



## **Improving educational equity through cultural responsiveness in schools and educator preparation programs: A virtual workshop series**

### **Webinar #1: A framework for educational equity and culturally responsive pedagogy**

*September 17, 2019*

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Workshop transcript

Webinar producer: Hello everyone and thank you for attending today’s webinar. Before we begin, we’d like to go over a few housekeeping items. On the bottom of your Audience console are multiple application widgets you can use. You can expand each widget by clicking on the Maximize icon at the top-right of the widget by dragging the bottom-right corner widget panel. Additional material including today’s copy of the slide deck is available in the Resource List widget indicated by the green file icon at the bottom of your screen. If you have any questions during the webcast you can click on the Q&A widget at the bottom and submit your questions. We have a Q&A session at the end of the webinar, but you can submit questions any time throughout the webinar. You don’t have to wait until the very end.

If you have technical difficulties, please click on the Help widget. It has a question mark icon and covers common technical issues. You can also submit technical issues via the Q&A widget. Please note, most technical issues can be resolved by pressing F5 or command R on Macs to refresh your player console. Finally, an on-demand version of this webinar will be available approximately one day after the webcast using the same audience link to access today’s event. Now I’d like to introduce Amy Johnson. Amy, you now have the floor.

Amy Johnson: Thanks, Brian, and thank you all for joining us for today's webinar, a Framework for Educational Equity and Culturally Responsive Pedagogy. The webinar is sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education's Mid-Atlantic Regional Educational Lab. I'm Amy Johnson from Mathematica which leads the work for the Regional Educational Lab. This is the first webinar in a four-part series. Our goal for the series is that it will prompt audience members, either individually or ideally with a team of colleagues, to put what you hear into action. We think of this four-part webinar series as a workshop that will provide you with valuable guidance on how to create more equitable education environments that include culturally responsive practices. Before I introduce today's speaker, I want to point audience members to an action plan that you all should've received electronically via email.

It's also available in the Resource List widget that Brian just mentioned. The action plan is intended to be a starting point for the critical conversations and strategic planning that we hope each of you and your colleagues will begin in working towards culturally responsive practices. Feel free to jot down thoughts, ideas or questions related to the prompts and the action plan throughout the webinar. But most of all, please take this with you after today's session is over and take action. Please do something with the information you hear today. Our speaker today is Dr. Heather Bennett, the Director of Equity Services for the Pennsylvania School Boards Association. Thank you, Heather, for joining us and I'm going to turn it over to you now.

Heather Bennett: Awesome. Thank you so much and it's great to be here. I'm very excited to help launch this awesome webinar series on culturally responsive pedagogy today, and so let's get started.

We're going to move to the next slide. The purpose of this workshop is to provide a framework for a culturally responsive pedagogy and that requires a discussion on equity to help situate CRP as a necessary strategy to move towards equity in our districts and community. So we're going to talk a little about six questions in this workshop today. One, what is educational equity? Two, why is equity important? Three, what does equity charge educators to do? Four, what is culturally responsive pedagogy? Five, how does culturally responsive pedagogy relate to efforts to achieve educational equity? And six, what does successful implementation

of culturally responsive pedagogy suggest about the needs for broader systemic change?

So I'll start off with the first question, what is educational equity? So at the Pennsylvania School Boards Association, we define equity as the just and fair distribution of resources based upon each individual student's needs. Equitable resources include funding, programs, policies, initiatives and supports that target each student's unique background and school context to guarantee that all students have equal access to a high-quality education. So I want to couch this to say that it is essential that each district define equity for themselves, especially to their context. And with that definition also explain why equity is important for your district and community. Having a clear definition of equity that is shared, understood and practiced by the district and community is the foundation for comprehensive and consistent practice of equity.

Without setting a definition there could be a lot of confusion, right? We can't assume that every stakeholder in our district knows what equity is. And so having a shared definition of equity is so important. Equity I think stands in the gap between what we know about providing a high-quality education for students and its benefits and what we do and have done to students. What we know is that access to high quality educational experiences increases positive economic, political and social life outcomes for all students. But unfortunately, what we do is that children are receiving inequitable educational experiences and opportunities, often determined by various factors, such as zip code, socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, language ability, immigrant status, disability, access to technology and multiple other factors, right?

So what causes these divergent educational experiences? One, inequitable funding and resources. Two, let's think about discriminatory and biased practices and policies that have limited the opportunities of groups of people. And so I list a couple of systems down - housing, employment, economics, health care, criminal justice system, education. There are a lot of other systems in place but when we think about these systems, it involves a pattern of practice, policy or class, where the alleged discrimination has a broad impact on industry professions, company or geographic area. When we're talking about systemic discrimination we're not just talking about education. Because all of these other systems have a huge impact on how our students come to our schools and

also the issues that they're dealing with on a daily, day-to-day basis. And these generational impacts of these systemic discrimination has a huge impact on providing an education for all students.

And then three, problems in acknowledging and addressing our students' unique differences, identities, cultures, histories, abilities and experiences. Our kids are coming into our districts and they're different, and they are dealing with multiple different things. And so we have to really think about and really talk to – speak to addressing those individual unique needs of our students.

So let's go into this wonderful visual of equity. Now there are so many visuals of equity out there, but I like this one the most because it shows the reality of what an inequitable education system can do to a child. Let's start off with equality. Pretty much we know an equal system says that we give all students the same supports, right?

But in reality, if we go to the third picture, our students are different. They come to our classrooms with unique gifts, individualized learning styles, different experience and cultural identities. I talked about that a second ago, and I think that this is a visual of what we have done to students, really. We have never treated our families and students equally nor have we respected our students' differences. A significant number of our students carry the weight of poverty, racism, sexism, trauma and other forms of prejudices and conditions that affect how they perform in school. Our kids are not starting from the same starting point. Some kids are privileged to not only see above the fence but to perceive the fence. And then there are kids who are starting below the ground. Equity recognizes that we have not treated students equally and that in order to see the game, might as well play in the game, we have to give students what they need, right?

So, again, I love visuals – our job as educators is to make sure that children get across that finish line. Whatever that means for that child. Not everyone is like a Usain Bolt and can run across the finish line in a world record time. Some people require support; some need racing chairs, prosthesis, running guide for the visually impaired, some need to walk. But the whole point is knowing that each and every one of our children can cross that finish line and that we need to provide them with the supports to be able to do so effectively. So now I'm going to talk about the characteristics of

what equity is. Equity is inclusive, it is fair and it is just. Equity is inclusive, meaning that it expends values and incorporates experiences in voices of all populations within that framework, climate and procedures of systems and institutions. Equity is fair. People are given what they need to participate fully in the system, and equity is just. It remedies past and present harms by the system that have created the inequities.

So let's talk about the second question, why is equitable – why is equity important? I'm going to discuss three different reasons for why our districts and communities need to practice equity. However, I also want to ask that you all determine your own personal why equity, or why equity is what keeps us motivated and helps us, keeps us sustaining in this work even when it's hard, right? So these three reasons here, demographic shifts, achievement and opportunity gaps and policy shifts. And just a quick caveat before I move on, I'm using Pennsylvania as an example because I work in Pennsylvania. But these trends that we're seeing in Pennsylvania are seen throughout the rest of the Mid-Atlantic region. And maybe these trends are even more stark in your own particular state and locality. So let's start off with demographic shifts real quick.

The Mid-Atlantic region is educating a rapidly changing student body that is racially, culturally, linguistically and economically diverse. And just beginning with the economic diversity, just focusing on our income inequality. This is a graph of earned income growth for full-time wage and salary workers in Pennsylvania from 1980 to 2015. This graph is coming from the National Equity Atlas, which is a USC subsidiary organization, data organization. As you can see, the income inequality between the rich and poor is growing in the U.S. and specifically in Pennsylvania. And according to this National Equity Atlas, since 1980 income for workers at the bottom and middle percentiles have decreased while those at the top have increased. And so this income inequality that we're seeing in our states and in our districts has a huge implication to who we are now educating in our classrooms. We are educating a growing student body that is dealing with the impacts of poverty.

In Pennsylvania, our child poverty rates have risen. In 1999, there was 15 percent. In 2017, that is now at 19 percent. And what you're seeing is a map of our 500 school districts in Pennsylvania. And so what I really want to say here is that poverty is found in every district and it is not exclusive to urban or rural districts. We

have about 36 percent of our suburban districts have high poverty levels. And also, it's important to note that even though issues of poverty impact every school district in Pennsylvania, mapping poverty rates across 500 school districts highlights extreme economic disparities between districts. So it's extremely important to think about this as also talking about income inequality within our own space but also recognizing and acknowledging that between – the income inequality between districts is also prevalent and also important to note.

So let's move onto racial transformation in our state. This is a map of Pennsylvania from 1990 to 2017. As you can see, demographic shifts have changed our districts racially. In 1990, the percent of students of color stood at 18 percent, in 2017 the percent of students of color stood at around 31 percent. And in 2018 the percent of students of color stands at 34 percent. So it is growing in our state, and we see most of the transformation in our Latino nation student population. So I kind of want to talk about this for a quick second. We have to understand that our suburban and even our rural spaces are no longer homogenized enclaves. They have diversified rapidly and therefore the cultural narratives in these areas have also shifted. We cannot hold on to the narrative perspectives and beliefs of what used to be, or what your students used to be, and we have – we must work towards developing an education practice for who your students are today.

And I feel like that is the exciting work of an educator. And what happens – and there's some detrimental things that happen when we do not focus on developing education that meets the students of our – that meets the needs of our students. So we're going to now shift and go into the next phase of this why equity and focus on achievement and opportunity gaps. So quickly, let's just talk about the achievement gap real quick. Achievement gaps mean the academic disparities and/or differences between groups of students, as indicated through variances in academic indicators such as test scores, GPA, graduation rates and post-secondary access. There's probably other factors and indicators that we can measure the achievement gap in as well. But I'm just going to focus right now on our high school graduation rates. So this is from the 2016-17 school year.

And as you can see, 87 percent of all Pennsylvania students graduate from high school. But if we really break that down and think about it from race, from language ability, to – and also

poverty levels, you're seeing a completely different story. For the most part let's talk about – let's break it down by race. White and Asian students predominately 91 to 92 percent graduate from high school respectively. But our black and Latino populations, 74 percent, only 74 percent graduate. Look at our special education, 74 percent of our special education students graduated that year. If you look at our English language students, those that do not identify as English language, 87 percent of them graduated. But only 63 percent of English language students graduated that year. Students attending a low poverty school district, 95 percent graduated.

Students attending a high poverty school district, 78 percent. Students in districts with less than 20 percent of students of color, 91 – 92 percent graduated. In a district with a high students of color population, 76 percent. And if we break it down by rural, suburban and urban, what we see is our rural and suburban school districts, they graduate students at like 92 percent, or urban school districts at 75 percent. And I really want to really talk about this, because if I stopped right there, we would have a problem. We wouldn't get to the purpose and the point of figuring out how we can educate our children effectively, because there's a lot of problems with the achievement gap. Here's the main problem: achievement gaps merely measure outcomes but does not explain why these disparities exist. By focusing only on the achievement gap, we come to believe that children who do not perform as well are unable to perform.

Therefore, we legitimize stereotypes, labels and then we place the blame of the lack of achievement on students and families, and we never address the system that is tasked with educating our students. Remember when I said earlier that equity stands in a gap of what we know about providing a high-quality education to students and what we actually do? We know that all children are capable of learning but not all children have had the same access to opportunities. For generations our education, political and economic systems have provided less opportunities for low income students, students of color, English learner students, students with disabilities and students in resource poor and geographically isolated districts. So therefore, it's essential – it's important to focus on the opportunity gap, and opportunity gaps mean the disparities in educational and extra-curricular delivery of opportunities, resources and funding between and among different student



groups, leading to different academic, extra-curricular, social and economic outcomes for students.

And so opportunity gaps create achievement gaps. We cannot focus only on the achievement gap, it doesn't tell the story. We have to focus on opportunity gaps, because it addresses how the education system – and when I say the education system I'm meaning teachers, administrators, staff, solicitors, school boards, communities and politicians, how they have delivered and delivered education, policies and practices to different groups of students. So where can we observe opportunity gaps in education? Pretty much everywhere. And I'll just list a few here, early childhood education, school segregation, transportation, career and technical education, extra-curricular opportunities. It impacts certain environmental factors. Do our children have access to clean water? Do – are our children being educated in buildings with lead paint still in the air? Are they obtaining adequate housing?

If they have access to healthcare, they have access to glasses, okay? Communication to families and communities are extremely important. So where we can observe opportunity gaps for education, it is everywhere, and I really am excited to hear and learn more about what – the ones that you are discussing in your districts, and also understand like what are the ones that are missing here in this list. So let's move onto institutional barriers, okay? So institutional barriers create opportunity gaps. Institutional barriers are policies, practices and procedures that systematically disadvantage certain groups of students. And here's the kicker, they can be explicit or implicit. And here's the part that's really hard to deal with, is when we're educating our kids, we may not be thinking about putting up a wall or making it hard for children to obtain certain opportunities.

Your program in its existence and also in its purpose may be very neutral. For example, developing a Saturday school math course for students who need extra help. But without looking at practices and policies with an equity lens, you may be inadvertently making it hard for certain students to access the opportunity. So what about kids who lack transportation on a Saturday morning? Is the teacher in charge of this program responsive? And we'll get into that in a second. And here's the kicker: have we talked to parents and students who you are actually developing this program for, what they think about the program, right? So institutional barriers is how



do we mitigate that is really thinking about everything, policies and practices to do with this equity lens at all times.

So the third thing we're going to talk about is – in terms of reasons of why equity is important is looking at policy shifts. Equity is not just a demographic mandate or a moral mandate, it is actually becoming a legal mandate. Our legislation has slowly progressed towards equity. And I'm only going to focus on the Federal legislation here because we come from different states. But our states and even our local policies may have moved so much further within the federal legislation. But let's just do a quick rundown about, you know, how equity has changed over time. We can pretty much – I wouldn't start here but I'm going to mention *Brown v. Board of Education*, 1954, then we had the Civil Rights Act in 1964. We had the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. We had the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in 1975.

We had the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act in 1987. No Child Left Behind Act in 2001. And then of course Every Student Succeeds Act in 2015. And all of these policies or cases kind of address this construct of equity and thinking about we need to provide students what they need to be successful in multiple different ways. And so this concept of equity is not new. And so but what we're seeing now is this commitment to move towards – and we see it in the purpose statement in the Every Student Succeeds Act. 'The purpose of this title is to provide all children significant opportunity to receive a fair, equitable and high-quality education, and to close educational achievement gaps.' Now I also say we have a long way to go but we have to understand that this is becoming like a legal mandate to provide an education – an equitable educational system for our students.

So we're going to move on to our third question, what does equity charge educators to do? Pursuing equity and achieving equity. I'm going to start with pursuing. 'In the pursuit of equity, school leaders must assess our actions locally to overcome institutional barriers and create opportunities so that each and every child has the tools and supports necessary to achieve their highest potential.' We have to overcome our institutional barriers, whether they're implicit or explicit. And we have to create opportunities, we have to actively move towards opportunities to make sure that our children are getting what they need to be successful. And how do we know we've achieved this, right? Is – our students' identities will not

predetermine their success in schools. We will be closing these achievement gaps, and that's what we're trying to get to. So that's what equity charges us to do. So moving onto that, how do we do this?

And so this is an action plan that PSBA developed to help districts in our state move towards equity, and really it's important, grounding each step, it is essential that districts must include and affirm the voices of students, families and communities. Without them we cannot overcome institutional barriers and create opportunities that will support students, right? And so examples of this is making sure that we – that our parents are serving on taskforce committees, that we have listening sessions, that our students, we're having opportunities for our students to share what they think. And so student voice is a huge part of this process, and creating multiple safe, structured and flexible opportunities for dialogue and engagement. This is important because we're now in the process of building trust for students and their families, and we know that we – if we build trust that students and families – we're going to find that our students are going to perform academically, okay?

And so I'm just going to go through the rest of the action steps. So grounding all these other steps is this concept of always including and affirming the voices of students, families and communities. So the first step is we have to identify and understand our district's demographics. Again, our demographics have changed dramatically over time, and so we have to be ready to educate our children of today, right? We've got to analyze the data. We have to look at our achievement and opportunity gaps, and an equity audit is essential in this. You've got to define equity for your district and community, again, figuring out what does equity mean for your district context. We have to embed educational equity training into all levels of professional development for administration, staff and board. We've got to pursue and practice cultural awareness and proficiency.

We have to analyze policies and practices with an equity lens, and we have to really think about developing an action plan on policy to incorporate equity into district structure. So to practice equity is a requirement of thinking about the internal work of dealing with our own experiences about education, and our own biases of education, but also thinking about how do we structure equity into our district practice.

So we're going to move on to the next slide. The whole point of this whole work is to make sure that equity serves as a foundation of your district practice, of your educational system. Equity should lift up every aspect of the educational system, which includes school boards, the administrations, teachers and staff, families and communities, curriculum, finances, HR facilities, transportation, food services and extra-curricular activities so it can reach our students.

We're going to move on to the fourth question, what is culturally responsive pedagogy, which is probably what we're all here today to talk about. I just really wanted to provide a framework of what equity is in order to kind of supplement really talking about what is culturally responsive pedagogy. So I'm going to briefly discuss the theory of CRP because in the next workshop you will be getting a more robust discussion on the literature behind culturally responsive pedagogy. So culturally responsive pedagogy holds that teachers and school leaders affirm and include students and their families' cultural identities, experiences, voices and values in the education process. And so we've had some really awesome researchers in this work. There's culturally responsive teaching, you have Gloria Ladson Billings, you have Zaretta Hammond and Geneva Gay. And when we're talking about culturally responsive school leadership, Dr. Muhammad Khalifa is doing some really wonderful work in that.

So there's a lot of information about culturally responsive teaching but I also want to really describe the role of leadership in this process. So both CRP and culturally responsive school leadership really discusses – talks about critically self – critical self-reflection. We have to deal with our own internal bias when we are educating our children. We have to, and we must incorporate students and families' culture in this process. And students need to learn and – learn to value their own culture and their own perspective as well as other perspectives in this process. CRP critiques social inequities, right? It promotes social justice. But I also want to talk a little bit about leadership, right? It is their role, principals, superintendents, school board directors, to develop culturally responsive teachers.

And with the purpose specifically about the board, because I work with school boards. It is their job to develop policy and practices that is community and student centric. So number five, how does CRP relate to efforts to achieve educational equity? And I use this

quote 'ignorance of cultural differences could lead teachers to underestimate the true academic potential of minority students' to kind of lift up this point. CRP is the lifeblood of equity work. How are we as school leaders or teachers or staff members supposed to create and implement policies and practices that reflect and support our students' individual needs if we do not engage with students and families? If we do not listen to students and families, and if we do not center students and families? If we do not deal with our own biases regarding students and families, and we do not include students and families in the educational process?

And I also want to say we have to engage our marginalized students and families, the ones that are not as much – that we don't see as much in our program so who do not come to our parent-teacher conferences. Because this is our job, in order for us to provide education for all students we have to engage all parents and students as well. We know from research that if students feel like they belong, that we believe in their brilliance, that we accept their identities, they will perform academically. To practice CRP, we have to push away any deficit mindset that makes it hard for us to engage, seek out and work with communities and students, okay? So the sixth question talks about this paradigm shift of what CRP brings to broader systemic change in our educational system, okay? And again, CRP centers students and communities, specifically students and communities that have been marginalized.

When we engage in culturally responsive pedagogy, we value the cultural practices of students and families. When we engage in culturally responsive pedagogy we promote and – we promote engagement and belonging. When we engage in CRP, we demand high expectations from our children, from our students. When we engage in CRP, we require continuous training for leaders and staff to learn more practices and also to learn ways to deal with our own issues of bias, right? CRP requires a paradigm shift in how we process and think about student achievement. And so to kind of address this point, I'm using Dr. Muhammad Khalifa's work. He discusses the traditional school approach and how we think about school achievement. And this traditional approach, it's kind of rather linear, or maybe I would even argue hierarchical, right? So how it works is district administrators and school board directors develop policy, and therefore that policy impacts and informs school leadership, such as principals.

And then our school leaders, our principals, then inform teacher practices, right? And then of course teacher practices has a direct impact on student achievement, student performance. So this is a very linear process. But if we're practicing and thinking about a paradigm shift of utilizing culturally responsive approaches, we're thinking in more of a humanistic viewpoint, right? And so Dr. Khalifa juxtaposes this traditional approach to this very culturally responsive approach. Where it's not linear, it's actually intertwined. Where the expertise is not coming specifically just from our district and our school board leaders, it's coming from communities and families. And this approach, district and community leaders work together with parents and which therefore informs school leadership, which then of course informs teacher practices, which then informs student performance. And, again, I said this process is very intertwined.

Teachers and school leadership be constantly – be learning from the community, which includes their students and parents to develop practices and supports to fit the needs of their students. And so I hope that this kind of framework can help like launch the next stage into really getting in depth about actual CRP practices. But I'm going to end it with these questions to consider. What are the primary equity concerns in your context? We should be asking ourselves these questions. What is your definition of equity for your district, school or community? To what extent have you analyzed data to understand opportunity gaps in your context? What groups are impacted? Have you conducted an equity audit in your district? To what extent have you analyzed policies and practices with an equity lens? Which policies or practices need to be examined and re-examined or redone, right?

What steps might you take to address them? How does CRP fit into those steps? And who do you need to involve? And I think this is the most important question, okay? Who do you need to involve? Who is missing from the conversation? Are you making decisions in isolation of students and families? So, again, it's coming from this space of recognizing what equity is, and equity is, again, providing the supports that our children need to be successful. So if that is the case then where do we get our information from? And that is from our students and families and uplifting their cultures and uplifting these practices as a way to reaching our students so that they feel like they belong. Then when they feel like they belong then they're going to perform for us academically. So I'm now ready for any questions that you might have.

Amy Johnson: Heather, thank you so much, that was a great presentation. And we are going to open it up for a Q&A session right now. We have plenty of time for that. And folks, I'm just going to remind folks, you can submit a question down in the Q&A part of this platform. I'm going to start with a first question for you, Heather, which is can you describe how organizations can review their policies to determine if they are supportive or not of educational equity? What does the process look like in practice?

Heather Bennett: Okay, so I would again start off to think about an equity lens approach. If you haven't had one, I would definitely find one. But there are some good ones, like we actually have an equity lens approach and these are just questions and we call it. It's like five questions for districts and also teachers in your own classroom to ask yourselves if you're thinking about moving towards equity. The first question is what is the decision and question? What does the data show regarding the impact of the decision, like – of decision? And this could also be your policy, what does the data show regarding the impact of the policy on student achievement opportunity and school climate. The third question is if there are disparity gaps between groups, why do these disparities exist? The fourth question is who is missing in the discussion to address the disparities? And the fifth question is how will you mitigate the disparities?

So these are five questions that you can think about in terms of reviewing your policies. If you have a policy, a school discipline policy or a curriculum policy, or just even a practice, again, I'll use the example of Saturday school on a Monday, on a Saturday school for math. And really kind of going through this process of okay, why did we come up with this decision, why was this decision made, who – what does the data show, who's actually engaging in this class and in the Saturday school? And if there are disparities why do they exist, right? And then really thinking about we created this opportunity for students, but only certain students are accessing it and others are not. Why don't we ask the parents and the students of those who are not accessing this opportunity to kind of get an understanding of really thinking about these disparities on a deeper level, and then how will you mitigate the disparities? How do you – how will you fix this, right?

And so this is kind of a quick five question way that I think organizations or districts can do – use, more systematically of

course, to kind of really start to address the barriers, opportunity in your practices or your policies. I hope that answers your question.

Amy Johnson: Thanks, Heather. This might be also a good follow-up question to that first one. Do you set goals after examining data and gaps?

Heather Bennett: You know what, I think so. You know, yes, absolutely. And the reason why I was quiet about that, because there could be a goal – like we're going to examine our data and gaps, right? Some districts we haven't even done that first step, right? And that's a goal in itself. But yes, I would definitely – you really don't know what the problem is really until you have a nice little x-ray about your districts, the system, right? And so really thinking about the disparities going on in your district. And, again, you might – again, because we're going about our day, we don't necessarily see it because some of this can be implicit, right? Some of these things that we don't really notice. And so I think you have to do an x-ray, really, of your district, do an equity audit to be able to really examine the disparities and also set goals. Because now you know what the problem is. Without it you're kind of thinking you know what the problem is.

But when you have an audit that says it – like with clear data, you can now have something to base it off of, and also set – also know where you're going, really, as well. So, yeah, I think after the fact is important.

Amy Johnson: Here's another question for you, Heather, and this might be one that others share. The question is – starts with the acknowledgement, it seems like our district is stuck in the initial stages. What is the recommended timeframe to get through the stages understanding that the work needs continuous training and work?

Heather Bennett: So the initial stages in terms of let's think about like with the action plan, just kind of addressing the data or just talking about it over and over again, is that where you're at – well, I'm just going to assume that.

Amy Johnson: Yeah.

Heather Bennett: Yeah. I know, I know. So I think a lot of the problem is again we get stuck really at okay, this is the problem, this is the problem. It



really now needs to go into kind of solution mode. So, again, if you know what the problem is, right, you've done an audit. That's important. My next thing is okay, get everyone together in a room and just say okay, what are the top three things that we need to address that's having a huge impact and that we see is a huge problem in our district, and let's tackle that. Because I think a lot of people get stuck too because there's so many problems, right? We see like a thousand – we have like a list, we've got to address discipline, we've got to address early childhood literacy. We've got to address all these things and sometimes we get so overwhelmed, but we don't know where to start.

And so I think sometimes we have to just start small. What is – what can you tackle? Thinking about what are the major top three or four, or five if you have the capacity, five things you really – that is having a huge impact on your students, and then tackle that. And then have short term goals and also long-term goals, because I think a lot of times when we think about goal setting, we think about okay, we've got to go to long term. We're going to cut discipline rates by 100 percent in a year. That's insane. You have to start off with what are the 30-day – what's the 30-day goal that we can have ourselves, that we can feel accomplished in so that we can keep moving forward? Because you're constantly building capacity in this process, constantly teaching your – you're getting teachers and community members and bringing them all into the fray.

So it's important to really think about a systematic plan of maybe 30 – like a small group, small goal, and then having a huge goal at the end. And also my advice is also just taking in – taking - like really starting small, thinking about the first three or four issues that you think that you can actually tackle and make a big impact, and then from there it'll grow. It'll grow from there. But you don't want to get stuck, so you have to start somewhere. So start, but knowing that it's okay if you start really small and then grow it up.

Amy Johnson: Great. Another question, could you provide more examples of how institutional or teacher practices can contribute to disparities?

Heather Bennett: Okay, so there's a lot. So we all know that the research says that teachers, like a quality teacher has probably the best impact to student achievement. And so we know that teachers are the gatekeepers as well. So thinking about access to AP, that is a huge opportunity. That's a huge barrier that teachers can have unless

there's a policy or practice that are saying that we're going to open it up to all students. What happens is it's the teachers that decide where – that decide who gets access to higher academic or gifted programming. Another thing is curriculum in itself, right? Definitely Zaretta Hammond has done some really good work on talking about it from like the brain-wise, like how important it is for teachers to develop practices that reflect the cultural dynamics that are in your classrooms. And so more group assignments. If you're having – so thinking about what our kids really need is important. So making sure that our curriculum looks like our children but at the same time thinking about practices that help them as well.

And so there's two frameworks or perspectives that we can think about, individualism versus collectivism. And we know that students of color and their families and communities are more likely to focus on collectivism as like the way of how they learn and how they process information. Also, storytelling and all of that. So teacher practices can start to reflect that, that process of how students are learning in their homes. We can also utilize those same practices to be learning in our – within our teachers as well, within our classrooms as well. And so I know you're going to get a lot more about this information in the next – in future workshops in this series. But really as a teacher, really thinking about who your students are and really understanding how they learn is essential in this work. And also recognizing that you have a role as a gatekeeper. That if we are not dealing with our own cultural biases, really thinking about that in a critical level.

If we are not addressing the issues that our kids are dealing with on a daily basis and we're not – and they don't see that in their curriculum and they don't see that in the way you're even talking to them, or working with them, or creating a relationship with them, they're not going to learn. So there's a lot of roles for teachers here but I think there's a lot of research too for teachers as well, and helping them become more culturally responsive to provide the needs – provide the resources and the supports for our children to learn.

Amy Johnson:

Great. Here's another question for you. How can we involve the district specifically with equity work? When understanding power, privilege and oppression, power can take a central role in districts where some of those individuals who hold power are not interested in equity or believe it is necessary to include.

Heather Bennett: Can you repeat that question -

Amy Johnson: Yeah, no problem. No problem. How can we involve the district specifically with equity work? And, again, there was – sort of putting it by way of explanation of the question, when understanding power, privilege and oppression, power can take a central role in districts where some of those individuals who hold power are not interested in equity or believe it is necessary to include. So I think that's sort of the source of the question, or that's the sort of motivation for the question - how can we involve the district specifically with equity work if that's the context?

Heather Bennett: Well, like I said, the – like I said, the one thing that is positive right now, and it's actually becoming a legislative mandate. I don't know everyone's educational – I don't know everyone's state as a plan, but we do know that equity is becoming front and center in this conversation. And so what is happening and that I'm seeing in my – in our districts in Pennsylvania is that we're having – we have some really good leaders in this and their districts that are championing it. And so how do we get them involved, again, an equity audit. Keep – I say this a lot because a lot of the time we don't – having an equity audit to really show that children in our districts are not performing. What happens is, again, that initial perspective of narratives, right? That we come from a certain district and in the past we've all done well because we've all had the same student body and therefore we think – when we bring in new children to our district, we therefore think oh, they need to assimilate because this is the narrative that we've told ourselves for generations.

And so when you pop that narrative, you pop that bubble, when you really take a good honest approach of your – of the opportunity gaps in your district, and not just focusing on the achievement gap. That's why I say an equity audit is important, because now you're really getting down and dirty to the disparities that are having – happening in your district. And that kind of show – gives them the why equity part of it. Because you can define what equity is all day every day, but if you don't explain really why this is important and your data will show that for you. It really will. Another thing is this, I've seen equity being moved in districts at different spaces, but where the community itself is calling for it. Where you have strong parental leaders who are championing it, where students are championing it, and I've also seen teachers

championing it. In one school district I saw where a teacher asked to develop a course on race and feminism.

And through that course the students themselves took an audit of their school and they showed the disparity gaps themselves. And that kind of launched a lot of – launched the district to moving forward as well. And so there's different ways to do it but I guess in terms of getting district leaders on board, the first step for me is really just thinking about looking at really getting a good x-ray of your data disparity gaps. And then from there having good leadership and championing it through creating an equity taskforce group. That is not just talking about the problem that are moving towards a solution, and bringing on that district leader, the district leaders that are in power into that taskforce group, they're not allowed to sit on the sidelines. They have to be a part of that conversation as well, so that they can start to grow. Because a lot of problems is just – people just don't know what it is, again, and then also they don't know why.

So if you're consistently talking about the why and how it in fact impacts our students on a daily basis, people are going to start to move into this. They're going to start to move into it.

Amy Johnson: Heather, we have a couple questions, and you're really speaking to this right now. There's more to add to it. We have a couple questions about either if you can provide a sample of a good equity audit tool or is there a model process that should be followed? Kind of maybe talking a little bit more specifically about what does that look like in practice.

Heather Bennett: At the top of my head the first one I think about is the Mid Atlantic Equity Consortiums. They have a nice little audit tool and it's free. So I think they have some really good questions that you can start to ask yourself, and they talk about classroom disparities, they talk about school discipline, they talk about teachers and districts. Also access, like inclusion of families and communities in the process. So they have kind of a nice little questionnaire. There are others, but at the top of my head I will definitely probably provide some resources in terms of that after. But that one at the top of my head is a really good one.

Amy Johnson: Yeah, if you just say it one more time just to make sure folks got that.

Heather Bennett: The Mid-Atlantic Equity Consortium is a really good resource. They have some equity audits where – free equity and to kind of look at and address. And there are free ones all over the place as well. So I said at the top of my head that’s – I’m blanking on a lot so what will happen is after this is over I’m probably going to send a whole list out. But that’s a – that’s a really good one to kind of start the process of thinking about an x-ray. But I know that if you bring anybody in the first thing that most trainers will do is say hey – well, a good one will say let’s look at your – let’s x-ray your district equity, your disparity gaps in your district. Because, again, we can’t create a solution if we don’t know what the problem really is. So -

Amy Johnson: Yeah, yeah. I’m going to switch gears a little bit. The next question, we’ll probably have time for one or maybe two more questions, but the next one, can you give an example of engaging parents that really achieved equity or moved toward equity?

Heather Bennett: So this is – like I said, the principal – again, context matters, who your parents are matters, again. So understanding your demographics and community, your community history is essential here. But I’ve had a school district that created – I call it coalition groups, right? And they broke them up like – so because they have stronger – they had a lot more black families moving into the district. So they had a black coalition, they had a Latino coalition, they had an Asian-American coalition, they had LGBTQ coalition of – and so they brought them in so that they can hear directly from these groups, and then they bring them together where now we’re having a conversation about – so all families are included in this conversation. So you’re not missing out on a specific demographic group, but they’re all a part of it. And so they would all meet individually and they would bring themselves together and talk about differences, experiences and how we can make sure that our children are all being represented and taken care of.

So that’s – that was one way. And another school district go – we have a mega church in one school district. And so what they did where most of the African-American families in the community went to. And so the superintendent went and spoke at one of the services at that mega church, and from there she also got more teachers of color to come to her school district because of what she did. And so meeting parents and families where they are I think is essential. We’re always – schools are always asking for parents and families to engage with us when we set the rules of that engagement. Instead of thinking about how we need to reach out

to them, we are serving them. That is our role, we are serving our students. So we need to get behind our four walls and go into the community and really think about how – what places that we see the people that we want to engage with us.

So mosques, churches I think are – community centers are important, and especially – and also places where people live. If you have like an apartment complex and you know a lot of students, families live in that apartment complex, setting up shop there as well. And do it often. Because what happens is – what happens with most districts, like we've tried that, we did that one time and it didn't work. You have to be consistent because we're building trust, remember? CRP work is about building trust in the community. It's saying that we're going to get our expertise – our – the community perspective, that is essential to doing this equity work. Therefore we have to actively engage, meaning we have to go beyond our walls and say we're going to do it not once, not twice but more, multiple times, so people feel like they're comfortable to create a sense of trust and building trust in community with the parents and families.

And so there is actually – there's actually some research but let me think. There's some research by – why I'm blanking on it, in Baltimore. But they said that they – achievement gaps went down when a lot more teachers did more home visits. And so – Johns Hopkins, I'm sorry. Johns Hopkins University has research done and they found that achievement gaps went down when those – when the teachers did more home visits. So really thinking about engaging the community on a systematic way is important, and also asking some parents to be a part of your equity taskforce teams, or committee teams, or – so – and being very cognizant of reaching out to families and communities that have not engaged in the past. And also recognizing which structures that we are placing them makes it hard for certain parents and families to engage with us. Is it hard for them to get to the school district because of transportation? Is our communication – are we only communicating through one way when our parents are communicating in another way?

It's really taking a really good, really structured look at how we're accessing the community, and how they're accessing us. And that's data. Again, equity audit, I'm telling you, that works.

Amy Johnson: Well, I think we're just about out of time for questions. I just want to say thanks again to Heather for today's webinar and this great Q&A session, great questions. Thank you for taking all of them and answering these questions so thoughtfully, Heather. To audience members, you'll see on your action plan the same questions that are up on the view right now that Heather posed at the end of the webinar with a prompt and some space to begin developing your own responses. Sort of the beginning of your own action plan. As a quick reminder to the audience, the next webinar in this series will be held on October 2nd. Eric Duncan from WestEd will share research on culturally responsive practices and discuss how to sustain systemic change. So thank you to everyone for joining us, we look forward to having you join us again in early October. I'm just going to turn this back to you, Brian.

Webinar producer: Thank you, Amy. Please note, at the conclusion of this webinar there will be a brief survey. Please take the time to fill it out. When you've completed the survey press the submit button. As a reminder, the on-demand recording will be available one day after the webcast using the same audience link that was sent to you following registration. The recording and the transcript will be available on the REL Mid Atlantic website in the coming weeks. Thanks for joining today's event. Have a great afternoon.

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