *The Guidebook's* instructions. My learning from the interviews also informed the “equity area focus topics” that are the backbone of the diagnostic and can be found in *The Playbook*. These focus topics are the high leverage areas that successful superintendents across the country repeatedly focus on.

Each interview lasted approximately one hour and an interview protocol was used to guide the conversations. Questions focused on the superintendents’ accomplishments and

the strategic thinking and actions they employed. When selecting participants for these interviews, we sought to ensure that the superintendents were from different regions of the country and that the superintendents themselves were racially diverse. Additionally the superintendents have varying levels of experience and lead districts of varying sizes. Details about superintendents can be seen below in Figure Four.

**Figure Four. Superintendents Interviewed for the Diagnostic.**

District	State	District Enrollment	Name	Current or Former Role	Gender	Person of Color	Years in Role
Charlotte-Mecklenburg	North Carolina	<a href="#">145,636</a>	Ann Clark	Former	F	No	2.5
Hillsborough County	Florida	<a href="#">207,469</a>	MaryEllen Elia	Currently NY State Commissioner	F	No	10
Louisville	Kentucky	<a href="#">100,602</a>	Sheldon Berman	Currently Andover, MA Superintendent	M	No	4
Eugene	Oregon	<a href="#">17,017</a>					4
Andover	Massachusetts	<a href="#">5,924</a>					3
Hudson	Massachusetts	<a href="#">2633</a>					14
Newburgh	New York	<a href="#">10,831</a>	Roberto Padilla	Current	M	Yes	4
New York City, Region 6 Chancellor's District	New York	100,000 <sup>1</sup>	Gloria Buckery	Former	F	Yes	3
							3
Newton Concord	Massachusetts	<a href="#">12,928</a>	Irwin Blumer	Former	M	No	9
Yonkers	New York	<a href="#">27,000</a>	Edwin Quezada	Current	M	Yes	2

**Superintendents Interviewed for the Pre-Pilot**

District	State	District Enrollment	Name	Current or Former Role	Gender	Person of Color	Years in Role
Amherst	MA	<a href="#">1343</a>	Michael Morris	Current	M	No	1.5
St. Paul	Minnesota	<a href="#">37,698</a>	Valeria Silva	Former	F	Yes	9

<sup>1</sup> This figure came from a communication with Gloria Buckery regarding her enrollment while superintendent on February 1, 2018.

Each of the superintendents was recorded as they answered the same set of thirteen multi-part questions. Examples of those questions were “What equity work did you engage in? Please explain specifically the changes you made at the systems-level, in the policies, in your personnel and in your curriculum? Other areas?” and “What led you to tackle this particular challenge/set of challenges? What data supported your decision to engage in this work? What factors led to the timing of this work?” [See Appendix A for full set of questions.]

I have permission to share the superintendents’ names but not the specific content of their interviews, so I am presenting a summarized version of my learning from the interviews below.

## **Superintendent Interviews: Summary of Findings**

### **Frequency of Equity Initiatives**

When asked about the equity initiatives they led in their districts, the superintendents shared thirty-one approaches they took to making their districts more equitable. Some of the initiatives were more commonly cited than others. Please see the chart below [Figure Five] for the responses and the rate of those responses.

**Figure Five. Frequency of Equity Initiatives Mentioned in Superintendents’ Responses**

<b>Equity Initiatives</b>	<b>Number</b>
Making data public and using it as a way to move equity work forward	7
Addressing discipline disparities	6
Providing equity of funding to schools	4
Ensuring students of color and low-income students are enrolled in high level/college preparatory classes	4
Training teachers in equitable practices and holding them accountable for using them	4
Implementing a board approved equity policy or set of core values	4
Offering incentives for teachers who work effectively low-income students	3
Creating new policies to support equity	3
Working to provide exceptional teachers	3
Engaging in anti-bias and cultural competency training for staff	3
Holding teachers accountable for having high standards for all students	3
Offering a rich curriculum to all students	3



Taking on the union for equity	3
Creating personnel policies to increase the number of teachers of color	3
Putting best teachers in most struggling schools	2
Ensuring all students are fully included	2
Improving school culture	2
Developing an equity committee	2
Desegregating schools and developing magnet schools	2
Removing all teachers and hiring all new teachers	2
Removing ineffective principals	2
Ensuring high expectations for special education students specifically	2
Engaging parents	2
Ensuring facilities are equitable	1
Closing failing schools	1
Challenging privileged parents in the community	1
Regularly focusing leadership meetings with the cabinet and principals on equity	1
Adding nurses and wraparound services to high poverty schools	1
Creating affinity groups for children	1
Scheduling for equity	1
Creating district wide focus on radically improving the graduation rates	1
Supporting early childhood opportunities	1
Creating collective impact in the community	1

As can be seen in the chart above, the most common equity initiative entails using data to make decisions about the work undertaken, making the data public and holding themselves accountable for the changes in the data over time. One superintendent added that using data as the grounding for difficult equity conversations “takes the emotion out of discussions of race.” Another recommended the use of “data owners” who tracked and reported out on a particular data set regularly. In this way, data was regularly tracked, analyzed and discussed. As a result, the examination of data is at the heart of the diagnostic process.

### **Sustaining Equity Work**

The superintendents had many strategies for making their equity work sustainable. These included diversifying the leadership and training leaders to recognize and replicate best practices. Two superintendents spoke of empowering parents to recognize and advocate for equitable practices. Another strategy was shifting people’s mindsets through constant examination of practices. This type of examination could be done by reviewing

practices and then asking practitioners if their behaviors were aligned or misaligned with stated values. Another believed building a team and putting an equity director into place was key for sustainability. Finally two spoke of the importance of having board policies approved.

### **Launching Equity Work**

The superintendents offered many pieces of advice for leaders who are just beginning equity work. One suggested being strategic about when to introduce what equity initiative – choose a time when there is community support. When community support is lacking, it can be developed through the steady communication of data illustrating the inequity. Two superintendents discussed the importance of giving more to communities in need, while not taking anything of great value away from wealthier communities. While this is not “equity”, per se, it is strategic politically as it allowed the superintendents to move money without any political fallout. Relatedly, another superintendent added, “The system functions around individual choice and opportunity not social justice.” Framing equity work for the community in a way that demonstrates it is in the best interest of all students, even the upper middle class, high-achieving ones, is critical to the success of the work and will be one focus of my political coaching.

Three superintendents as well as one of the pre-pilot superintendents talked about the importance of creating and celebrating “quick wins”. These quick wins allow them to build the community’s confidence in the work and then more easily take on additional initiatives.

Three superintendents addressed the need to speak regularly about equity being what the children need. One added that it was important to use this framing so that teachers did

not feel they were being blamed for their biases. One used the district's equity core values as the structure and frame for all of his discussions. This same leader spent time with his leadership team once a month talking about the behaviors that should be witnessed in practice for each of their core values.

One superintendent stressed the importance of experiencing diversity training before leading the district in such work stressing the complexity of it. Two superintendents suggested having outside help with this work because of the complexity. During a pre-pilot a superintendent also suggested that a consultant can be helpful because, if it is just the superintendent leading, "Superintendents have too much power. Everyone will just agree with him/her." The same superintendent added another reason that having outside assistance is helpful because, "If the superintendent is a person of color, people will think it is their agenda. If the superintendent is white, people will think it is white guilt."

One suggested not solving problems on one's own, but rather problem solving as a community and then together owning the work needed for the solution. This is a way to empower and engender participation and not to be the sole owner of a problem and its solution.

### **Characteristics that Contributed to Progress Towards Equity**

While anecdotal reports find that superintendents who engage in equity work often lose their jobs, this was the case for only two of the seven superintendents in my study. And the two who were eventually let go by their boards did accomplish significant amounts of equity work before leaving.

When asked about the leadership traits that helped them be successful, one superintendent discussed humility as being key. Another two talked about the importance of

having a learning stance and asking for help when you do not know the answer. Three discussed their “relentlessness”, “courage” and “persistence” on behalf of children. To maintain their relentlessness through difficult times, one superintendent told me she had a two-hour conversation with another superintendent engaged in equity work every weekend. They helped one another think strategically about moving the work forward in both of their districts. Two others found strength in being clear and consistent about their core values. One said, when he became overwhelmed by the challenges of the work, he sat in on a kindergarten class in order to regain perspective. One emphasized the importance of maintaining some work-life balance and quality family time.

Four of the superintendents had a significant amount of political capital in their districts that they attributed to their significant years of service, often originally in other positions within the same district. This capital was also attributed to the relentlessness in the name of children mentioned above. Relatedly, one perceived her social capital as having come from people knowing she was going to respectfully but thoroughly “clean up the system.” One perceived his capital as being derived from his “ability to navigate the politics” in the system. Through my coaching I hope to help superintendents reflect on their capital and how, as a result of that capital, they can best negotiate equity initiatives they intend to lead. In the case of new superintendents, I will coach them to ensure they have developed political capital through widely supported early initiatives before embarking on more contentious equity issues that will cause them to expend large amounts of political capital. It is an essential part of the work of today’s superintendent to be aware, through check-ins with board members and trusted parents and colleagues, of one’s own political capital.

During one interview a superintendent also recommended investigating practices rather than just policies. Practices, she explained, while they may be engrained, are technically easier to change than policies as they require no board vote. While board approved policies may show no signs of inequity, visits to schools and departments may illustrate that the – often unwritten – practices related to those policies may prove to be very inequitable. Examples of these practices included a district where many bilingual classes did not have any needed Spanish speaking teachers. When the superintendent investigated she found a practice was at the root of the problem. Candidates had to take a test in order to apply for the bilingual teacher position. The applicants were charged \$70 and many had to miss work to take the test because it was only offered one morning a week. As a result, many Spanish speaking teachers were unable to take the test and, hence, apply. When that practice was eliminated, all of the bilingual teacher positions were quickly filled.

Some superintendents gave credit for some of their accomplishments to characteristics of their communities. Two discussed their community’s overall commitment to equity. One was grateful to a long term, consistent school board with a focus on equity.

### **How Interview Data Informed The Diagnostic**

The advice and experiences of the superintendents is woven into the diagnostic. Based on the literature review as well as the overwhelming focus on data by the superintendents, a deep dive into many forms of data is at the heart of the diagnostic. We direct superintendents using the diagnostic to create both “quick wins”, as many superintendents suggested, as well as long term goals in their action planning. These quick wins build both confidence and enthusiasm in stakeholders to continue the work.

The diagnostic incorporates the superintendents' consistent emphasis on the importance of developing board policies and/or core values that prioritize equity. Such policies ensure sustainability of equity work in the district. These values and priorities are also a constant source of support for the work during challenging times when critical decisions must be made. The superintendent can always ask the community, based on our policy and values, which important behavior or decision will best support students' needs?

Another learning from the interviews that can be found in the diagnostic is the importance of investigating the routines in schools that are impacting the day-to-day lives of children. Even if the policies are equitable, a thorough diagnosis will include the voices of the children, parents and teachers who can see the fine grain inequitable details. One anecdote shared by a superintendent in support of this was a special education practice she discovered when visiting a school. Special education students were required to enter the school through a back door and eat at a separate time. This segregation of special education students was not evident in any policy, but was only found by speaking directly to the staff, students and parents within a school. For this reason, the second layer of diagnosis in Phase Two requires this deeper dive into school-level practices.

Suggestions from the superintendents around issues of sustainability also impacted the diagnostic's development. Community member empowerment through their participation both by serving on the equity committee and by being asked about their experiences and observations is a key component of the diagnostic. Their engagement will ensure stakeholders are involved and supportive of the process and decisions resulting from it. It will also ensure they demand their recommended policies and practices remain even when the district leadership turns over.

Also in terms of sustainability, another important strategy we incorporated into the diagnostic is shifting people's mindsets through constant examination of behaviors. Questions require participants to think deeply about what policies and practices are limiting students' access to high quality instruction and programming. The cyclical nature of the diagnostic, which is meant to be a repeated process over the years, also reinforces this constant questioning of practice.

Overall, the interviews with these successful superintendents supplied me with the strategies that became the foundation of the diagnostic. The lessons they learned from effectively making their districts more equitable informed the coaching, the most important areas to address (focus topics), the political strategy and the process we recommend in the diagnostic.

### **Diagnostic Team**

As I was concluding the interviews, I began the design process for the diagnostic. My cross-functional team included my supervisor, Mary Rice-Boothe, Vice President of District Leadership Support; Dr. Kathleen Drucker, Associate Vice President, Research, Evaluation and Impact; a member of the business development department, Phil Benowitz; both members of the on-line learning department, Rachel Scott and Tiffany Smith. I also regularly consulted with the CEO, Irma Zardoya; the Executive Vice President, Kathy Nadurak; and the Chief Strategy Officer, Nancy Gutierrez. However, to begin the process, I had an extended meeting with Dr. Drucker. We developed an introductory design, based on lessons from the school-level diagnostic and my interviews, to act as a straw man for the rest of the team to react to. Each week throughout the fall, I made adjustments based on new research and additional rounds of feedback. This team's role has been to provide me with

guidance, suggestions and support as I have revised the diagnostic and pushed it forward from one stage to the next. For example, when I had questions about how other organizations have marketed and measured the impact of their equity tools, Rachel Scott connected me with a colleague of hers at Education Northwest who could tell me about the successes and challenges of developing the LEAD tool (described in more detail in the RKA). More than anything, the team's support has come from their on-going posing of thoughtful questions and their critical feedback, such as Mary Rice-Boothe's comments on my pilot training which noted that, though I had "leading challenging conversations about race" as a learning target, much of the focus of the training was technical (e.g. how to synthesize the small groups' accomplishments at the end of the committee meeting).

## **Piloting the Diagnostic**

### **Pre-Pilots**

Once the diagnostic had been through several feedback loops and revisions, I engaged in two "pre-pilots". The pre-pilots were interviews with superintendents, new to the diagnostic, with whom I went through the diagnostic process in detail. I chose two very different superintendents to work with so that I would receive a range of feedback. Once they understood all of the steps delineated in the diagnostic guidebook, I asked them a variety of questions to determine whether or not they felt the diagnostic would be helpful in diagnosing and addressing their district's greatest inequities.

### **Pilot Site: Risedale<sup>2</sup>, NY – Why It is A Good Fit for the Diagnostic**

We pitched the pilot to three different sites and got a commitment from Risedale, NY. Risedale has just over 208,000 residents with nearly 33% of the population living in

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<sup>2</sup> Note: Risedale is a pseudonym used to protect the district's privacy. Statistics are from the district's homepage and the 2016 Census.



poverty. There are 32,000 students enrolled in Risedale's schools. In terms of demographics, 60% of the students are black, 10% of students are white, 25% are Latino and the remaining 5% are Asian, Indian-American or multi-racial.

Risedale is well-positioned for the pilot because their board supports racial equity initiatives. They have demonstrated their commitment to racial equity through their review of the curriculum as well as the code of conduct for inequities earlier this year. One of the board members has already agreed to serve on the equity committee, Racial Equity, Advocacy and Leadership Team (REAL) that will go through the diagnostic process. Board involvement is critical to the diagnostic's success as this member can help forward any new policies recommended by the committee. The superintendent and deputy agreed in our call that the board had given them "no resistance" on any of their racial equity initiatives. The district has also adopted core values that support equity, including "cultivate advocacy for justice." Community groups have rallied in support of locating and hiring more staff of color and the leadership has increased their commitment to the recruitment of teachers of color. As a result, one of their diagnostic focus topics will probably be "personnel policy." There is also a charge for this committee by the superintendent that they develop a "racial action plan" by the spring, so the diagnostic's four-month timeline fits perfectly.

Other features of Risedale that make it a good fit for the diagnostic are its achievement gaps. For example, only one half of all boys of color graduate from high school. Elementary school students of color test far lower on reading comprehension than their white peers.

## **The Strategic Project: Process Updates**

I worked with my supervisor to design the training for Risedale's deputy superintendent and three cabinet level co-facilitators. This training taught the leaders how to use the diagnostic as well as how to lead challenging conversations about race. It also offered me the opportunity, as their coach, to offer strategic political advice as we planned out the first meeting. I led this training in January at NYCLA's headquarters in New York City.

The final, critical step of the strategic project will be my leadership of the Risedale pilot. The committee began the process in earnest on January 23<sup>rd</sup> in Risedale. Most important will be the analysis of the diagnostic's effectiveness in diagnosing and developing an action plan to address Risedale's most urgent inequities. To determine the diagnostic's effectiveness, we will survey equity committee members before and after the process. With help from Dr. Drucker, I have developed pre-survey questions for the Risedale pilot [See Appendix C]. We decided to use an interview format, rather than a survey, with the deputy superintendent leading the process, in order to get richer feedback. I am also completing a facilitator reflection myself after each substantial meeting with district leaders. The information we derive will be used to finalize the diagnostic before it is released widely in the summer of 2018.

## **V. Evidence**

### **Evidence to Date: Pre-Pilot Results**

The first pre-pilot was conducted with Ms. Valeria Silva, a Latina woman originally from Chile, who is the former superintendent of the St. Paul, MN school district. Ms. Silva had successfully made her district more equitable for students of color by developing a racial equity policy. Ms. Silva also implemented practices that led to increased graduation rates for students of color and greater inclusion of special education students. (V. Silva, personal communication, October 17, 2017; Verges, 2016) The second pre-pilot was with Dr. Michael Morris, a white man who is newer to the superintendency in Amherst, MA. Dr. Morris is very equity minded, as shown by his commitment to replace neighborhood schools with more equitable, racially and socio-economically integrated schools (Lindah, 2016). [Note: While the specifics of my research interviews with superintendents is being kept confidential, the pre-pilot conversations with superintendents are not.]

### **Pre-Pilot One: Ms. Valeria Silva**

Before we met, Ms. Silva had read the diagnostic through and spent a couple of hours giving us feedback from the perspective of a superintendent encountering the process for the first time. Her first comment was, “You nailed it. I wish I had this when I was in my district” (V. Silva, personal communication, October 17, 2017). She said every time she thought something was missing, she kept reading and found we had thought of it. She also said that she has never seen another similar diagnostic.

## **Feedback from Ms. Silva That's Been Incorporated into the Diagnostic**

Ms. Silva offered several strategic suggestions. The ones I found most helpful and chose to apply to the next revision of the diagnostic are detailed here. She suggested we:

- **Clearly state that board involvement is critical.** She suggested that the ideal number of board members on the equity committee would be two - one who supports the work and the one who supports it the least.
- **Cap the number of total committee members at fifteen.** While I had originally thought the committee should have experts in each of the equity areas, she suggested that this would be too cumbersome to be productive. Ms. Silva said, “Don’t allow the equity committee to be larger than 15 because people will stop coming, thinking their presence is not noticed. To limit its size, rather than including representatives with all kinds of expertise (e.g. special education, ELL), invite these experts to present or consult as needed” (V. Silva, personal communication, October 17, 2017). Ms. Silva suggested that the superintendent pay for any costs associated with the committee meeting with a grant or foundation funding to minimize community push back to the work.
- **Have committee synthesize decisions and accomplishments at the end of each of the 3 day-long meetings.** She felt strongly that all members of the committee agree that these summaries will be the talking points so the board, the community and the press are all given the same information.
- **Use stronger semantics as well such as using the term “task force” rather than “committee”** (V. Silva, personal communication, October 17, 2017).

- **Zero in on the inequitable practices not just the policies.** She found her policies in St. Paul were not problematic, but the implementation of them on the ground was - and created many inequities. As mentioned earlier in this paper, practices are much easier to change than policies as no board approval is needed.

As for the ideal amount of NYCLA support for the implementation of the diagnostic, in her opinion, would be NYCLA on the ground facilitating the three large meetings and a coach/mentor/thought partner to help the superintendent through the process. We explained the standardized nature of the diagnostic as we currently envision it. In that case she said having a mentor or coach would be ideal.

#### **Pre-Pilot Two: Dr. Morris**

My second pre-pilot with Dr. Morris was also extremely helpful. By this point in the process NYCLA had asked me to increase my focus on the marketing questions, such as what would a superintendent be willing to pay for such a tool. Dr. Morris reported that he had not seen another diagnostic like this. It reminded him more than anything else of the strategic planning process he uses called *Planning for Success* that he pays about \$8500 to use. It comes with some in person support. Dr. Morris suggested we market the diagnostic as a strategic planning process because he would "never have time for both" (meaning a strategic plan and the diagnostic) (M. Morris, personal communication, October 26, 2017). [The question he raised, about the commitment of resources, both funding and time, remains an on-going one for us at NYCLA.]

Dr. Morris said, "The diagnostic offers a very helpful roadmap. This work is overwhelming" (M. Morris, personal communication, October 26, 2017). He also liked

the emphasis on ensuring some "quick wins" that was something that came out of my original interviews with superintendents.

### **Feedback from Dr. Morris That's Been Incorporated into the Diagnostic**

Dr. Morris had some useful feedback for the tool's improvement as well. He suggested the following.

- **Add an additional layer of community engagement by having members of the equity committee meet with focus groups throughout the process.**
- **Include a communication plan as an appendix** for superintendents because, as he put it, "Equity can be hard to talk about and advice would be helpful" (M. Morris, personal communication, October 26, 2017).
- Similar to Ms. Silva's suggestion for increasing communication and being sure it is consistent, Dr. Morris recommended that at the end of each Phase, equity committee members **share the results of the meetings both in writing and in person at a meeting where community members can offer feedback.** As Dr. Morris said, "It will be hard to get the work done if the community doesn't feel heard in the process" (M. Morris, personal communication, October 26, 2017).
- In a couple of places where the diagnostic offers flexibility, such as how many focus topics to choose, Dr. Morris suggested we **give more specific advice.** "Superintendents can adjust it as they see fit, but they will want to know what NYCLA recommends," he explained (M. Morris, personal communication, October 26, 2017).

- Dr. Morris was concerned about the places where the decision points were only the superintendent's. He suggested we **have all decisions facilitated by the committee.**
- In terms of the amount of support he would hope to get from NYCLA, if Dr. Morris were to engage in the diagnostic, he suggested we **offer coaching on facilitation before and after each of the three meetings the superintendent is to facilitate.** [Note: While this level of coaching was not what we had anticipated at NYCLA, it could actually increase the revenue we might be able to derive from selling the diagnostic.]

### **Evidence of Progress to Date**

#### **Feedback from Colleagues**

There is a significant amount of evidence that the diagnostic's development has been successful thus far. As stated above, while both of the pre-pilot superintendents had many useful suggestions for improvement, they also both felt the diagnostic would be helpful to superintendents who were trying to diagnose and address their most urgent inequities.

Many members of the NYCLA staff, including several who were former principals and superintendents themselves, participated in the iterative feedback and design loop that went on between September and November. When I shared the diagnostic with the cabinet, which is made up of the CEO, the vice president and the heads of all the divisions, the Chief Strategy Officer commented, "It is amazing how this has come together so comprehensively in such little time." There was very little feedback overall during the meeting, which concerned me. However, my supervisor, the

Vice President for District Improvement, said the reason for that was because they could see the diagnostic already incorporated so much of their feedback. [Please see **Implications for Self** below for additional factors that may have limited their participation.]

### **Readiness for An External Audience**

A very significant piece of evidence of the success of the development of the diagnostic is that others in the organization are beginning to use components of the diagnostic when designing new services, such as our newest program, *Equity: From Inquiry to Action*. [See Appendix D] The marketing for this program began in November and the first iteration of the program took place in March. Twenty senior level leaders from Chicago, Palm Beach County and New York City took part. Feedback from participants was extremely positive. All participants left the training with an action plan focused on eliminating inequities in their district's. Of the thirteen surveys we collected, eleven reported that *The Playbook* was helpful in the process and/or they had plans for using it in their districts. Several also offered useful recommendations for *The Playbook's* further development, such as the inclusion of case studies.

In addition, the diagnostic was also deemed complete and high quality enough to share with potential funders. I was asked to create a special version of the tool for this purpose. I was told that one funder was "very excited" about the diagnostic and NYCLA is using it in an application to fund a new position for the creation of strategic tools, such as the diagnostic.

Another piece of evidence demonstrating the diagnostic's deemed value for unpacking and addressing inequities, is the response of the Massachusetts' Department of



Education's (ESE) Senior Associate Commissioner, Cliff Chuang. The Senior Associate Commissioner, who was my mentor during my time at ESE, reviewed the diagnostic and asked me to come and present it to the Massachusetts Urban Superintendents Network. He was hopeful that some of the superintendents would be interested in using it and potentially even being in the pilot. (See Appendix F for agenda.)

### **First Stages of The Pilot**

Most importantly, the diagnostic was approved by NYCLA to move to the pilot phase, which demonstrates that the organization's leadership is confident that it will effectively support superintendents engaging in equity work.

The pilot began with planning meetings with the Risedale School District Deputy Superintendent, who is charged with leading the equity committee. He shared important aspects of the historical and political context of both the district and the equity committee. He also shared data and anecdotal evidence of the district's greatest areas of weakness, including graduating boys of color and hiring teachers of color.

In January I led a six-hour training for the deputy superintendent and the three cabinet level colleagues who would co-facilitate the diagnostic process. [See Appendix G for Agenda]. There were three goals for the training. The first goal was technical. I wanted them to learn how to use the diagnostic *Guidebook* and *Playbook* and to plan out their first meeting agendas. My second and third goals were more adaptive. I wanted them to adopt a new skillset and understanding about how to lead challenging and meaningful conversations about racial equity. I also wanted them to begin to think strategically and politically, through my coaching, about how to effectively manage the process even with an unpredictable group.

I surveyed the participants at the end of the training. Overall, their feedback was that the training was extremely helpful in preparing them to lead this work. They reported that the resources and activities, both the technical and more adaptive, were practical and helpful. One comment read, “The entire day was helpful in preparing us to actually lead the work instead of falling victim to the agenda of others,” as had happened at all of the previous REAL committee meetings. In fact, there had never been a meeting before when they had made it even half way through their agenda. The participants’ constructive feedback was around time. They would have liked even more time to engage in the readings and activities, so we will need to build this into future trainings either with more pre-work or an even longer training. [See Appendix H for a sample Training Evaluation.]

On January 23<sup>rd</sup>, the first meeting of the diagnostic process in Risedale took place. While there was some participant resistance, the facilitators were able for the first time to get through the entire planned agenda. There were challenging moments. For example, one person was asked to leave for behaving inappropriately. However, all aspects of the meeting were successfully led and the small groups were able to begin looking at data. Feedback from the leaders included this reflection, “Thank you. Thank you. You prepared us to feel comfortable entering what we knew was going to be a very hostile situation.” Most importantly, the first narrowing in on areas of inequity took place with the committee choosing “discipline disparities”, “personnel” and “cultural competency” as their focus topics.

In March a mid-pilot survey was completed. The facilitators reported that the diagnostic, the training and the coaching had continued to help them move productively

towards the development of a plan to target inequities. They have chosen their focus topics and have analyzed the data related to each. They also reported that the coaching continued to help them manage challenging conversations with their committee that had formerly been rife with conflict. The meetings had become more civil and productive. At every meeting, the leaders were able to accomplish all of the goals they have set out beforehand. While the committee is slightly behind because one meeting was cancelled, they are still on track to finish within our target timeline of four to six months.

In terms of the sale of the diagnostic, we had planned to begin selling it after the pilot was complete. However, when Mary Rice-Boothe shared some components of it with leaders in Hillsborough County, they chose to purchase it. Ms. Rice-Boothe was also asked to deliver a keynote speech based on *The Playbook* for the district’s end of year administrators’ meeting.

The following chart, Figure Six, details the ways that the evidence of success aligns with my Theory of Action for the strategic project.

**Figure Six: Theory of Action (ToA) Evidence Chart**

ToA “If” Statements	Evidence of Results
If I come to understand how, through interviews and research, superintendents across the country effectively make their districts more equitable, decrease disparities and close achievement and opportunity gaps for low income children and children of color;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Interviewed seven superintendents across the country known for their success decreasing inequities and gaps in their districts. [See RKA]</li> <li>* Coded answers from seven interviews, tracking for patterns of behavior that resulted in success. [See RKA]</li> <li>* Reviewed literature on effectively reducing inequities. [See RKA]</li> </ul>
And devise a tool based on the findings (above);	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Investigated other tools in the field and found no similar diagnostic. [See RKA]</li> <li>* Created and revised diagnostic more than twenty times. [See Diagnostic Guidebook for most updated version in Appendix B]</li> <li>* Developed <i>The Playbook</i> with exemplars that chart best practices. [See Appendix E]</li> </ul>
And test that tool, gather data and continuous feedback from my colleagues at NYCLA and those in the field;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Conducted two pre-pilots with superintendents to learn how the diagnostic would be effective or ineffective in helping them diagnose and address inequities in their districts.</li> <li>* Used pre-pilot feedback to revise diagnostic.</li> <li>* Presented diagnostic to NYCLA cabinet and gathered ideas for supporting the tool in practice.</li> <li>* Pitched diagnostic to three superintendents, one of whom agreed</li> </ul>

	<p>to be the pilot site.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Was given approval to proceed with pilot.</li> <li>* Was asked to share diagnostic with funders. As a result of viewing diagnostic, funders are considering giving money to NYCLA to support a new position. The person in this new role would continue to develop tools for the sector.</li> </ul>
<b>“Then” Statement</b>	<b>Evidence of Results</b>
<p>Then I will create a tool and accompanying training superintendents will use to effectively diagnose and diminish their district’s inequities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Pre-pilot superintendents’ feedback regarding the diagnostic: “You nailed it. I wish I had this when I was in my district.” She said every time she thought something was missing, she kept reading and found we had thought of it. She also said that she has never seen another similar diagnostic. (Silva, 2017) Dr. Morris said, "The diagnostic offers a very helpful roadmap. This work is overwhelming." (Morris, 2017)</li> <li>*Former BPS Chief of Schools, Michele Shannon, joined the NYCLA staff and reviewed the tool saying she was “very excited about it” and is using a portion of it in her upcoming training for district leaders entitled <i>Equity: From Inquiry to Action</i>.</li> <li>*MA DOE Senior Associate Commissioner, Cliff Chuang, reviewed the diagnostic and asked that I present it to the state’s urban superintendents. He was hopeful one of them will join the pilot and use the tool.</li> <li>*In February 2018, Mary Rice-Boothe, Vice President of District Leadership Support, used the diagnostic’s <i>Playbook</i> with district leaders in Hillsborough, FL and Phoenix, AZ to assist them in narrowing in on their most urgent areas of focus.</li> <li>*Deputy Superintendent of Risedale, NY and his leadership team are in need of assistance diagnosing their district’s most urgent equities and developing a plan to address those inequities with their equity committee. They have chosen the diagnostic as a tool for engaging in that work.</li> <li>*Feedback from the pilot diagnostic training showed that participants felt the session prepared them to lead conversations about racial equity and to confidently begin the diagnostic process of examining inequities.</li> <li>*In the first committee meeting, since taking part in the training and beginning the diagnostic process, the Risedale facilitators met all of the goals on their agenda and successfully made the first decision about narrowing the focus to personnel, discipline and cultural competency.</li> <li>*In March, the training <i>Equity: From Inquiry to Action</i> took place. Components of the diagnostic were used with 20 leaders from Chicago, Palm Beach County and New York City. Participants’ surveys showed the session helped them narrow in and create a plan to address their greatest inequities.</li> <li>* In March a mid-pilot survey was completed. The Risedale facilitators reported that the diagnostic, the training and the coaching continued to help them move productively towards the</li> </ul>

	<p>development of a plan to target inequities.</p> <p>*In March, the diagnostic was sold to Hillsborough County, FL, four months before NYCLA anticipated it would be ready to market.</p>
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## VI. Implications for Site

### Learning from The Pilot

There are three lessons that I have already learned from the pilot that are useful for NYCLA.

- **In order for the diagnostic to be successful, more coaching time than we originally planned on is going to be critical.** The Risedale facilitators are requesting a chance to debrief and plan between each session, which feels necessary and appropriate to me. The process will not be as effective if it is not planned based on what happened during the previous meeting. I suggest 2-3 hours between each committee meeting. In the case of Risedale, there will probably be five meetings so that would be a minimum of ten coaching hours. We had originally estimated that 2-3 hours of coaching time for the entire process would be sufficient.
- **One of the most important skillsets for the trainer to have will be the ability to coach the leaders on leading challenging conversations about race.** Becoming more comfortable leading these conversations and knowing some strategies for building a safe environment for participants will be key. In the training we discussed strategies and role-played challenging scenarios. Two of the four scenarios we role-played actually took place in the January meeting.
- **The other critical skillset for the trainer will be to offer strategic political coaching.** In fact, the majority of the questions and potential pitfalls have been in

this category. From bringing the right people to the table, to removing participants who are disrupting the process, strategic political coaching has been key to keeping the process on track. We will want to be sure that anyone at NYCLA chosen to lead this process has significant experience successfully navigating challenging political situations. I also believe we can build the capacity of NYCLA's facilitators by using case studies to brainstorm solutions that both move the work forward and ensure equity of voice.

### **Framework for Analyzing NYCLA's Growth**

While engaging in the development and implementation of the diagnostic, I have been on the figurative "dance floor", engaging in the day-to-day work of the organization. At the same time, I have attempted to view the whole organization from the "balcony" and have used the ambidextrous organizations framework as my lens (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002). In reading through the research and case studies on ambidextrous organizations, I have developed a list of nine essentials for a successful ambidextrous organization with my EdLD colleague, Babak Mostighami. We have confirmed the accuracy of these "essentials" with Dr. Tushman (M. L. Tushman, personal communication, October 19, 2017). The essentials are:

1. A supportive financial environment,
2. A supportive organizational environment,
3. Continued engagement with former and current products and expertise,
4. An ambidextrous CEO and leadership team,
5. An overarching mission for both the explore (innovation) and the engage (management of current services) parts of the organization,

6. A separate set of metrics and/or adjusted expectations for explore and engage,
7. Shared non-financial resources between explore and engage,
8. Flexible cultural norms for explore staff and
9. The ability to ready the environment and stakeholders for the explore innovation

(O'Reilly & Tushman, 2004; M. L. Tushman, personal communication, September 26, 2017). The following passages illustrate the ways that NYCLA embodies these nine essentials as does the chart in Figure Six. Using my strategic project, the district-level equity diagnostic, as an example of an effort to “explore” and innovate, I have found evidence of several of the ambidextrous essentials at NYCLA.

As for **essential one**, a supportive financial environment, NYCLA wrote for and won a Carnegie Foundation grant to support the exploration of my strategic project and innovation, the district-level diagnostic. Financial resources, in the form of colleagues' time, has also been significant. Colleagues in the departments of measurement and evaluation, district improvement, and business development have continuously offered support and guidance. The annual renewal of the Ed.L.D. resident position also demonstrates the organization's long term financial commitment to innovation.

In terms of **essential two**, a supportive organizational environment, the CEO has shared the diagnostic with the board and the staff as an important component of the organization's strategic plan. This support from the top has given the project the internal political support it has needed to survive. As I have reached out to colleagues across departments for feedback, I have received quick and thoughtful responses and support.

What is lacking in terms of these essentials? While there is financial support for my position and the development of diagnostic, there has been limited support for marketing

research. In the words of a member from the business development department, “We need to stop innovating in a vacuum.” In other words, although we are all former district leaders, before we develop tools in the future, market data should inspire our innovation – not the other way around. I attempted to correct for this by asking questions of the superintendents I interviewed (written collaboratively with a leader in business development), such as, “Have you ever seen any other diagnostic like this?” And, “What would you have found useful in your equity work?” However, the basic concept had been determined before I began asking these questions.

In terms of **essential three**, continued engagement with former and current products and expertise, NYCLA does continue to engage the products that have historically been its bread and butter. The Aspiring Principals Program (APP) that was originally developed to train all of New York City’s principals continue to be implemented in districts outside of the city, such as Rochester, NY. In addition, when the demand for APP was dropping, a similar program, Foundations of Principal Supervision, was designed for principal supervisors. Now in its third year, Foundations is also a program that is being engaged by NYCLA. Planning and recruitment for its fourth year has begun and mini versions of it have been created in other areas of the country such as the Maricopa County Education Service Agency (MCESA) in Arizona and San Francisco, CA.

Coaching is also something that NYCLA engages in. Originally part of the APP model, where aspiring coaches would receive coaching from a former principal, NYCLA has maintained and expanded this service. While some New York City principals continue to purchase coaching services, coaching has developed a new format called “executive coaching”. This coaching focuses on senior leaders throughout the sector.



In terms of **essential four**, an ambidextrous CEO and leadership team, NYCLA has an ambidextrous leader in CEO and president, Irma Zardoya. Ms. Zardoya uses her political and social capital in support of NYCLA's engage and explore arms. Examples of this are her work to fundraise for explore and engage projects. She reaches out to colleagues in the field for their support of both sets of projects. Chief Strategy Officer, Dr. Nancy Gutierrez, cites Ms. Zardoya's commitment to continued funding of the innovation side of the organization. Dr. Gutierrez and Ms. Zardoya also have tasked both the Client Services department as well as the Business Development department with juggling the funding and support of both explore and engage on a daily basis.

**Essential five**, having an overarching mission/vision that unites explore and engage, is one of NYCLA's greatest strengths. No matter who I interviewed during my first months at NYCLA, from employees in the cabinet to those working in business development, everyone shared some version of the organization's mission being about leadership as a lever for equity. This mission permeates the projects and work being done by both the explore and engage arms of the organization. While my diagnostic is being created to help superintendents successfully unpack the inequities in their districts, the work of all departments and teams, has the same focus. In Hillsborough County School District, we are assisting the superintendents in living out their Racial Equity Policy and improving their school walk-throughs so they have an equity focus. In Nevada, we are developing a statewide PLC for principals to help them better understand their data by subgroups and to use it to improve inequities.

**Essential six**, having a separate set of metrics and/or adjusted expectations for explore and engage, is developing. Historically, measures of success have been client

satisfaction as measured through surveys, interviews, funds raised and the continuation of contracts. While these measures will continue, some new measures are being considered for the diagnostic. Rather than a significant amount of funds raised per contract, one measure of success will be the number of districts buying licenses. While the income per contract will be far less than in-person services, the diagnostic will be able to be profitable if many districts purchase a license.

**Essential seven**, shared non-financial resources between explore and engage, is an area of relative strength that is becoming stronger. NYCLA consistently offers staff members from all departments access to materials from all past projects, via a shared drive, as well as the thought partnership of anyone in the organization. By asking for and receiving feedback on the diagnostic from people across the organization, I am observing people on other projects learning about the diagnostic and then incorporating it into their designs. For example, *The Playbook* portion of the diagnostic was used in Phoenix and Hillsborough County in February and several components of the diagnostic (*The Playbook*, the action plan, the political coaching) were incorporated into a new training, *From Inquiry to Action*, in March.

In terms of **essential eight**, flexible cultural norms for the explore staff, it is clear that NYCLA is increasingly hiring people for a new set of skills. Historically, NYCLA would hire former principals and superintendents, who were strong leaders and facilitators. While most NYCLA employees continue to need that skillset, the organization is now hiring people with skills more connected to the “explore” part of the business. Some examples of this are a new on-line designer, who is helping NYCLA expand their virtual learning capacity, and a communications director, who is helping NYCLA develop a policy voice

and broaden our market reach. My team, district leadership, is almost entirely focused on exploring by developing the diagnostic, new racial equity training and equity trainings at the state level.

While I see no evidence that employees engaged in explore projects have a more flexible culture, there is evidence that – as the organization has moved towards exploration – more flexibility has been granted to all employees. For example, employees no longer need to live in New York City. Several of us, including two cabinet members, are based in other parts of the country. Even employees living in the city, however, are able to work from home. The culture as a whole is adjusting as well to be more sensitive to the schedules of employees and to avoid burdening anyone with too much travel.

**Essential nine**, readying the environment and stakeholders for the explore innovation, is an area in which NYCLA is developing. Through the Chief Strategy Officer and Communications Director our expanded menu of services is being shared through newsletters, short films, blog posts, Tweets and other social media. We are readying the community for our products by engaging in pilots. In the case of the district diagnostic, I have engaged about ten experienced superintendents across the country in the development of the tool. Two took part in a pre-pilot where they experienced a complete first draft of the diagnostic and gave detailed feedback. These leaders will now be aware of our new services. The business department has also created a “playbook” that has a set of standardized steps to go through during product development. NYCLA is also readying stakeholders by coming out not just with products but also with opinions. For example, in the last month several employees wrote articles and opinion pieces that had political policy implications, such as the Chief Strategy Officer’s piece on supporting immigrant students in

*Education Week*. Rather than argue that we have something worth purchasing, we are arguing that there is a mindset shift we hope our readers and stakeholders will make.

Below, in Figure Seven, please find those traits which make NYCLA an ambidextrous organization.

**Figure Seven: NYCLA’s Ambidextrous Qualities**

<b>Essential</b>	<b>Evidence of Essential at NYCLA</b>
<b>One</b> - <i>A supportive financial environment</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Carnegie Foundation grants fund innovative projects.</li> <li>2. Staff across departments, including business development and evaluation and measurement, offer guidance, support and (the resource of their) time resources to the development of new innovations.</li> </ol>
<b>Two</b> - <i>A supportive organizational environment</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. New ideas are given support from leadership, such as being included in strategic plans and speeches about important organizational endeavors. Such support gives innovative work the political capital necessary to move forward.</li> <li>2. The staff culture is one of openness to new ideas, married with critical feedback.</li> </ol>
<b>Three</b> - <i>Continued engagement of former and current products and expertise</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Coaching continues to be an engagement service.</li> <li>2. Versions of APP continue to be created outside of New York City, such as in Risedale, NY.</li> <li>3. Foundations is now an engagement service for principal supervisors.</li> </ol>
<b>Four</b> - <i>An ambidextrous CEO and leadership team</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Ms. Irma Zardoya, CEO, and her development team fundraise and seek grants for both explore and engage projects.</li> <li>2. Ms. Zardoya and her cabinet oversee both explore and engage projects.</li> </ol>
<b>Five</b> - <i>An overarching mission/vision that unites explore and engage</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Mission permeates the projects and work being done by both the explore and engage arms of the organization.</li> <li>2. All arms of the organization are focused on using leadership as a lever for equity. Evidence can be seen in individual coaching, district-level and state-level work.</li> </ol>
<b>Six</b> - <i>A separate set of metrics and/or adjusted expectations for explore and engage</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Success with standardized tools may be measured by the number of contracts rather than the size of each one.</li> </ol>
<b>Seven</b> - <i>Shared non-financial resources between explore and engage</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Staff are encouraged to utilize resources from other departments and previous client engagements in the development of new services via a shared drive.</li> <li>2. Staff use elements of services (e.g. The Playbook) in new and varied ways.</li> </ol>
<b>Eight</b> - <i>Flexible cultural norms for “explore” staff</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. NYCLA is hiring staff with new skillsets to assist with innovation such as virtual learning, communications, fundraising and marketing skills.</li> </ol>
<b>Nine</b> - <i>Readying the Environment</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The expanded menu of services is being shared through newsletters, short films, blog posts, Tweets and other social media.</li> <li>2. Pilots allow clients to experience and learn about future services.</li> <li>3. Blog posts and editorials now offer opinions, preparing clients for NYCLA’s shifting vision and the mindset shifts it hopes its services will help leaders make.</li> </ol>

In order to continue to be sustainable and successful, NYCLA must continue to model the ambidextrous essentials it already embraces and begin to embody the other

essentials as well. As for the first essential, NYCLA should invest in more market research before beginning to innovate. An innovation director could survey leaders in focus groups, on-line surveys and 1:1 interviews *to determine exactly what principals and central office administrators need* for support now and what they envision they will need in the future – as well as what they would pay for it. This innovation director can then share findings with experts in the coaching, school leadership and district leadership pods and, through a design thinking process, develop new innovations to pilot. This director can manage on-going pilots in schools and districts across the country and work with the research and evaluation team to determine which projects are effective and should be fully developed and sold.

Being more ambidextrous in this way would support my strategic project and other standardized offerings in the future. This is because, *if we designed in response to the specific needs of a particular client* or set of clients, we would not have to go looking for a site who needed our product. NYCLA would already know. If we developed something specific based on the needs of a set of clients we could also have them agree ahead of time to pilot or purchase that service if we chose to develop it. This would ensure we would not get stuck developing something and having no district to pilot it in or no client to purchase it as is currently happening with a recently designed training. See chart [Figure Eight] for a comparison of our current process versus this more ambidextrous process.

**Figure Eight: Current NYCLA Standardized Service Design Process Vs. Recommended Ambidextrous Design Process**

<b>Steps in Product Development</b>	<b>Current NYCLA Process for Customized Service Design</b>	<b>Current NYCLA Process for Standardized Service Design</b>	<b>Recommended Ambidextrous Process for Standardized Service Design</b>
One	NYCLA responds to direct client request for specific services or RFP. Business development in consultation with team lead secures contract.	NYCLA staff member proposes an idea for a product, based on their experiences in the field, and vets it with NYCLA colleagues. Idea is agreed upon by leadership.	Innovation Director and/or NYCLA staff members interview colleagues in field to determine products and services <i>they need</i> as well as what they would be willing and able to pay for that service.
Two	NYCLA project manager is chosen by leadership and brings team together for internal launch.	NYCLA project manager is chosen by leadership and brings team together for internal launch.	Design thinking session takes place at NYCLA. Launch is a team brainstorm of potential trainings and tools that would meet the specified needs of colleagues in the field (gathered in step one). Team chooses best option(s) to present to districts (who were interviewed in Step One of the process).
Three	NYCLA team meets with client to share draft plan and revises based on client's feedback. Revised plan shared with client once more before delivery.	NYCLA team develops training and product, based on NYCLA staff member's idea, through a series of design meetings.	Innovation Director or other NYCLA lead goes back to district leaders with proposed design, gets feedback. Team makes requested modifications to service.
Four	NYCLA facilitators deliver service.	If this is a tool being developed, NYCLA staff contact colleagues in the field to see if they would be willing to pilot.  If this is a training being developed, NYCLA staff reach out to colleagues in the field to invite them to participate. Clients may or may not be interested. If sufficient clients are not found, training does not occur.	Innovation Director, NYCLA lead and/or business development officer shares updated design with districts that originally shared their need and gets commitment for pilot and/or service for purchase.
Five	Participant surveys and After Action Review (AAR) conducted to determine success of the project as well as potential next steps.	If the pilot or training occurred, feedback is used to revise the service. Business development may engage in market research that involves asking districts what they think of a service that we have designed and/or the way we plan to market the product.	Pilot and/or first delivery of training conducted. Feedback used to refine service.
Six	Business development	Business development	Business development

	reaches out to client to discuss interest in future services.	markets and sells the service. Targeted emails are sent to districts around the country.	markets the service to districts with similar features, explaining how need was met in pilot district.
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These insights were further supported during a visit in February 2018 to four ambidextrous organizations, Google, Uber, Facebook and IDEO, in San Francisco, CA. In speaking with leaders at each of these organizations, it was clear that one driver of their continued success was their ability to both maintain their standard products (e.g. Google maintains its search engine) *while continuously having employees talk to clients about their evolving needs* (e.g. Google interviews teachers) and test out new services (e.g. Google has designed ways for teachers to collaborate as well as computer science modules). NYCLA will benefit from engaging in this regular practice as a beginning point for its design of standardized services.

## VII. Implications for Self

As a leader, I am working on building my capacity in many areas. First, I am working to build my knowledge base around data analysis and closing achievement gaps through my interviews and research. I would someday like to serve as both a superintendent and a high-level policy maker. Before taking on either of these roles, I am committed to knowing how to effectively address inequities.

In terms of competencies, I am working on slowing my pace and becoming more reflective. In my past leadership roles, especially as a principal, I have always been motivated first and foremost to *finish*. I have always been known for getting incredible amounts of work done quickly. While the work I completed was high quality, there was a downside to the pace. Working quickly can mean some voices are not heard in the process. I have never spent enough time in conversation or gathering feedback. I did not really listen deeply. If I challenge myself to consider why, I think I feared that the feedback might be critical of my idea or solution. Hearing and reacting to such criticism would slow my pace. And, at that point in my career, my sense of self was largely about my effectiveness in getting work done. So a criticism of my idea or solution was a criticism of me. By engaging in the development of the diagnostic, I have been trying to strengthen these leadership muscles. I started my residency two months early in hopes that I would not feel as frantic about getting everything done as quickly as possible. I regularly asked people with varied roles in my organization for feedback and listened with a learning stance rather than a defensive one. I tried to hold the diagnostic and the feedback object. The diagnostic, and my other work at NYCLA, is not me. My work and me are not one and the same. And someone's opinion of my delivery of my work



should be viewed with interest, as an opportunity to grow, but also not as the truth. It is one data point that I should learn from, make good use of and then move on.

I also learned that, when I did start to slip into that pattern of thinking that I AM the diagnostic and my worth is totally bound up in the success of this one piece of work, it was a sign I had become too insular. I needed to get on a train to New York or meet with members of my team virtually, get feedback and collaboratively improve the diagnostic. There was a moment when I learned that some colleagues were going to use a piece of the diagnostic but not all of it. I immediately was concerned that the tool as a whole was problematic and that I had not accomplished what I set out to do. However, I pushed myself to take a step back. I realized this additional use of the diagnostic was a sign of success because others saw the tool as something they could use in innovative ways. It was something they contributed to and also owned. And our organization was going to benefit from this innovative opportunity to “explore” with the diagnostic in new ways.

As mentioned above, I know I used to rarely ask for feedback, but I notice myself doing it regularly now. In fact, during a meeting in October, my supervisor, Ms. Rice-Boothe, said to me, “Now you need to stop gathering feedback” and move on to the next phase (M. Rice-Boothe, personal communication, October, 2017). While the old me may have worried that she was concerned I was not making enough progress quickly enough, the new “wanting myself to hear feedback” me was surprised and thrilled.

Additional evidence of this growth in listening and applying feedback can be found in my supervisor’s evaluation on November 17, 2017. Ms. Rice-Boothe’s comments read, “Carole has sought my feedback on her projects, reflected on them and

applied the feedback.” (M. Rice-Boothe, personal communication, November 17, 2017)  
She also listed as one of my strengths “seeking and acting on feedback”.

I know I have work to do in this area still, however. After my presentation to the cabinet, I asked Ms. Rice-Boothe what could have been done to deepen the conversation, as it felt very surface level. As I reflect on it myself, I know I was trying to just get the meeting finished without hearing any feedback that might derail my progress. Ms. Rice-Boothe suggested I speak less, avoid reading the content on the slides and give people more time to process and respond. This is an area that I will continue to work on during this project and after residency (M. Rice-Boothe, personal communication, November 17, 2017).

Related learning can also be seen in the design of the diagnostic. Because this has been a weakness of mine, I aimed to prioritize the involvement of stakeholders in the diagnostic itself. While this would have been hard for me as a principal or a central office administrator, I intentionally advised superintendents to involve Board members who were supporters and detractors as well as community members with varied expertise. This involvement will slow the process, making it longer and messier. There will be more conflict during meetings, but, at the end of the process, the action plan will be better quality and more sustainable as a result of the broad involvement of community members. The community will own the actions.

This learning has also made me a better coach. As I have come to realize the importance of slowing down the process in order to increase community participation, I have been able to more clearly see the tendency to rush the work in my clients. Having

struggled with this issue myself allows me to speak thoughtfully and with vulnerability about my own learning in this area, as a way to guide the leaders whom I am coaching.

One of my greatest strengths is constantly wanting to learn new content, new theories and new strategies. I had never worked for a non-profit before beginning my residency, but I feel I have been able to use my enthusiasm for learning to design a product the organization needed. More importantly though, I feel I have been able to travel between the “balcony” and the “dance floor” regularly so that I can accomplish my assignments while also making recommendations for overall organizational improvement (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002). Again, this was something Ms. Rice-Boothe noted in her evaluation by saying “Carole came into the organization in a learner’s stance. This stance has allowed her to see the organization in totality while also asking great questions that could lead to innovation and improvement” (M. Rice-Boothe, personal communication, November 17, 2017). I hope to continue to be able to travel between the balcony and dance floor as the pilot continues and the pace of the work quickens and my tendency to “finish” reappears.

Ms. Rice-Boothe has also encouraged me to think about how I, personally, might serve as an ambidextrous leader for equity within an organization. I will do this by staying connected with the field and the challenges leaders are facing, so that our services effectively meet the needs of leaders and help them make their districts more equitable. At the same time as I help to oversee this ongoing external work, I must innovate within our organization for equity as well. Innovating for equity within our organization means naming, disrupting and then reimagining the structures and policies that are perpetuating inequities. It also involves deepening my awareness of my own biases, being vulnerable

by sharing my own personal development, seeking on-going training for myself and encouraging my colleagues to continue to develop their own racial consciousness.

Overall, my leadership journey within the organization has been extremely rich. In addition to successfully creating the diagnostic, I have also been offered and accepted a position that grew out of my capstone, Senior Director of Innovation and Policy. This role will allow me to develop new supports for leaders based on regulatory and policy changes as well as their district-specific needs.

When I began, I knew that I was capable of meeting high expectations for a high quality diagnostic, but I was concerned about being able to do it with minimal positional power. In my most recent roles before the EdLD program, as principal and central office administrator, I had the authority to make change. How would I move a project along with virtually no positional power at NYCLA? I learned that two things allowed me to be successful. First, the culture of NYCLA as a real learning organization was critical. By this I mean that NYCLA's leadership offers employees both the encouragement and flexibility within their schedules to ask and offer support to one another. This allowed me, without any positional power, to ask numerous colleagues for their advice, time and assistance. I literally never had a colleague say no to a request for help. While my colleagues certainly were aware that my supervisor, who does have positional power, as well as the CEO, prioritized my project, I really attribute the level of collaboration and support I received to the NYCLA's learning culture first and foremost. As a leader, I will take this lesson with me. I will ensure that everyone who works in my organization and district is encouraged to learn, to take risks, to ask for help and to offer support. Such a

learning organization encourages collaboration not competition and is more flat than hierarchical. These are features I hope to replicate.

The second reason I was able to be successful with limited positional power was because of the creation of trusting relationships. While the culture of NYCLA allowed me to move work forward, I also believe it was the trust that I built with colleagues, superintendents in the field and clients that was key. Taking the time to ask questions and really listen deeply to the answers colleagues at NYCLA and in the field were giving allowed me to gather insights that were essential to the development of the diagnostic. While relationship building has long been a strength of mine and something I do naturally, I want to remember that it is another important reason that I will be able to successfully move work forward with or without positional power. This is also a lesson I will share with those I mentor in the future.

For all of these reasons, I have had an incredibly valuable leadership journey during my time at NYCLA. The lessons learned will help me effectively lead within NYCLA and as a superintendent and policy maker in the future.

## VIII. Implications for the Sector

Many of the lessons I have learned through my research and development of the diagnostic will be useful for superintendents embarking on equity work. That content knowledge was shared in the exemplars and RKA. However, in order to use that knowledge to adjust policies and practices, and close achievement and opportunity gaps, superintendents must work strategically and gain the support of their board and community in order to truly be successful. Some of these critical strategic lessons, outlined in detail below, I will include in *The Guidebook*. I also plan to share it more broadly with the sector by writing shorter pieces, such as a blog for NYCLA's *Leadership Insights* web page.

### **Strategic Advice for Effectively Accomplishing Equity Work**

**Superintendents should engage personally in racial equity work before leading a district wide initiative.** It will be critical for leaders to be aware of their own biases and model vulnerability and risk taking. As necessary, leaders should engage coaches and experts to support their continued development.

**Superintendents must be strategic about their timing.** Superintendents I interviewed suggested first tackling issues that members of the community would largely view as urgent. It is critical that the early equity work, whenever possible, has broad community support. Once those issues have been successfully addressed, it is important that the superintendent communicate these “quick wins” to the board and the community. As one superintendent explained, “Success stories are really important and can be infectious.” In other words, once you have shown that the district can effectively fix inequities in the system, it can be easier to gain support for future initiatives.

**Messaging must also be strategic.** One superintendent shared that her city's main industry was banking. So, when she discussed issues of inequities, she posed them as banking analogies. Another superintendent, who restructured the special education classes so that children with special needs were now in inclusive classes, put her strongest teachers in charge of those classes. She intentionally told parents that her strongest teachers led the inclusive, heterogeneous classes. As a result, parents of regular education students wanted their children in those inclusive classes and did not complain about the restructuring. Superintendents spoke about the need to call people to action and some used their personal stories to build trust and rally their communities.

**Superintendents must ensure there are board approved values and/or a policy in support of equity.** If such values or policies exist, the superintendent can use them as justification when making controversial decisions. Core values and equity policies can also be the basis for staff trainings. Such trainings can offer educators the opportunity to debate and come to consensus around the behaviors they would hope to see for each core value or portion of the equity policy.

Superintendents must have a team of educators who carefully monitor varied types of formative and summative data. To gain buy-in from the community, this **data must be shared openly and regularly. It should be used to show misalignment with stated values and policies.** Those responsible for the data must also be held accountable for improvement or lack there of.

While this is not always possible, **avoid taking resources from one community to give to another.** One superintendent did this by finding additional funding and offering it only to the school with more students in need. Another superintendent

replaced a regular chess teacher with a virtual chess class, in order to ensure that both the low-income and the upper-income schools both had chess. These strategic ways to provide more to needier schools may allow the superintendent to offer more and more support without any pushback from more privileged parents.

### **Strategic Advice for Sustainability of Equity Work**

**Superintendents and their designees should meet regularly with all members of their boards and local leaders to stay on top of their “political base”.** It will be critical to know and be able to quickly address questions and concerns being raised about the equity work.

**When challenges arise, bring a diverse team together to find a solution.** When possible try to avoid making the problem and its solution only the purview of the superintendent.

**Superintendents can be strategic about sustainability by hiring and training a diverse leadership team whose members are committed to equity.**

**Also as a way to ensure sustainability, superintendents can empower parents** by sharing data and information about initiatives with them so they will continue to demand these programs even after the superintendent’s tenure is up.



## **IX. Conclusion**

### **How Problems of Practice Were Addressed**

My strategic project has been an effort to solve a series of problems of practice for NYCLA as well as the education sector. Please see the problems of practice as well as the solutions that came of my strategic project below.

### **Problems of Practice for the Sector**

**I. Problem: Significant progress diminishing achievement and opportunity gaps in districts is rarely made because the underlying policies promote institutional racism and inequities for children of color, low-income children and their families.**

I. Solution: While the pilot is still on-going, superintendents who have reviewed the diagnostic have felt its design will guide leaders to thoroughly investigate the policies perpetuating inequities and develop an action plan to effectively address those inequities. Early pilot results have shown that the diagnostic has already helped the committee begin the process of prioritizing the inequities.

**II. Problem: Superintendents do not have sufficient research-based tools or training for 1) examining their district's policies and practices, 2) identifying those that promote inequities and 3) redesigning those policies and practices so that they increase access and equity.**

II. Solution: Two critical components of the diagnostic are *The Guidebook* and *The Playbook*. *The Guidebook* provides advice on how to strategically diagnose and address a district's inequitable policies. *The Playbook* offers a catalog of research-based practices that have been used to effectively close achievement and opportunity gaps. In addition,

there is a component that assists district leaders in developing and monitoring an action plan.

**III. Problem: Superintendents lack support engaging in difficult equity conversations with communities that may be suspicious of and/or resistant to change.**

III. Solution: According to survey data, the training and coaching that accompany the diagnostic have successfully provided those leading the diagnostic with strategies for leading conversations about racial equity and for navigating political challenges.

### **Problems of Practice for NYCLA**

**I. As NYCLA has pivoted to become a national organization, the capacity of the team has been stretched and many staff members are spending large amounts of time traveling.** Early results from the pilot are showing that much of the training and the basic process of the diagnostic can be standardized. There will need to be a NYCLA facilitator who is a thought partner and coach throughout the process. Coaching in this way will take time given the need to fully understand the district political context. However, NYCLA staff will not have to travel as much because this work can largely be done by phone or virtual meetings.

**II. While our mission at NYCLA is to use leadership as a lever for equity, staff members across our organization have a varying level of competence discussing racial equity.**

As the development of the diagnostic has progressed, the staff has been simultaneously trained in issues of racial equity, such as understanding one's own whiteness.

Additionally, I will train colleagues to lead the diagnostic process. I hope to train future facilitators as well as some members of the cross-functional team so that they are able to

deeply understand the diagnostic. Through their participation in this training as well as ongoing NYCLA staff trainings, colleagues across the organization will learn how to lead discussions about racial equity.

**III. NYCLA hopes to have impact across the country, however, the cost of NYCLA's customized services is too expensive for many districts. Therefore, the tool developed needs to be useful without requiring a substantial financial commitment.**

While we have not yet determined the cost of the diagnostic, the limited travel and a license to use the diagnostic are going to be affordable for districts. The full day training and the on-going coaching will be the more expensive components, but our hope is to measure its success by the number of districts using the process rather than a particularly high fee each individual service.

### **Overall Conclusions**

While achievement and opportunity gaps persist across the nation, research and experience has shown that there are practices that are effective in minimizing them. In order to engage in this critical work, superintendents must first lead an in-depth diagnosis of their quantitative and qualitative data. To assist with this important process, I have designed, in collaboration with a team at NYCLA, a diagnostic tool and training for superintendents and their equity committees. By following this process, engaging in coaching and using the exemplars, district leaders can gain a deep understanding of their most urgent inequities and develop an action plan for addressing them.

This diagnostic has also been designed to assist superintendents in being strategic in their equity work. While superintendent turnover is an issue across the country (American Association of School Administrators, 2017), anecdotal evidence and

interviews show superintendents are forced out even more quickly when they engage in controversial but important equity work (V. Silva, personal communications, October 17, 2017). Our hope at NYCLA is that this diagnostic will allow equity work to be done successfully without any negative political consequences for the superintendent.

For NYCLA, the development of the diagnostic allows the organization to more fully meet their mission to “build the capacity of educational leaders, at every level of the system, to confront inequities and create the conditions necessary for all students to thrive” (New York City Leadership Academy, 2017d). This is the case both because the purpose of using the tool is to eliminate their system’s inequities and because the standardized nature of the tool will make it more affordable and accessible to a greater number of district leaders.

The tool also further enhances NYCLA’s development as an ambidextrous organization. While NYCLA continues to “engage” their traditional, core services such as principal and principal supervisor trainings, they are successfully “exploring” by innovating and designing for future markets.

## **Appendix**

### **Appendix A**

#### **Superintendent Interview Questions**

1. Help me understand your community and what drew you to it.
2. What does equity mean to you and in the context of the communities that you serve/served?
3. What equity work did you engage in? Please explain specifically the changes you made at the systems-level, in the policies, in your personnel and in your curriculum? Other areas?
4. What led you to tackle this particular challenge/set of challenges? What data supported your decision to engage in this work? What factors led to the timing of this work?
5. How did you talk with your community and Board about the need to take on this challenge? In general, how do you talk with your community about equity? If you are the superintendent, how do you talk with your Board?
6. Which other members of your team were very involved in this work?
7. What improvements have you seen (quantitative and qualitative)?
8. What factors allowed these improvements to happen (or prevented this work from happening)? What qualities or actions did your Board, Union, leadership team, parents/community or others have/do which allowed this success? What about you as a leader allowed this work to move forward?
9. Were there specific policies or issues which made this work especially complex, such as labor relations? Was funding an issue? Are your schools largely funded via local taxes?
10. What did you do to make this work part of the fabric of the district and sustainable after your departure from the district?
11. Did this work shorten your term – or nearly shorten your term – as superintendent?
12. What advice do you have for other superintendents looking to engage in equity work? How would you advise their leadership team, community and Board to go about supporting their work? What moves should they make?
13. Were any tools helpful in this work? What tools would have been more helpful to you? If NYCLA creates a diagnostic tool to assist leaders, what should it include? Is there anything we could provide which would allow this work to take place more rapidly?

## Appendix B



**District-Level Equity Diagnostic**  
*A Strategic Planning Process with An Equity Lens*

# GUIDEBOOK

# District-Level Equity Diagnostic

## *A Strategic Planning Process with An Equity Lens*

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## **District-Level Equity Diagnostic**

### *A Strategic Planning Process with An Equity Lens*

Dear Superintendents,

Our District-Level Equity Diagnostic has been designed to support your strategic planning with a focus on equity. Our goal is to assist you in closing the persistent achievement and opportunity gaps leaders face across the country. This process involves many stakeholders so that members of your community will be empowered to own and implement the actions chosen at the end of the diagnostic process.

If you have not already done so, we recommend that you work with your staff and your community to develop a set of core values that address your district's commitment to equity and/or a district-level equity policy before beginning this process. Such values and policies will support your work as you engage in this process and your equity committee is faced with challenging decisions. Additionally, if your educators and/or team members have engaged in anti-bias and cultural competency training ahead of time, your process will be enhanced as each member of your committee will be more likely to approach the data with an equity lens.

We also suggest that you assemble an equity committee that is representative of your students' voices and experiences. Members should be representative of your students' racial, ethnic, linguistic and socio-economic backgrounds. They should also have expertise in the equity areas listed below. Their expertise should be derived from experience at the school level, the district level and the community level. It will be critical that members of your committee have an in-depth understanding of the day-to-day life experiences of the children in your district.

Our diagnostic will assist you in building an annual inquiry process to help you determine the most pressing areas for action. It will also encourage continual community engagement around these issues.

The equity diagnostic has five equity areas that will be examined by members of your committee. These areas are:

- Adult Growth & Development
- Curriculum
- Community Engagement
- Policies & Practices
- Leadership

After looking at data in each of these areas, you and your committee will prioritize areas for greater research and determine the action steps that will have the greatest leverage in both the short and long term.

Our team is here to support your work. Please let us know what questions you have as you learn about and begin to engage in this process.

Sincerely,

Irma Zardoya  
President & CEO

# District-Level Equity Diagnostic

## A Strategic Planning Process with An Equity Lens

### Equity Areas

EQUITY AREAS	FOCUS TOPICS
Adult Growth & Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cultural competency and understanding of bias</li> <li>• Pedagogical skill</li> </ul>
Curriculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Respectful and accurate representation of all cultures, races and ethnicities</li> <li>• Quality standards and rigor for all students</li> </ul>
Community Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collective action with community organizations with shared focuses (e.g. Ensuring students of color and low-income students are graduating and enrolling in post-secondary education at high rates)</li> <li>• Access to early childhood learning</li> <li>• Respectful and inclusive parent involvement</li> </ul>
Policies & Practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transportation</li> <li>• Enrollment</li> <li>• Special Education</li> <li>• Personnel</li> <li>• Discipline</li> <li>• Budgeting</li> <li>• Scheduling</li> </ul>
Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pipeline of equity-minded leaders as well as those who are representative of the district’s student population</li> <li>• Encouragement of courageous equity work</li> <li>• Political support to make progress</li> </ul>

## District-Level Equity Diagnostic

### *A Strategic Planning Process with An Equity Lens*

#### Process Overview: Phase One

I.	<p><b>Superintendent initiates diagnostic process.</b> S/he</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Chooses focus topics and participants for equity committee;</li> <li>b) Serves as the committee’s chair or co-chair;</li> <li>c) Explains the diagnostic process and timeline to the committee and the community;</li> <li>d) Chooses an overarching equity goal for the district;</li> <li>e) Assigns members of equity committee to Phase One focus topic teams, and</li> <li>f) Synthesizes accomplishments and action steps with committee to share with community and board.</li> </ul>
II.	<p><b>Phase One focus topic teams begin analysis.</b> Each team</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Identifies and examines relevant data;</li> <li>b) Answers diagnostic questions, and</li> <li>c) Shares findings with equity committee.</li> </ul>
III.	<p><b>Equity committee reconvenes for next stage of diagnosis.</b> They</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Look for themes and trends across focus topics, and</li> <li>b) Select highest leverage commitments across focus topics.</li> </ul>
IV.	<p><b>Superintendent finalizes Phase One.</b> S/he</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Reviews selections and chooses commitments for action planning;</li> <li>b) Presents decisions to committee;</li> <li>c) Determines new or continued team assignments, and</li> <li>d) Synthesizes accomplishments and action steps with committee to share with community and board.</li> </ul>

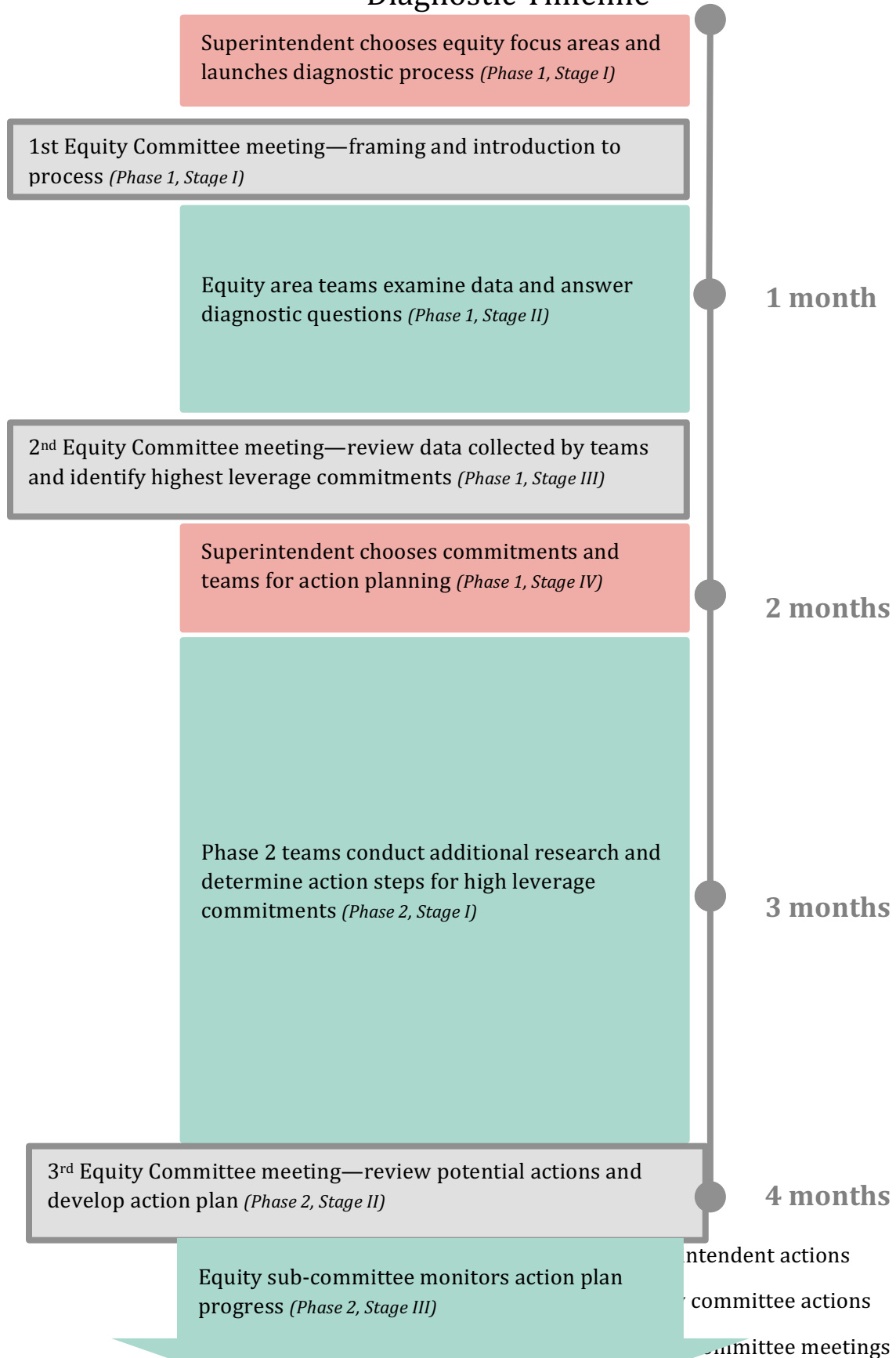
## District-Level Equity Diagnostic

### *A Strategic Planning Process with An Equity Lens*

#### Process Overview: Phase Two

- 
- I. **Phase Two teams engage in next level of diagnosis.** They
- a) Answer Phase Two diagnostic questions;
  - b) Conduct necessary additional research, such as parent surveys;
  - c) Contact other educators and experts in the field for recommendations, and
  - d) Determine potential action steps for each commitment and chart the ease/impact of each action.
- 
- II. **Equity committee reconvenes to develop action plan.** They
- a) Hear from each team about their research findings and the ease/impact of their potential actions;
  - b) Discuss findings as a committee;
  - c) Develops between two and five action steps overall that are both “quick wins” and long-term strategies;
  - d) Create action plan with timeline, specific individuals responsible for each part of the plan, the specific data that will be regularly collected as well as any additional accountability measures, and
  - e) Communicate action plan to all stakeholders.
- 
- III. **Cyclical strategic planning begins.** Equity sub-committee
- a) Reconvenes every 4-6 weeks to review data and hear updates from individuals responsible for each action;
  - b) Adjusts actions when progress is not being made; and
  - c) Completes entire process regularly, choosing new commitments over time to focus on.
-

## Diagnostic Timeline



# District-Level Equity Diagnostic

## Overview & Process Components

We anticipate this process will take you four months to complete. However, six months should be scheduled given the regular events and vacations that occur during the school year. The specific length of time needed will depend on the preparedness of your committee members and of your data as well as the political climate in your district.

*Phase* – The diagnostic is broken up into two distinct parts called Phase One and Phase Two.

*Equity Area* – There are five equity areas in the diagnostic. They are 1) Adult Growth & Development, 2) Curriculum, 3) Community Engagement, 4) Policies & Practices and 5) Leadership. They were chosen based on extensive research into the areas within a school system that can have the greatest impact on the lives of students. In the example below, “Transportation” is a focus topic of the equity area “Policies & Practices”.

*Focus Topic* – Each equity area is broken into focus topics. For example, the equity area “Policies & Practices” is broken down into the following seven focus topics 1) Transportations, 2) Enrollment, 3) Special Education, 4) Personnel, 5) Discipline, 6) Budgeting and 7) Scheduling. (In the chart below, the focus topic is highlighted in green.)

*Commitment* – Each focus topic is made up of indicators. These indicators are grouped by “commitments”. These commitments are based on the Council of Chief State School Officers’ (CCSSO) ten equity commitments.<sup>1</sup> (In the example below the commitment is highlighted in yellow.)

*Exemplar* – An exemplar is a list of model behaviors. In this diagnostic, there is an exemplar for each focus topic.

*Indicator* – Each commitment is broken into indicators, which are model behaviors. (Below they are in blue.)

### Transportation Exemplar

<p><b>Transportation Principle:</b> Transportation policies and procedures increase all students’ access to the most rigorous and high quality schools and enrichment opportunities available in the district.<sup>1</sup></p>	<p><b>Prioritize Equity: Set &amp; Communicate an Equity Target and Measurable Targets<sup>2</sup></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communicate clearly to the community that transportation will be used as a tool to close achievement and opportunity gaps within the district.</li> <li>• Publicly share data and discuss opportunity gaps caused by lack of transportation as well as the district’s plan for closing those gaps.</li> <li>• Monitor progress and share that progress with the community twice a year.</li> </ul>
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<sup>1</sup> The CCSSO Ten Commitments (used here as the headings). Aspen Institute & Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) (2017). *Leading for Equity: Opportunities for State Education Chiefs*. Washington, D.C.: CCSSO

# District-Level Equity Diagnostic

## PHASE ONE GUIDEBOOK

## Phase One Guidebook: Stage One

- I. **Superintendent initiates diagnostic process.** S/he
- a) Chooses focus topics and participants for equity committee;
  - b) Serves as the committee's chair or co-chair;
  - c) Explains the diagnostic process and timeline to the committee and the community;
  - d) Chooses an overarching equity goal for the district;
  - e) Assigns members of equity committee to Phase One focus topic teams, and
  - f) Synthesize accomplishments and action steps with committee to share with community and board.

**Ia. Superintendent chooses equity area focus topics and participants for equity committee.**

Each equity area has between two and seven focus topics. Over time, your committee may target each of the focus topics. For the first round of the process, the superintendent should choose no more than five focus topics, based on his or her understanding of students' greatest needs. This determination should be based on data, such as graduation rates or focus group notes, that show which policies and practices in the district are creating the greatest barriers.

A superintendent may choose to utilize an equity committee already in existence or to assemble a new committee. The diagnostic process will work most effectively if members of the committee have experienced anti-bias and cultural competency training so that they bring an equity lens to the analysis.

We suggest that you assemble an equity committee that is representative of your students' voices and experiences. Members should be representative of your students' racial, ethnic, linguistic and socio-economic backgrounds. They should also have expertise in the equity areas listed below. Their expertise should be derived from experience at the school level, the district level and the community level. It will be critical that members of your committee have an in-depth understanding of the day-to-day life experiences of the children from every neighborhood in your district. We strongly recommend inviting one or two board members to participate on this committee as well. Ideally one board member would be supportive of this process and the other would be more critical. These board member(s) may be essential, later in the process, in persuading the rest of the board to adopt a policy recommended by the committee. They will be able to articulate the work and the thinking behind this proposal if they have participated from the start. We recommend capping the committee at fifteen.

**Ib. Superintendent serves as the equity committee's chair or co-chair.** By serving as the chair of the equity committee, the superintendent will show his/her level of commitment to this work. His/her attendance at all of the meetings will make clear to the committee members and the greater community that the work is urgent.

**Ic. Superintendent explains the diagnostic process and timeline to the committee and the community.**

We anticipate that each round of the diagnostic process will take committees between four and six months to complete. It will be critical that members of the committee understand that they are making a significant time commitment when they engage in the diagnostic. The superintendent



should also give members of the committee time and space for this work in their schedules. This acknowledgement will be a signal of the work's importance.

Throughout this process, we recommend that the superintendent communicate regularly with the committee and the greater community about goals and findings of the diagnostic process. This communication will allow the community to understand how and why the superintendent is making the decisions that s/he is proposing.

**Id. The superintendent chooses an overarching equity goal.** This should be done in collaboration with the equity committee and the district school board. This goal may be one chosen through a previous strategic planning process. It should be derived from the district's data. It should be specific and measurable, however, it should be general enough that any commitment chosen by your equity committee could support the goal.

*Example goal:*

*Data shows:* Currently 20% of our students of color are not graduating from high school. As a result, they are ill-prepared for post-secondary learning and careers.

*Goal:* By 2020, 100% of our students will graduate from high school and they will have a post-secondary learning, training or career plan. In order to meet this goal, we will improve our graduation rate for students of color by 5% - 10% every year.

**Ie) The superintendent assigns members of equity committee to Phase One focus topic teams.** It will be critical for each team to have members who deeply understand their focus topics. Members should also be diverse in terms of their racial, ethnic and linguistic backgrounds and their expertise. For example, an ideal committee for the equity area transportation policy would include staff and community members who reflect the backgrounds of the students the district serves. Additionally, these members should understand the challenges students face in accessing the district's transportation at a school, district and community level.

*Example Transportation Policy Focus Topic committee:*

\*Two principals from neighborhoods with distinctly different demographics.

\*Director of public transportation for the city.

\*Director of transportation for the district.

\*Director of after school programming.

\*Athletic director.

\*Parent from a neighborhood where children historically have difficulty accessing the district's enrichment opportunities.

**If) Synthesize accomplishments and action steps with committee to share with community and board.** It will be critical to synthesize and summarize the accomplishments and next steps of the committee at the end of each day-long meeting. All members should be involved in developing this synthesis and approving it. Members should also agree to use this document as their talking points when speaking with stakeholders and the press so that a coherent message is presented.

## Phase One Guidebook: Stage Two

- II. Phase One focus topic teams begin analysis.** Each team
- a) Identifies and examines relevant data related to their equity area focus topic;
  - b) Answers Phase One diagnostic questions, and
  - c) Shares findings with equity committee.

**IIa) Each team identifies and examines all relevant data related to their focus topic.** Teams gather data, by student subgroup, for the same time period of time (at least the most recent academic year). Teams highlight gaps and disparities found within their data. Depending on the district and the teams, data may include:

- A. Enrollment (K-12, enrichment, preschools, sports, AP courses, gifted and talented programs, special education)
- B. Achievement data (state test scores, growth percentile)
- C. Discipline data
- D. Graduation rates
- E. College and post-secondary training enrollment and completion rates
- F. Professional Development Teacher Attendance (cultural proficiency, bias training)
- G. Personnel (rates of teachers of color at all level)
- H. Parent attendance at family events
- I. Data from subject-level curriculum reviews
- J. Personnel involved in leadership pipeline
- K. District budget, school budgets and budget formulas (what is the per pupil amount for children living in poverty, children who are ELL)
- L. Transportation budget (which buses are transporting which children to which locations)
- M. Policy documentation
- N. School calendars and schedules

**IIb) Each team answers Phase One diagnostic questions.** Using the exemplar for the team’s focus topic, the team should compare the district’s current state to the exemplar. Careful notes must be taken and written up for the full equity committee’s review.

*Phase One Diagnostic Questions:*

- 1) *What does the data tell you about the experiences of each subgroup of children in your community?* Answer this question for both the traditional subgroups, broken out in your data, such as race, socio-economic status, special education and ELL as well as the experiences of children living in particular neighborhoods and/or zip codes in your district.
- 2) *Based on the data analysis and the exemplar for your focus topic, in what ways does your district align or diverge from the exemplar?* Note the gaps that exist.

**IIc) Each team shares the findings from the diagnostic process with equity committee.** All disparities should be presented. Alignment and divergence from the exemplars should also be shared with the full committee.

## Phase One Guidebook: Stage Three

- III. Equity committee engages in the next stage of diagnosis.** They
- a) Look for themes and trends across focus topics, and
  - b) Select commitments that have the greatest leverage to meet the most serious needs.

**IIIa) The committee looks for themes and trends across focus topics.** Many inequities are inter-related and have a disproportionate impact on a particular subgroup of children. It will be important to note any such trends by answering the following questions.

*Phase One Trends Questions:*

1. What experience are children living in each neighborhood and zip code of our district having?
2. Are the same group(s) of children facing issues of accessibility and/or disparities?
3. Do we believe the same root cause may be creating all of these inequities? If yes, what is that root cause? What commitments might best address that root cause?

If there is a particular student group facing greater adversity in many areas, keep those students in mind as you complete the ranking (below). How can the district best support this group of children? Additionally, while root causes, such as racism and poverty, are enormous to tackle, consider which commitments can best help the district chip away at those root causes.

**IIIb) Select commitments that have the greatest leverage to meet the most serious needs.** Equity committee members will now select the commitments that, if focused on, would give the district the greatest leverage in meeting a critical need as well as the overarching equity goal. Give each equity committee member a copy of the exemplars for each focus topic. Give each equity committee member four stickers. Incorporating the data analysis they have heard, committee members should consider the following question: Which of these commitments is going to do the most to get us towards the overarching equity goal for the district? Using their stickers, committee members should independently label the commitments, on a poster-size version, that they believe will be most likely to have the greatest leverage and impact on the areas of greatest need. This will create a large visual of what the committee recommends, as shown by those commitments with the greatest number of stickers.

## Phase One Guidebook: Stage Four

- IV. Superintendent finalizes Phase One.** S/he
- a) Reviews selections and finalizes the commitments for action planning;
  - b) Presents decisions to committee;
  - c) Makes new or continued team assignments, and
  - d) Synthesizes accomplishments and action steps to share with community and board.

**IVa) The superintendent reviews selections and finalizes the commitments for action planning.** Choose no more than three so that time and financial resources can be successfully channeled towards these priority commitments. This step will be especially critical if there is a tie between commitments. Keep in mind that, given this is a repeated, strategic annual process, that other commitments will be chosen and focused on in future years.

**IVb) The superintendent presents decisions to the equity committee.** The superintendent may choose to share the results of the equity committee's work thus far with his/her board and/or community. The superintendent will share his/her final decision about the commitments with the entire equity committee.

**IVc) The superintendent makes new or continued team assignments.** Once the commitments are chosen, the superintendent may ask the same teams to concentrate on those commitments for Phase Two or s/he may select new teams with different areas of expertise. The superintendent should ensure that the team members continue to have backgrounds that represent the students in the district and have an in-depth understanding of the commitments from a school, district and community lens. When considering whom to appoint or invite, the superintendent should ask him or herself whether the team members understand the students' day-to-day lives as they relate to their assigned commitments.

**IVd) The superintendent and the committee synthesize accomplishments and action steps to share with community and board.** It will be critical to synthesize and summarize the accomplishments and next steps of the committee at the end of each day-long meeting. All members should be involved in developing this synthesis and approving it. Members should also agree to use this document as their talking points when speaking with stakeholders and the press so that a coherent message is presented.

## District-Level Equity Diagnostic

### PHASE TWO GUIDEBOOK

## Phase Two Guidebook: Stage One

- I. **Phase Two teams engage in next level of diagnosis.** They
- a) Answer Phase Two diagnostic questions;
  - b) Conduct necessary additional research;
  - c) Contact other educators and experts in the field for recommendations, and
  - d) Determine potential action steps for each commitment and then chart the ease/impact of each action.

**Ia) Phase Two teams answer diagnostic questions.** They use the Phase One data analysis as well as new data and research in order to answer these questions. (See Ib and Ic for more detail.)

*Phase Two Diagnostic Questions:*

*What does the data tell you some children are unable to access?*

*What are the children who are not accessing the opportunity doing instead?*

*What would it take for these children to access the opportunity?*

*What are the various steps we could take in order to ensure all children can access this opportunity?*

**Ib) Phase Two teams conduct necessary additional research.** Team members may have to interview students or access other forms of data in order to have a full understanding of students' experiences. This may include surveys of parents and students; research on the financial and political feasibility of various actions. A rigorous timeline should be developed for each team to gather this data and answer the diagnostic questions.

**Ic) Phase Two teams contact other educators and experts in the field for recommendations.** Research and experts in the field should be consulted to ensure the team fully understands the breadth and depth of the issues and all possible research-based solutions. Educators in other districts facing similar issues may also be consulted.

**Id) Determine potential action steps for each commitment and then chart the ease/impact of each action.**



## Phase Two Guidebook: Stage Two

- II. **Equity committee reconvenes to develop action plan.** They
- a) Hear from each team about their research findings and the ease/impact of their potential actions;
  - b) Discuss findings as a committee;
  - c) Develops between two and five action steps overall that are both “quick wins” and long-term strategies to meet the district’s overall goal;
  - d) Create an action plan with timeline, specific individuals responsible for each part of the plan, specific data that will be regularly collected as well as any additional accountability measures, and
  - e) Develop communication plan and share accomplishments with all stakeholders.

**IIa) The equity committee hears from each team about their research findings and the ease/impact of each of their potential actions.**

**IIb) The equity committee discusses the findings of all the teams as a whole.**

**IIc) The equity committee develops between two and five action steps overall that include both “quick wins” and long-term strategies.** Quick wins, which stakeholders will be able to see immediately or within the first year will help the community see that success is possible and build confidence. These are more likely to be technical fixes. Long-term strategies are focused on challenges that are more complicated to solve and may require adaptive solutions such as a shift in mindset.

**IId) The equity committee will create an action plan with a timeline for each of the chosen action steps.** This action plan will be the district’s strategic plan. Ensure it has a timeline that includes specific individuals responsible for each part of the plan, the specific data that will be regularly collected as well as any additional accountability measures necessary to track impact.



## Action Plan

<p>What is the gap between our current state and the exemplar? (Refer to data)</p>	
<p>What steps have we chosen to take?</p>	<p>Action #1:</p> <p>Who is responsible?</p> <p>How will success be measured?</p> <p>What is the timeline?</p> <p>Action #2:</p> <p>Who is responsible?</p> <p>How will success be measured?</p> <p>What is the timeline?</p>
<p>What stakeholders will be impacted?</p> <p>What is the communication plan?</p>	<p>What stakeholders are impacted?</p> <p>How will we communicate the action plan with them?</p> <p>How will we gather their input and feedback?</p> <p>How will we regularly share our progress?</p>

**IIe) Superintendent and equity committee develop communication plan and share accomplishments with all stakeholders.** Meetings should be held with the district school board and in schools and neighborhoods across the community to explain the process, the action plans as well as the ways progress will be measured. As with every committee meeting, all members should be involved in developing the communication plan and approving it. Members should also agree to use this written plan when speaking with stakeholders and the press so that a coherent message is presented.

## Phase Two Guidebook: Stage Three

- III. **Cyclical strategic planning begins.** Equity sub-committee
- a) Reconvenes every 4-6 weeks to review data and hear updates from individuals responsible for each action;
  - b) Adjusts actions when progress is not being made; and
  - c) Completes entire process regularly, choosing new commitments over time to focus on.

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**IIIa) The equity sub-committee reconvenes every 4-6 weeks to review data and hear updates from individuals responsible for each action.** Committee members ask questions to investigate the impact the work is having. The superintendent communicates progress being made to wider community.

**IIIb) The equity committee adjusts the actions when progress is not being made.** These changes should also be explained to stakeholders.

**IIIc) The equity committee completes a round of the entire process regularly, choosing new commitments.** As goals are met, new ones should be set based on the updated data.

## Appendix C

### District-Level Equity Diagnostic Pre-Survey

1. Please help us understand your role. Are you a (please circle all that apply):

Community Member    Central Office Administrator    Principal    Teacher

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Before interacting with the District-Level Equity Diagnostic (the process being used by your equity committee to examine data and develop a racial equity plan), what experience(s) have you had engaging with issues of equity in education?

3. Why did you choose to join the committee?

4. What hopes do you have for this committee, for the district and for the racial equity plan that is being developed?

5. What do you envision will be the major barriers to meeting those goals?

6. What suggestions do you have for overcoming those barriers?

7. Additional comments? Please feel free to write on the other side as well.

## Appendix D

### Flier for From Inquiry to Action



The Leadership Academy's Equity: From Inquiry to Action program helps school districts address equity-related problems of practice.

Bring a leadership team to collaborate with national education equity experts and district leaders from across the country to develop and implement a practice, policy or initiative that addresses a significant equity challenge in your district. Your team will:

- ✓ Assess the current state of policies and practices, leadership, curriculum, community engagement, and adult growth and development in your district **using NYCLA's Equity Diagnostic tool.**
- ✓ Design a prototype solution to address a high-leverage opportunity for improvement.
- ✓ Conduct a pilot implementation of the prototype in your district.
- ✓ Review the lessons learned from the pilot with national experts and program colleagues, modify the prototype as necessary, and develop plans to scale, implement, and sustain the solution in your district.

#### KEY DATES

Two 2-day sessions in New York City supplemented with pre-session virtual support:

Session One: March 26 & 27

Session Two: July 31 & August 1

#### PRICE

\$9,500 for each district team

#### REGISTRATION

Contact Philip Benowitz at (646) 981-2140 or [pbenowitz@nyclleadershipacademy.org](mailto:pbenowitz@nyclleadershipacademy.org)

## Appendix E



# The Playbook

## District-level Diagnostic Exemplars

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JANUARY 2018

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## Introduction

NYCLA's Playbook is a series of ten exemplars in the areas of Adult Growth & Development, Community Engagement and Policies & Practices. These exemplars are based on current literature as well as interviews with superintendents who have effectively made their districts more equitable.

We invite districts to use these exemplars as part of the formal District-Level Diagnostic or another data analysis process. They can be used to chart the gaps between where your district currently stands, based on a review of data, versus the exemplar's ideal state.

If you have suggestions or questions about how to use the Playbook, please contact Carole Learned-Miller at [clearnedmiller@nycleadershipacademy.org](mailto:clearnedmiller@nycleadershipacademy.org).





## Adult Growth & Development

### Cultural Competency Exemplar

#### Cultural Competency Guiding Principle<sup>1</sup>:

Culturally competent teachers and staff members ensure all students have access to a curriculum that is relevant, respectful of difference, rich and engaging.

#### *Prioritize Equity: Set & Communicate an Equity Vision and Measurable Targets<sup>2</sup>*

- Share leadership's commitment to ensuring that all children will learn at high levels.
- Communicate clearly to the community that all teachers and staff members will be trained in and observed for their use of culturally competent teaching practices.
- Monitor progress and share that progress with the community twice a year.

#### *Measure What Matters: Create Accountability for Equity*

- Create cultural competency accountability measures in the evaluation system for principals, teachers and all staff members.
- Survey students, parents and staff regularly to ensure that all members of the community feel connected, respected and embraced.

#### *Follow The Money: Allocate Resources to Achieve Fiscal Equity*

- Budget for anti-bias and cultural competency training.
- Budget for curricular reviews to ensure the curriculum accurately and respectfully includes and represents all cultures, races and ethnic groups.
- Budget for the creation of new curricula and courses, including ethnic studies courses.<sup>3</sup>

#### *Start Early: Invest in The Youngest Learners.*

- Collaborate with early childhood centers to ensure all educators are trained in culturally competent practices.

#### *Engage More Deeply: Monitor Equitable Implementation of Standards and Assessments*

- Design monitoring processes to ensure teacher biases are not negatively impacting student referrals to high-level classes.
- Ensure enrollment in honors and AP courses is reflective of the district's overall demographics.
- Use data from formative and summative assessments to analyze and address

gaps. When gaps are present, consider policies that may be contributing to these gaps.

### *Value People: Focus on Teachers and Leaders*

- Ensure all teachers understand and honor the “cultural characteristics and contributions of different ethnic groups.”<sup>4</sup>
- Require all teachers to have anti-bias training as well as professional development in cultural competency and stereotype threat.<sup>5</sup>
- Ensure new leaders in the district have extensive training and experience with anti-bias training as well as professional development in cultural competency and stereotype threat.
- Ensure teachers understand that “when academic knowledge and skills are situated within the lived experiences and frames of reference of students, they are more personally meaningful, have higher interest appeal, and are learned more easily and thoroughly. As a result, the academic achievement of ethnically diverse students will improve when they are taught through their own cultural and experiential filters.”<sup>6</sup>
- Train teachers to lead challenging and important conversations about race, prejudice, biases, discrimination and the inaccurate representations of various ethnic groups as found in the media.<sup>7</sup>
- Teach educators to avoid the use of “coded language” such as the term “minority” and use accurate and respectful language to refer to students’ race and ethnicity.<sup>8</sup>

### *Improve Conditions for Learning: Focus on School Culture, Climate, and Social-emotional Development*

- Ensure all students have at least one strong relationship with an adult in their building.
- Make clear to all students that they are loved and that all of their teachers have high expectations for their learning. “Teachers have to care so much about ethnically diverse students that they accept nothing less than high level success from them and work diligently to accomplish it.”<sup>9</sup>
- Share information about the contributions people from all ethnic, racial and cultural backgrounds have made on, among other areas, science, math, medicine and the arts.<sup>10</sup>
- Ensure all aspects of the schools are inclusive and welcoming, including the “symbolic curriculum” such as bulletin boards.<sup>11</sup>
- Teach educators to comprehensively review and revise curricular materials so that they fully and respectfully represent diverse cultures.<sup>12</sup>
- Train teachers to employ flexible, heterogeneous groupings to ensure that all

children benefit from the diversity in their classrooms and develop friendships with children who come from different racial, linguistic, ethnic or cultural backgrounds.

- Ensure teachers interview students and graduates to best understand the types of lessons that were most meaningful and engaging as well as those that most effectively prepared them for life after graduation.<sup>13</sup>

*Empower Student Options: Ensure Families Have Access to High Quality Educational Options That Align to Community Needs.*

- Create courses that resonate with and empower students, such as ethnic studies classes.<sup>14</sup>
- Ensure all students have the preparation and a plan for post-secondary learning and career.

## Pedagogy Exemplar

**Pedagogy Guiding Principle:** Teaching that is individualized, high quality and rigorous is going to have the greatest impact on achievement for all students.<sup>15</sup>

### *Prioritize Equity: Set & Communicate an Equity Vision and Measurable Targets*<sup>16</sup>

- Communicate the district's commitment having exceptional teaching for every child in every classroom.
- Share widely the data indicating what achievement gaps exist as well as the plans to address those gaps.
- Set targets that narrow specific gaps for subgroups and increase achievement for all children.

### *Measure What Matters: Create Accountability for Equity*

- Evaluate teachers' effectiveness (both instruction and the development of relationships) with every student using multiple measures (e.g. value added, achievement scores on standardized tests, portfolios, student work and surveys).
- Ensure that teachers and their students are clear about the objectives of their lessons and how concepts being learned are relevant to other disciplines and in the real world.<sup>17</sup>
- Offer feedback to teachers on whether all children are regularly being asked critical thinking questions.
- Remove teachers from the classroom who are unable to improve.

### *Follow The Money: Allocate Resources to Achieve Fiscal Equity*

- Invest in research-based practices for improving teachers' pedagogic knowledge and instruction such as school-based instructional coaches.
- Provide the support necessary to ensure teachers have time to collaborate.
- Ensure teachers have the opportunity to observe model practices within and outside of the district.
- Purchase necessary materials (e.g. manipulative, writing journals) to allow teachers to implement selected programs with fidelity.
- Share materials, field trip sites and experts with teachers to support and deepen their units (e.g. potential speakers).
- Fund meeting time at the beginning and middle of the school year to give teachers sufficient time to read, understand and ask questions of experts (e.g. special education teachers, former teachers) about students' learning plans (e.g. IEPs, 504 plans) and what strategies best support their achievement.

### *Start Early: Invest in The Youngest Learners.*

- Include area pre-school teachers in trainings.
- Review student work during the transition from preschool to kindergarten to ensure consistently high expectations across grades.

### *Engage More Deeply: Monitor Equitable Implementation of Standards and Assessments*

- Observe lessons to ensure that every child is learning the appropriate grade level standards.
- Guide teachers to use both formative and summative assessments to adjust practice.
- Evaluate teachers on their ability to assess comprehension.
- Focus observations on students who are not engaged in learning and offer specific feedback to teachers on how to engage those students.

### *Value People: Focus on Teachers and Leaders*

- Ensure that every principal understands what exceptional practice looks like (e.g. students are constructing ideas and solving problems rather than sitting passively).<sup>18</sup>
- Train all instructional leaders (e.g. principals, assistant principals, coaches) to coach teachers in the use of research-based effective practices.
- Provide training in both the re-teaching of concepts and the extension of concepts.<sup>19</sup>
- Give all teachers training in the use of questioning as a form of differentiation.
- Support teachers' developing knowledge base so that they can anticipate and address student misunderstandings.<sup>20</sup>
- Guide educators to give students' specific feedback as well as the support needed to improve their work.<sup>21</sup>
- Train teachers to give students varied options to express what they have learned.<sup>22</sup>
- Support the development of rubrics for projects across disciplines so students and teachers have a consistent understanding of high expectations.<sup>23</sup>

### *Improve Conditions for Learning: Focus on School Culture, Climate, and Social-emotional Development*

- Use student and parent surveys and interviews to target areas of the culture and climate to be improved.
- Provide teachers, staff and social workers with training in a consistent, research-based social emotional learning program and support the fidelity of its implementation.
- Design lessons, units and school events that are respectful of and responsive to students' learning styles, home languages, cultures and customs.<sup>24</sup>

- Give opportunities to reflect on the concepts and skills that have been learned are present in every classroom.<sup>25</sup>
- Encourage teachers to lead conversations where students ask one another (not just the teacher) questions to deepen their own understanding.<sup>26</sup>

## Community Engagement

### Collective Action Exemplar

**Community Engagement Guiding Principle:** Adaptive problems can be more effectively solved with collective, rather than isolated, action.<sup>27</sup>

#### *Prioritize Equity: Set & Communicate an Equity Vision and Measurable Targets<sup>28</sup>*

- Communicate consistent communitywide goals to all stakeholders.
- Develop a coherent definition of the problem(s) facing the community.<sup>29</sup>
- Share belief widely that diverse groups, that have participants with varied expertise and backgrounds, are best equipped to solve problems.<sup>30</sup>

#### *Measure What Matters: Create Accountability for Equity*

- Evaluate teachers, principals and staff on their efforts to work collaboratively with colleagues in and outside of the district to address classroom, school and district challenges.

#### *Follow The Money: Allocate Resources to Achieve Fiscal Equity*

- Budget for staff to carefully coordinate the collective action process.<sup>31</sup>
- Share resources across agencies working towards the same goals.<sup>32</sup>
- Apply for grants collaboratively.

#### *Start Early: Invest in The Youngest Learners.*

- Invite leaders from early childhood centers to participate.

#### *Engage More Deeply: Monitor Equitable Implementation of Standards and Assessments*

- Create common objectives across agencies.<sup>33</sup>
- Develop a consistent set of measures across agencies.<sup>34</sup>

#### *Value People: Focus on Teachers and Leaders*

- Share the research illustrating the success of collective action across the country.
- Share case studies and/or observe effective models of collective action to replicate.
- Train educators how they can effectively participate.

#### *Improve Conditions for Learning: Focus on School Culture, Climate, and Social-emotional Development*



- Communicate progress, successes and challenges regularly to develop collective ability to problem solve.
- Meet in person at least monthly in order to create shared language and to build trust.<sup>35</sup>
- Communicate virtually regularly between meetings to further collaborate and build trust.<sup>36</sup>
- Target and solve challenges that will help all children have opportunities after high school, such as the creation of technical career coursework.<sup>37</sup>

## Parent Engagement Exemplar

**Parent Engagement Guiding Principle:** Parent engagement is critical to student success.<sup>38</sup>

### *Prioritize Equity: Set & Communicate an Equity Vision and Measurable Targets*<sup>39</sup>

- Communicate to staff the importance of reaching out to all parents and the belief that all parents add value to the school community.<sup>40</sup>
- Share the belief all parents want the very best for their children, although they may communicate this in varied ways.<sup>41</sup>
- Encourage educators to build trust with parents through on-going, positive and varied communication (e.g. starting the school year by calling parents with good news about each student's learning).<sup>42</sup>
- Communicate the importance of designing events that offer parents the opportunity to see what their children are learning.

### *Measure What Matters: Create Accountability for Equity*

- Evaluate teachers and principals' ability to engage and involve their students' parents.

### *Follow The Money: Allocate Resources to Achieve Fiscal Equity*

- Fund programs to help educators think creatively about how to involve all parents.
- Budget for educators to make home visits and for meetings to take place before and after school hours.

### *Start Early: Invest in The Youngest Learners.*

- Invite educators in local pre-schools to participate in trainings on parent engagement.
- Work with pre-school teachers to learn about successful ways to engage parents of children transitioning to kindergarten.

### *Engage More Deeply: Monitor Equitable Implementation of Standards and Assessments*

- Assess the effectiveness of parent engagement programs and adjust them as needed to increase effectiveness.

### *Value People: Focus on Teachers and Leaders*

- Offer on-going, differentiated training for teachers, counselors and principals on research-based, culturally responsive best practices for parent

engagement.<sup>43</sup>

- Provide training for teachers on helping parents support the skills they are teaching in school.<sup>44</sup>
- Ensure educators have training on biases and how those biases may impact their work with parents.<sup>45</sup>
- Give educators feedback on ways they can become increasingly effective engaging parents.

*Improve Conditions for Learning: Focus on School Culture, Climate, and Social-emotional Development*

- Ensure materials sent home are translated in all of the languages spoken by parents.
- Arrange translation for parent phone calls, conferences and meetings.
- Design bulletin boards and placards so that they are welcoming, inclusive and representative of families' cultures.
- Create family engagement events that focus on the district's academic and social emotional areas for improvement.<sup>46</sup>

## Policies & Practice

### Discipline Exemplar

**Discipline Guiding Principle:** Students are most likely to achieve academically and be prepared for post-secondary learning when they are in their classrooms daily, have positive relationships with their teachers and the support of mental health professionals as needed.<sup>47</sup>

#### *Prioritize Equity: Set & Communicate an Equity Vision and Measurable Targets*<sup>48</sup>

- Share leadership's commitment to keeping all students in school and eliminating discipline disparities.<sup>49</sup>
- Communicate clearly to the community that all teachers and staff members will be trained in and observed for their use of positive and restorative disciplinary practices.<sup>50</sup>
- Monitor progress and share that progress with the community regularly.

#### *Measure What Matters: Create Accountability for Equity*

- Create accountability measures in the evaluation system for principals, teachers and all staff members that measure educators' ability to diminish discipline disparities and create an inclusive school culture.
- Survey students<sup>51</sup>, parents and staff regularly to ensure that all members of the community feel connected, respected and embraced. Reflect on the results with staff and make an action plan to address areas of concern. Monitor actions and revise as necessary to meet student, staff and parent needs.

#### *Follow The Money: Allocate Resources to Achieve Fiscal Equity*

- Budget for positive and restorative practices training.<sup>52</sup>
- Fund training so that staff members know how to support children who have experienced trauma and the behaviors that can result from that trauma.<sup>53</sup>
- Budget for mental health staff to support the social emotional needs of students and staff.<sup>54</sup>
- Budget for teacher coaches to support the learning of new positive and restorative practices of their colleagues.
- Support collaborations between schools and community agencies that support the emotional wellbeing of families and students.

#### *Start Early: Invest in The Youngest Learners.*

- Collaborate with early childhood centers to ensure all educators are trained in

restorative practices.

- Work with early childhood centers to share community mental health services and other resources for families in crisis.
- Meet with the counselors and educators of rising kindergarteners to ensure a smooth transition to kindergarten and the continuation of any necessary support services.
- Work with city or town officials to share positive disciplinary practices with parents of young children.

### *Engage More Deeply: Monitor Equitable Implementation of Standards and Assessments*

- Design monitoring processes to ensure students of color are not receiving a disproportionate number of office referrals.
- Provide additional training and accountability measures for schools or teachers where disparities continue.

### *Value People: Focus on Teachers and Leaders*

- Share research on the ineffectiveness of “zero tolerance” policies<sup>55</sup> and of the damaging effects they can have on students who have experienced trauma.<sup>56</sup>
- Require training for educators on the frequency<sup>57</sup> and impact of childhood trauma as well as the behavioral impact it can have so that teachers know how to minimize triggers and support their students.<sup>58</sup>
- Encourage risk-taking and build a supportive school environment in order to shift teachers’ mindsets and help them engage in new restorative practices.
- Look for signs of stress in teachers who may be supporting large numbers of children who have experienced trauma.<sup>59</sup>
- Ensure new leaders in the district have extensive trauma-sensitive training and experience with positive disciplinary techniques.

### *Improve Conditions for Learning: Focus on School Culture, Climate, and Social-emotional Development*

- Develop disciplinary systems that are positive and restorative rather than punitive.<sup>60</sup>
- Ensure a social-emotional learning program is in place so that students can learn how best to address social challenges such as bullying in school.
- Establish student support teams that include mental health experts who can respond quickly when students and teachers require support.
- Make clear through your school/district’s vision, mission and curriculum that all students, regardless of gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, immigrant status or learning style are valued and welcome in the community.

## Enrollment Exemplar

**Enrollment Guiding Principle:** Commit to enrolling every child in a school with well-prepared, highly-effective teachers.

### *Prioritize Equity: Set & Communicate an Equity Vision and Measurable Targets*<sup>61</sup>

- Communicate a commitment to having every child, but especially those who have been historically marginalized, enrolled in a school with exceptional teachers.
- Set regular clear, public goals for increasing the number of historically marginalized children enrolled in schools with highly trained teachers.

### *Measure What Matters: Create Accountability for Equity*

- Measure regularly, by subgroup, the number of children who are enrolled in a school and classroom with a teacher certified in the subject being taught.<sup>62</sup>
- When new enrollment policies and practices are implemented, regularly monitor their impact on children from all subgroups.

### *Follow The Money: Allocate Resources to Achieve Fiscal Equity*

- Fund research necessary to investigate and implement enrollment practices that will increase students' access to high quality teachers and schools.
- Invest in the transportation necessary to separate students' school assignments from their neighborhoods.<sup>63</sup>
- Fund research necessary to investigate and implement enrollment practices that desegregate schools (e.g. controlled choice).<sup>64</sup>
- Support the design and implementation of new technologies to communicate with families and simplify the communication process.<sup>65</sup>

### *Start Early: Invest in The Youngest Learners.*

- Work with colleagues at early childhood learning centers to ensure that preschool age children from every neighborhood all have access to high quality childcare.

### *Value People: Focus on Teachers and Leaders*

- Train staff in the district's enrollment center in cultural competency and biases to ensure they are not making assumptions about which schools are the best fit for students based on race, culture or socio-economic status.
- Ensure district's enrollment center staff are doing all that they can to offer every family access to information about the highest quality schools and programming (e.g. offering parent open houses in a variety of neighborhoods).

## Personnel Exemplar

**Personnel Guiding Principle<sup>66</sup>:** Students are most likely to be successful if they have diverse, culturally competent and highly effective teachers.

### *Prioritize Equity: Set & Communicate an Equity Vision and Measurable Targets<sup>67</sup>*

- Communicate clearly to the community that diversity will be a priority in hiring.
- Communicate the district's commitment to hiring and retaining exceptionally effective educators.
- Set clear goals for the teaching and administrative staff to reflect the demographic diversity of the students in the district.
- Aim to have a more diverse faculty than the student body in districts where the majority of students are white.

### *Measure What Matters: Create Accountability for Equity*

- Develop guidelines for hiring administrators that ensure they have anti-bias training, assemble a diverse committee and interview diverse candidates.
- Evaluate principals on their ability to remove ineffective teachers as well as hire and retain highly effective, diverse educators.
- Triangulate educator effectiveness data such as observations, parent and student surveys and value-added measures to gain a deeper understanding of educators' strengths and weaknesses.<sup>68</sup>
- Measure the access historically marginalized students have to the district's most effective teachers.
- Move teachers as necessary to ensure low-income students and students of color have the greatest access to the district's best teachers.

### *Follow The Money: Allocate Resources to Achieve Fiscal Equity*

- Dedicate funds to training hiring administrators in equitable practices.
- Financially support efforts to expand the pool of candidates, such as advertising in a range of publications and traveling outside of the district for interviews and recruitment.
- Budget for alternative pathways to certification within the district as a way to develop educators who enter the profession as paraprofessionals and substitutes.<sup>69</sup>
- Fund technology to assist hiring administrators so that they can quickly and effectively learn about candidates.<sup>70</sup>
- Support a leadership pipeline by funding the on-going development of teachers interested in becoming principals.
- Provide resources to give teachers sufficient opportunities to plan and learn

together.

*Value People: Focus on Teachers and Leaders*

- Retain exceptional teachers through the creation of leadership roles, such as instructional coach.
- Develop a leadership pipeline by encouraging talented and diverse teachers to train to be principals.
- Create opportunities for teachers to learn from the high quality practices of district colleagues through such practices as the creation of model classrooms and peer visits.

*Improve Conditions for Learning: Focus on School Culture, Climate, and Social-emotional Development*

- Create affinity groups and hire mentors to support staff members of color.<sup>71</sup>
- Ensure all new teachers have highly effective, collaborative and supportive mentors.
- Offer all teachers the time necessary to collaborate, look together at student work and share best practices.



## Scheduling Exemplar

**Scheduling Guiding Principle:** Every child will have a schedule that gives them access to rigorous coursework and high quality teaching.<sup>72</sup>

### *Prioritize Equity: Set & Communicate an Equity Vision and Measurable Targets*<sup>73</sup>

- Communicate that every student will have a schedule that allows him or her to graduate in a timely manner and to be ready for post-secondary learning.

### *Measure What Matters: Create Accountability for Equity*

- Review students and teachers schedules (e.g. block, dropped, rotating) regularly and evaluate leaders on their ability to use educators' time most efficiently.
- Ensure that all school leaders schedule their most needy students (e.g. ELLs, special education students) first, ensuring they have their needs met as well as the strongest available teachers.<sup>74</sup>
- Require all leaders allocate collaboration time sufficient to share best practices and student work.

### *Follow The Money: Allocate Resources to Achieve Fiscal Equity*

- Fund extra learning time before and after school as needed for enrichment and remediation.
- Budget for teachers to have time for re-teaching and extensions during the regular school day.<sup>75</sup>
- Fund rigorous coursework for every student K-12.

### *Start Early: Invest in The Youngest Learners.*

- Share creative scheduling ideas with colleagues at early learning centers.

### *Value People: Focus on Teachers and Leaders*

- Train district leaders to think creatively about scheduling in order to best meet the needs of students (e.g. staggering teachers' schedules).

### *Improve Conditions for Learning: Focus on School Culture, Climate, and Social-emotional Development*

- Ensure sufficient time is allowed for classes that develop students' social emotional skills.
- Offer affinity groups for students to gather and building relationships based on commonalities including interests, race and culture.
- Guide school leaders to host events that build community and trust in their communities.

## Special Education Exemplar

**Special Education Guiding Principle<sup>76</sup>:** Use a rigorous, unbiased process for the referral of students to special education. Provide special education students with an enriching, standards-based and inclusive program.

### *Prioritize Equity: Set & Communicate an Equity Vision and Measurable Targets<sup>77</sup>*

- Share leadership's commitment to designing an inclusive school<sup>78</sup> and eliminating disparities in special education referrals by race, gender and socio-economic status.
- Communicate clearly to the community that all teachers and staff members will be trained in and observed for their use of inclusive, researched-based and Universally Designed for Learning practices.<sup>79</sup>
- Provide students with the accommodations they need to fully participate.<sup>80</sup>
- Ensure students with special needs have access to the academic and extracurricular opportunities.<sup>81</sup>
- Monitor progress and share that progress with the community regularly.

### *Measure What Matters: Create Accountability for Equity*

- Create accountability measures in the evaluation system for principals, teachers and all staff members that measure educators' ability to diminish referral disparities and create an inclusive, Universally Designed for Learning and rigorous school culture for all children.
- Survey students<sup>82</sup>, parents and staff regularly to ensure that all members of the community feel connected, respected and embraced. Reflect on the results with staff and make an action plan to address areas of concern. Monitor actions and revise as necessary to meet student, staff and parent needs.

### *Follow The Money: Allocate Resources to Achieve Fiscal Equity*

- Budget for educator training in research-based best practices for meeting the needs of all students including Universal Design for Learning<sup>83</sup>, co-teaching and other inclusive practices.
- Fund a robust RTI process to ensure that students are receiving high quality tiered support before being referred for special education services.<sup>84</sup>
- Budget classroom teachers and special educators to have sufficient co-planning time.
- Budget for teacher coaches to support the implementation of co-teaching and other inclusive practices.
- Fund technology (e.g. taped texts) and materials necessary for all students to participate fully in all classes.<sup>85</sup>

*Start Early: Invest in The Youngest Learners.*

- Collaborate with early childhood centers to ensure all educators are trained in inclusive practices.
- Meet with the counselors and educators of rising kindergarteners to ensure a smooth transition to kindergarten and the continuation of any necessary support services.

*Engage More Deeply: Monitor Equitable Implementation of Standards and Assessments*

- Design monitoring processes to ensure students of color are not being referred in disproportionate rates for special education. Provide additional training and accountability measures for schools or teachers where disparities continue.
- Monitor to ensure educators are teaching all students their grade level standards.
- Ensure assessments accurately measure what students know and are able to do. Explore creative options, such as portfolios and the use of technology to fully capture student learning.
- Monitor school-based practices to ensure special education students are not being unnecessarily segregated.<sup>86 87</sup>
- Monitor suspension rates to ensure that students with special needs are not being disproportionately disciplined and suspended.<sup>88</sup>
- Monitor RTI and referral process to ensure that students are being given appropriate interventions and are not being unnecessarily referred for special education for issues such as reading support.<sup>89</sup>

*Value People: Focus on Teachers and Leaders*

- Share research on the importance of minimizing barriers to the regular program.
- Require training for special and general education staff on the best ways to scaffold instruction.
- Build supportive schools where staff are encouraged to take risks and try out their new learning.
- Ensure new leaders have training in inclusive and research-based best practices for special education.

*Improve Conditions for Learning: Focus on School Culture, Climate, and Social-emotional Development*

- Ensure a social-emotional learning program is in place so that students can learn how best to address social challenges, such as bullying, which may be more likely to occur because of their special needs.
- Establish student support teams that monitor student progress and will call team meetings in a timely manner when progress is not being made.
- Make clear through your mission and curriculum that all students, regardless of sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, immigrant status or learning style are valued.

## Transportation Exemplar

### Transportation Guiding Principle:

Transportation policies and procedures increase all students' access to the most rigorous and high quality schools and enrichment opportunities available in the district.<sup>90</sup>

### *Prioritize Equity: Set & Communicate an Equity Target and Measurable Targets<sup>91</sup>*

- Communicate clearly to the community that transportation will be used as a tool to close achievement and opportunity gaps within the district.
- Publicly share data and discuss opportunity gaps caused by lack of transportation as well as the district's plan for closing those gaps.
- Monitor progress and share that progress with the community twice a year.

### *Measure What Matters: Create Accountability for Equity*

- Create cross-functional committees, made up of stakeholders from across the community, to review the enrollment data such as the numbers of children of color, special education students, ELLs and low-income students in special programming, such as gifted and talented programs and AP courses, to ensure students are accessing these opportunities and that transportation is not in any way a barrier.
- Allow committee members to adjust policies as needed to increase access.

### *Go Local: Engage LEAs and Provide Tailored and Differentiated Support*

- Work with local agencies to ensure that all students who walk to school can do so safely and that necessary sidewalk repairs and assistance from safety personnel is available.
- Collaborate with local transportation agencies to ensure public transportation is safe and affordable for families.<sup>92</sup>

### *Follow The Money: Allocate Resources to Achieve Fiscal Equity*

- Fund transportation that allows children from every neighborhood to access the schools with the strongest records of achievement.
- Fund transportation for children of every neighborhood to high quality enrichment opportunities such as athletics and the arts. Additional funding may be needed for additional bus routes and/or late buses.
- Fund transportation that ensures homeless students and those in foster care can remain in the same school.

### *Start Early: Invest in The Youngest Learners.*

- Provide transportation to early childhood centers that have shown their effectiveness in preparing all children for kindergarten.

### *Empower Student Options: Ensure Families Have Access to High Quality Educational Options That Align to Community Needs.*

- Promote policies, such as controlled choice, that allow families from every neighborhood to access the district's highest performing schools and programs.
- Ensure the cross-functional transportation committee (see *Prioritize Equity*) regularly reviews policies and practices for issues of access.
- Empower the committee to revise policies and practices that limit access.
- Provide families with transportation to ensure they can attend school events, such as conferences and curriculum nights.

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## Appendix F

### Urban Superintendents Network Agenda

**Friday, December 8, 2017; 8:30-11:30**

Massachusetts International Academy - 280 Locke Drive, Marlborough, MA

- 8:00 – 8:30      **Refreshments and Informal Conversation**
- 8:30-9:30      **Proposed Updates to Model Evaluation Rubrics**  
*Claire Abbot and Amy Gerade, ESE Center for Instructional Support*
- Overview of rubric refinements
  - Lessons learned from pilots
  - Implications for collective bargaining
- 9:30-10:00      **Diverse Leaders Project**  
*Cliff Chuang, ESE Senior Associate Commissioner for Educational Options*  
*Carole Learned-Miller, PhD Student, Harvard Graduate School of Education*
- Update and feedback on diverse leader pipeline work
  - District-level Equity Diagnostic
- 10:00-10:15      BREAK
- 10:15-11:15      **Leading the Nation Campaign**  
*Jass Stewart, ESE Special Assistant to the Chief of Staff and Sr. Strategist for Public Understanding*  
*Engagement*
- Update on planned activities
  - Brainstorming: What can districts do to support the campaign?
  - Feedback and next steps
- 11:15-11:30      **Updates from Workgroups on Serving Students with Intense SEL Needs**
- Update on data collection
  - Update from Workgroup #2: Professional Development
  - Next steps

## Appendix G

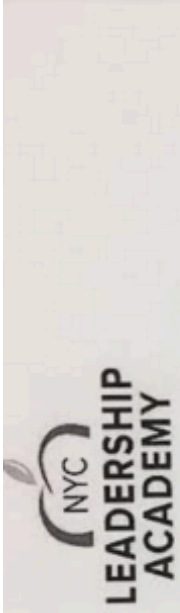
### Equity Diagnostic Training Agenda January 16, 2018

- 9:00 – 9:15 a.m. Welcome & Framing**
- Hopes for session
  - Overview of agenda
  - Training Know & Be Able to Dos (KBADS)
1. Develop facilitation skills for leading conversations about racial equity.
  2. Understand and prepare for the data analysis process participants will go through.
  3. Plan logistics strategically to ensure this process will be successful politically.
  4. Practice team building equity activities.
- 9:15 – 9:45 a.m. Trust-building Equity Activity: The River**
- 9:45 – 10:00 a.m. NYCLA’s Leadership Behaviors that Promote Equitable Schools: Self Evaluation**
- 10:00 – 10:20 a.m. Guidebook Overview**
- 10:20 – 11:35 a.m. Development of the January 23<sup>rd</sup> REAL Meeting**
- Review & Revise Draft Agenda (10:20 – 10:35 a.m.)*
- Plan for Focus Topic Small Groups (10:35 – 11:35 a.m.)*
- 11:35 – 11:45 a.m. Break**
- 11:45 – 12:30 p.m. Focus Topic Team Activity – Trying it out!**
1. Choose one of the focus topics.
  2. Read over data, policies and exemplar.
  3. Answer diagnostic questions.
  4. What were we able to answer? What could we not answer with the available data?
  5. What additional data did we need before January 23<sup>rd</sup>?
  6. Is there a district expert who should present to the team?
  7. What worked well and less well?
  8. Adjust “To Do” chart as needed.

- 12:30 – 1:00 p.m. Lunch**
- 12:30 – 1:00 p.m. Communication Discussion: Using the Synthesis Chart**
1. Why will it be important to synthesize the accomplishments and next steps at the end of every meeting?
  2. What ideas do you have for bringing the committee to consensus?
  3. Who will you want to be sure has this synthesis?
- 1:00 – 1:45 p.m. Bias-Based Beliefs in Disproportionality Discussion**
1. What ideas if any were new to you in the Fergus reading?
  2. What ideas, if any, challenged your previous thinking?
  3. As a leader, how will you personally confront these biases in Risedale?
  4. Which of these ideas will be new to your committee members? Which ideas might they resist?
  5. How might you introduce these ideas?
  6. How might you address their resistance?
- 1:45 – 2:15 Facilitating Challenging Conversations about Race Activity**
- 2:15 – 2:45 p.m. Looking Ahead: February & March REAL Meetings**
- 2:45 – 3:00 p.m. Surveys**

## Appendix H

### Training Feedback Form



**District-Level Equity Diagnostic Training Evaluation**

1. In what ways did this training prepare you to lead the Equity Diagnostic?

- thinking about our own journey/stories (the river)
- understanding the ideal state
- carefully drafting the agenda for our next city.
- anticipating problems that may occur during sessions

2. What improvements would you suggest for this training?

- I did have any suggestions for improvement - I wish we had more time to consider planning for February.

3. What on-going support would you feel would be most helpful as you continue to lead the Equity Diagnostic?

- This type of conversation & focused planning for next

4. What do you feel are going to be the greatest barriers to successfully leading the Diagnostic in your district?

- Missing certain personalities of those at the table

5. Other comments or feedback?

- Great!
- work
- This was extremely helpful!

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