



Districts Advancing Racial Equity (DARE) Tool

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Districts Advancing Racial Equity (DARE) Tool

INTRODUCTION

The Districts Advancing Racial Equity (DARE) tool provides a practical and accessible resource for understanding, assessing, and advancing racial equity within districts.

Purpose of this tool

The DARE tool brings together—in a uniquely broad and practical way—what is known about district actions that can support racial equity. The tool captures research-informed, high-leverage aspects of schooling that leaders must address in order to create systems that build on the strengths of and respond to the needs of students of color. This tool is not an exhaustive, one-size-fits-all manual for advancing racial equity in school districts. Rather, it helps conceptualize and organize systems-level equity work and provides a guide for district leaders to interrogate their systems, set equity-oriented goals, and track progress over time. The tool offers a framework for district leaders and staff to understand the complex ecosystem of policies and practices they design and enact. The tool also contains a set of qualitative and quantitative indicators to support data-informed decision-making and track progress toward greater racial equity.

Why focus on racial equity? Decades of reforms have proven insufficient to address persistent racial disparities in educational opportunities. In school systems across the United States, meaningful efforts to ensure access to strong educational opportunities require a bold and significant shift.¹ Policies and practice must not only prevent discrimination; they must move beyond simple notions of equality—in which every student gets the same—to equity—in which all students get what they need to develop academically, socially, emotionally, and physically.

School leaders committed to racial equity understand the historical legacy of structural racism that reaches to our present context and that results in the educational opportunity gaps that students still experience. District staff who focus on racial equity recognize that students' individualized experiences, opportunities, and successes in school are deeply contextualized in the social reality of institutionalized racism across the United States. They seek to educate the individuals and ameliorate the systems that perpetuate inequitable opportunities and resulting outcomes for students.

Why a racial equity tool? The system we need requires educational leaders in every corner of our nation to respond in new ways to the complex challenges they navigate and to pay attention to the social, historical, economic, and political contexts of the communities they serve. Although the domains of district work included in this tool are not new, few researchers or practitioners have applied a racial equity lens to these key areas. The DARE tool responds to this need, leveraging what we know about district systems to build on the assets of and respond to the needs of students of color.

Why we use the language we use. First and foremost, we believe in each individual's right to self-identify racially, given their racial and ethnic background and cultural experiences. We know that race is a social construction, yet it comes with very real, research-proven consequences in today's society, including, quite blatantly, in our education system.²

However, given the complexities and nuances within students' racial and ethnic identities and how those influence what they bring to, and how they experience, schooling, we use the term “students of color” to identify student racial groups in the United States that have historically been denied equal access to quality educational opportunities, in particular: American Indian or Alaska Native, Black or African American, Latino/a, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, and Southeast Asian (e.g., Cambodian, Laotian, Thai, Vietnamese, and ethnic Hmong) student groups.

We acknowledge the limitations of the term “students of color” and derivatives such as “people of color” and “communities of color.” We choose deliberately not to use “minority students” because of the factual inaccuracy of that term: Numerically, White students are now the official minority in public schools in the United States.³

We also acknowledge the concern that the term “students of color” is so broad that it can unintentionally mask Black and Indigenous students' experiences that are shaped by our nation's history of slavery and genocide and the continued impact on Black and Indigenous people and communities today. Likewise, the umbrella of “Latino/a” veils wide-ranging experiences. A first-generation Salvadorian immigrant student new to the U.S., learning a new language and culture, has a different experience than a Mexican American student whose American lineage predates the geographic boundaries of the United States. Neither student, however, is free from the effects of individual or structural racism found in our education system.

Similarly, Asian and Asian American students encompass vastly different experiences, with Southeast Asian students, in recent history, often being furthest from opportunity. Some Asian and Asian American students have had access to educational opportunities similar to White students in the United States, and often achieve at greater rates than all other student racial groups.⁴ However, higher achievement is not uniform across countries of origin. Indeed, aggregate achievement data often conceal the experiences of Asian and Asian American learners who attend some of the most under-resourced schools and have limited access to high-quality educational opportunities. Additionally, all students of Asian descent can experience racial discrimination and racialized experiences that need to be identified and addressed. High academic achievement does not automatically signal healthy, positive school experiences for students of Asian descent.

Finally, while test scores do not get reported by the multiple racial and ethnic identities represented across the Middle East, we know that the current climate of xenophobia in the United States contributes to Middle Eastern students often experiencing racism and violence in schools.⁵ These racialized experiences in schools, too, need to be identified and eradicated.

One potential pitfall of focusing on students of color is an erroneous, deficit-based analysis that leads to interventions and strategies aimed at students as the problem. We intend the opposite. By focusing on students of color, we recognize the funds of knowledge—the historically and culturally developed knowledge and skills—students and their families bring to their educational experiences. Districts and district leaders, therefore, should be alert to language and policies that aim to “fix” students or their families rather than the system in which the problems actually reside. This asset-based approach to students, their families, and communities is vital to policies and strategies that result in positive social, emotional, and academic school experiences for students of color.

Given these complexities, we encourage districts and schools to be specific when identifying their students’ racial and ethnic backgrounds and analyzing how they are organizing their students’ schooling and learning experiences. If your student population is 90% Black and 10% Latino/a, then there is no need to use the term “students of color.” Instead, it is sufficient to name your student population “Black and Latino/a students.” However, when you disaggregate your data, it is important to understand the distinctions within those labels as well. Is your Black student body made up of a mix of African Americans and students of African or Caribbean descent? Is your Latino/a student population Mexican American, Dominican American, or Salvadorian American? What percentage of both racial groups are immigrants new to the country? What percentage are second generation? These questions, along with the answers, allow districts and schools to have a better understanding of student, family, and community assets, as well as to determine needs and strategies for how best to engage their unique student population in growth and learning.

It is our hope that in making our use of language and its limitations transparent, you will consider carefully the individual and collective identities of your students as you work toward greater racial equity outcomes in your district and schools.

How DARE was developed

The Southern Education Foundation, in partnership with the Learning Policy Institute and the National Equity Project, launched the [Racial Equity Leadership Network \(RELN\)](#), a fellowship that brings together superintendents and other cabinet-level leaders to strengthen their capacity to advance racial equity in their school systems. The DARE tool was developed to support the work of the fellows and staff from other districts interested in leading this work. It is based on a systematic review of literature and existing instruments for advancing systems-level equity (see Appendix). In its final form, the DARE tool was peer-reviewed by leading academic scholars and practitioner-experts.

The framework

The following graphic presents the framework for advancing racial equity that sits at the heart of this tool. The framework for advancing racial equity is based on the supposition that achieving racial equity means that student success is not predetermined by student race. Student success occurs when students demonstrate developmentally appropriate academic knowledge and skills; preparation for work, life, and civic participation; and the social-emotional skills that undergird healthy self-image and relationships with others and the broader world. The framework also recommends that districts set direction and take action in an ongoing cycle of improvement in partnership with school community members.

The DARE framework consists of six key domains. To achieve racial equity, districts must have the following:

- A clear vision for racial equity
- Deeper learning and culturally responsive instructional practices
- Safe, healthy, and inclusive school environments
- Resources that are equitably distributed
- Meaningful partnerships with families and the community
- Data systems that drive progress toward racial equity

The domains are arranged in a wheel to demonstrate their essential interconnection in a systems approach to racial equity.

To achieve racial equity, district leaders set direction and take action to influence these domains in an ongoing cycle of improvement in partnership with school community members.



The structure of the tool

The tool is organized into tables that present the six key domains that district leadership can influence to advance racial equity. Each table provides a description of the domain, frames essential questions that break the domain into components for exploration, and suggests a set of qualitative and quantitative measures to facilitate targeted inquiry into district data.

DOMAIN

This space contains a brief description of the domain.

ASK	LOOK FOR
Essential questions help guide inquiry in the domain	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Prompts in this section suggest parts of the system that leaders can investigate to answer the essential questions.• Other: _____ Each table includes an “other” option to encourage reflection on any additional information needed.

Users

The DARE tool is designed primarily for use by cabinet-level district administrators as a resource to help them better understand current conditions for racial equity in their districts and to guide policy and practice. It can also be used by principals and other school-level leaders to understand racial equity within a school. Parents can use the tool to better understand the context in which their children are educated and to advocate for racial equity. Community organizations can use the tool to see where districts need support and to determine how they can work in partnership with the district to meet student needs and advance racial equity. District leaders can share key findings from the tool with state and federal policymakers to inform state efforts to advance equity across all districts in a state and to leverage federal opportunities to support these state and local efforts. The tool is most powerful when used in collaboration with multiple stakeholders, such as school leaders, teachers, community organizations, parents, policymakers, and external consultants invested in advancing racial equity.

How to use this tool

This tool can be used in different ways to address district priorities and processes. Users interested in taking a comprehensive approach to advancing racial equity can use the DARE tool as a guide for the activities suggested below.

Assessing current state. Use the domain descriptions and essential questions to guide discussions about racial equity assets and blind spots based on current district policies and practices. Users may look across all six domains to learn more about district work in its entirety or choose to focus on a few targeted domains.

Reviewing available district data. After choosing a focus for assessment (whether targeted to one, a few, or all the domains), review the accompanying “look-fors” to identify information available or needed to set racial equity goals and track progress. Users can develop and consider additional look-fors relevant to their systems. As appropriate, look-fors should be disaggregated by student race and by schools with high and low percentages of students of color.

Shifting policies and practices. Make data-informed decisions for improving district policy and practice in one or more of the domains considered.

Monitoring progress. Continue district discussions about racial equity in an ongoing cycle of continuous improvement. Revisit look-fors to track and report progress toward greater racial equity over time.

A CLEAR, AMBITIOUS VISION FOR DISTRICTWIDE RACIAL EQUITY

Having a clear, explicit, and ambitious vision for districtwide racial equity is imperative because it demonstrates that achieving racial equity is a central commitment of a district. When a vision statement is made explicit, it provides the impetus for setting goals; serves as a north star for the district's structures, policies, and norms; and enables the district to move forward toward racial equity.⁶

The vision must be shared and enacted by all district stakeholders so that it has the power to energize stakeholders and impact behavior; when the vision becomes a shared one, it can be a catalyst for transformation.⁷ Therefore, superintendents must work with district and school leadership, teachers, students, families, and community members to build a commitment to a vision centered on racial equity. Board members, too, as key decision-makers, need to be aligned to the racial equity vision in order to build practices and policies that achieve more just outcomes for the communities they serve.⁸

Having a vision that explicitly identifies racial equity, in contrast to broad equity statements that encompass “all students,” is essential. When a racial equity focus is not identified directly, official policies and expected norms tend to be colorblind in ways that ignore important aspects of students' experiences.⁹ This approach ignores the very real impact of the historical, social, economic, and political context of the United States and how these issues directly impact the experiences of students of color and their learning both outside and inside of schools.¹⁰ Instead, district stakeholders should strive to take a race-conscious approach by understanding the historical and systemic issues of race in their local and national contexts. Investing in a race-conscious approach allows districts to enact an equity-oriented vision that seeks educational justice for students from diverse backgrounds.¹¹

A vision statement that explicitly names racial equity should be a living document that reflects the specific context of a district's communities. It should guide continual deep reflection and learning on racial inequality and structural racism that permeates society and the school system. Given the evolving nature of the school ecosystem (e.g., staff turnover, shifting racial demographics), district stakeholders should make a commitment to revisiting and revising their vision for racial equity over time.

A CLEAR, AMBITIOUS VISION FOR DISTRICTWIDE RACIAL EQUITY

Racial equity is a fundamental value that is clearly articulated and championed by all members of the community, including students, families, teachers, school leaders, district staff, and local partners (e.g., businesses, nonprofits, municipal agencies, religious institutions, and residents). All community members believe that students of color can be successful and that together the community members can create the conditions to make that a reality.

ASK

Has the district made a public commitment to racial equity?

LOOK FOR

- Mission and/or vision statement(s) that includes explicit language prioritizing racial equity
- Enactment of substantive districtwide structures (e.g., staff, departments, commissions, committees, campaigns) that champion conversations and programming regarding racial equity
- A strategy to revisit and revise the mission and/or vision for racial equity on a consistent basis
- Other: _____

Do community members play a part in identifying racial equity priorities?

- A variety of strategies designed to facilitate active engagement of all community members in developing the district mission and/or vision statement(s)
- Interactive, reciprocal participation of students and families in the development of schools' goals, mission, or vision
- Other: _____

ACCESS TO RICH, DEEPER LEARNING AND CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE CURRICULA AND PRACTICES IN ALL SCHOOLS AND FOR EACH STUDENT POPULATION

Deeper learning is rooted in the findings of research on learning over the past century and incorporates the newest research in the science of learning and development, with the goal of meeting the needs of 21st-century students.¹² Deeper learning pairs challenging academic content with engaging, experiential, and innovative learning experiences. Such learning experiences equip students with the skills to find, analyze, and apply knowledge in new and emerging contexts and situations and prepare them for college, work, civic participation in a democratic society, and lifelong learning in a fast-changing and information-rich world.¹³ Especially important is a focus on equity and ensuring all students have access to deeper learning opportunities—particularly students of color, who have systemically been denied such access in systems that reserved deeper learning for a small percentage of students.¹⁴

Schools and classrooms that are rich in deeper learning experiences have leaders and teachers who are culturally responsive and provide rich, relevant content in personalized learning environments.¹⁵ Culturally responsive teaching uses “the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them. It teaches to and through the strengths of these students.”¹⁶ Thus, leaders and teachers must be aware both of the individual experiences, talents, and interests of their students and of the local context in which their students are learning, including the historical, economic, political, and social influences on the educational experiences of students of color. Leaders and teachers also understand how institutional and individual racism manifests in schools and classrooms and actively disrupts the practices, norms, and policies that stem from racism (e.g., tracking, unconscious bias, lowered expectations, and viewing students from a deficit perspective).

Teachers must know their students, families, and communities and have authentic, caring relationships with them in order to contextualize lessons to build on students’ culture, experiences, and prior knowledge. Drawing upon students’ funds of knowledge¹⁷—the culture-based knowledge, critical thinking, and skills students and their families have and enact in their daily lives—allows teachers to go beyond shallow incorporation of racial diversity in course materials and instead create units and lessons that tap into students’ cultural assets and build upon the knowledge, strengths, and skills students of color bring with them into the classroom.

Deeper learning practices go beyond “sit and get” instructional delivery to inquiry- and project-based instruction in which authentic performance assessments and portfolios that assemble rich evidence of learning are the norm. Expectations of students are high, and personalized support and enrichment are available to all students, including students of color, to ensure they are appropriately challenged and are meeting or exceeding learning goals.¹⁸

In order to ensure students of color have access to deeper learning and culturally responsive environments, schools need to be staffed with leaders and teachers equipped to create, develop, and support these types of opportunities.¹⁹ Schools and classrooms should be resourced and organized so that all students have access to courses, curricula, and teachers that emphasize deeper learning and culturally responsive pedagogy. This access is particularly vital for students of color, who often either are tracked into low-level courses focused on rote tasks and skills or attend under-resourced schools that do not offer higher-level courses such as honors, Advanced Placement (AP), or International Baccalaureate (IB) programs.²⁰ Students of color, when given the access and opportunity to engage in deeper learning experiences, are able to thrive and achieve at high levels.²¹

ACCESS TO RICH, DEEPER LEARNING AND CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE CURRICULA AND PRACTICES IN ALL SCHOOLS AND FOR EACH STUDENT POPULATION

All students, including students of color, engage in deeper learning, characterized by higher-order thinking skills and social-emotional learning. Curricula, instruction, and assessment support students' development of skills required for 21st-century life (e.g., collaboration, communication, mastery of content knowledge for transfer and application, and creative problem-solving). Students are provided the supports they need to be successful.

ASK	LOOK FOR	
<p>Does every student have access to curricula and assessments that are rigorous, authentic, relevant, and well rounded?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An instructional vision and aligned practices that are intellectually challenging and include critical thinking, complex problem-solving, effective communication, the ability to work together, and self-directedness in every school for every child • Culturally responsive curricula and instruction in every school • A full, rich curriculum for every child (i.e., science, history, social studies, writing, music, physical education, arts, foreign languages, reading, and mathematics) • Learning environments that are fully integrated by race, socioeconomic status, and linguistic backgrounds of students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of a variety of assessments (e.g., projects, portfolios, extended learning tasks) that allow students to demonstrate deeper learning in multiple ways • A teacher workforce prepared to teach for deeper learning (i.e., teaching for 21st-century skills such as collaboration, communication, deep understanding of content knowledge for transfer and application, social-emotional skills, and creative problem-solving) • Other: _____
<p>Does every student have access to college- and career-oriented instruction?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participation and pass rate data for honors, AP, IB, and dual credit courses, by school and by student race • Participation and pass rate data for college preparation curricula, by school and by student race • Participation and pass rate data for career technical education course sequences, by school and by student race 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunities to participate in service learning and/or student internships that are assessed and counted toward graduation requirements, by school and by student race • Other: _____
<p>Does every student have access to the academic supports they need to learn and excel academically?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student success in courses (pass rates in each course, by school and by student race) • Access to supplemental tutoring and enrichment activities, by school and by student race 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to expanded learning time and resources (e.g., summer school, after school, double block courses) to support greater success • Adequate and equitable access to college and career counseling staff, by school and by student race • Other: _____

SAFE, HEALTHY, AND INCLUSIVE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENTS

Study after study has shown that a positive school climate—one in which students of color feel understood and respected—is critical to students’ academic, social, and emotional development.²² In order to provide empowering and inclusive environments, districts must address many aspects of schooling that affect students’ development, including the classroom environment, discipline, students’ physical and mental health, and meaningful relationships.

Educators’ attitudes toward their students can significantly shape the expectations they hold for student learning, their treatment of students, and what students ultimately learn.²³ When teachers view students’ backgrounds and experiences as assets and welcome students’ voices, they create identity-safe and engaging classroom environments. Identity-safe classrooms foster understanding, celebrate student voice, cultivate diversity as a resource, establish trusting relationships, and practice an ethics of care. Such environments promote both student achievement and positive attitudes about school.²⁴ When educators are aware of the implicit biases that can operate in the society, school, and classroom, and take steps to change implicit associations (e.g., through meaningful, positive engagement with individuals of color and exposure to a counter-stereotypical exemplar), they can mitigate the discrimination students so often experience in favor of more equitable actions.²⁵

Schools that honor cultural diversity contribute to positive school climate and positive perceptions of students of color. These schools promote positive cross-racial interactions and learning about other cultures, and they help sustain the unique cultural identities of students. In these environments, students develop feelings of connectedness and find school inherently more safe and enjoyable.²⁶

Nurturing and supportive relationships between students and teachers, and between students and other adults in the school, are also linked to better school performance and engagement, greater social competence, and willingness to take on challenges.²⁷ Such relationships help develop the emotional, social, behavioral, and cognitive competencies foundational to learning.

Schools can foster safe, inclusive environments by adopting restorative disciplinary practices. Restorative practices provide opportunities for students to develop a strong sense of community in which they can share and problem solve and remain part of the community by practicing social and emotional skills and developing personal responsibility.²⁸ These practices are in stark contrast with punitive disciplinary policies that can magnify stress and disproportionately affect students of color.²⁹ Rather, restorative disciplinary practices support safe and empowering classroom environments, and students in these environments have higher levels of self-understanding, commitment, performance, and belongingness and fewer disciplinary experiences.³⁰

Supportive learning environments also attend to students’ physical and emotional health and welfare. There is a direct connection between learning and students’ physical and mental health.³¹ Schools that meet students’ basic needs for food and health care can improve academic achievement overall and reduce the negative effects of adverse childhood experiences (e.g., exposure to violence, trauma, homelessness, and food insecurity).³² Additionally, positive school climate includes school connectedness and engagement for staff and families,³³ which are related to achievement gains and other positive outcomes.³⁴ When students of color are in supportive learning environments that attend to their physical, emotional, and relational needs, they are able to thrive academically *and* socially and emotionally.

SAFE, HEALTHY, AND INCLUSIVE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENTS

School environments allow students, staff, and other community members of color to be treated with fair and inclusive practices so that they feel safe, valued, heard, and respected. Students develop a sense of agency and a healthy sense of identity. The district and schools are aware of and help meet students’ physical, emotional, and mental health needs.

ASK	LOOK FOR	
<p>How does the district address students’ physical and mental health needs?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A set of strategies to identify and address the mental health and physical health needs of all students in the district, by school and by student race • Student access to nutrition, health, and mental health services, by school and by student race 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training and resources for staff to support students in trauma-informed and healing-informed ways • Measures of student social-emotional well-being and school climate, by school and by student race • Other: _____
<p>Is the district inclusive of all students, fostering positive youth development and interpersonal relationships?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A school culture that recognizes and appreciates racial and cultural differences • School structures and programs that foster positive adult–student and student–student relationships (e.g., advisories, peer mentoring, looping) • Opportunities for educators to learn about and address implicit racial biases in society and school • Inclusive classrooms that are integrated by race, socioeconomic status, language background, and special education status • Special education rates of referral and identification by school, student race, and disability type 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Percent of time students with special needs spend in general education setting— with and without support staff (e.g., special education teacher, paraprofessional)— by school and by student race • Absentee levels, by school and by student race • Students’ sense of belonging, by school and by student race • Other: _____
<p>Does the district use social-emotional supports and restorative practices?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explicit teaching of social and emotional skills, habits, and mindsets (including a sense of belonging and growth mindset) • Availability of social and emotional supports when students encounter trauma or other challenges • Use of educative and restorative practices to build community, teach responsibility, and allow for amends when challenges occur 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduction of exclusionary discipline (measured by rates of suspensions or expulsions by school and student race) • Other: _____
<p>Do the district and schools provide a safe and supportive environment for all community members?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher, principal, and staff perceptions of supportive working conditions, by school and by educator race • Percentage of students, families, and school staff reporting safe school environment, by race 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Percentage of students, families, and school staff reporting supportive school environment, by race • Other: _____

FINANCIAL, HUMAN, AND MATERIAL RESOURCES THAT ARE SUFFICIENT, APPROPRIATE, AND EQUITABLY ALLOCATED ACROSS AND WITHIN SCHOOLS

Persistent inequities in educational outcomes are rooted in opportunity gaps—systemic disparities in access to the resources that all students need to reach their potential.³⁵ Districts can enact their vision for racial equity through resource allocation that ensures students of color have access to appropriate, sufficient, and up-to-date resources that support their growth and well-being. Further, every student needs access to equipment and supplies for deeper learning instruction, which include high-speed connectivity and digital devices.

Substantial research shows that sustained, equitable investments can lead to greater educational opportunities and lifetime outcomes, particularly for students of color.³⁶ Residential discrimination and divestment in communities of color mean that Black and Latino/a students are more likely to attend high-poverty schools,³⁷ which receive inadequate funding under flat or regressive state school finance models.³⁸ One promising practice to advance district fiscal equity is student-weighted funding, which bases school budgets on needs as determined by the student groups served, rather than staff placement or property wealth.³⁹ Quite often, with more experienced teachers concentrated in more advantaged schools, these schools essentially receive more dollars per pupil than those serving less advantaged students. Weighted pupil formulas ensure that high-poverty schools receive the dollars generated by their pupil needs and can use them to improve staffing, mentoring and coaching, professional learning, and more.⁴⁰

The largest item in a district's budget is its human resources.⁴¹ Research shows that a strong connection exists between teacher and principal quality and student success⁴² and that investments in educator quality and stability are demonstrably effective in raising student achievement.⁴³ Studies show that schools with high percentages of students of color are most likely to have a revolving door of inexperienced and uncredentialed teachers,⁴⁴ who also have high rates of turnover, which further depresses achievement.⁴⁵ Districts interested in advancing a vision for racial equity can invest in developing and applying educators' knowledge about race and racism, as tailored to the context of the local community. Recruiting and retaining high-quality, credentialed teachers and leaders, particularly educators of color, contributes to academic and social benefits for all students—and students of color in particular.⁴⁶ Research shows that students cognitively benefit from exposure to “mirrors,” those who reflect their culture and help build a positive identity, and “windows,” those who offer a view into different experiences.⁴⁷

School leaders play a key role in recruiting and supporting racially diverse and culturally responsive teachers⁴⁸ and in leading decision-making in other areas of school policy (e.g., instructional practices, school discipline, and community engagement) that advance equitable opportunities and access for students of color. School leaders enter the profession with different understandings, experiences, and needs when it comes to leadership oriented to racial equity.⁴⁹ Recruiting and developing racially diverse and culturally responsive leaders can help support the awareness, knowledge, and skills required to lead for racial equity.⁵⁰

FINANCIAL, HUMAN, AND MATERIAL RESOURCES THAT ARE SUFFICIENT, APPROPRIATE, AND EQUITABLY ALLOCATED ACROSS AND WITHIN SCHOOLS

Every school has the resources, including a diverse, stable, high-quality workforce, necessary to support the learning and healthy development of its students of color. Leaders, educators, and other staff engage in professional learning opportunities to develop their ability to create racially equitable school environments.

ASK	LOOK FOR	
<p>Do the district and schools equitably distribute financial and material resources?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student-based budgeting (i.e., weighted or student-centered funding) that allocates additional funds for student groups that need additional services such that schools serving students with greater needs receive more funds • Availability of digital devices and high-speed internet connectivity for all students • School facilities that are safe, structurally sound, well maintained, well lit, clean, spacious, and heated and air-conditioned as needed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Availability of appropriate, sufficient, and up-to-date equipment and supplies for deeper learning instruction (e.g., curricular materials, books, and lab equipment) across all classrooms • Transportation vehicles and routes that ensure access to regular, enrichment, and extracurricular school activities, by school and by student race • Other: _____
<p>Is the district supported by a diverse, stable team of well-prepared, culturally competent leaders?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • District staff who are knowledgeable about student learning and development and about the racial, ethnic, and cultural communities they serve, and who are committed to advancing racial equity • Racial diversity of district and school leaders • Retention rates for principals and other school and district leaders, by school and by race 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School leaders in every school who are knowledgeable about student learning and development and about the racial, ethnic, and cultural communities they serve, and who are committed to advancing racial equity • Other: _____
<p>Is every student supported by a stable team of well-prepared, culturally competent teachers?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers who are knowledgeable about student learning and development and about the racial, ethnic, and cultural communities they serve, and who are committed to advancing equity • Percentage of teachers fully certified for the courses they teach, by school and by student race • Percentage of National Board Certified Teachers, by school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Racial diversity of teachers, by school • Teacher retention rates, by school • Percentage of teachers with more than 3 years of experience, by school • Average class size and pupil load, by school and by course • Other: _____
<p>Do the district and schools support the hiring and equitable distribution of well-prepared and culturally competent leaders, teachers, and support staff?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programs to recruit and retain talented and racially diverse leaders, teachers, and support staff • Incentives—including programmatic resources and other supports—to encourage expert leaders, teachers, and support staff to work in hard-to-staff schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mentoring and coaching to support the effectiveness and retention of teachers and leaders in schools serving students of color • Other: _____
<p>Does every school support the development of well-prepared and culturally competent leaders, teachers, and support staff?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Availability of high-quality professional development for leaders, teachers, and support staff in key areas identified to support students of color (e.g., teaching deeper learning skills within and across content areas, social-emotional learning and restorative practices, supports for students with special needs, and culturally responsive curricula) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Structured time for and authentic engagement in staff collaboration in schools • High-quality induction and mentoring programs for new or struggling teachers • High-quality mentoring and support for new or struggling administrators • Other: _____

MEANINGFUL PARTNERSHIPS ACROSS COMMUNITY MEMBERS

Schools that successfully engage families from racially diverse backgrounds adopt a philosophy of partnership in which power and responsibility are shared and important decisions are structured to include family participation.⁵¹ Where strong staff–family relationships exist, parents are engaged as valued experts and there are regular exchanges between home and schools.⁵²

The positive effects of programs that meaningfully involve parents in their children’s schooling are evident for children of color in all grade levels, pk through 12.⁵³ A substantial body of research demonstrates that family and community participation in schools is important for improving student achievement, motivating school improvement, and building inclusive school cultures for students of color.⁵⁴ Students with involved parents have more self-confidence, feel school is more important, earn higher grades, and are more likely to attend college.⁵⁵

Districts and schools have not traditionally been spaces where parents and families of color feel welcomed and supported. However, it is possible for districts and schools to build authentic partnerships with families and communities that ensure the healthy learning and development of students of color.⁵⁶

Reciprocal family–school partnerships benefit teachers as well. When teachers visit homes with the purpose of deeply understanding families’ funds of knowledge—their historically and culturally developed knowledge and skills—teachers are able to create high-quality instructional activities that support student growth and well-being by tapping into families’ cultural practices and building on learning practices familiar to the students.⁵⁷

Partnerships with community-based organizations also support students’ healthy development. These partnerships bring a range of services into schools for students and their families, such as health care and mental health services, child nutrition and food assistance programs, before- and after-school care, and job training and housing assistance for parents.⁵⁸ Community-based partnerships help provide supports that are needed for children’s healthy development and to address barriers to learning. Research is clear that models that integrate student services in schools, such as the community schools model, have positive effects on student progress in school, attendance, academic achievement, and overall grade point averages; such models also decrease grade retention, dropout rates, and absenteeism.⁵⁹ Although this strategy can benefit students of all backgrounds, many community schools arise in neighborhoods in which structural forces linked to racism and poverty shape the experiences of young people and erect barriers to learning and school success.⁶⁰ Community-based partnerships contribute to a different environment, one in which the schools and community work hand in hand to support student learning and school success.

MEANINGFUL PARTNERSHIPS ACROSS COMMUNITY MEMBERS

Families and other community members, especially in communities of color, continuously shape the direction of racial equity solutions and are integral in helping them to be effective.

ASK	LOOK FOR	
<p>Do families and other community members have opportunities to meaningfully engage with and contribute to schools?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Active, two-way engagement of families in their children’s education through positive phone calls home, home and school visits, regular communication with educators, student–teacher–parent conferences, invitations to student exhibitions and other events, and school meetings at accessible times and places • Active, two-way engagement of students, families, and local partners in contributing to curricula, program, and budgeting priorities • Systems to facilitate and track volunteer opportunities and participation (e.g., mechanisms to publicize opportunities for involvement, match volunteers’ knowledge and skills with schools’ needs, assist volunteers in completing required paperwork or fingerprinting, and provide training for volunteers as appropriate) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extent to which family engagement opportunities are directly related to student learning and development priorities • Extent to which family engagement opportunities are regular and highly accessible across all families and schools • Number of communitywide forums and outcomes of forums • Personnel and systems to gather and track family and other community member input • Extent to which family and other community members feel welcome in schools, as measured by parent surveys • Other: _____
<p>Does the district partner with community-based organizations to support the academic, social-emotional, and physical health of students?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partnerships that support the academic growth of all students • Partnerships that support the physical and mental health of all students • Partnerships that support the social-emotional growth of all students • Distribution of partnerships across district schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Systems to evaluate the quality and alignment of the support that partners provide within and across schools • Ongoing and strategic efforts to engage local partners in addressing the shifting needs of students • Other: _____

SYSTEMS FOR GATHERING, COMMUNICATING, AND USING DATA TO DRIVE PROGRESS TOWARD RACIAL EQUITY

Effective use of data has been shown to support district improvement efforts generally and the ability of districts to advance racial equity specifically.⁶¹ The use of data for improvement is characterized by a collaborative, transparent, and inquiry-driven approach to collecting and interpreting data, developing solutions, implementing change, and monitoring and evaluating outcomes.⁶² When used this way, data can help districts to set priorities and develop effective strategies for addressing problems. Districts using data for improved racial equity examine a wide range of measures, including quantitative data about learning conditions and outcomes as well as qualitative data from interviews and observations, in order to develop a deep understanding of systemic opportunities and challenges.⁶³ They disaggregate data to understand differences in educational opportunities and outcomes by racial groups.

Studies have shown that gathering data alone does not guarantee improvement. The use of data to advance racial equity should be embedded within a districtwide improvement process or methodology that involves the district's stakeholders and includes frequent data monitoring, continuous learning, and action.⁶⁴ Districts benefit from cultivating a data culture in which staff members feel that data are used to solve problems rather than to shame and punish.⁶⁵ This kind of data culture helps staff members appreciate the value of the data they collect and makes it more likely that they will use the data to inform decision-making.⁶⁶ In addition, districts working to advance racial equity regularly share data with the broader school community to solicit feedback, acknowledge successes and challenges, and develop a greater sense of ownership for the district's ongoing efforts to advance racial equity.⁶⁷

Districts working toward a vision for racial equity invest in learning how to interpret data from an equity-oriented perspective, which begins with the understanding that every student has assets and can learn. Rather than attributing outcome disparities in ways that malign the character and culture of families of color and center White cultural norms and values, an equity-focused analysis examines the levels of support provided in the system. In other words, educators who understand the systemic nature of racism make sense of disparate outcomes in student success by evaluating the underlying inputs and processes that matter for student success, such as access to resources; deeper learning curricula; and safe, healthy, and inclusive school environments.

This approach is different from the more prevalent use of data in education systems, which is often associated with accountability measures to identify problems with student outcomes.⁶⁸ Until recently, high-stakes accountability pressures have had a disproportionate impact on schools serving more students of color—schools that are more likely to be under-resourced and lower performing on standardized exams.⁶⁹ For many districts, accountability measures have led to punitive measures, such as school closures.⁷⁰ However, using data for improvement is a distinct and constructive process. Districts that do this effectively consider the contexts for and conditions of learning, identify the root causes of identified problems, and consider how changes to the system can improve them.⁷¹

SYSTEMS FOR GATHERING, COMMUNICATING, AND USING DATA TO DRIVE PROGRESS TOWARD RACIAL EQUITY

The district systematically tracks progress toward districtwide student success and the elimination of racial disparities, engages with community members about that progress, and uses information about progress in decision-making.

ASK	LOOK FOR	
<p>Do the district and schools analyze a range of student outcomes and academic, social, and emotional supports by race?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A specific set of indicators on student participation, opportunities to learn, and outcomes, with systems for gathering data accurately and tracking racial equity over time (e.g., equity report card, equity-focused dashboard) • Student academic achievement data (e.g., graduation rates, standardized test scores, performance-based assessment scores, end-of-course and benchmark exams, and grade point averages) disaggregated by school and student race • Student- and school-level climate data regarding social-emotional supports (e.g., connections with adults and peers, access to supports, and feelings of belonging) disaggregated by school and student race • Student postsecondary outcomes data (e.g., employment, enlistment, and 2- and 4-year college enrollment) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student participation data (e.g., attendance, chronic absenteeism, exclusion rates, dropout rates) disaggregated by school and student race • Student- and school-level data about opportunities to learn (e.g., financial resources; access to experienced, well-qualified, stable teachers and principals; and access to rich, rigorous, and responsive curricula) by student composition of each school • Student-level data demonstrating the development of deeper learning competencies (e.g., collaboration, communication, mastery of content knowledge for transfer and application, and creative problem-solving) • Other: _____
<p>Do the district and schools communicate student learning conditions and outcomes by race to the community and solicit feedback?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A communication and feedback system that includes deliberate data sharing and opportunities for active engagement among community members • A data analysis system that examines disparities in both learning conditions and outcomes by group and by school and the relationships between them • Frequency of reporting disaggregated student data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Systems for identifying problems to be addressed as well as communicating successful movement toward racial equity • Accessibility of communication, including communication type (e.g., report, presentation, report card, online dashboard), language translations, and accessibility of terminology • Other: _____
<p>Do the district and schools create plans to address disparities in achievement and social-emotional outcomes?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analyses that identify the underlying causes of student outcome disparities (e.g., unmet student needs, gaps in learning opportunities) • Targeted, strategic goals that address the underlying causes of student outcome disparities identified in the data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prototypes and pilots designed to meet identified goals; reviews of their implementation and outcomes • Other: _____

APPENDIX

Indicators were informed by the following sources:

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