



# Equity Leadership Team Protocol

*October 2013*

## Acknowledgments

The Oregon Leadership Network (OLN) would like to thank all of those who took part in the fall OLN Leadership Institute on December 12, 2012. Approximately 40 educators from OLN schools and organizations participated in two breakout sessions that discussed the importance of equity teams and their function, role, and tasks. The two sessions on “Establishing Effective Equity Teams: Setting Up for Success,” presented by John Lensen and Sho Shigeoka, yielded valuable perspectives from many OLN members. Their rich conversations contributed to the development of the equity protocol described in this document.

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## About the Oregon Leadership Network

The Oregon Leadership Network (OLN) is the only statewide educational leadership network in the nation with equity at its core. OLN strengthens educational leadership to increase equitable outcomes and success so that all students will meet or exceed state standards. The vision of OLN is that there will be no performance gap between different ethnic or socio-economic groups. OLN is guided by the principle that nested learning communities are essential to collectively confront problems of policy and practice and to foster equitable system improvement. Its value lies in its capacity to collectively examine and act on school, district, and state data and conditions to eliminate racial, ethnic, and socio-economic disparities. Founded in 2000 with a decade of support from the Wallace Foundation, the OLN is now administered by Education Northwest, which convenes members, organizes research, shares best practices, develops products, and documents OLN work. For more information about OLN visit <http://educationnorthwest.org/oln>.

### How do we define equity?

For decades, the American public education system has persistently acknowledged gaps of achievement and success among different groups of students. These gaps of opportunity, access, and outcomes are highly predictable by race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and location. They demand that we as educational leaders examine the root causes of these gaps and confront the disparities among student populations. To do that, we must intentionally adjust inputs into the educational system: providing greater resources, targeting professional learning for educators, and changing educational practices and processes. However, equal inputs, while achieving the goal of fairness or similar treatment, do not necessarily result in just outcomes (Gutiérrez & Jaramillo, 2006). To truly achieve equity, there must be an intentionally different level of support to meet the most urgent student needs and achieve equal outcomes.

# Purpose of the Equity Leadership Team

The Oregon Leadership Network (OLN) promotes the engagement of school and district staff to continually examine and discuss potential inequities. These conversations may address policy and procedural issues, student engagement issues, allocation or redistribution of resources, or just a new way of looking at school or districts structure, practice, or policy. One way to scaffold these important conversations is through the creation of an Equity Leadership Team.

An Equity Leadership Team is a group of committed individuals whose goal is “to ensure that each child receives what they need to reach their academic and social potential.” It should be noted that some “equity teams” are known by other names, such as a leadership team, school improvement team, or school climate team. Team members essentially collaborate around equity issues, potential equity issues, or proactive ways to engage stakeholders about future challenges arising from inequities.



Equity Leadership Teams work to:

- Eliminate inequities and disparities in student achievement
- Foster a safe and healthy school climate
- Promote an inclusive culture that engages and draws on the assets of students, families, staff and community members
- Foster leadership development
- Encourage conversations about equity and social justice

The protocol presented in this booklet is intended as a guide for designing the structure, role, and work of the Equity Leadership Team.

# Getting started

In order to successfully launch an Equity Leadership Team, organizers should take the following steps:

- Gain administrative support
- Secure necessary resources (time for staff to meet, meeting location, refreshments)
- Access possible assistance needed (OLN, neighboring district, consultants)
- Actively recruit members (consider diversity, role group, advocates)
- Focus first on team development (identifying the appropriate people to serve on the team)
- Develop agreements, protocols, and/or norms
- Develop a plan for learning, actions, and accountability
- Focus on changing some practices, structures, or systems
- Celebrate early successes

## Selecting team members

Districts and schools are encouraged to form equity teams. Team members may include administrators, certified staff, classified staff, students, parents, community members, or school board members. Members should reflect the race/ethnicity and national origin diversity of the community; represent perspectives based on gender and differing ability levels; and be inclusive of a broad socio-economic range. All participants should have a relationship with or some connection to the school community.



# Structuring the team

Many school teams have preexisting structures that are used to help groups stay focused on the work and accomplish goals. The OLN recommends the development of group protocols to ensure equitable participation in team activities and processes. The Center for Adaptive Schools (n.d.) offers norms of collaboration as essential capacities and skills for high-performing groups. The norms operate within several practical frameworks that help groups to develop shared meaning and gracefully reach decisions. The collaborative norms of the group have more influence on the possibility of success than do the knowledge and talents of the group facilitator. The Center found the following components to be helpful in groups that achieve high skill levels in the challenging talk required in professional communities (Garmston & Wellman, as cited in Center for Adaptive Schools, n.d.).

## **The Norms of Collaboration**

1. Pausing
2. Paraphrasing
3. Posing Questions
4. Putting Ideas on the Table
5. Providing Data
6. Paying Attention to Self and Others
7. Presuming Positive Intentions

Equity Leadership Team meetings should be planned regularly (e.g., weekly, biweekly, or monthly) and allow for discussion of all agenda items. There may be times when the meeting must be extended or shortened due to the length of the agenda. The important thing is to establish a regular day and time for the meeting to take place. Each meeting should have a facilitator skilled in ensuring a courageous and honest dialogue about the work of the team. Facilitators can be representatives from the school or district. Rotating leaders or using cofacilitators is appropriate and offers exposure to different perspectives and experiences. Team members should be provided release time or an extended contract to participate in meetings and attend to assigned tasks/assignments. If team members are not given time to engage in the equity team process, the work of the team will be stymied.

Equity Leadership Teams should have a defined role within a school or district. It is vital that the purpose and work of the team is connected to the priorities of the school/district. Equity Leadership Teams should be formed to examine and address real problems and identify real solutions for the school/district.

## Characteristics of Effective Teams

1. There is a clear unity of purpose.
2. The group is self-conscious about its own operations.
3. The group has set clear and demanding performance goals.
4. The atmosphere tends to be informal, comfortable, relaxed.
5. There is a lot of discussion in which virtually everyone participates.
6. People are free to express their feelings, as well as their ideas.
7. There is disagreement, which is viewed as healthy.
8. Most decisions are made at a point where there is general agreement.
9. Each individual carries his or her own weight.
10. Criticism is frequent, frank, and relatively comfortable.
11. The leadership of the group shifts from time to time.

(MacGreger, Kaztenbach, & Smith, as cited in Stanford University, n.d.)

The National School Reform Faculty suggests that “protocols are most powerful and effective when used within an ongoing professional learning community” such as an Equity Leadership Team (Southern Maine Partnership, 2013). The protocol should identify the purpose of the team, roles for team members, and steps to achieve goals.

Some examples of discussion topics addressed by an Equity Leadership Team include:

- Student achievement, which is predictable by race/ethnicity, national origin, socio-economic status, gender, familial status, students’ living conditions, and/or disability
- Disproportionality in behavior and discipline referrals
- Disproportionality in enrollment in talented and gifted programs and special education
- Participation/attendance of parents of color in school activities/events
- School policies and procedures that create imbalance between different student groups
- A civil rights complaint or violation brought against the school/district
- Existence of a culture of disrespect and allegations of chronic bullying and harassment
- Curriculum bias

Equity Leadership Teams should develop agreements that provide guidelines for respect, safety, comfort, participation, and communication. For example, *Courageous Conversations About Race: A Field Guide for Achieving Equity in Schools* (Singleton & Linton, 2006) utilizes the Four Agreements, Six Conditions, and Compass in order to engage, sustain, and deepen interracial dialogue. For districts and schools dealing with

equity issues related to race, the Four Agreements and Six Conditions provide structure that emphasizes the consideration of the role of one's race and ethnicity.

### **The Four Agreements**

1. Stay Engaged
2. Experience Discomfort
3. Speak Your Truth
4. Expect/Accept Nonclosure

### **The Six Conditions**

1. Focus on the Personal, Local, and Immediate
  2. Isolate Race
  3. Normalize Social Construction and Multiple Perspectives
  4. Monitor Agreements and Conditions and Establish Parameters
  5. Use a "Working Definition" of Race
  6. Examine the Presence and Role of "Whiteness"
- (Singleton & Linton, 2006)



# Setting the focus

Much like professional learning communities, Equity Leadership Teams should examine school/district data and challenges or opportunities to determine the team's working agenda. Equity Leadership Teams share collective values and a vision for strengthening the school/district culture. Their focus works to change discourse and practices and to improve student learning.

One resource that can help teams hone their focus is the Leadership for Equity Assessment & Development (LEAD) Tool™, launched by OLN in summer 2012 (Education Northwest, 2012). This research-based set of rubrics (found at <http://leadtool.educationnorthwest.org/>) is designed to support school leadership teams in developing organizational leadership capacity for equity.

The LEAD Tool consists of 10 high-leverage equitable practices, including three considered “core” practices that **can guide the team's initial conversations**.

## **10 High-Leverage Equitable Practices**

1. Engaging in self-reflection and growth for equity (Core Equitable Practice)
2. Developing organizational leadership for equity (Core Equitable Practice)
3. Constructing and enacting an equity vision (Core Equitable Practice)
4. Supervising for improvement of equitable teaching and learning
5. Fostering an equitable school culture
6. Collaborating with families and communities
7. Influencing the sociopolitical context
8. Allocating resources
9. Hiring and placing personnel
10. Modeling ethical and equitable behavior

# Leading for equity

Developing leadership for equity is foundational. Shared leadership is key and requires creating multiple opportunities for leadership among team members, staff, students, families, and community members. Potential leaders are vital members in terms of decisionmaking and change.

When choosing a facilitator for the team, there are pros and cons in selecting district leaders to serve in that role:

## **Pros**

- May have respect and trust among team members
- May have strong facilitation skills
- May lead with cultural humility
- May have a strong sense of urgency

## **Cons**

- May not embrace the need for adaptive change
- May not have facilitation skills
- May not have a sense of urgency
- May need to be a learner/supporter and not leaders of the work

Choosing co-facilitators who represent different perspectives can reflect the inclusive nature of an Equity Leadership Team. Outside facilitation may be valuable, especially in the beginning stages. Rotating facilitation of meetings is also an option.

The OLN supports the development of Equity Leadership Teams as working groups to discuss and address issues of equity that intentionally or unintentionally limit the potential of different student groups. An Equity Leadership Team can develop a district- or school-level plan to monitor movement toward the elimination of inequities. New learning will be accomplished through formal, ongoing interactions of the team with the ultimate goal of strengthening school and district capacity to meet the teaching and learning goals of each member of the school community.

As you begin the process of developing an Equity Leadership Team or restructuring your current team and find that you are having trouble getting started, please contact the OLN. Staff members listed below are available to provide initial guidance in your process.

# References

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