

Learning Series: Advancing Racial Justice and Educational Equity in PK-12

When addressing trauma, racism, and equity, the key lies within the racial consciousness and equity-centered approaches of district and school leaders. In June 2023, seven one-on-one interviews and one panel discussion were conducted to examine the perspectives and lived experiences of leaders working in school districts (PK-12) to explore what, if any, practices have served them well in advancing racial justice and educational equity. Facilitators for these interviews were Dra. Alexandra Escobar, founder of [Affirming Voices](#), and Dr. Mashana Smith, clinical psychologist at [Center for Childhood Resilience](#) at Ann & Robert H Lurie Children's Hospital.

The purpose of this series is to learn from the stories of those in the field who are doing this important work; listen to their struggles, applaud their victories and learn from their journeys. Each interview can be used with your school or district team as a learning tool to begin conversations, evaluate your environment or as a spark to fuel your own path to equity and racial justice.

We are very grateful to the school administrators who participated and shared their journeys in this work so that others may learn. Support for this project was provided by the [Grand Victoria Foundation](#).

Guiding Questions for this Work

In addition to one-on-one interviews, we held a panel with five leaders and asked the following questions. Consider using these questions to help guide discussions in your school and district. Check out all the interviews with school administrators, as well as a panel discussion with school leaders, on the [Learning and Resource Hub](#). Not registered yet? Go to www.learningwithccr.org/ to sign-up and let the learning begin!

1. How do you encourage reflective practices and build cultural awareness in educators and students?
2. In what ways do you operationalize student agency so that students have a voice in how the school district operates and take on authentic leadership roles?
3. How do you build the capacity of educators to create equitable learning environments where all students can thrive socially, emotionally, and academically?
4. What specific communication strategies do you employ to ensure historically excluded groups are heard and reached?
5. What checks and balances do you have in place to counter unconscious or undisclosed biases in their hiring practices?
6. What strategies have you employed to diversify your staff at all levels?
7. How do you ensure equity work is systemic and sustainable?

Guiding Activities for this Work

Following are tools, activities, and pathways to assist in your school's journey advancing racial justice and educational equity. These ideas come from our interviews with the school leaders who participated in this learning series. We thank them for all their work for students and whole school communities!

Pathways to Advancing Racial Justice & Educational Equity

Self-Reflection	<p>Model self-reflection. Promote reflective practices. Do the internal work. Examine beliefs and behaviors. Be self-aware of your positionality, how you are showing up in the work, and how you might contribute to the outcomes. Develop the capacity of others, e.g., ongoing professional development, book studies, coaching studies, coaching cycles, all-staff training, etc.</p>
Student Voice & Agency	<p>Nurture and cultivate student voice and agency by giving students a seat at the table to inform decisions that impact their educational experience, e.g., inform curriculum and instruction, assessments, grading, programming, etc. Foster positive racial, cultural, and ethnic identities. Solicit feedback from students and respond to their needs. Avoid performative acts in the name of equity. Create student leadership and advocacy groups to bring about change.</p>
Climate & Culture	<p>Model self and collective care. Build relational trust. Establish respect and rapport with staff, students, and families. Earn the right to be a “warm demander.” Create welcoming and affirming learning environments so that all faculty, staff, parents and students feel safe, valued, cared for and seen. Implement policies and practices that emphasize proactive, instructive, and restorative approaches to discipline. Solicit feedback from students and respond to their needs. Build a culture of collective efficacy. Create affinity spaces.</p>
Teaching & Learning	<p>Employ an Equity-Centered MTSS Framework to ensure all students have access to effective, high-quality curricula that are both academically rigorous and culturally responsive and relevant. Solicit feedback from students and respond to their needs. Provide windows, mirrors, and sliding doors. Introduce new texts, new perspectives, and resources. Prioritize Culturally Responsive Teaching Practices and embed them in the evaluation process. Create structures to support peer observations and instructional coaching.</p>
Leadership	<p>Lead by example. Overcome fear. Model equity-centered leadership practices. Unapologetically advocate for racial justice and educational equity. Leads with love, care, and compassion. Practice intellectual and cultural humility. Normalize courageous conversations about race. Challenge deficit ideology. Value multiple ways of being, thinking, doing and knowing. Solicit feedback from staff, students, and families to respond to their needs. Create an admin manual to articulate the district’s equity-centered vision, mission, and core values. Establish accountability measures to track progress toward goals. Commit to diversifying staff at all levels.</p>
Infrastructure	<p>Create systemic and sustainable infrastructure to ensure equity permeates the system, e.g., equity-centered strategic plans, equity directory, equity department, district-wide equity committees inclusive of leaders, staff, students, and families, equitable hiring practices, equitable policies/practices such as MTSS Framework, Responsive Discipline, Advanced Placement, Culturally Responsive Teaching), etc.</p>
Finance	<p>Ensure your district’s budget reflects its value and commitment to racial justice and educational equity. Create systems and structures that equitably distribute resources.</p>
Community & Family and Community Engagement	<p>Step away from emails and newsletters. Ensure communication and engagement strategies are equitable, inclusive, accessible, and culturally responsive, e.g., phone calls, in-person meetings, linguistic accommodations, etc. Build relationships among families and between families and educators. Prioritize family goals and center families’ experiences and stories as sources of knowledge, expertise, and solutions.</p>

Additional Learning

The series on Advancing Racial Justice & Educational Equity can be found on Center for Childhood Resilience's [Learning and Resource Hub](#), and includes the following courses:

- Trauma, Racism and Equity: Comprehensive Overview (90 minutes)
- Trauma, Racism and Equity: Laying the Foundation for Awareness and Strategies (45 minutes)
- Institutional Racism: Awareness & Strategies (45 minutes)
- Personally Mediated Racism: Awareness & Strategies (45 minutes)
- Internalized Racism: Awareness & Strategies (45 minutes)
- Equity in Discipline: a Look at Policing in Schools (30 minutes)
- Navigating Difficult Discussions about Race (30 minutes)
- Advancing Racial Justice & Educational Equity in PK-12: Interviews with School Leaders
- Advancing Racial Justice & Educational Equity in PK-12: Panel Discussion with School Leaders

Additional courses and resources are added to the Learning & Resource Hub regularly. Use the search feature in the Hub to find relevant learning materials to help guide this important work. Go to www.learningwithccr.org/ to sign-up and let the learning begin!

Questions, please contact REACH@luriechildrens.org.

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