Why Racial Equity?

First, what do we mean by equity?

We believe that all children should have equal access to a high quality education. We understand that as long as race, class, and ethnicity continue to predict the future life chances of some children in our nation, we must work with schools and school systems to identify related barriers and obstacles to opportunity and development, interrupt their negative impact, and eliminate the persistent disparities in child outcomes.

We choose to focus our work on racial equity as a point of departure for identifying multiple forms of inequity primarily for two reasons: a.) to increase awareness of systemic barriers that disadvantage children of color; and b.) to encourage and support educators as they seek to adapt instructional and leadership practices to respond more effectively to the needs and aspirations of all the children they serve. We refer to this process of consciously leading, coaching, and teaching for equity as developing an equity lens and taking an equity stance.

Why use an equity lens to inform our work?

We intentionally engage and support educators who work in vulnerable communities as they seek culturally responsive ways of teaching and learning to interrupt and eliminate inequities. Reframing our work through a racial equity lens engages us in courageous conversations that help us learn from our experiences, foster healing, and reveal the structures, policies, and behaviors that hold some children back. Two ideas central to our efforts are structural racism and targeted universalism.

Structural Racism

When it comes to understanding the persistence of racial disparities, social structures matter. They are not neutral arrangements for purely functional purposes. The operational arrangements within institutions and the ways in which they are aligned at a community or societal level—the way they distribute benefits and burdens, convey information, and assign meaning—produce and/or reproduce racial disparities. As educators, we play a critical role in a system of operationally-interrelated institutions. Examining our work through an equity lens can help us take more effective action, i.e., adopt an equity stance, to interrupt inequitable practices and eliminate racialized outcomes for children.
Targeted Universalism

Targeted Universalism recognizes racial disparities, while acknowledging their presence within a larger inequitable, institutional framework. It is an approach that is inclusive of the needs of all groups, but pays particular attention to the specific context or situation of marginal groups. Thus, any proposal or strategy for change is calibrated against specific outcomes—that is, the way it addresses the specific needs of the targeted group, not just the intent to provide blanket benefits to all groups.

The existence of social structures that contribute to and perpetuate inequities involves a set of complex interactions within and across institutions and organizations. Adopting a targeted universalism approach requires building and sustaining partnerships and coalitions willing to align and integrate their efforts to be more targeted, efficient, and effective. When we begin to examine our practice through a racial equity lens, we recognize both the similarities and differences that exist across many other manifestations of inequity—gender, class, ethnicity, language, disabilities, and sexual preference; understanding these similarities and differences enables us to be more inclusive and strategic in our work.

Despite the scale and complexity of structural inequity, we recognize that big problems do not necessarily require big solutions. In a structurally-oriented initiative, small interventions can be critical to create change, but these interventions must be informed by and explicitly targeted to the structural arrangements causing the disparity.

Recognizing our Linked Fate

Why should others care about equity and inclusion? Why should those who are not marginalized care about equity challenges? More than ever, we find ourselves inextricably connected to the rest of the world through a web of interdependence. In this context, nations, regions, communities and individuals share a linked fate. Inequality is a sign of economic and social inefficiency that results in large numbers of individuals unable to reach their potential. To thrive, individuals must be competitive in the global economy. Disparities in the life chances of individuals ultimately make all of us less competitive and more vulnerable in a complex and interdependent world.

*Adapted from and inspired by john powell, “Toward a Structural Racism Framework”*