

# Leading for Equity: How leaders move beyond “school improvement” to school transformation toward a just, inclusive, and quality education for all!

## 2020 Michigan Continuous Improvement Conference

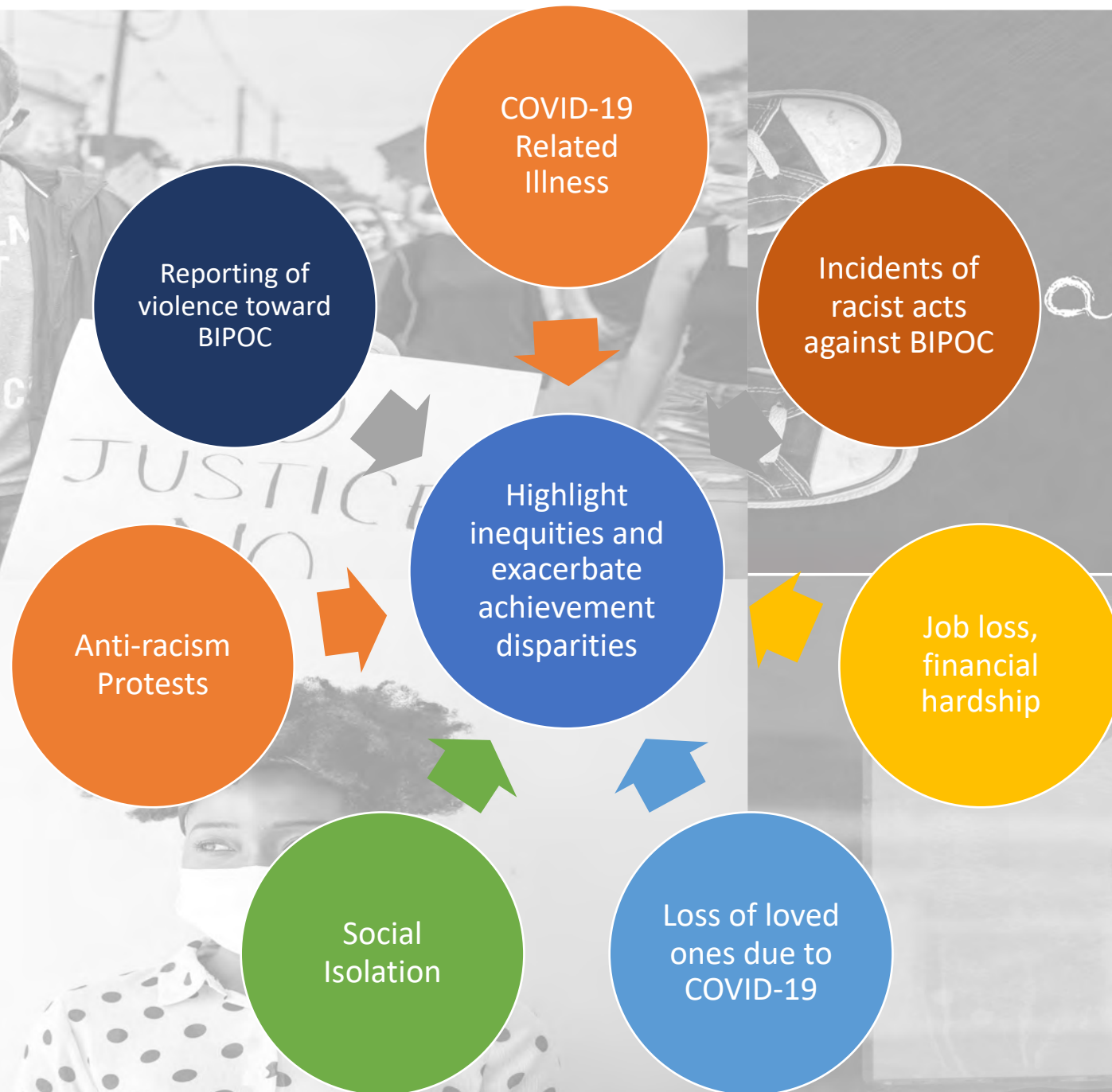
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# Reflecting on our current context: Intersections of Racism & COVID-19



# School Leadership and Social Justice

School leadership rooted in social justice has, at its center, tension. Out of these tensions grow reform movements, initiated and instituted by those who live in this intersection of tension ... who are able to embrace the dis-junction between ideal and reality, privilege and oppression, surface change and the dismantling of structural barriers. I contend that leaders who hold a social justice agenda embody the compassion that allows them to be both touched and moved and the capacity to touch and move others.

- Dr. Ed Taylor, Center for Educational Leadership, University of Washington.

Small Schools  
Xenophobia  
Disproportionality  
Open Schools  
Linguicism  
MTSS  
Ableism  
Accelerated Schools  
Adaptive Teaching  
Racism  
SEL  
Sexism  
Heterosexism  
PBIS  
Grit  
Success For All  
Restorative Practices  
Direct Instruction  
Achievement Inequities  
Deficit Thinking  
Growth Mindset  
Personalized Learning

# How some students are experiencing school:

70% of young people say they have seen bullying in their schools and about 20% of students ages 12-18 experienced bullying ([www.stopbullying.gov](http://www.stopbullying.gov)).

Approximately 60% of LGBTQ students report feeling unsafe at school because of their sexual orientation, 85% because of their gender or gender expression (GLSEN, 2019).

A study examining the race gap in school safety indicated that Black students reported feeling less safe compared to White and Asian students within the same schools (Lacoe, 2015).

Children with disabilities are disproportionately affected by bullying ([Stopbullying.gov](http://Stopbullying.gov)).



# How some adults are experiencing school:

Two qualitative studies recently released by The Education Trust found that Black and Latinx teachers feel disrespected and de-professionalized in their jobs, despite often exerting more emotional and actual labor than their colleagues.

Educators who identify as LGBTQ+ felt as though their jobs were at risk if they were out, reported experiencing harassment, and perceived their school community was unsafe, (Wright & Smith, 2015).

Disabled teachers have been discriminated against, isolated or excluded because of their disability (Hauk, 2010; Manderson, 2018).

Parents of color experience interactions with educators and other school personnel that message school norms are superior to that of their home culture; parents and caregivers of color feel silenced and face racial discrimination in schools (Lee, 2019).

# Inequities in school conditions: A few statistics

Schools serving mostly students of Color have lower quality or **fewer resources** than schools serving largely White populations, even within the same district (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

Schools serving more students of color are **less likely** to offer advanced courses and GATE programs than schools serving mostly white students (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

Black students with high math performance in fifth grade are **unlikely** to be placed in algebra in eighth grade (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

Students of Color in schools located in dis-invested communities are **less likely** to receive course work targeted at grade appropriate standards, reflect higher-level cognitive demand and are meaningfully engaging and relevant (Santos & Haycock, 2016; (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

# Inequities in school conditions: A few statistics

Black and Latino students are provided **less rigorous** feedback about their work from classroom teachers than White students (Harber, Gorman, Gengaro, Butisingh, Tsang, & Ouellette, 2012).

Schools serving mostly students of color are **more likely** to be taught by out-of-field and novice teachers (Bromberg, 2016; U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

Students of Color are **more likely** to attend school where more than 50% of teachers were absent for more than 10 days (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

Students of Color are **more likely** to attend a school with an SRO, but not a school counselor, than White students (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).



# Inequities in school conditions: A few statistics

Most U.S. history textbooks offer a romanticized view of the Europeans' experience in the United States, whereas most of the experiences of Indigenous people, Asian and/or Africans are either **misrepresented or underrepresented** (Loewen, 2007).

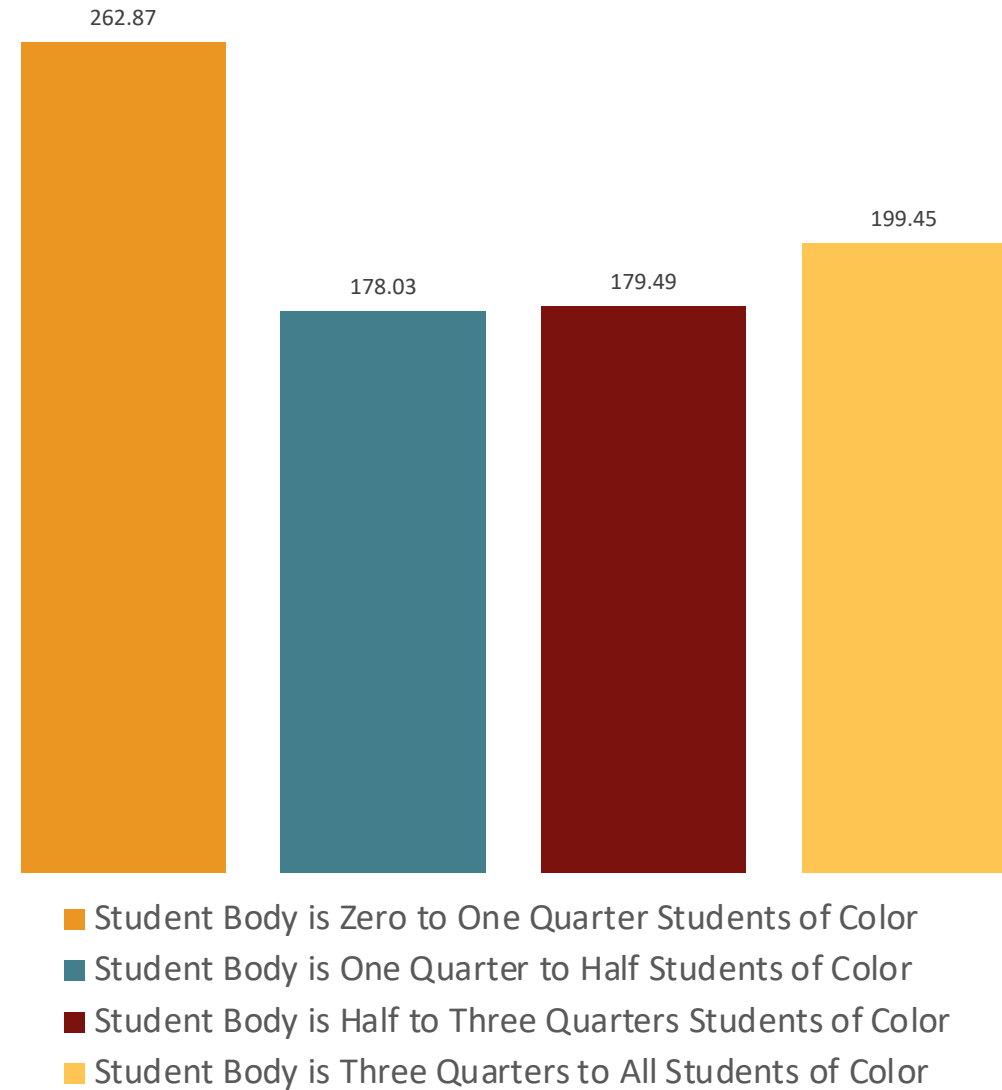
Research has also shown that additional academic domains such as the natural sciences and English also **promote a [Eurocentric] ideological** (e.g., Solano-Flores & Nelson-Barber, 2001).

Due to the dearth of professors of Color at many universities, students of Color say their point of view **isn't represented** when, for example, Western culture is considered the default standard by which all literature, architecture, film, and art is judged (Quinlan, 2016).

A study conducted by researchers at New York University, Columbia University, and the University of Pennsylvania found that when students contacted professors for mentorship, faculty were **significantly more responsive to White men** than women and people of Color — particularly in private universities and higher-paying disciplines (Milkman, Akinola, & Chugh, 2014)

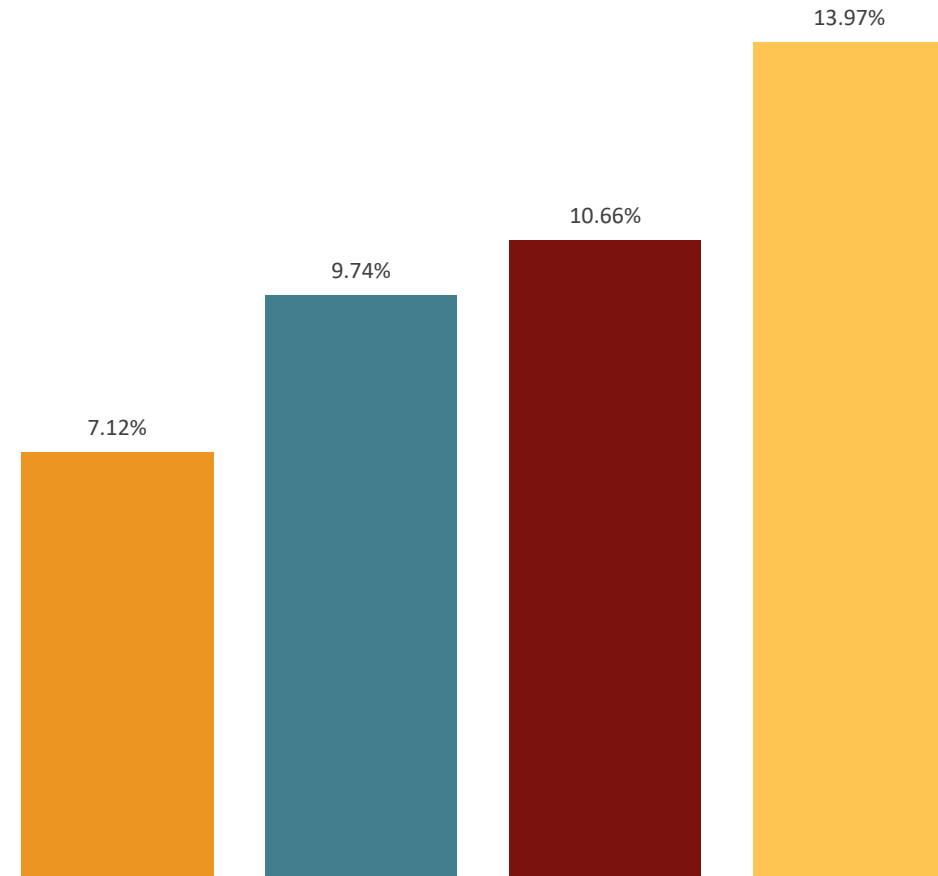
# A look at Michigan Data

## Michigan, Average Number of High School Counselors



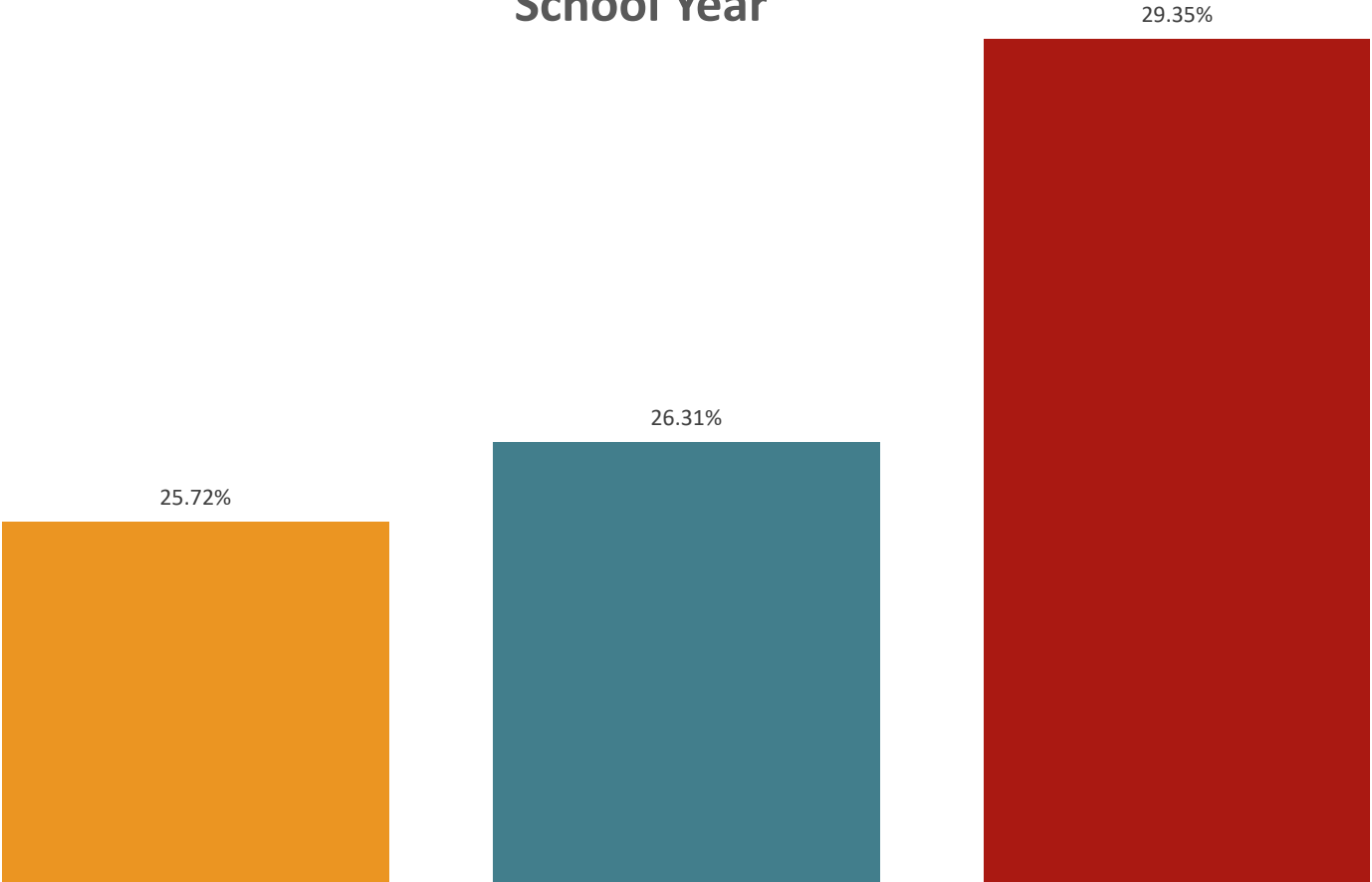
# A look at Michigan Data

## Michigan, Average Percentage of Teachers in their 1st or 2nd Year of Teaching



- Student Body is Zero to One Quarter Students of Color
- Student Body is One Quarter to Half Students of Color
- Student Body is Half to Three Quarters Students of Color
- Student Body is Three Quarters to All Students of Color

# Michigan, Average Percentage of Teachers Absent more than 10 Days per School Year



- Student Body is Zero to One Quarter Students of Color
- Student Body is One Quarter to Half Students of Color
- Student Body is Half to Three Quarters Students of Color



# Wow and Wonder

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What wow, surprises or resonates with you about the data just shared?

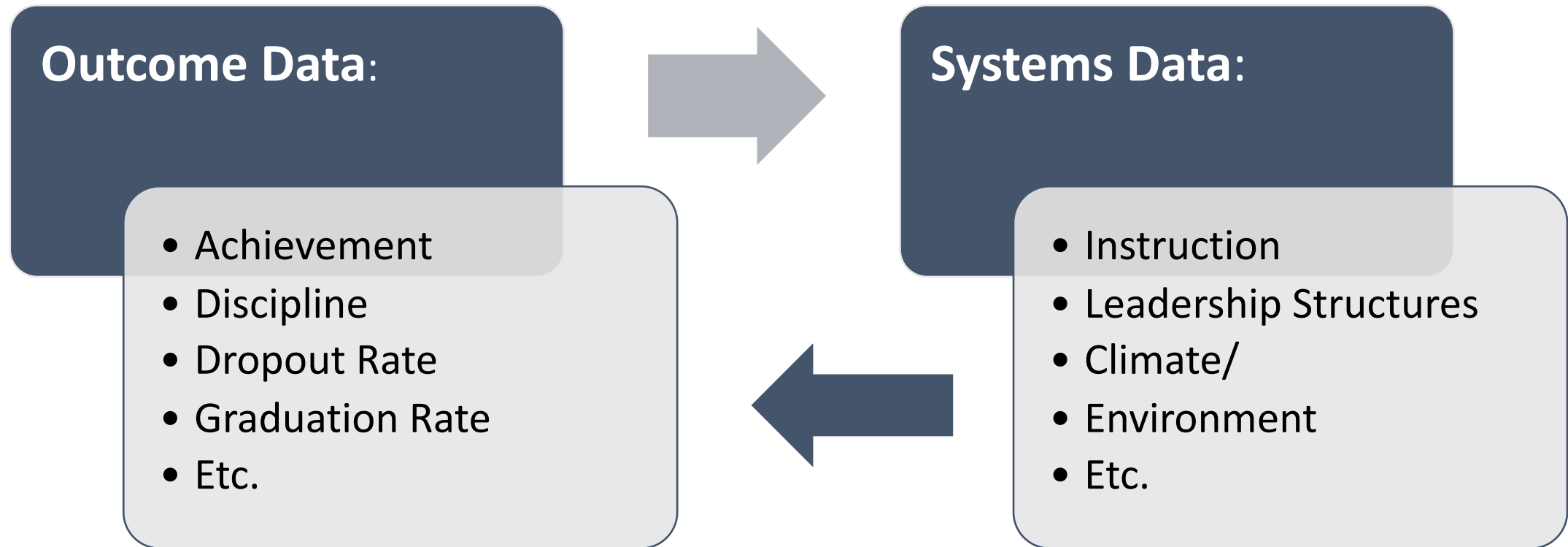
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Given the information shared, what do you wonder about or what questions do you have related to the implications for continuous improvement?

# Persistent inequities

*Student outcomes data illustrate the results yielded from systems practices*

*Systems factors contribute to students' learning opportunities affecting student outcomes*





"Every system is perfectly designed to get the results it gets."

Attributed to Donald Berwick and W. Edwards Deming

Let's talk about  
what equity-  
focused district  
improvement is  
not.



**Equity-centered education improvement efforts focus on increasing opportunities not on closing achievement gaps.**

The focus on the achievement gap in education discourse works to evade the analysis of racism and other forms of structural oppression in [P] K-16 schooling. The framing of the achievement gap serves as a distraction from “the historical, economic, sociopolitical, and moral decisions and policies that characterize our society [and] have created an education debt” owed to Black and Latin[x] students (Ladson-Billings, 2006 p. 5.)

While recognizing racial [and other] disparities in the success of students is important, without understanding the critical role of structural racism [and other systems of oppression] in the outcomes being analyzed, as Ladson-Billings (2006) points out, “this all-out focus on the ‘Achievement Gap’ moves us toward short- term solutions that are unlikely to address the long-term underlying problem” (p. 4).

# ... then continuous improvement for what purpose?

To create and sustain school conditions, such that all students from diverse backgrounds experience affirming learning environments that position them as knowledge producers and enable them to graduate as critical thinkers, with an appreciation and love of themselves, their communities, the larger society and the world, as well as empowered and equipped to make decisions and actions toward self-determination and positive social change.

Equity-centered continuous improvement efforts critically examine how beliefs, discourse, policies, and practices create conditions in which students learn and contribute to student outcomes; **improvement activities focus on reducing systemic barriers and increasing equitable access to quality learning for every student**, by surfacing and redressing marginalizing policies and practices, (Kozleski & Artiles, 2012).





# Specifically, equity-centered continuous improvement aims to

**Redress** marginalizing policies and practices

**Redistribute** resources as well as access to and participation in opportunities

**Recognize and value differences** as reflected in policies, practices, learning content, pedagogy, and assessment methods

**Ensure representation** in educational decision-making

Beyond “school improvement” to school **transformation** toward a just, inclusive, and quality education for all

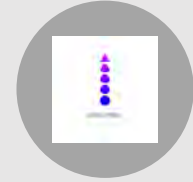
## Transformation

- a thorough and dramatic change in form, function, and appearance.

# SITUATING SYSTEMS TRANSFORMATION



CENTERING  
EDUCATIONAL  
EQUITY



CULTIVATING THE  
CULTURE OF A  
LEARNING  
ORGANIZATION

# Educational Equity

when educational policies, practices, interactions, and resources are **representative** of constructed by and responsive to all people so that each person has **access** to, **meaningfully participates** in and has positive outcomes from **high-quality** learning experiences, regardless of individual characteristics and group memberships (Fraser, 2008; Great Lakes Equity Center 2012).



# Core Equity Concepts



**Access** – Entrance into, involvement with, and full benefit (Paris, 2012).



**Representation** – Having presence in decision making and in content (Mulligan & Kozleski, 2009).



**Meaningful participation** – Agency and are empowered to contribute in effectual ways (Fraser, 1998).




**High Outcomes** – Solutions benefit all (Waitoller & Kozleski, 2013).



Educational improvement efforts should focus on *transforming* school systems into equity-centered *learning organizations*.

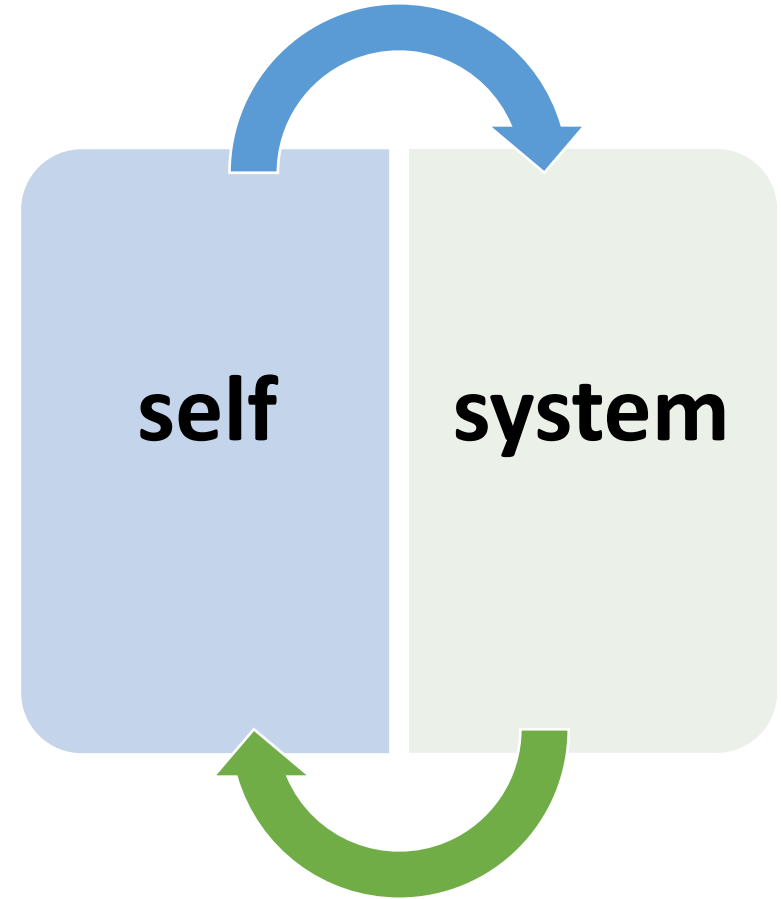




**At its foundation, a learning organization is one in which the people within the organization have a commitment to continuous improvement at all levels of the system - classroom, school, district and state. It is one where the people in the organization continually expand their capacity to create the outcomes they desire (Senge, 1990).**

# Being an Equity-Centered Learning Organization

**Cultivates a culture of critical inquiry of both:**



(Hatcher et al. 2010; Rogoff, 2003; Waitoller & Kozleski, 2013)

Awareness of how one's identities inform one's understandings of and experiences with complex social problems (Tania D. Mitchell).

Examination of the power dynamics that maintain oppressive/marginalizing realities for specific individuals and groups.

Understanding of how socio-historical contexts impact the present details of everyday life and how ways of thinking, feeling, and decision-making serve to maintain and perpetuate existing systems of inequality. (Freire, 2000; Watts & Serrano-Garcia, 2003)



Critical  
examination  
of the  
personal &  
the system

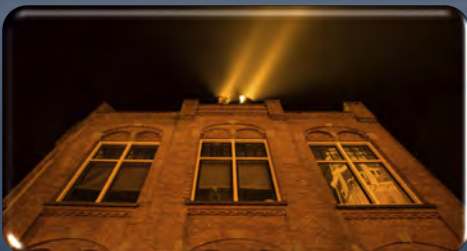
# Leading for transformative change: Three key shifts of praxis



Recognize that learning is a culturally mediated, social process rather than “culturally neutral,” individual cognitive process, i.e. the cultural nature of learning (Artiles, 2003; Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003; Rogoff, 2003):



Openly acknowledge, appreciate, and accept differences as positive and valuable (Garcia, 2008; González, Moll, and Amanti, 2005);



Focus improvement efforts away from blaming and “fixing” students and communities, toward creating responsive systems.

# Wow and Wonder

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What wow, surprises or resonates about how equity-centered continuous improvement is reframed away from the goal of closing the achievement gap toward dismantling systemic barriers to learning opportunities?

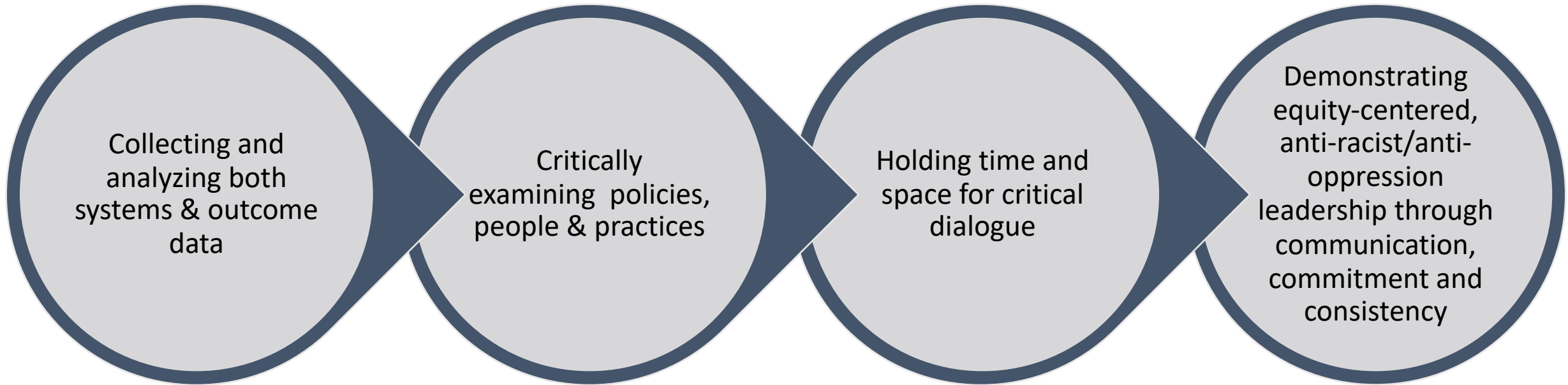
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Given the information shared, what do you wonder about or what questions do you have related to implications for how you frame continuous improvement efforts in your setting?

# Transformative leadership for educational equity

- A leadership approach which **causes change in individuals and social systems** that **disrupts and dismantles** historical legacies of **normative beliefs** about individual characteristics and cultural identities **that marginalize** people and **contribute to the creation of barriers to accessing resources and opportunities** for specific people or groups of people.
- **Transformative leadership creates valuable and positive change in people, with the end goal of mobilizing efforts towards equity and education justice.** (Great lakes equity center, 2011; Midwest & Plains Equity Assistance Center, 2019).

# Continuous improvement activities toward leading equity-centered transformation



Critical inquiry process requires that we examine both  
student outcomes data

Achievement  
Test Scores

Graduation  
Rates

Student  
absenteeism

Suspension

Expulsion

Grade  
Retention

Drop Out



# As well as structural barriers to student learning opportunities

Participation in  
advance courses and  
learning programs

Educators  
expectations and  
rigorous instructional  
standards

Exposure to in-field  
and  
experienced/effective  
teachers

Exposure to effective  
school principals

Diversity among  
educators

School funding

Teacher workforce  
stability

Resource allocation

Teacher attendance

Socioemotional  
care/resources

Selected curricular  
material/content

# Critically examining and enacting Transformative change ...

## People

State, district, and school  
leaders  
Educators  
Families and community  
members  
Students

## Policies

State  
District  
School  
Classroom

## Practices

Curricular Material  
Instructional Decisions  
Social Interactions

# Holding time and space for critical dialogue

## Ensuring a shared vision

Clarity and shared understanding about the desired outcomes among all members of the school community. Promote an anti-racist, anti-oppression vision for the school community.

# Holding time and space for critical dialogue

**Equity is  
centered  
in the  
content  
of all  
work**

Equity and equity-related goals are overtly connected to all district/school decisions, initiatives, programs etc. Continuous improvement activities are meaningful, comprehensible, aspirational, and anti-racist/anti-oppression.

# Holding time and space for critical dialogue

**Time and space is designated to enable ongoing critical reflection and discourse**

Multiple and diverse perspectives are included.

The voices/experiences of minoritized groups are centered.

Deficit narratives about minoritized groups are surfaced, challenged and reframed.

Inequities about “inputs” are examined as well as disparities in “outcomes.”

# Holding time and space for critical dialogue

Data presentations facilitate discourse that challenges status quo assumptions.	Multiple data sources are used,
	Both qualitative and quantitative data are collected, analyzed and represented.
	Diverse members of the school community are involved in interpreting and making meaning of data.
	Critical questioning in order surface the narrative being constructed about specific groups from how data are discussed and interpreted. Who benefits from the way the data are being presented and interpreted?

# Equity-Centered Decision Framework

[An equity-centered decision] framework provides a way to facilitate and enhance decision making by providing conceptual structures and principles for [centering and integrating equity constructs] in the economic, social, ecological, and legal/institutional dimensions of decisions (adapted from Lockie and Rockloff, 2005).

# Equity-Centered Decision Framework

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**Access,  
Representation,  
Meaningfully  
Participate,  
High Outcomes  
for All**

Does/did our decision or action create pathways or barriers to **accessing** resources or opportunities for youth or adults in our school community, particularly historically marginalized youth or adults?

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Was our decision or action informed by and reflective of diverse viewpoints that is **representative** of our school community or at least by those members of the school community most and directly affected by the decision or action?

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Does/did our decision or action enable or create barriers for members of our school community to **meaningfully participate** in learning or decision-making opportunities?

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Does/did our decision or action move all students, particularly historically marginalized students closer to quality learning opportunities and the possibility of achieving **high outcomes** or further away (Pollock, 2008)?

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# Wow and Wonder

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What continuous improvement activities toward leading equity-centered transformation most resonate with you?

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Given the information shared, what do you wonder about or what questions surface for you about facilitating continuous improvement activities for leading equity-centered transformation ?



## Transformational Equity-Centered “work” is:

- Intentional & Organic
- Metacognitive
- Dialogical & Introspective
- Critical, Contextual & Technical
- Personal & Systemic
- Actionable



Moving Beyond  
School  
improvement to  
School  
Transformation  
Brings About  
New  
Opportunities

**(Re)claim**

**(Re)vitalize**

**(Re)imagine**

**(Re)commit**