

## **Strategic Plan for Educational Equity**

The School Board through its policies creates the imperative to work towards educational equity. The mission statement of the School Board states in part that the Board policies will: Ensure quality, equitable, and innovative educational opportunities for all students. Elements of the School Board's Operational Expectations and Results policies fulfill this expectation. In addition, Administrative Policy 4110.5 - Equity in Education demonstrates the School District's commitment to educational equity stating:

The School District of La Crosse is committed to the success of each and every student in our schools. We believe every student has the potential to achieve, and it is the responsibility of school district personnel to give each student the opportunity and support to meet their highest potential. Every School District of La Crosse employee is responsible for the success and achievement of each and every student. Closing the achievement gap – while raising the achievement for each and every student – is a top priority for our Superintendent and all district personnel.

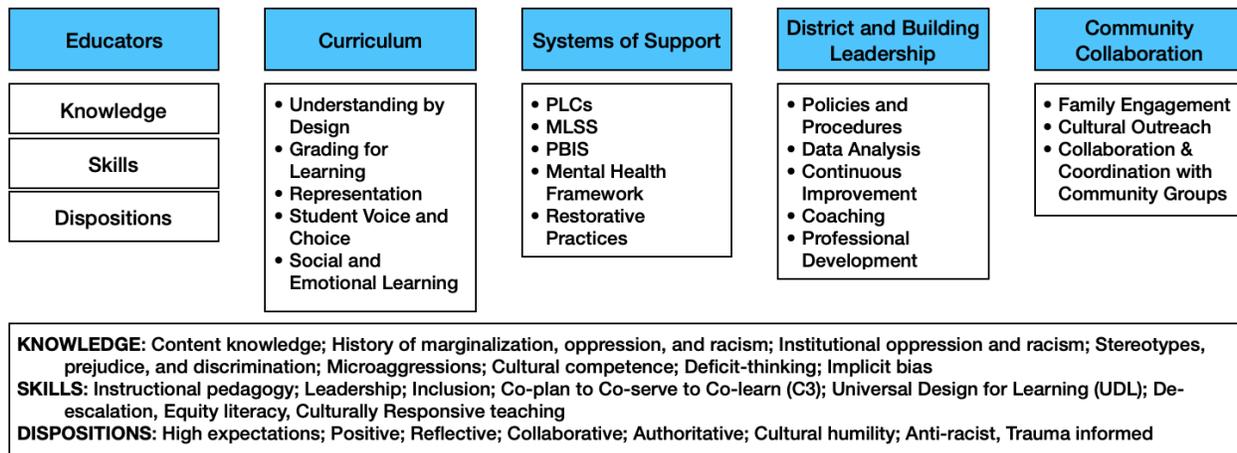
In combination, School Board policy and Administrative policy create an imperative for the school district to work towards educational equity.

This strategic plan for educational equity will result in a school system that is fair for all students and yields equal results through equitable practices. Educational equity is the differential application of resources and support to ensure that each student gets what they need to succeed. We will know equal results are achieved when outcomes by any measure are proportional to the makeup of the student body by the same measure. The result is social justice for all students.

This strategic plan for educational equity is aligned with the theory of action for student achievement (see Figure 1). Equity for social justice is embedded in each element of the theory of action and the supporting components. To achieve rigor, relevance and relationships leading to instructional quality and students ready to learn, five areas must be addressed:

1. Educators' knowledge, skills and dispositions;
2. Curriculum;
3. Systems of support;
4. District and building leadership; and
5. Community collaboration.

These five areas are interconnected and are described in more detail in the rest of this document.



**Figure 1.** Educational Equity Strategy.

## Educators

Educators are all school personnel that work directly with students or provide instructional support. Educators are teachers, administrators, teaching assistants, administrative assistants, district office staff in the Instructional Department and the Superintendent. Educators must have the knowledge, skills and disposition necessary to provide rigor, relevance and relationships to successfully serve all students equitably.

**Knowledge.** To effectively provide instructional quality and ensure students are ready to learn, educators must have knowledge. Acquiring knowledge is a continual process that involves assessing our own understanding and seeking to learn more.

Educators must have knowledge of general educational systems and content knowledge in the areas they work in to be successful. Educators must also have knowledge related to social justice to understand the historical and cultural context of educational practices and their students. These areas include knowledge of:

- History of marginalization, oppression, and racism
- Institutional oppression and racism
- Stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination
- Microaggressions
- Cultural competence
- Deficit-thinking
- Implicit bias

**Skills.** To effectively provide instructional quality and ensure students are ready to learn educators must be skilled in a wide range of areas. Ongoing professional development and support is necessary to build and reinforce skills.

Educators must be skilled in pedagogy and classroom management to educate students effectively. Educational leaders must have the necessary skills for effectively leading others.

Educators must also have skills related to social justice to effectively implement equitable practices. These skills include:

- Inclusion
- Co-plan to Co-serve to Co-learn (C3)
- Universal Design for Learning (UDL)
- De-escalation
- Equity literacy
- Culturally responsive teaching

Inclusion of students in general education is a process that is critical to ensuring all students have access to grade-level, universal instruction and for establishing high expectations for all students. C3 is a strategy<sup>1</sup> for collaboratively planning for diverse learners in the general education setting. UDL is a framework for designing learning environments that provide integrated options for diverse learner needs<sup>2</sup>. UDL guidelines are organized around three principles that provide multiple means of engagement, representation, and action and expression.

Equity literacy is a series of skills and principles<sup>3</sup> that allow educators to recognize, respond to and redress equity issues and to actively cultivate and sustain equity efforts. Culturally responsive teaching<sup>4</sup> is an approach that 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 students. Culturally responsive teaching is rooted in culturally relevant pedagogy<sup>5</sup> which strives for teaching that yields academic success, helps students develop positive ethnic and cultural identities and supports students ability to recognize, understand, and critique current and social inequalities.

**Dispositions.** To effectively provide instructional quality and ensure students are ready to learn, educators must develop conducive dispositions about students and learning. Educators must be actively involved in self-reflection and self-exploration to identify and develop productive dispositions. The right dispositions lead to impactful relationships with students and relevant curriculum and instruction.

General dispositions that educators must embody to be successful are: positive; reflective; collaborative; authoritative; and having high expectations. Educators must also have dispositions related to social justice to effectively implement equitable practices. These include:

- Cultural humility
- Anti-oppression
- Trauma informed

These dispositions are augmented by the other general dispositions and take active, ongoing effort to cultivate and maintain.

Cultural humility allows an individual to engage effectively with individuals from any background through self-evaluation and critique, addressing power imbalances, developing partnerships with the community and through institutional change and accountability<sup>6</sup>. Cultural humility

requires knowledge and skills, district and building leadership, and community collaboration to be fully employed.

Anti-oppression is recognizing power imbalances and implementing change to redress the balance of power. Anti-oppression includes an understanding of systems of oppression and the ways oppression manifests (e.g. racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, and ableism). Anti-racism is an element of anti-oppression and involves rejecting false notions of human difference, acknowledging lived experiences shaped along racial lines, learning from diverse forms of knowledge and experience and challenging systems of racial inequality<sup>7</sup>. Anti-oppression is not just a disposition but also intersects with knowledge and skills, curriculum, and district and building leadership resulting in an understanding of implicit bias and the disruption of institutional oppression and racism.

Trauma informed practices require educators to understand the causes of trauma, how trauma affects students, and best practices for approaching all students to both accommodate and alleviate trauma. Trauma sensitive practices view behavior through an alternative lens to help understand the reasons behind students' behavior. Many students experience the impacts of family or community violence which can lead to a basic mistrust in human relationship and over-protective responses. Trauma sensitive practices are based upon relationships with adults that build trust and safety. Classroom instruction includes choices in learning. Interventions with students are collaborative and empower youth to take responsibility for their behavior by building the skills they need to regulate their emotions.<sup>8</sup>

### **Curriculum**

Curriculum is the content of school, in all its forms, written and unwritten<sup>9</sup>. Curriculum is influenced by the instructional practices of educators, the activities students engage in to acquire skills and knowledge, and the assessments given to determine if learning is accomplished. Equitable curriculum is rigorous and relevant leading to instructional quality and engaged students ready to learn.

Well designed curriculum is intentionally crafted with the learning outcomes in mind from the beginning<sup>10</sup>. High quality grading practices<sup>11</sup> support curriculum and instructional practices leading to increased student engagement. In combination these strategies lead to rigorous and relevant curriculum and assessment practices.

For students to find curriculum relevant they must be represented in the curriculum. This representation must occur not only in textbooks but also in hallways, in language, in learning strategies, and in the opportunity to explore one's own identity. This curricular representation intersects with the skills of culturally responsive teaching.

A critical element of curriculum that leads to relevance and engagement is student voice and choice.<sup>12</sup> Student voice and choice leads to more democratic classrooms resulting in students who are more engaged, learn more, and perform at higher levels.

To support the development of well-rounded students who graduate college and career ready as citizens in our community, social and emotional learning is crucial. Social and emotional learning (SEL)<sup>13</sup> is the process through which students acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions.<sup>14</sup> Curriculum that integrates SEL ensures students are ready to learn and have the skills they need to be successful.

### **Systems of Support**

Systems of support are the structures and frameworks that support students and guide educators. Systems of support lead to rigorous and relevant instruction and ensure students are ready to learn.

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) are “an ongoing process in which educators work collaboratively in recurring cycles of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the students they serve.”<sup>15</sup> PLCs lead to focused, collaborative work on student learning. PLCs are equity focused in that they actively address how to help all students achieve at high levels.

An equitable multi-level system of support (MLSS) systematically provides differing levels of intensity of supports (interventions/additional challenges, collaborative structures, monitoring of learner progress) based upon learner responsiveness to instruction and intervention.<sup>16</sup> A MLSS leads to rigorous curriculum and instruction for all students focused on ensuring each student gets what they need to succeed.

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) is a proactive approach to establishing the positive behavioral systems of support and social culture needed for all learners to reach college and career readiness. PBIS is incorporated into a comprehensive MLSS. PBIS must be culturally responsive to be effective for all students. Effective implementation of culturally responsive PBIS leads to more productive learning time for students, positive relationships and students who are ready to learn.

The DPI Mental Health Framework is a comprehensive system that integrates social-emotional development and mental health support into the daily academic and social life of schools to reduce barriers to learning.<sup>17</sup> It integrates mental health and wellness into an MLSS, intersects with PBIS, and connects Social and Emotional Learning. A robust mental health framework supports students so that they are ready to learn.

Restorative practices are non-punitive practices that seek to “build community and cultivate relationships among a group of stakeholders. It is about equity, understanding context, and true accountability, in which everyone acknowledges their responsibility to humanity and makes a commitment to putting things right when they have caused harm.”<sup>18</sup> Restorative practices are equitable, democratic in nature, and build relationships leading to students that are ready to learn.

### **District and Building Leadership**

District and building leadership is crucial to leading and accomplishing equity work. District and building leadership provide direction, evaluation and accountability to shared commitments. Leadership also ensures educators have the knowledge, skills, and disposition they need, that curriculum is in place, and that systems of support are developed. Elements of leadership that provide district direction and accountability are: policies and procedures; data analysis, and; continuous improvement. Leadership to support educators includes coaching and professional development.

District and building leadership must be applied to equity work. Policies and procedures support equity work through the direction the school district takes and how daily activities are carried out. Procedures can support students and families by ensuring access to programs and processes to report instances of inequity or hate and bias. Data analysis is used to conduct an ongoing equity audit. As student data is gathered, it must be disaggregated by various student characteristics to identify where inequities may exist. Continuous improvement processes are ongoing to identify and redress inequities. A focus on reducing opportunity and achievement gaps is essential to providing social justice for historically marginalized groups.

### **Community Collaboration**

Community collaboration involves collaborating with families, with local government, and with community organizations. Effective community collaboration leads to support for families and students coming to school ready to learn.

Family engagement through meaningful partnerships helps students both academically and socially. Engaged families are involved in their children's success and become partners and advocates in collaboration with the school district.<sup>19</sup> <sup>20</sup> Family engagement yields better relationships with students and students ready to learn.

Further collaboration and coordination is necessary with community groups to align common interests for the benefit of students. This involves governmental agencies like the City and the County, as well as advocacy groups in the community. If our interests and efforts are aligned we will all be more effective and successful in building up our community to ensure students are ready to learn. Along with general community group collaboration we must expand our cultural outreach to ensure that families that come from unique cultural backgrounds have the culturally responsive supports they need for their children to be successful in school.

## End Notes

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EDUCATIONAL THEORY OF ACTION

Student Achievement

If schools provide quality instruction to students who are ready to learn through rigor, relevance, and relationships, then students will achieve at high levels.

Instructional Quality

Students Ready to Learn

Rigor

Relevance

Relationships

EDUCATIONAL EQUITY STRATEGY



Educators

Curriculum

Systems of Support

District and Building Leadership

Community Collaboration

Knowledge

Skills

Dispositions

- Understanding by Design
- Grading for Learning
- Representation
- Student Voice and Choice
- Social and Emotional Learning

- PLCs
- MLSS
- PBIS
- Mental Health Framework
- Restorative Practices

- Policies and Procedures
- Data Analysis
- Continuous Improvement
- Coaching
- Professional Development

- Family Engagement
- Cultural Outreach
- Collaboration & Coordination with Community Groups

**KNOWLEDGE:** Content knowledge; History of marginalization, oppression, and racism; Institutional oppression and racism; Stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination; Microaggressions; Cultural competence; Deficit-thinking; Implicit bias

**SKILLS:** Instructional pedagogy; Leadership; Inclusion; Co-plan to Co-serve to Co-learn (C3); Universal Design for Learning (UDL); De-escalation, Equity literacy, Culturally Responsive teaching

**DISPOSITIONS:** High expectations; Positive; Reflective; Collaborative; Authoritative; Cultural humility; Anti-racist, Trauma informed