

A Focus on Equity:

San Diego and Kern County's
Efforts to Implement the
California Equity Performance
and Improvement Program

Final Report 2020



Full report can be accessed at:
www.sdcoe.net/EquityResources

© Copyright San Diego County Office of Education



A Focus on Equity:

Final Report

A San Diego County Office
of Education Publication
August 2020

STUDY PARTICIPANTS

Principal Investigator
Shannon Coulter, Ph.D.
Director, Research and Evaluation
San Diego County Office of Education

PROJECT DIRECTOR

Jaguanana Lathan, Ed.D.
Executive Director, Equity
San Diego County Office of Education

STAFF

Robert Arias
Chief Deputy for Local and Statewide Initiatives
Kern County Superintendent of Schools

Fabiola Bagula, Ph.D.
Interim Executive Director, Equity
San Diego County Office of Education

Sonja Gagnon
Coordinator, Multilingual Education and Global Achievement
San Diego County Office of Education

Lisa Gilbert
Assistant Superintendent of Instructional Services
Kern County Superintendent of Schools

Julie Goldman, Ed.D.
Director, Equity Curriculum and Instruction
San Diego County Office of Education

Jessica Goode
Executive Leadership Coach, Equity
San Diego County Office of Education

Kimberly Graham
Management Analyst, Continuous Improvement Support
Kern County Superintendent of Schools

Kirsten Grimm
Executive Leadership Coach, Equity
San Diego County Office of Education

Heather Richter
Administrator, Continuous Improvement Support
Kern County Superintendent of Schools

RESEARCH SUPPORT

Todd Langager
Evaluation Coordinator
San Diego County Office of Education

John Watson, Ph.D.
Data Scientist
San Diego County Office of Education

Dan Jesse, Ph.D.
Educational Researcher
Metropolitan State University, Denver

ADVISORS

Joseph F. Johnson Jr., Ph.D.
Executive Director of the National Center for Urban School
Transformation
San Diego State University

Jian-Hua Liang, Ed.D.
Educational Research and Evaluation Consultant
California Department of Education

Rose Owens-West, Ed.D.
Equity Project Director
WestEd

Sandra Park, Ph.D.
Senior Fellow, Improvement Collective
Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching

Mark Salinas
Co-Director, Center for Equity Leadership
National Equity Project Director

REPORT DESIGN

Albert Hernandez
Graphic Arts Technician
San Diego County Office of Education

CONTENTS

Executive Summary	7
CEPIP Background	8
The Importance of CEPIP for California Students	9
The CEPIP Approach and Expectations	10
The CEPIP Approach for Kern County Students	11
CEPIP and the Role of Equity in San Diego County	12
CEPIP Context Snapshots	13
Kern	13
McFarland High School.....	13
McFarland Middle School.....	13
Horizon Elementary School	13
Browning Road Elementary School	14
Kern Elementary School.....	14
San Diego	14
Mt. Miguel High School.....	14
Orange Glen High School	14
Bancroft Elementary School	14
Rancho Elementary School.....	15
Granite Hills High School.....	15
Escondido High School.....	15
Morse High School.....	15
The Intersection of Equity and Continuous Improvement	16
CEPIP Results	17
Methods	17
Student Equity Surveys	18
How do we know a system is inequitable?	
How do inequities manifest in a system?	18
Kern	18
Figure 1. Percentage of Kern students who agree and strongly agree about whether matters at their school site were addressed equitably.....	19
San Diego	19
Figure 2. Percentage of San Diego students who agree and strongly agree about whether matters at their school site were addressed equitably.....	19
Participant Knowledge	22
Does exposure to an integrated service from a county office of education (COE) aimed at addressing school inequities improve educators' understanding of equity-conscious teaching and leadership practices?.....	21
Kern	22
San Diego	23
Teacher/Administrator Interviews.....	24
How are teachers and school leaders enacting this learning in their respective contexts?	24
How High Performing Schools Ensure Equity	28
Conclusions and Recommendations	29
Promising findings:.....	29
Areas to consider:	30
References	31

LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

Figure 1. Percentage of Kern students who agree and strongly agree about whether matters at their school site were addressed equitably.	19
Figure 2. Percentage of San Diego students who agree and strongly agree about whether matters at their school site were addressed equitably.	21
Figure 3. Average pretest posttest changes in participants levels of knowledge.	22
Figure 4. Average pretest posttest changes in participants levels of knowledge.	23



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

We recognize that inequities in schools have not improved over the past 20 years (Garcia & Weiss, 2017), and these problems tend to compound with the “rich” getting richer while the poor continue to be marginalized. In response to inequities schools face across the state, the California Legislature in cooperation with the California Department of Education designed the California Equity Performance and Improvement Program (CEPIP), which appropriated \$1.25 million to the San Diego County Office of Education (SDCOE) and Kern County Superintendent of Schools (KCSOS). CEPIP required these two organizations to collaborate with local educational agencies (LEAs) and schools to develop equity resources, disseminate information on effective equity practices, and provide trainings and conferences to achieve equity outcomes. The SDCOE and KCSOS equity approach focused on support to promote challenging learning opportunities for students that would ensure equitable school interactions, improving access to rigorous coursework, and guaranteeing high achievement for all students.

This final report summarizes these organizations’ joint efforts to understand (1) how inequities manifest in a school system, (2) if professional learning events improve educators’ understanding of equity-conscious teaching and leadership practices, and (3) how teachers and school leaders enact their professional learning in their respective contexts. Evidence from this two-year project suggests schools can use data to uncover the root causes – the source of inequities in their systems – and initialize processes to address the root of these problems. Findings also suggest that educators deepen their understanding of equity-conscious teaching and leadership practices and can apply this learning in context. And finally, this report acknowledges that equity works needs an accepting environment to thrive; educators must be able to apply their learning in focused environments that motivate them to do the work. Equity work is the most urgent social justice issue our schools face. We must continue to gather evidence diligently and intentionally so that policy makers and educational leaders can make informed decisions that ultimately alleviate the burden of inequities on our students and our schools and ensure comparably high outcomes for all students.

CEPIP BACKGROUND

The California Equity Performance and Improvement Program (CEPIP), with support from Assembly Member Dr. Shirley Weber, generated a renewed interest in implementing promising evidence-based practices targeted at building equity and narrowing the achievement and opportunity gaps for all underserved students. The San Diego County Office of Education (SDCOE), partnering with Kern County Superintendent of Schools (KCSOS), developed a cross-organizational approach to meet the criteria for the CEPIP grant. This approach focused on support for promoting challenging learning opportunities for students, ensuring equitable school interactions, improving access to rigorous coursework, and guaranteeing high achievement for all students.

SDCOE and KCSOS engaged in this process because they believed schools and districts in those counties needed a bold, transformative approach to improvement. Both county offices of education (COEs) recognized that school districts in their areas are facing substantial demographic shifts that necessitate new educator skills and abilities to address the needs of students in the system. In San Diego County, less than 30% of all teachers are teachers of color compared to 77% of students. In McFarland, California, in Kern County, more than one-third of the teaching force is white, yet less the 1% of students are white. Students of color also represent a greater share of students who are socio-economically disadvantaged, students with disabilities, and English learners. Furthermore, documented gaps have existed between students identified in these groups and their academic performance, compared to other students since 1992 (de Brey, et al., 2019). Preparing teachers and administrators to meet the needs of these historically marginalized students is an urgent social justice issue – one initiated by the state Legislature and accepted by these COEs.

CEPIP appropriated \$1.25 million to SDCOE and KCSOS and required these organizations to collaborate with LEAs and schools to develop equity resources, disseminate information on effective equity practices, and provide trainings and conferences to achieve equity outcomes. This report examines the progress these COEs and partner schools have made identifying inequities in schools, building educator knowledge and skills to address equity issues, and enacting this understanding in their respective school contexts.

The intent of this evaluation report is to recognize trends that have emerged from the CEPIP work over the first two years and to make recommendations for sharing the work to other COEs across the state.

This report serves to provide school and district leaders, classroom teachers, and other educational stakeholders an in-depth picture of how CEPIP works and the progress CEPIP has made on the contexts of implementation, including participants, school culture, and students. Section One briefly outlines the SDCOE/KCSOS codeveloped CEPIP approach and expectations. Section Two describes the school contexts where the CEPIP work occurred. Section Three presents the evaluation questions, along with the methods and results for answering the questions. Section Four explores current challenges moving forward and offers recommendations for scaling the program to other COEs.



THE IMPORTANCE OF CEPIP FOR CALIFORNIA STUDENTS

Dr. Shirley Weber, Member California State Assembly

This report has great personal significance to me. Born to sharecroppers of Hope, Arkansas, I moved to California with my family as a toddler. As a young professor in the 1970s, I became one of the founders of the field of Africana Studies at San Diego State University, where I taught for more than 40 years. As an equity-focused educator, school board member, and now a California state assembly member representing the 79th Assembly District, I have dedicated my career to advocating to close the achievement gap and provide a higher standard of excellence for all students.

For this reason, I strongly supported the 2018 California Department of Education (CDE) funding for the California Equity Performance and Improvement (CEPIP) Grant. The CEPIP projects have aimed to support and build capacity within county offices of education (COEs), local education agencies (LEAs), and schools to implement proven or promising evidence-based programs and practices, specifically targeted at building equity and narrowing the achievement and opportunity gaps for all underserved students in California schools. The findings in this report inform us during this time of transformation and opportunity. This important foundational work provides a solid structure to continue to refine and design new approaches to equity education that, ultimately, build a better world.

THE CEPIP APPROACH AND EXPECTATIONS

CEPIP was authorized by Assembly Bill 99, and \$1.25 million of the grant funding was allocated to SDCOE, in partnership with KCSOS, to implement promising evidence-based practices targeted at building equity and narrowing the achievement and opportunity gaps for all underserved students. The SDCOE and KCSOS approach to CEPIP consisted of a two-year program that supported sites with a needs assessment and data analysis cycle, equity consciousness and continuous improvement professional learning, and coaching support during critical action periods.

This approach begins with an Equity Audit conducted by the National Center for Urban School Transformation (NCUST) at San Diego State University, where equity experts use evidence from classroom observations, structured interviews, and data analysis to identify key themes and benchmark a school's practices and systems against the NCUST high-performing school standard. Equity teams use the Equity Audit School Report during the face-to-face professional learning sessions to determine the root cause of an equity challenge their school faces and to plan specific changes to address this challenge. In addition to the structured needs assessment process, this approach facilitates learning sessions organized around key equity concepts, including implicit bias, systemic oppression, and culturally responsive teaching practices, in addition to the application of the continuous improvement process, which includes establishing an aim, developing measures, and testing change ideas. Finally, participants apply their learning in their school contexts by testing changes during 60-day action periods. These three components of the SDCOE/KCSOS CEPIP model – the equity audit, face-to-face professional learning, and improvement action periods – include wraparound coaching, where equity leadership coaches provide direct support to implement participant learning from the face-to-face sessions.

As a result of this work, the CEPIP approach expects the following shifts in outcomes (as outlined in Bradley Scott's Six Equity Goals (2006):

- 1. Comparably high achievement and other student outcomes.** As data on academic achievement and other student outcomes are disaggregated and analyzed, schools see high comparable performance for all identifiable groups of learners, and performance gaps are virtually non-existent.
- 2. Equitable access and inclusion.** Schools have unobstructed entrance into excellent school programs and activities for all students and full participation once accessed.
- 3. Equitable treatment.** School interaction patterns among students, staff, and others is free from threat and danger, and exists within a supportive environment characterized by acceptance, valuing, and respect.
- 4. Equitable opportunity to learn.** Schools create challenging learning opportunities such that every child, regardless of characteristics and need, is given the requisite pedagogical, social and emotional material supports to achieve high standards.
- 5. Equitable resource distribution.** Schools assign funds, staff, and other resources for equity and excellence including equitable staff assignment, quality instructional technology, and appropriate materials.
- 6. School accountability.** Schools assure that all stakeholders accept responsibility and hold themselves and each other accountable for every learner having access to a quality education, qualified teachers, challenging curriculum, and support.



THE CEPIP APPROACH FOR KERN COUNTY STUDENTS

Dr. Mary Barlow, Kern County Superintendent of Schools

Kern County Superintendent of Schools believes that it is imperative that educational leaders and practitioners implement district policies and practices that deliver an equitable educational experience. Equity is ensuring educational environments employ a systemic approach through access, opportunities, and support to celebrate and value all students, raise achievement, narrow gaps, and eliminate the predictability of student outcomes regardless of factors such as income, ZIP code, ethnicity, gender, language, and learning ability.

California School Dashboard results have shown a disparity of outcomes for certain student groups in Kern County. This information tells us we need to improve how our education system responds to the needs of certain student groups. Trends include students with disabilities not succeeding at the same rate as students without disabilities; African American students not experiencing the same outcomes as other student groups; foster youth not performing at the same level as their peers; and low-income students, regardless of race, ethnicity, and gender, are less likely to experience the same educational outcomes as their peers. Clearly, it is imperative that we continue this systemic work and continue to make progress on closing these performance gaps.

Over the past two years, KCSOS has facilitated an equity-focused continuous improvement process with McFarland Unified School District. This process assisted in identifying circumstances and conditions that contributed to inequitable academic and social-emotional student outcomes. Continuous Improvement Process methods included an extensive look at data (including the California School Dashboard, California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress, and local data) to identify a problem of practice, root cause analysis, and theory of action. Teams engaged with equity partners and left with an action plan, including long-term and interim metrics, initiatives, and action steps. Throughout this process, the McFarland Unified School District teams received equity-centered professional learning on the effects of racism and other bias on education policies and practices, and other resources for equity-focused leadership.

The continuous improvement process has been modified and implemented across Kern County with over 30 LEAs, including an internal review of our operations at KCSOS. Additionally, the process has been modified to support our Geographic Area work with five other county offices of education (Valley to Coast Collaborative), the workgroups of the Kern Education Pledge, ACSA iLead Equity Team Lab, and nearly 20 local schools identified for additional support through Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI) or Additional Targeted Support and Improvement (ATSI).

Professional learning across the county included the first Power of Equity in Education Symposium, where over 300 educators learned of the impact of inequitable practices on our students, how to identify inequities within their own system, and tools available to support equity work. The second annual Power of Equity in Education Symposium will be held in September 2020. Additionally, equity professional learning opportunities will continue to be embedded throughout networks across our county for superintendents, instructional leaders, and administrators.

Kern County Superintendent of Schools is committed to ensuring educational equity for all students. We can and must do more to advance equity. This requires a systemic approach to ensure all students are provided with the resources and opportunities to succeed. We will continue to explore and address the issues of equity, as we believe that educational equity is imperative and have set forth a goal to close the achievement gap in Kern County at twice the rate of the state.



CEPIP AND THE ROLE OF EQUITY IN SAN DIEGO COUNTY

Dr. Paul Gothold, Superintendent San Diego County Office of Education

All students are deserving of a world-class education with high expectations from caring adults who love and support them. That's the goal, but how do we make it a reality? The fact is, our school systems were not designed to support all students, such as those experiencing poverty or students whose first language isn't English, and we see too many kids falling through the cracks. Equity is an urgent need for our districts and, as a service organization, the San Diego County Office of Education (SDCOE) is committed to being on the forefront of those conversations on race,

socioeconomic status, and implicit bias in our systems.

In San Diego County based on 2018 CAASPP results, only four out of 10 Latinx, American Indian, and African American students are meeting or exceeding standard in English language arts. Only three out of 10 Latinx students and one out of four American Indian and African American students are meeting or exceeding standard in mathematics. Every student should be graduating from high school with the option to attend a four-year college. That's not a reality for many. Only 45% of students who are African American or Latinx enroll in postsecondary education, compared to 71% of students who are white or Asian.

The San Diego County Board of Education has established four goals for SDCOE: career technical education, innovation, equity, and organizational excellence. The four are intertwined and equity runs through them all, just as it must be embedded in all we do at SDCOE and in support of the county's students. Because of our in-house expertise, strong relationships with our school districts, and the ability to leverage resources, SDCOE is uniquely positioned to continue leading this effort on behalf of the region and the state.

The Continuous Improvement Process (CIP) Equity Model is one important component of SDCOE's effort to expand and enhance the work to transform schools into places of opportunity for our most vulnerable youth. The CIP Equity Model engages participants in a process that both strengthens their understanding of the complexities of equity and helps them develop a continuous improvement habit of mind with the goal of implementing sustainable system change for all students. The model includes research-proven methodologies and strategies.

SDCOE must focus on equity to ensure each and every student has access to powerful learning opportunities – every day, whether they're learning from home or in a classroom – with the supports they need to be successful in college, career, and life. Learning from a distance during the COVID-19 crisis has upped the urgency for educational leaders to meet the basic needs of students in new and innovative ways. From WiFi hotspots to drive-thru device and meal distribution, we know our most vulnerable children need their schools and educators more than ever. Our SDCOE teams have been working around the clock to ensure education leaders have the tools to mitigate learning loss for all students, create dialogue space to listen to students impacted by racism and social injustice, and meet the increased social and emotional needs of children. What has inspired me during this pandemic is the fact that we have so many valuable individuals, in SDCOE, districts, schools, and our critical partners, who step in and do whatever it takes to help our kids and families. It is that love and care for other individuals that I've seen happen on a regular basis, and that I know will help keep us committed to doing whatever it takes for our students. Things may look different, but the work hasn't changed.

CEPIP CONTEXT SNAPSHOTS

The SDCOE/KCSOS CEPIP approach is a two-year program where participants spend the first year examining their systems using an equity-focused lens. In the first year, participants attend equity-based professional learning events and conduct cycles of improvement to address a local equity challenge. Local Improvement Teams (LIT) develop a plan for addressing an inequity and test changes in their system to remedy that challenge. In the second year, schools focus on improvement cycles with support from equity coaches to implement the changes.

SDCOE and KCSOS engaged four sites in the CEPIP work in 2018-19 and an additional eight sites in 2019-20. In Kern County, each school in the McFarland Unified School District participated, including McFarland High School, McFarland Middle School, Horizon, Kern, and Browning Road elementary schools. In San Diego County, Mt. Miguel and Granite Hills high schools participated from the Grossmont Union High School District; Orange Glen and Escondido high schools from the Escondido Union High School District; Bancroft and Rancho elementary schools in the La Mesa-Spring Valley School District; and Morse High School from the San Diego Unified School District.

We derived the following snapshots from information presented on the California Schools Dashboard. The purpose of these snapshots is to provide high-level information about each school supported by the CEPIP grant and the reasons why they were recruited.

Kern

McFarland High School

McFarland High School is a rural high school located in McFarland, California. McFarland High serves 1,145 students with 49 teachers and three administrators. The site's student population is predominately Latinx (98%). Most students identify as low-income (92%) and nearly 18% are English learners. McFarland was invited to send a Local Improvement Team as part of CEPIP Cohort 1 based on California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP) achievement results, where 7% of English learners met standard in English language arts. McFarland was also included in CEPIP due to a high suspension rate (5.8%) and low percentage of English learners graduating college-ready (36%). McFarland's Local Improvement Team included three administrators and four teachers. Local Improvement Team teachers served approximately 530 students.

McFarland Middle School

McFarland Middle School is an urban elementary school located in McFarland, California. McFarland Middle serves 801 students with 39 teachers and two administrators. The site's student population is predominately Latinx (98%). Most students are low-income (92%) and 35% are English learners. McFarland Middle was invited to send a Local Improvement Team as part of CEPIP Cohort 2 based on CAASPP achievement results, where 5% of English learners met standard in English language arts and 4% in mathematics. McFarland Middle was also included in CEPIP due to a high, chronic absenteeism rate (13.4%) for English learners. McFarland Middle's Local Improvement Team included two administrators a teacher, and the school counselor. Teachers served approximately 98 students.

Horizon Elementary School

Horizon Elementary School is an urban elementary school located in McFarland, California. Horizon serves 488 students with 19 teachers and one administrator. The site's student population is predominately Latinx (96%). Most students are low-income (86%) and 49% are English learners.

A Focus on Equity:

Final Report

Horizon was invited to send a Local Improvement Team as part of CEPIP Cohort 2 based on CAASPP achievement results, where 34% of English learners met standard in English language arts. Horizon's Local Improvement Team included one administrator, a teacher, and an academic coach. The Local Improvement Team served approximately 55 students.

Browning Road Elementary School

Browning Road Elementary School is an urban elementary school located in McFarland, California. Browning Road serves 509 students with 20 teachers and one administrator. The site's student population is predominately Latinx (99%). Most students are low-income (95%) and 60% are English learners. Browning Road was invited to send a Local Improvement Team as part of CEPIP Cohort 2 based on CAASPP achievement results, where 7% of English learners met standard in English language arts and 9% in mathematics. Browning Road's Local Improvement Team included one teacher who served approximately 27 students.

Kern Elementary School

Kern Elementary School is an urban elementary school located in McFarland, California. Kern serves 689 students with 27 teachers and one administrator. The site's student population is predominately Latinx (97%). Most students are low-income (93%) and 62% are English learners. Kern was invited to send a Local Improvement Team as part of CEPIP Cohort 2 based on CAASPP achievement results, where 15% of English learners met standard in English language arts and mathematics. Kern's Local Improvement Team included one administrator, a teacher, and an academic coach. The Local Improvement Team served approximately 51 students.

San Diego

Mt. Miguel High School

Mt. Miguel High School is an urban high school located in Spring Valley, California. Mt. Miguel serves 1,245 students with 66 teachers and four administrators. The site's student population is predominately African American (18%), Latinx (60%), and white (10%). Most students are low-income (81%) and nearly 17% are English learners. Mt. Miguel was invited to send a Local Improvement Team as part of CEPIP Cohort 1 based on CAASPP achievement results, where 42% of students met standard in English language arts and 11% met standard in mathematics. Mt. Miguel was also included in CEPIP due to a high suspension rate of African American students (45.8%) and a low percentage of students graduating college-ready (29%). Mt. Miguel's Local Improvement Team included three administrators, seven teachers, a counselor, and one support staff member. Teachers served approximately 696 students.

Orange Glen High School

Orange Glen High School is an urban high school located in Escondido, California. Orange Glen serves 1,880 students with 82 teachers and four administrators. The site's student population is predominately Latinx (87%) and white (7%). Most students are low-income (89%) and 21% are English learners. Orange Glen was invited to send a Local Improvement Team as part of CEPIP Cohort 1 based on CAASPP achievement results, where 20% of English learners met standard in English language arts. Orange Glen was also included in CEPIP due to a high suspension rate (5.9%) and low percentage of students graduating college-ready (41%). Orange Glen's Local Improvement Team included four administrators, five teachers, a counselor, and two support staff members. Teachers served approximately 325 students.

Bancroft Elementary School

Bancroft Elementary School is an urban elementary school located in Spring Valley, California.

Bancroft serves 276 students with 18 teachers and two administrators. The site's student population is predominately African American (8%), Latinx (78%), and white (7%). Most students are low-income (92%) and 43% are English learners. Bancroft was invited to send a Local Improvement Team as part of CEPIP Cohort 1 based on CAASPP achievement results, where 8% of English learners met standard in English language arts. Bancroft was also included in CEPIP due to a high suspension rate (8.7%). Bancroft's Local Improvement Team included four administrators and four teachers. Teachers served approximately 98 students.

Rancho Elementary School

Rancho Elementary School is an urban elementary school located in Spring Valley, California. Rancho serves 344 students with 14 teachers and one administrator. The site's student population is predominately African American (13%), Latinx (64%), and Filipino (9%). Most students are low-income (74%) and 27% are English learners. Rancho was invited to send a Local Improvement Team as part of CEPIP Cohort 2 based on a high suspension rate (6.5%) for African American students. Rancho's Local Improvement Team included one administrator, seven teachers, and one social worker. Teachers served approximately 158 students.

Granite Hills High School

Granite Hills High School is an urban high school located in El Cajon, California. Granite Hills serves 2,294 students with 122 teachers and four administrators. The site's student population is predominately Latinx (38%), and white (51%). Many students are low-income (56%). Granite Hills was invited to send a Local Improvement Team as part of CEPIP Cohort 2 based on CAASPP achievement results, where no English learners met standard in English language arts and mathematics and only 8% of students with disabilities met standard in mathematics. Granite Hills was also included in CEPIP due to a low percentage of students graduating college-ready (38%), especially English learners (17.6%). Granite Hills' Local Improvement Team included three administrators, five teachers, and a counselor. Teachers served approximately 709 students.

Escondido High School

Escondido High School is an urban high school located in Escondido, California. Escondido serves 2,244 students with 109 teachers and four administrators. The site's student population is predominately Latinx (78%) and white (13%). Most students are low-income (76%) and nearly 19% are English learners. Escondido was invited to send a Local Improvement Team as part of CEPIP Cohort 2 based on CAASPP achievement results, where 2% of English learners met standard in English language arts and 0% met standard in mathematics. Escondido's Local Improvement Team included two administrators, five teachers, a counselor, and two support staff members. Teachers served approximately 506 students.

Morse High School

Morse High School is an urban high school located in San Diego, California. Morse serves 1,718 students with 80 teachers and three administrators. The site's student population is African American (13%), Latinx (36%), and Filipino (35%). Most students are low-income (80%) and nearly 12% are English learners. Morse was invited to send a Local Improvement Team as part of CEPIP Cohort 2 based on CAASPP achievement results, where 29% of students met standard in mathematics. Morse was also included in CEPIP due to a high suspension rate of English learners (11.9%) and students with disabilities (13.7%). Morse's Local Improvement Team included one administrator, eight teachers, a counselor, and one support staff member. Teachers served approximately 727 students.

THE INTERSECTION OF EQUITY AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Dr. Sandra Park, Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching

Continuous improvement is the ongoing, disciplined efforts of everyone in the system to make evidence-based changes that will lead to better outcomes, system performance, and organizational learning.¹ Over the past decade, many educational organizations have turned to continuous improvement as a promising approach in identifying and dismantling pernicious educational inequities.

First, this approach assumes that it is the system and not individuals that produce current outcomes. As result, most improvement journeys begin with a deep examination of the system. What are the current outcomes of our system; more specifically, what key disparities exist? What is the current design of our system? How is the design of our system producing these disparities?

In answering these questions, educators seek out the perspectives of those most impacted by system – namely students and families – and illuminate key policies, routines, practices, and mindsets that “are holding the problem in place.”² As researchers Lewis and Dimond note, “(Educators) can carefully diagnose the causes of specific outcomes in their schools and engage in purposeful design and redesign of organizational routines to facilitate different outcomes. Such an approach helps us move beyond accusation and blame and toward equity-based practices that can transform educational outcomes.”³

As the quote implies, continuous improvement engages individuals throughout the organization, especially those on the frontline and most impacted by the system, in the reengineering process. Unlike traditional top-down reforms, continuous improvement efforts are driven by disciplined learning cycles that encourage educators to test ideas in practice, making assumptions about cause and effect explicit. Finally, learning is codified into equity-based policies and processes that produce the equitable outcomes we seek to achieve.

¹Definition adapted from Batalden, P. B., & Davidoff, F. (2007). What is “quality improvement” and how can it transform healthcare? *Quality & Safety in Health Care*, 16(1), 2–3.

²Kania, J. Kramer, M. & Senge, P. “The Water of Systems Change.” FSG Report, 2018, 3.

³Lewis, A. E., & Diamond, J. B. (2015). *Despite the best intentions: How racial inequality thrives in good schools*. New York: Oxford University Press, 176.

CEPIP RESULTS

Methods

This report is the second in a series of reports conducted by the Research and Evaluation team from the San Diego County Office of Education. The first report described in detail the CEPIP model developed by SDCOE and KCSOS, including the evidence of implementation and student outcomes. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting state mandates regarding student testing and school accountability, many of the student-level outcomes were not available. For this second progress report, the SDCOE evaluation team focused on three questions and gathered evidence to answer these questions using student surveys, pre-post assessments from professional learning events, and semi-structured interviews. We structured the following section according to each question and outcome expected.

For the first question(s), “How do we know a system is inequitable? How do inequities manifest in a system?” we partnered with the Western Educational Evaluation Assistance Center (WEEAC) at Metropolitan State University in Denver to develop and deliver an equity-focused student survey. The Equity Compass Review Survey gathered information from students in the upper elementary grades through high school and covered a range of issues related to educational equity in schools including harassment, religion, respect, safety, and others. We administered surveys to 11 school sites in September and January, and we used the results to identify the kinds of inequities manifesting within and across these school sites.

The second question was, “Do COE professional learning events regarding school inequities improve educators’ understanding of equity-conscious teaching and leadership practices?” To answer this question, we assessed participants’ levels of understanding about course objectives before and after the multi-day events using a survey. Participants rated their level of understanding on a six-point scale, where a score of “1” indicated “No Knowledge” of the course topic and a score of “6” indicated “Expert” knowledge. We subtracted the pre-workshop score from the post-workshop score to measure the changes in participants’ understanding, and we plotted the changes across all course objectives.

The third question was, “How do teachers and school leaders enact their learning in their respective contexts?” For this final question, we gathered evidence using an interview protocol on the most significant changes experienced by practice participants who participated in CEPIP for at least 18 months. During the interviews, participants provided a personal account of the change and described its significance. We analyzed these personal accounts by thematizing the changes within and across participants.

The intent of these evaluation questions was to recognize trends that have emerged from the CEPIP work over the first two years and to make recommendations for spreading the work to other COEs across the state.

A Focus on Equity:

Final Report

Student Equity Surveys

How do we know a system is inequitable? How do inequities manifest in a system?

To determine how inequities manifest in a school system, we gathered student perceptions using the Equity Compass Review Survey. The purpose of this survey was to provide detailed information to schools and districts about educational equity issues and inform their equity intervention efforts. By getting detailed feedback about student attitudes and perceptions regarding a range of equity-related issues, schools and districts have the information they need to understand school climate issues in some depth and respond accordingly.

The Equity Compass Review Survey gathered information from students in the upper elementary grades through high school and covered a range of issues related to educational equity in schools. The Western Educational Equity Assistance Center at Metropolitan State University of Denver developed the survey. The survey consists of approximately 50 questions rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale (Strongly Disagree=1; Disagree=2; Neutral=3; Agree=4; and Strongly Agree=5).

The full bank of survey items consists of 13 subscales:

- | | |
|--------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Valuing Diversity | 8. Respect |
| 2. Diversity Instruction | 9. Safety |
| 3. Belonging | 10. Harassment |
| 4. Representation | 11. Religion |
| 5. Expectations | 12. Parent Involvement |
| 6. Access and Fairness | 13. Gender Equity |
| 7. Support | |

Students in all 11 schools participated in the survey representing approximately 6,259 students altogether. About half the students were male. In terms of race and ethnicity, 57% were Latinx, 8% were African American, 14% Filipino, 21% white, and 32% were two or more races. LEAs decided to use 10 of the 13 survey subscales in order to minimize the impact on instructional time and not to duplicate information collected from the California Healthy Kids Survey. The purpose of using the Equity Compass Review Survey was to gain an understanding of how inequities manifest in schools, as revealed by student perceptions. Survey results are arrayed below by county.

Kern

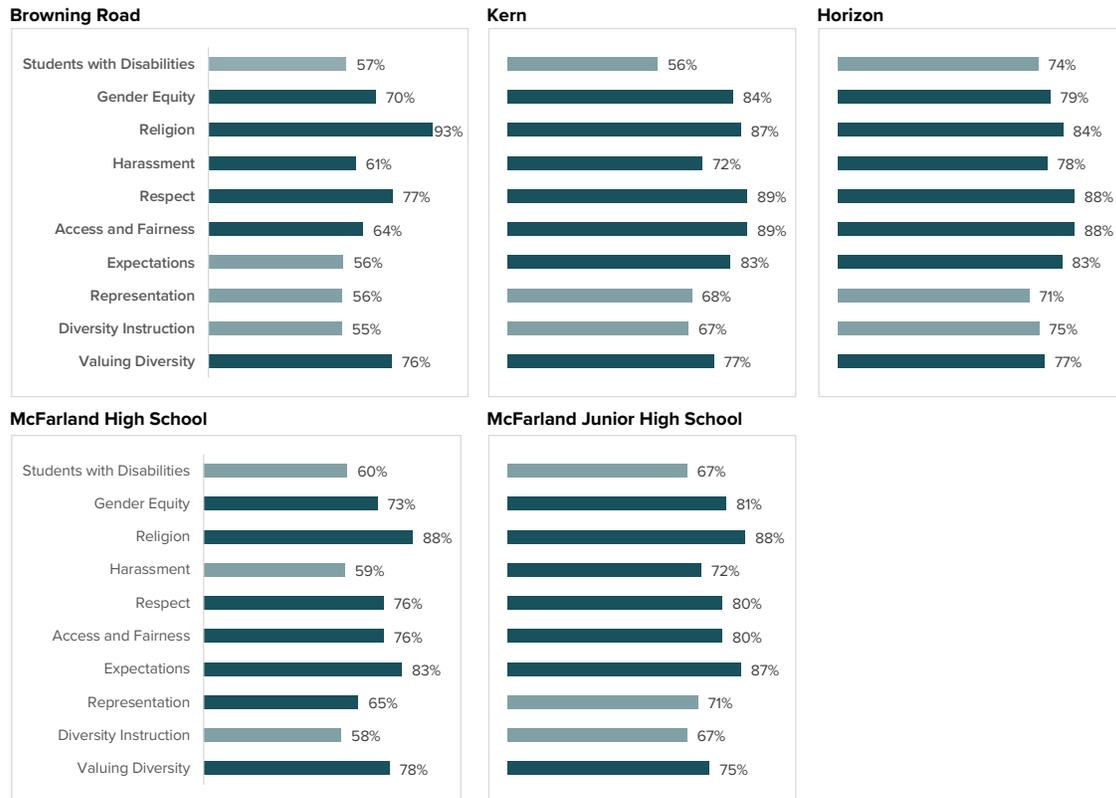
Five schools in Kern County participated in the Equity Compass Review Survey. These are the results for each area of interest at the participating schools. *The percentage scores in Figure 1 indicate the cumulative percentage of respondents who agreed or strongly agreed with each question.* Dark blue bars suggest students perceived the area of interest more favorably. Light blue bars suggest the students perceived the area of interest less favorably. For example, at Browning Road, only 57% of students agreed that students with disabilities were treated equitably in their school. In contrast, 93% of those students agreed that religious views were handled equitably.

Figure 1 shows the results of the subscale analyses for Kern County schools. The dark blue bars suggest students rated the school's treatment of the following topics equitably: Religion, Respect, Valuing Diversity, Harassment, and Gender. In contrast, students rated the school's treatment of the following topics less favorably: Students with Disabilities, Representation, and Diversity Instruction.

A Focus on Equity:

Final Report

Figure 1. Percentage of Kern students who agree and strongly agree about whether matters at their school site were addressed equitably.



San Diego

Six schools in San Diego County participated in the Equity Compass Review Survey. Results are presented in the same format as the previous section.

Figure 2 shows the results of the analyses for the San Diego students. As can be seen in the visual, the results are nearly identical to Kern, students were in greater agreement that Religion, Respect, Valuing Diversity, Harassment, and Gender-based topics were handled equitably across each site. Students rated the topics of Students with Disabilities, Representation, and Diversity Instruction less favorably, suggesting that equity issues are more prominent in these areas in these schools. Additionally, San Diego schools had greater variation in student perceptions across school sites. In some of these schools, Harassment emerged as a more prominent issue, as did Access and Fairness. This may in fact be a product of San Diego serving more high schools, where harassment and access are more prominent than they are in elementary schools. It may also result from McFarland having a highly homogenous population (99% Latinx) compared to the greater diversity in the San Diego population. It is important to note that both counties have similar patterns, representing a common set of inequities manifesting in both regions.

A Focus on Equity:

Final Report

Across both counties, most students in elementary and secondary schools perceived that students in their schools were treated fairly based on their gender and religious orientation. Students also perceived their teachers respected them, and they felt their teachers provided them with opportunities to participate in impartial learning experiences. Furthermore, on average, students perceived they had social relationships with a diverse set of friends.

Across these sites, four equity areas concern students the most. These four areas (Students with Disabilities, Diversity Instruction, Representation, and Harassment) reflect the areas where students perceive the most noticeable inequities.

Students with Disabilities

Survey questions regarding Students with Disabilities asked about the treatment of students with disabilities including, “Students with disabilities are treated the same as other students at this school.” Students’ perceptions of the treatment of students with disabilities have the lowest levels of agreement compared to all other survey items. Less than one-half of the students surveyed indicated they associated with students with disabilities on a regular basis, and four in 10 perceived the harassment of students with disabilities as a school issue. Many students commented about the discrimination students with a disability experienced. Additional comments by students suggested inclusivity issues at schools. Students with a disability were not included in opportunities or activities in which other students participated. These inequities manifested across all CEPIP sites, according to student perception.

Diversity Instruction

The Diversity Instruction items asked students questions about how teachers created conditions where students learned about and interacted with others who have different backgrounds. They included statements such as “We are taught the history of different groups.” While many students agreed that they learned about different race groups in the curriculum, students indicated they interacted with students from other race groups far less. Additionally, less than one-third of students agreed they talked about how race impacted students at school. Many students expressed resistance to learning about race and the impact of race in the school curriculum. Some student comments expressed the desire to learn more practical things in school, especially in high school where students favored life skills.

Representation

Representation refers to students’ perceptions of others in their school. For example, students were asked, “The people who volunteer at my school look like my classmates and me.” While most students perceived their schools as places representative of different people, they agreed that the adults in their schools were not always representative of their racial backgrounds. Furthermore, many students mentioned abusive behaviors directed toward students who represented different racial backgrounds and sexual orientations. Student comments also suggested that schools should do more to address these sensitive topics to prevent future harassment.

Harassment

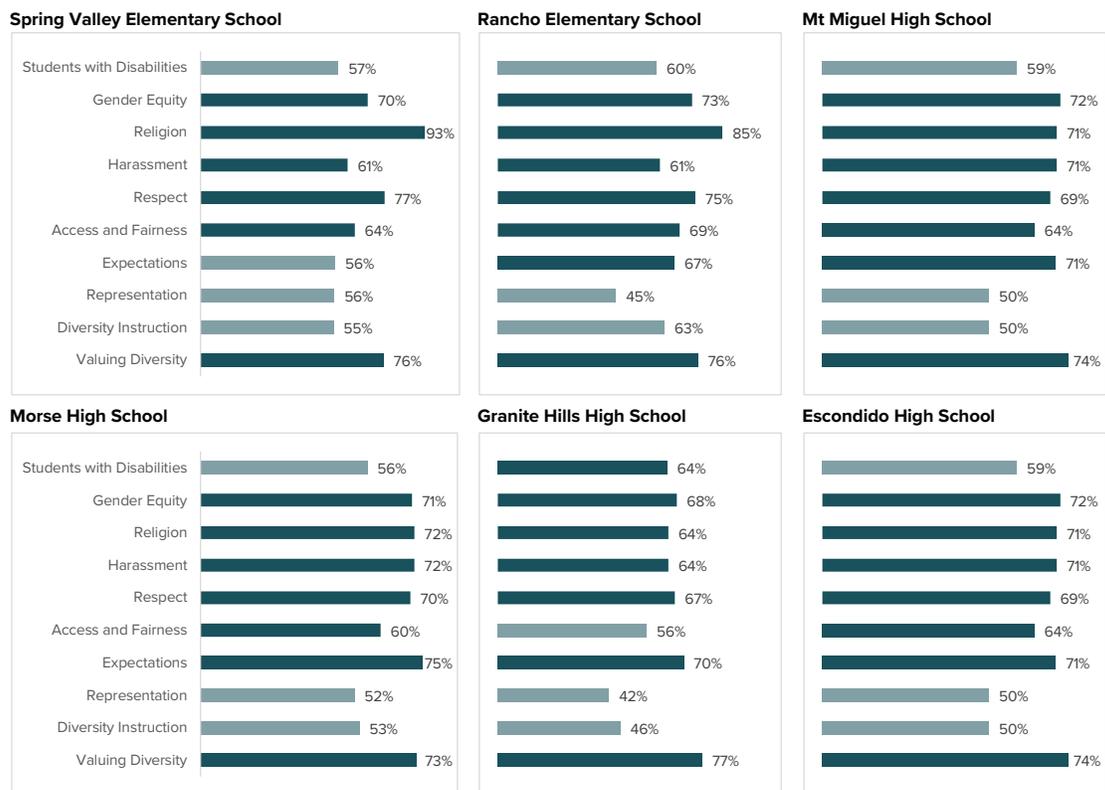
Harassment is a barrier to equity in all schools. Overall, harassment is less prevalent across all three elementary schools served by CEPIP. In middle and high school, harassment is a more prominent issue according to these students’ perceptions. While most students in McFarland Unified perceived

A Focus on Equity:

Final Report

their school as a safe place, over 30% of students indicated that students were harassed regularly based sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, and/or English learner status. Most high school students in San Diego concurred that harassment was a prominent issue in their schools and directed at many of the same groups especially based on race. Less than half the students from high schools in both counties agreed that teachers stopped bullying at their school site. Several students recalled situations where adults ignored harassment on campus; others described situations where teachers participated in bullying. While some of the harassment was directed at specific students, many student comments regarding harassment focused on types of students or groups of students, such as students with disabilities.

Figure 2. Percentage of San Diego students who agree and strongly agree about whether matters at their school site were addressed equitably.



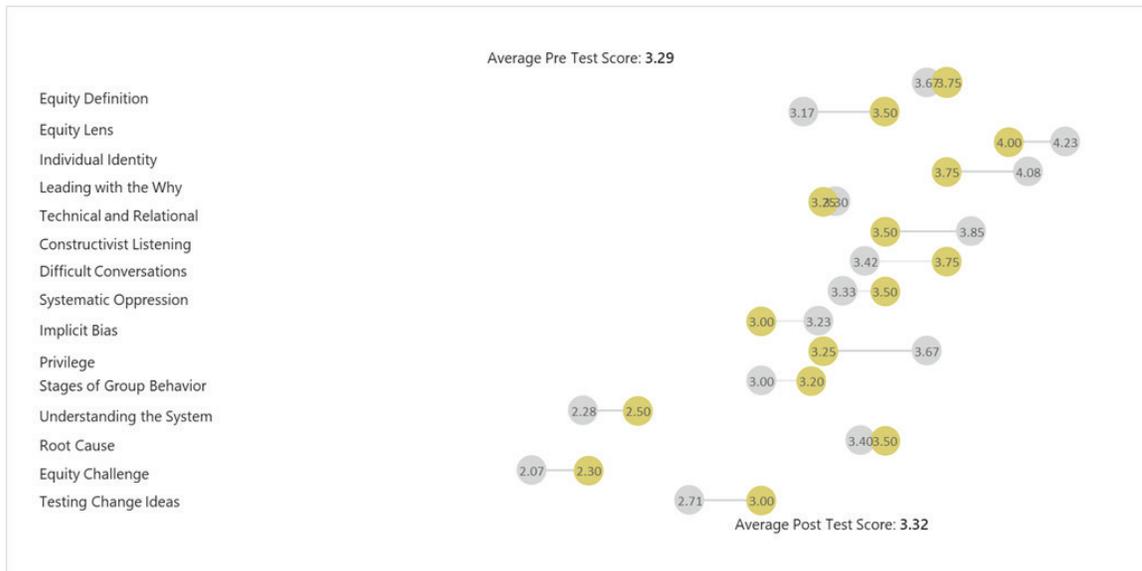
Participant Knowledge

Does exposure to an integrated service from a county office of education (COE) aimed at addressing school inequities improve educators’ understanding of equity-conscious teaching and leadership practices?

To answer the question about whether a professional learning event can change educators’ understanding and skills, we administered a survey to assess participants’ levels of understanding regarding equity course objectives before and after the multi-day professional learning institutes. Participants rated their levels of understanding on a six-point scale, where a score of “1” is a “No Knowledge” level of the course topic and a score of “6” is “Expert” level of the course topic. We subtracted the pre-workshop score from the post-workshop score to measure the change in participants’ understanding and plotted the changes across all course objectives. We report on the results from Cohort 2 (2019-20) below arrayed by county.

Kern

Figure 3. Average pretest posttest changes in participants levels of knowledge.

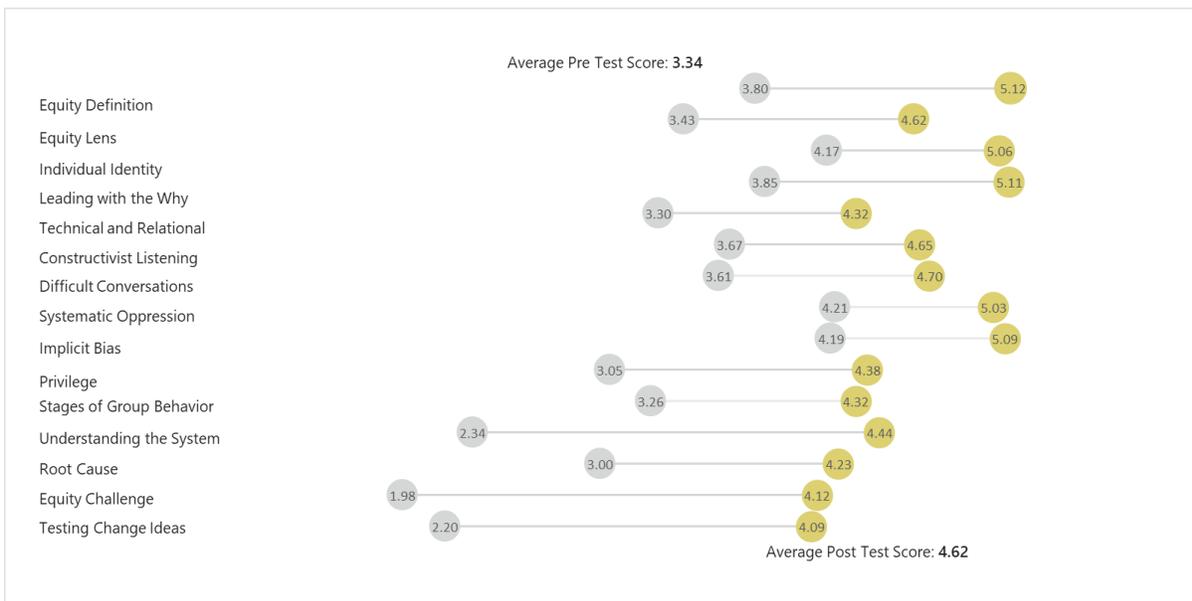


Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent school closures, Kern sites were unable to complete the CEPIP process. In fact, most sites only completed the needs assessment process. As a result, there are little to no changes in the knowledge of the participants across any of the 15 professional learning objectives, as would be expected given the shutdown.

San Diego

On average, participants self-reported a 1.28-level change across all course objectives. The change amounts to a full point change on the survey’s expertise scale from an average pre-rating of “I can tell you what this is given a defined situation” (rating of a 3) to “I have knowledge of this, and I can analyze a situation and determine if it is needed, and then independently and accurately apply it” (rating of a 4). The interval changes from basic application (3) to analysis and application (4) is practically important. All the participants self-reporting a post-survey score of “4,” now have the capacity to carry out course objectives independently.

Figure 4. Average pretest posttest changes in participants levels of knowledge.



The data also reveals that participants made substantial gains across all 15 course objectives. The greatest areas of change occurred for content focused on “Understanding the System,” “Equity Challenge,” and “Testing Change Ideas.” Each of these areas highlight the California Equity Performance and Improvement Program’s focus on the improvement process. Participants learned how to examine their own systems, craft an equity challenge from a root cause analysis, develop measures to determine if a change is an improvement, and test changes. Only three areas reflected a less than full point change in knowledge: “Individual Identity,” “Systemic Oppression,” and “Implicit Bias.” These are complex topics that may need additional attention by program developers to meet the expectation of a full level change; that is to say, moving a participant from a state of understanding to a state of application. Overall, this evidence suggests that participants acquire the knowledge and skills during a multi-day professional learning institute to address a complex equity challenge in their respective districts.

Teacher/Administrator Interviews

How are teachers and school leaders enacting this learning in their respective contexts?

To answer this final question about how teachers and leaders use the knowledge they acquire, we interviewed seven teachers and six administrators from both San Diego and Kern counties from Cohort 1 who participated in CEPIP activities for 18 months. We identified 32 participants overall who met our criteria, and from these 32, we contacted and scheduled 13 interviews. Five of the participants taught or worked in Kern County in the McFarland Unified School District; the other eight worked at sites in San Diego County. Five participants were male: one African American, two Latinx, and two white. The other eight were female: six Latinx and two white.

Over a three-month timeframe, we collected data in the form of semi-structured interviews. We followed an interview protocol at each of the interviews, which included follow-up questions to clarify information, deepen understanding of emerging themes, and provide concrete examples. The interview questions focused on the experiences of the participants and the meaning that they attached to these experiences. The interviews lasting 45 to 90 minutes were held at the participants' place of work and audio recorded.

Following the transcription of each interview, the evaluator independently read and re-read the data, engaged in line-by-line coding, organized the data into categories and subcategories, and noted relationships within and across interviews. The following themes emerged from that analysis captured in the original language of the participants.

Schools feel the push to change at the peril of altering too much.

Because low-performing schools are under tremendous pressure to improve outcomes, school leaders often try to change too many things in their systems simultaneously. In both teacher and administrator interviews, participants described feeling overwhelmed by the number of school initiatives taking place. One interviewee described the situation as “wearing too many hats,” referring to her school having a handful of teachers involved in too many improvement initiatives. Another participant described an event where the staff reviewed the results of a CEPIP equity audit and a WASC accreditation report within the same month. Both reports painted comprehensive pictures of school governance, achievement, culture, and so on, and required considerable staff time to process. Many of these interviewees described feeling overwhelmed by the amount of information generated from all their improvement efforts and a sense of paralysis to act on it.

Local Improvement Teams also struggled to establish a distinct school improvement identity. As a result of having these tangled, disconnected initiatives, staff members informally attempted to connect all the work under one broad umbrella of equity. Interviewees described situations where other school staff were unclear if what the CEPIP team was doing was like what “the Universal Design group” was doing. Many staff members confused the work of other school improvement initiatives with the CEPIP work. Some interviewees expressed a sense of frustration, especially when staff suggested “Isn’t that the work of the equity team?” For these interviewees, the equity team had become a “catchall” group, where the actions to address school-related issues ultimately landed. Most equity teams struggled to establish a unique identity separate from all the other ongoing improvement initiatives.

Furthermore, interviewees expressed anxiety about completing the CEPIP activities with all the other work occurring on their campuses. For example, every interviewee described having limited “time to actually do the homework” when back at the site. Others described meeting 45 minutes a month



to complete CEPIP tasks. “We were just checking off boxes,” one participant stated. This lack of time – coupled with work from multiple, ongoing improvement initiatives – inadvertently created a more compliance-like environment around equity work versus an environment where teams focused on effectiveness and results. These and other challenges stem from sites not having adequate time to examine their own systems, consider how to integrate different initiatives to function more interdependently, or reduce initiatives altogether.

Equity problems can quickly become kitchen sinks.

CEPIP equity teams across all sites expressed there were challenges defining the scope of their work to stakeholders. Part of the CEPIP process required sites to identify the root cause of an equity issue and address it. Some sites focused on cultural changes, while others concentrated on instructional strategies. However, when teams addressed a problem using an equity lens, it seemed to grow beyond the specific problem the team defined. One CEPIP equity team participant described a conversation with a parent where the parent questioned why one school sports team received more publicity than another. “How is that equitable?” the parent commented. Instead of focusing exclusively on an equity problem of practice, this equity team fielded additional questions by staff and parents regarding other equity issues at the site. Equity teams quickly became places where staff, parents, and students complained about any and all equity issues, which as one administrator described, can “shift the focus” of the equity team’s work, unless the team constantly communicates the purpose of its work.

Sometimes, however, the scope creep originated from within the equity team. At one site, an interviewee described questioning the authenticity of one of his equity team colleagues’ statements, saying “you have one of the highest F rates in the school for African American students.” His response stemmed from a disagreement about the equity team’s focus or problem of practice, an observable, actionable change in instructional practice. In his words, “What good does it do to change instructional practices, when it’s built on the same teacher mindset and beliefs that are damaging our African American students?” Rather than focusing narrowly on changing an instructional practice, the team vacillated between the practice and the site’s larger macro conditions, such as teacher mindsets and adult culture. Equity teams constantly negotiated the scope of their work from within the equity team, in addition to the scope being negotiated by others outside the team. Both events created a flaring out of the aim of the equity work and introduced with it unreasonable, unattainable expectations for success.

It takes an emotional awakening to kickstart and affirm the equity work.

Equity teams described “spinning their wheels” in some cases for more than a year before taking any action at their sites. These teams described moments, or what one interviewee called an “awakening,” that triggered the work.

A Focus on Equity:

Final Report



It was just push back. It wasn't anything earth shattering. We hadn't done anything like that in our staff meetings. Everything had been low key, simple, introductory. We were facilitating a conversation about equitable practices to the staff and the team was so angry when we debriefed about how the staff was responding to what we were doing. There was passion in the room...the lights came on.



One administrator described reviewing staff and student surveys where he found high levels of distrust between the groups, “There was no trust between teachers and the administrators, and there wasn't really any trust between the students and teachers...it was like the lights went on. We needed to tackle this idea of distrust before doing anything else.” Even in low-performing schools, where there is considerable evidence of performance gaps between student groups, these equity team members needed something that instigated a visceral reaction to get started on the work. As one administrator described, “Sometimes you have to make people angry to get things done here.”

The “lights coming on” had a precipitous effect on each equity team. Armed with a purpose, these teams engaged in a range of equity work with staff – from examining implicit bias to addressing institutional racism. The equity teams' work was quickly affirmed through the feedback from other staff members. One site described their efforts to build community by empowering staff: “It had such a positive reception that, as a team, it gave us buy-in to what we were doing.” Feedback affirmed the work and kept these teams motivated to continue it. One team described the feedback they received from a staff member as “Whatever you're doing, keep doing it.” These are critical moments in the equity journey. Experiencing the “lights coming on” and getting “feedback” from staff affirmed the team was on the right track; these are pivotal drivers in the equity team's momentum to accomplish its aim.

Leadership can make or break equity efforts.

In each site interview, participants described issues regarding school leadership. One participant described her school leadership experience as inconsistent:

“Over a period of four years, we had six administrators.”

Other site interviews also referred to school leadership as a “revolving door.” Research has consistently confirmed the challenges of leading low-performing schools and maintaining consistent leadership (Aladjem, von Glatz, Hildreth, & McKitchen, 2018). A leadership void creates a vacuum at a site, leading to teachers and others making a lot of individual decisions about what works for stu-

A Focus on Equity:

Final Report

dents. These decisions often lack continuity and result in fragmented policies that may benefit some students, but not all. As one teacher described, “There wasn’t any stability. So, the teachers were the ones making all the decisions.” Even when leaders come with good intentions, some teachers, who have previously experienced these kinds of environments, are reluctant to trust them. One teacher described the situation as, “Teachers don’t want to get attached to someone or start listening to someone because, then, that person will be gone next year. We know you are going to get a promotion; so why should we listen to you?” Lack of consistent leadership and a culture of distrust exacerbates underlying equity issues affecting a school.

While inconsistency and distrust were major concerns for teachers, many teachers also affirmed the importance of effective leadership. One teacher acknowledged how the equity work raised the principal’s “consciousness” and voice around their equity issue. “It’s made our principal conscious. He is putting these things forward to the school, and this team is going to back him up.” Other teachers described situations where they celebrated their school leader’s ability to “remove barriers to getting the work done.” One teacher applauded her administrator for how he “built buy-in” with the staff for the work. Another teacher praised her principal for “carving out space for planning changes we needed to make.” Inconsistent leadership certainly contributes to equity-related issues in schools; however, school leaders positively influence equity work by nudging staff in their efforts and providing the necessary supports to make the work happen.

School leaders also acknowledged their role in equity work, especially by providing focus to the work. One administrator commented, “Inconsistent leadership led to inconsistent expectations, inconsistent student outcomes, and distrust among teachers, staff, and students. Good leadership creates focus for a school and a reason to address these problems.” Another administrator remarked, “It took us a long time to get on the same page, but we are finally in a space where we are integrating our school’s goals with our equity work.” Administrators are pivotal in providing both focus to the equity work and to communicating how the work aligns with other school priorities. Another administrator described her role as “tweaking the system to benefit all students.” She indicated that many teachers have “picked up on equity as a buzzword.” In her opinion, “teachers use ‘equity’ when they want something for their students, but our role as administrators is to remind them what our focus is.” Good leaders relish the role of creating clarity and focus and in removing the barriers that impede teachers from tackling a school’s equity issues. While inconsistent leadership creates a void where many people are making decisions that affect student groups differently, consistent leadership can bring focus to a school’s improvement initiatives and result in better outcomes for all students.





HOW HIGH PERFORMING SCHOOLS ENSURE EQUITY

Dr. Joseph F. Johnson Jr., National Center for Urban School Transformation

As part of a grant from the California Department of Education, the National Center for Urban School Transformation (NCUST) worked in collaboration with the San Diego County Office of Education (SDCOE) and the Kern County Office of Education (KCOE) to help schools and districts advance the educational attainment of Black and Brown students. A key element of the collaboration was the implementation of an equity process developed by NCUST.

Since 2005, NCUST has been identifying, awarding, and studying urban schools that achieve outstanding educational outcomes for every racial/ethnic/income group of students. NCUST adapted the data review processes, classroom observation tools, and interview protocols used to identify and study schools that were achieving equitable learning outcomes to create an equity audit that could help school and district teams understand how their school was similar to and/or different from schools that had already achieved multiple remarkable learning outcomes for Black, Brown, and low-income students. Unlike some equity audit processes that focus exclusively on inputs or on low-level results, this equity audit highlighted the challenges associated with moving schools toward both excellent and equitable educational outcomes.

NCUST personnel worked alongside SDCOE and KCSOS personnel to implement this rigorous equity audit process in several K-12 schools. While the reports highlighted strengths in each of the schools examined, the reports also brought focus to the real issues related to school culture, curriculum, instruction, and leadership that were barriers to the educational success of Black and Brown students.

Both SDCOE and KCSOS personnel engaged with teams of leaders from the participating San Diego County schools to help them understand the equity audit findings, identify root causes, prioritize needs, and commit to plans of action for improvement. The support from SDCOE and KCSOS personnel was critical in helping school leaders grapple with difficult issues and nurture a commitment to improve practices, processes, programs, and systems.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Addressing inequities in schools is a daunting task. The intent of this report was to examine the progress these COEs and partner schools have made identifying inequities in schools, building educator knowledge and skills to address equity issues, and enacting their understanding in their respective school contexts. We have identified trends and challenges that have emerged from the CEPIP work over the first two years, and the following section summarizes some of the promising findings during the early stages of CEPIP implementation. We also suggest recommendations for spreading the work to other COEs across the state.

Promising findings:

The SDCOE/KCSOS CEPIP approach supports schools to determine how inequities manifest in their systems and focuses these teams on the root cause of that inequity. Schools often lack a systems approach to solving problems, and as a result, find themselves entangled in too many disconnected improvement initiatives aimed at symptoms of a problem. Analyzing the system involves understanding the root of an equity problem and attacking that area – in a word, it requires focus (Fullan, 2004). CEPIP builds educators’ capacity to use data in a focused manner to identify the root cause of an inequity and systematically address it. According to the CEPIP data available to schools, some students identified bullying as the most prominent way in which inequities manifest in their school system, especially for students with disabilities. Other students perceived school rules were different for boys compared to girls, while others identified harassment (both racial and sexual) as the most pernicious inequity in their system. These data help focus CEPIP teams on actions directed at the root of these problems; for example, these data lead teams to review policies and procedures to determine how information is communicated to students and if there is disproportionality in how the rules are enforced for different students. These data lead sites to examine classroom practices more closely to determine which students are talking, which ones get the most attention from the teacher, and why. CEPIP’s approach avoids the “Band-Aid” mentality of attacking multiple symptoms of a problem and focuses participants on addressing the root cause. LEAs adopting a process to address inequities in the system must ensure that process focuses efforts at the root cause of the problem; otherwise, the connection between the actions and student-level outcomes is less apparent. In this work, we noticed in the student surveys that with the year-two sites, where teachers and leaders participated in the CEPIP process for a full year, agreement levels were higher across the survey subscales for students in these schools than they were for the students in schools that had just started the work. We substantiated our observation through an independent statistical analysis performed by WEEAC. As this work matures, we may find that, as educators engage in equity work over time and effectively interrupt inequities, student perceptions of equity-related concepts grow more positive in their schools and lead to more inclusive environments for all students.

This CEPIP approach is improving adult learning and broadening educators’ understanding of equity practices to counteract bias and systemic oppression and implement continuous improvement.

Research has questioned the efficacy of teacher professional learning for decades, often suggesting that professional learning events have a minimal impact on an educator’s practice, especially in contexts that lack a shared vision, time for implementation, and have dysfunctional school cultures (Tooley & Connally, 2016). Contrary to this kind of environment, CEPIP incorporates all the elements of effective professional learning. The content of each workshop is highly focused on equity concepts and integrated with principles of adult learning. Participants work in collaborative, job-embedded environments with coaching support sustained over two years. CEPIP offers regular opportunities to receive feedback and reflect, allowing ample time for educators to consider the needs of historically marginalized students, the supports necessary for their success in challenging learning environments,

A Focus on Equity:

Final Report

and a process for knowing which supports work. LEAs considering the needs of its educators should develop similar standards for professional learning to ensure that educators develop their practice in ways that promote equity in the classroom and provide the greatest benefit to students.

This CEPIP approach is being enacted in complex, dynamic school environments where progress is dependent on focus, leadership, and passion. Most of the CEPIP sites are inundated with numerous improvement efforts, struggle with unstable leadership, and are places where staff have competing perspectives regarding their improvement initiatives. However, CEPIP sites are also places that celebrate consistent leadership. Stable leadership creates a focus and drives the staff's passions for equity work. When staff passions ignite and the work launches, it leads to an upsurge in equity work, iterating between periods of action, feedback, and empowerment. While adults in the system must learn how to create more equitable schools, they need to be able to apply this learning in focused environments that motivate them to do the work. Schools and districts must consider its policies and practices that lead to leadership turnover, especially as it applies to equity work occurring in low performing schools. Nationally, more than half of the school leaders in schools today have led schools for less than a year or leave in less than three years. The constant churn of leadership prevents schools from sustaining a focus on equity and may contribute to persistent achievement and opportunity gaps between students (Finnigan & Daly, 2017). These issues have human and fiscal costs for low performing schools that cannot be ignored.

Areas to consider:

1. *SDCOE/KCSOS CEPIP developers should consider partnering with a more diverse group or organization to spread this work and support more districts.* For a focus on equity to permeate San Diego County, Kern County, and beyond, CEPIP must draw on the support of other organizations such as WestEd, the California Collaborative for Educational Excellence (CCEE), the Association of California School Administrators (ACSA), and others to integrate these practices across multiple organization to reach more teachers, school leaders, and policy makers.
2. *SDCOE/KCSOS CEPIP developers should consider how to sustain the work during the present educational context.* During the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers and students are working and learning in digital environments where gaps in outcomes may become more prevalent.
3. *SDCOE/KCSOS CEPIP developers should transform equity content and improvement tools into consumable resources for LEAs and schools.* All LEAs and schools should have access to CEPIP materials, activities, and resources that develop educator knowledge, skills, and attitudes to address equity challenges. CEPIP should also consider ways to support schools through virtual coaching sessions and to provide these LEAs and schools with the tools to evaluate the progress on their own equity initiatives.

This year-two report underscores the urgent nature of this work. We recognize that inequities in schools have not improved over the past 20 years (Garcia & Weiss, 2017), and these problems tend to compound with the “rich” getting richer while the poor continue to be marginalized. Much of the work to redress these issues needs greater understanding. In the coming years, there is a great deal to be learned regarding how equity work shapes school culture and the long-term effects of this work on student learning. We must continue to gather evidence diligently and intentionally so that policy makers and educational leaders can make informed decisions regarding one of the most pervasive social justice issues of our era.

REFERENCES

- Aladjem, D., von Glatz, A., Hildreth, J., & McKitchen, C. (2018). *Leading low-performing schools: Lessons from the turnaround school leaders program*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education.
- California Department of Education. (2019, September 4). *DataQuest*. Retrieved from <https://data1.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/>
- de Brey, C., Musu, L., McFarland, J., Wilkinson-Flicker, S., Diliberti, M., Zhang, A., . . . Wang, X. (2019). *Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Groups 2018 (NCES 2019-038)*. U.S. Department of Education, Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved from <https://nces.ed.gov/>
- Finnigan, K., & Daly, A. (2017). The trust gap: Understanding the effects of leadership churn in school districts. *American Educator*, 24-43.
- Fullan, M. (2004). *Systems thinkers in action: Moving beyond the standards plateau*. Nottingham: DfES Publications.
- Garcia, E., & Weiss, E. (2017). *Education inequalities at the school starting gate*. Washington, D.C.: Economic Policy Institute.
- Scott, B. (2006). *Six goals of educational equity and school reform*. . San Antonio: Intercultural Development Research Association.
- Tooley, M., & Connally, K. (2016). *No panacea: Diagnosing what ails teacher professional development before reaching for remedies*. Washington, D.C.: New America.



FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:

Shannon E. Coulter, Ph.D.

Director, Research and Evaluation

San Diego County Office of Education

6401 Linda Vista Drive

San Diego, CA 92111

scoulter@sdcoe.net

858-292-3593