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**Designing at the Margins:
How Senior School District Leaders of Color
Learn to Enact Equitable Policies and Practices**

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Executive Summary

One central theory undergirding the Equity by Design (ExD) Community of Practice (CoP) is that building the capacity of district teams, composed primarily of leaders of color, to transform organizations has the potential to create conditions for more equitable outcomes for historically marginalized students. Caroline Hill, the CoP facilitator, used the Equity Action Framework Tool (EAFT), empathy interviews, and equity walks during in-person convenings, webinars, and local collaborations to deepen participants' learning. The CoP was comprised of district leaders of color ($n = 27$) from five school districts in the Midwest and East Coast, all of whom served predominantly students of color who also qualified for free or reduced lunch.

We use the EAFT, a research-based tool of individual and collective leadership dispositions and competencies, to test ExD's theory of action. Specifically, we explored three research questions:

Research Question 1: How do school district leaders of color participating in the ExD CoP learn to design and implement equitable policies and practices aimed at closing persistent opportunity gaps?

Research Question 2: To what degree do school district leaders of color change policies and practices aimed at closing persistent opportunity gaps after participating in a CoP?

Research Question 3: To what degree do school district leaders of color describe changes in their policies and practices aimed at closing persistent opportunity gaps after participating in a CoP?

First, we found that CoP members learned to design and implement equitable policies and practices aimed at closing opportunity gaps through the use of (a) skillful facilitation, (b) learning about the past to design for the future, and (c) core characteristics of the CoP.

Second, after analyzing pre-, mid- and post-survey responses, we found that participants reported that their greatest learning was in the areas of (a) being able to assess the will, skill, knowledge, and capacity of the organization to disrupt inequitable policies and practices; and (b) developing a theory of change to disrupt inequitable policies and practices based on an analysis of data.

Third, we found that school closure and reopening plans due to the COVID-19 pandemic created a unique opportunity to understand how school systems were applying their learning from the CoP to design policies and practices aimed at closing persistent opportunity gaps.

We provide four important recommendations for the ExD portfolio as it continues to deepen and sustain its impact aimed at supporting school district leaders of color to design equitable policies and practices: (a) continued support for the ExD CoP beyond the initial 1-year period; (b) focus on practice in particular in the next iteration of the CoP; (c) include a geographic representation of schools in future CoPs that account for both charter and traditional

public schools; and (d) continue to use the EAFT in future CoPs to deepen and sustain ExD team members' capacity to design equitable policies and practices.

As a part of their investments in expanding high-quality, culturally relevant K12 educational opportunities for Black and Latinx students from low-income backgrounds, Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Philanthropies invests in an EquityxDesign portfolio designed to increase the number and retention of teachers and school leaders of color and decrease inequitable school policies and systems that hinder students of color from accessing quality instruction. Schusterman has formed a community of practice of its grantee-partners within this portfolio.

Project Overview

One central theory of action undergirding the ExD CoP is that building the capacity of district teams, composed primarily of leaders of color, to transform organizations has the potential to create conditions for more equitable outcomes for historically marginalized students. To answer the question, How does the CoP build the capacity of leaders of color to design and implement policies and practices that close persistent opportunity gaps?, we utilized the EAFT. Briefly, this framework is a research-based tool of individual and collective leadership dispositions and competencies. Caroline Hill, the CoP facilitator, used the EAFT, empathy interviews, and equity walks during in-person convenings, webinars, and local collaborations to deepen participants' learning.

Equity Action Framework Tool

The three key dimensions described in the EAFT illuminate the micro- and macro-level moves made by leaders to enact equity-centered change in schools and districts: (a) maintaining and including critical social perspectives, (b) maintaining and including critical instructional perspectives, and (c) strategy for organizational change (see Table 1). Given that leadership development has both inward- and outward-facing components, we offer three levels: (a) *emerging*, which focuses on individual leader practice; (b) *practicing in public*, which focuses on selected opportunities to practice with others; and (c) *norming the culture*, which focuses on consistent organizational-level practice. For the sake of length and readability, we chose to genericize some of our language used in the framework so that users can specify according to their context. We also suggest this tool can support both individual self-assessment as well as observation of leadership (at the individual or group level). We suggest highlighting specific phrases that best describe leader action rather than using holistic categories. The EAFT can support both individual self-assessment as well as observation of leadership (at the individual or group level). We suggest highlighting specific phrases that best describe leader action rather than using holistic categories.

Table 1

Equity Action Framework Tool

Dimension	Emerging Individual	Practice with Selected Others	Practice with Organization
Maintaining Critical Social Perspectives			
Maintaining Critical Instructional Perspectives			
Strategy for Organizational Change			

Research Questions

To test the ExD’s theory of action, we explored the following three research questions:

Research Question 1: How do school district leaders of color participating in the ExD CoP learn to design and implement equitable policies and practices aimed at closing persistent opportunity gaps?

Research Question 2: To what degree do school district leaders of color change policies and practices aimed at closing persistent opportunity gaps after participating in a CoP?

Research Question 3: To what degree do school district leaders of color describe changes in their policies and practices aimed at closing persistent opportunity gaps after participating in a CoP?

Data Collection and Study Sample

To answer each research question, we drew on data collected from three sources: observations, interviews, and surveys. We observed three 2-day in-person convening and 19 virtual sessions, which amounted to **70** hours of observational data. We administered three surveys over the course of the CoP: one pre-survey in January 2019, a mid-point survey in January 2020, and a post-survey in July 2020. Finally, we conducted 1:1 interviews (n = 27) with each member of the CoP as well as the facilitator. In total, data collection took place over the course of 20 months, January 2019-August 2020.

The CoP was comprised of five district leaders of color from five school districts in the Midwest and East Coast, all of whom served predominantly students of color who also qualified for free or reduced lunch (see Table 2). The largest school district in the CoP was Longhorn School District.¹ Longhorn, a traditional public school in Texas, has a student population of 85,000 students, 90% of whom self-identified as students of color. The second largest district in the CoP was Arch Public School District in Missouri. Also a traditional public school, Arch has 20,000 students, 86% of whom were students of color. Mills Public School District, located in Massachusetts, serves approximately 16,000 students, 90% of whom self-identified as students of color. There were also two charter school networks participating in the CoP. The No Excuses Charter Network in Georgia serves 4,600 students, all of whom identified as students of color.

¹ All names of school districts are pseudonyms.

The last district, the Rio Grande Charter Network in Texas, serves 2,000 students, 96% of whom identified as students of color.

Table 2

Student Demographics of Community of Practice School Districts

	Mills Public School District	Arch Public Schools	Longhorn School District	No Excuses Charter Network	Rio Grande Charter Network
# of Students	16,000	20,000	85,000	4,600	2,000
% Students of Color	90%	86%	90%	100%	96%
% Students Receiving Free or Reduced Lunch	60%	72%	86%	96%	85%

The members of each CoP were the most senior district officials. As such, the superintendent in each of the traditional public school districts and the executive director for each of the charter management organizations participated in the CoP. In addition to the most senior leaders, each district team included members of the senior leader’s cabinet as well as one school building leader. It is also important to note that most CoP members self-identified as a person of color (see Table 3).

Table 3

Demographics of Community of Practice Participants

District	Mills Public School District (n = 4)	Arch Public Schools (n = 5)	Longhorn School District (n = 7)	No Excuses Charter Network (n = 5)	Rio Grande Charter Network (n = 6)	Total (n = 27)
Race/Ethnicity						
Asian	0	0	0	1	1	2
Black	2	4	4	4	3	17
Latinx	0	0	2	0	2	4
White	2	1	1	0	0	4
Gender (%)						
Female	66	80	71	80	83	78
Male	33	20	29	20	17	22

Findings

Below, we share findings for each of the study's questions.

Research Question 1: How do school district leaders of color participating in the ExD CoP learn to design and implement equitable policies and practices aimed at closing persistent opportunity gaps?

After analyzing the data, we found that CoP members learned to design and implement equitable policies and practices aimed at closing opportunity gaps through the use of (a) skillful facilitation, (b) learning about the past to design for the future, and (c) core characteristics of the CoP. Below, we provide a more in-depth analysis and discussion of how members of the CoP learned to design and implement equitable policies and practices.

Skillful Facilitation

First, we found that the skillful equity-centered facilitation of Caroline Hill, ExD facilitator, provided the enabling conditions for CoP members to learn policies and practices that have the potential to close persistent opportunity gaps. CoP members described Caroline as being effective in modeling and promoting equity practices. Moreover, participants were impressed by her ability to challenge their notions of educational justice and to deepen their critical approach to leadership practice. For example, Mills Public Schools's Diversity Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Officer shared that the facilitator's techniques enriched her experience in the CoP:

I do a ton of facilitation. And so, I have a high bar.... She [the facilitator] models equitable facilitation...always taking notes...focusing on the meta-moments that really matter, to make sure that we just aren't focusing on what schools are doing or what principals are doing, but actually how are we treating people, so that we can balance the power as best we can.... She always makes sure that there is a space for everyone to say something. And being able to experience that and to see how much it matters is important because then, that can be in our brain for how we interact with each other in this Community of Practice and outside of that group. (Mills Public Schools DEI Officer)

Another participant, the DEI Officer at the Rio Grande Charter Network, described how the facilitator guided the group to answer its own dilemmas in a manner that builds competency and provides tangible solutions:

[The facilitator]'s questions, there's something about her tone that conveys curiosity. They experience her tone as curious and nonjudgmental. It is manifested in the questions that she asks, "Have you considered, have you thought about what might happen if...." So I think that makes her a strong facilitator.... So she also puts a cognitive lift on me and on us. All right, she's not a "Here's the answer to your question." She's going to ask you more questions so that you can arrive at the question you need to ask to identify what is the real challenge you're trying to solve. And I find that incredibly helpful. (Rio Grande Charter Network DEI Officer)

Learning about the Past to Design for the Future

The second way CoP members said they learned how to design equitable policies and practices was *learning about the past to design for the future*. The required pre-reading activity from the ExD facilitator, Caroline, focused on the legacy of racism in each of the five districts in which the CoP teams were located (see Figure A). Specifically, the readings focused on the historical roots of desegregation, gentrification, reform, and other inequalities.

Figure 1

Pre-reading for Arch Public Schools



Freeman, R. (1975). Educational desegregation in St. Louis, Missouri. *Negro History Bulletin*, 38(3), 364-369.

Caroline began the first CoP session grounding participants' understanding of equity issues facing their district in a historical context to frame present-day inequities. In turn, CoP members indicated that learning about the past created a new opportunity for critical thought that would have not happened in their district setting:

I think we've been challenged and pushed outside of our boundaries in a way that I've never experienced in my tenure in [this district]. How we started off...it was a history lesson that we went through with our readings and about how historically our individual cities are impacted or how our educational systems are impacted by the history within our cities, the racist behaviors that have existed over the years and how that shows up and impacts our schools, and I think having those deep, richer conversations is something that our district has not been able to do primarily because I think it's been too uncomfortable of a conversation. (Principal, Arch Public Schools)

In addition to providing and discussing readings about the historical roots of race and racism and their influence on students' learning outcomes, the ExD facilitator, Caroline, also organized an experiential learning opportunity for CoP members to learn about the roots of anti-Black racism in the United States through a visit to the National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC) in Washington, DC. Participants found the visit to NMAAHC equally as transformative as the pre-reading material described above in developing their capacity to understand the complexity of the past in order to design equitable policies and practices for the future.

We have an experience that's curated in the places that we've gone to. Being able to go to the museum of Black history in Washington, DC. That was tremendously—I heard so many people talking about it [it was] valuable to have that experience, and to reflect and debrief with others who were thinking about the challenges of race and racism and oppression, in the context of education.... (Chief Diversity Officer, Rio Grande Charter Network)

CoP Core Characteristics

Finally, we observed that three core characteristics of the CoP supported participants' capacity to design equitable policies and practices: (a) a designated affinity space for critical engagement, (b) emboldened to lead for equity, and (c) an expectation to put equity into action. First, participants perceived the CoP as a designated affinity space for critical engagement; such critical spaces, according to CoP members, were not available in their districts:

I think the purpose is to make us think about equity and what it looks like in our districts, in our schools. I think it is bringing awareness of the biases that are out there and the inaccurate perspectives that have been shared over history and over time and continue to be misrepresented. I think it's a lot about awareness and touching on how can we, as leaders, help bring awareness back to our own districts and begin that process with our own staff so that all voices and perspectives are heard and considered in everything that we do. (Deputy Superintendent, Mills Public Schools)

Participants also indicated that the CoP emboldened their leadership vision and practice for implementing equitable work. Many members aspired to do equity work; however, CoP members said they had to navigate racially hostile work environments and learned how to navigate such spaces only after participating in the CoP.

...as a Black woman, my voice has been not heard. I would say something, give a suggestion and it wasn't heard. But then my White peer down the table said something practically the same word and then it's like, oh, that's a good idea. Now I'm bold enough to say, I just said that. That is what I have grown in to see and to call it and it has been challenging even when it's at the leadership table to keep reminding everybody let's keep race not at the table but on the table. (District-level Administrator, Longhorn School District)

Finally, the third characteristic of the CoP was the expectation to put equity into action. By design, the facilitator, Caroline, required participants to identify a policy in their district that perpetuated the opportunity gap. CoP participants had to design what Caroline referred to as a "small test." In this practice, districts had to apply their learning to their district, collect and analyze data aligned with the small test, and then identify policy prescriptions. The participants found this practice important in helping them to learn how to design equitable policies.

It's best practice when it comes to adult learning that it translates from, here's what I learned into now, what are you going to do about it and you're expected to do something about it. That's a unique dynamic that is the most valuable when it comes to continuous

learning, not just attending some conference or some session. (District-level administrator, Rio Grande Charter Network)

Research Question 2: To what degree do school district leaders of color change policies and practices aimed at closing persistent opportunity gaps after participating in a CoP?

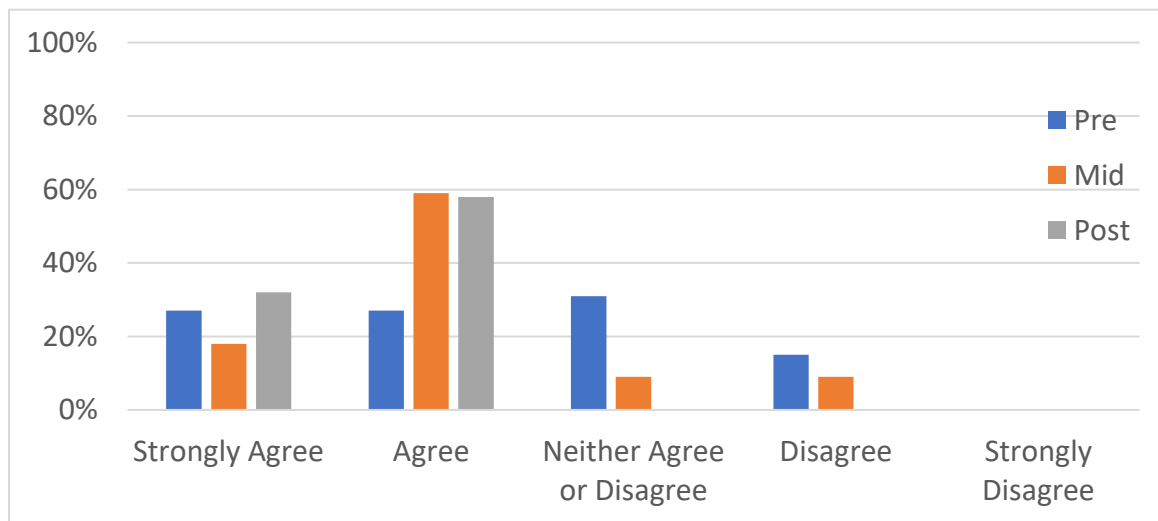
To answer this question, we analyzed three rounds of survey data. As described above, we administered the same survey at three intervals during the CoP, aligned with the EAFT. Each member of the CoP completed a pre-survey before the beginning of the first CoP session in January 2019, a mid-point survey in January 2020, and a final survey at the end of the CoP’s last session in July 2020.

To understand the degree to which school district leaders change policies and practices aimed at closing persistent gaps, we focused on the survey items in which we saw the greatest shift from strongly disagree to strongly agree based on the pre-, mid- and post-survey responses. After participating in the 2-year ExD CoP, participants reported that their greatest learning was in the area of being able to assess the will, skill, knowledge, and capacity of the organization to disrupt inequitable policies and practices (see **Figure 2**). Before the CoP, slightly more than **40%** of participants reported being able to assess the capacity of their organization to disrupt inequitable policies and practices; by the end of the CoP, **100%** of participants reported that they had the skill and knowledge to disrupt inequitable policies and practices.

Figure 2

Pre-, Mid, and Post-survey Responses

As a leader for equity, I...assess the will, skill, knowledge, and capacity of the organization to disrupt inequitable policies and practices

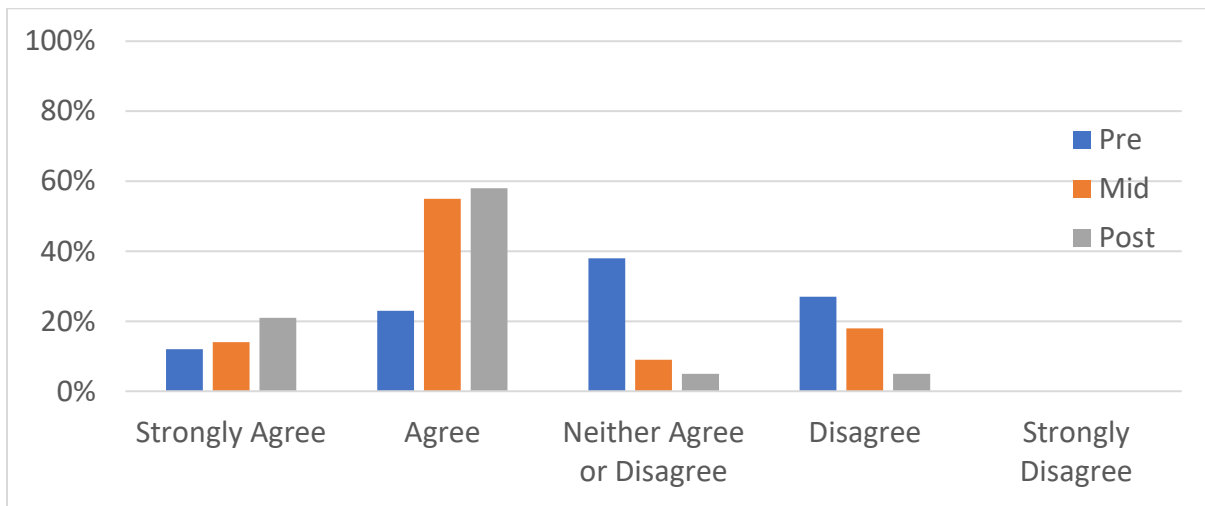


The second greatest reported shift in participants’ perceptions about the ExD was developing a theory of change to disrupt inequitable policies and practices based on an analysis of data (see **Figure 3**). Before the beginning of the CoP, approximately 30% of participants believed they engaged in a theory of change to disrupt inequitable policies and practices; by the end of the CoP, the percentage increased to 80%.

Figure 3

Pre-, Mid, and Post-survey Responses

As a leader for equity, I...engage in the development of a theory of change to disrupt inequitable policies and practices based on an analysis of data



Self-reported survey data showed that CoP members reported an increased capacity to assess the degree to which their organizations could disrupt inequitable policies, as well as to develop a theory of change to shift such policies. Interview data from CoP members corroborated this finding:

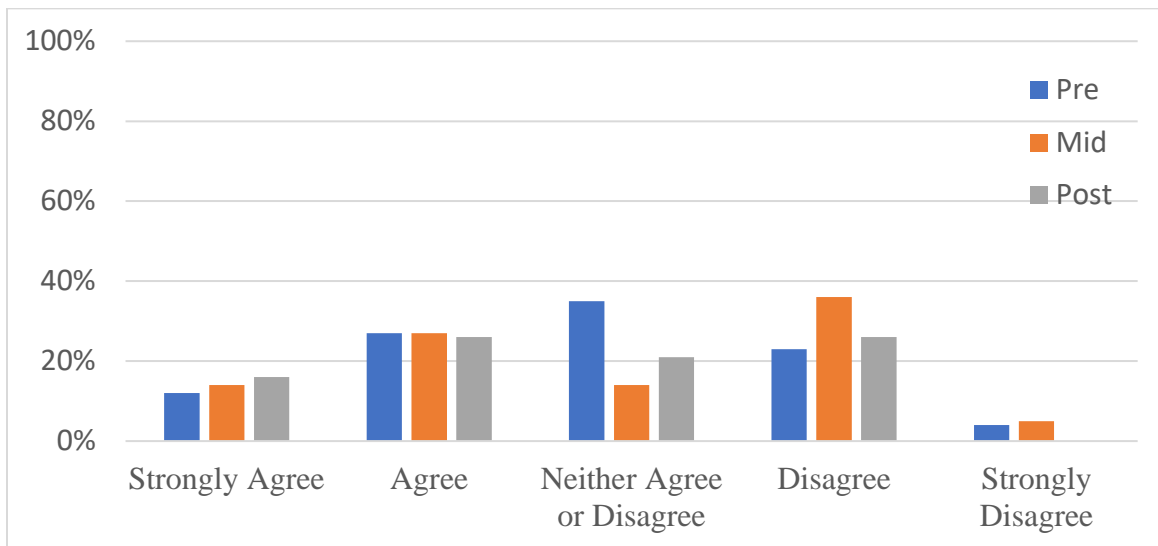
I think we have learned plenty of tools bringing voices of the most marginalized to the table, looking at the rubric [Equity Action Framework Tool] to say, who has power, doing empathy interviews, evaluating, learning the historical connotation of certain practices. Like those are some of the things that have helped us be a better organization today than we were eighteen months ago. (Director, No Excuses Charter Network)

While CoP members reported clear positive shifts in their capacity to design equitable policies and practices, we did observe critical growth areas, namely in area of curriculum (see **Figure 4**) for the second phase of the CoP. Specifically, CoP members reported little to no change when conducting audits of curricular materials to determine if they were aligned with core standards and school-specific context.

Figure 4

Pre-, Mid, and Post-survey Responses

As a leader for equity, I...conduct audits of curricular materials to determine alignment with core standards and school-specific contexts



Within-District Analysis

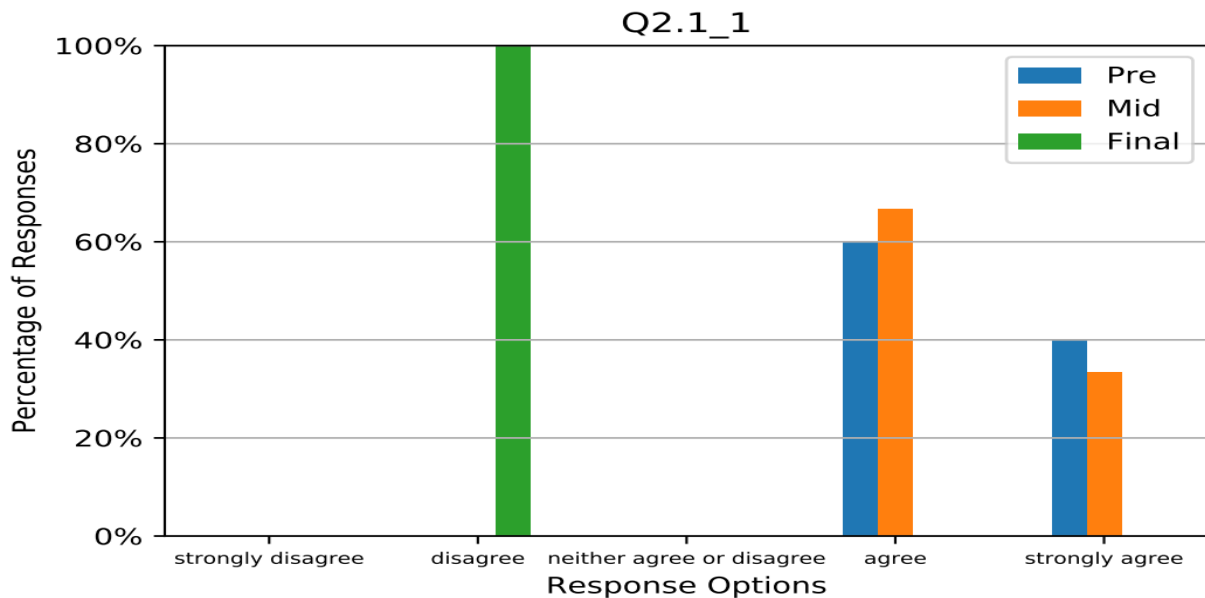
Above, we highlighted positive shifts across the entire CoP on the pre-, mid-, and post-surveys. Here, we briefly draw attention to the largest shift in learning within each of the five CoP teams.

Arch Public Schools. At the beginning of and mid-way through the CoP, Arch Public Schools participants unanimously reported articulating norms of high expectations and rigor for historically marginalized students (see **Figure 5**). By the end of the CoP, however, each member of the Arch Public Schools team said they *did not* communicate expectations around rigor for vulnerable students. We believe that one potential explanation for this noticeable shift was that participants, over time, began to understand the complexity of—and their own complicity in—what it means to set high expectations for historically marginalized students.

Figure 5

Arch Public Schools Pre-, Mid, and Post-survey Responses

As a leader for equity, I...articulate organization-wide norms of high expectations and rigor for vulnerable and historically underserved students

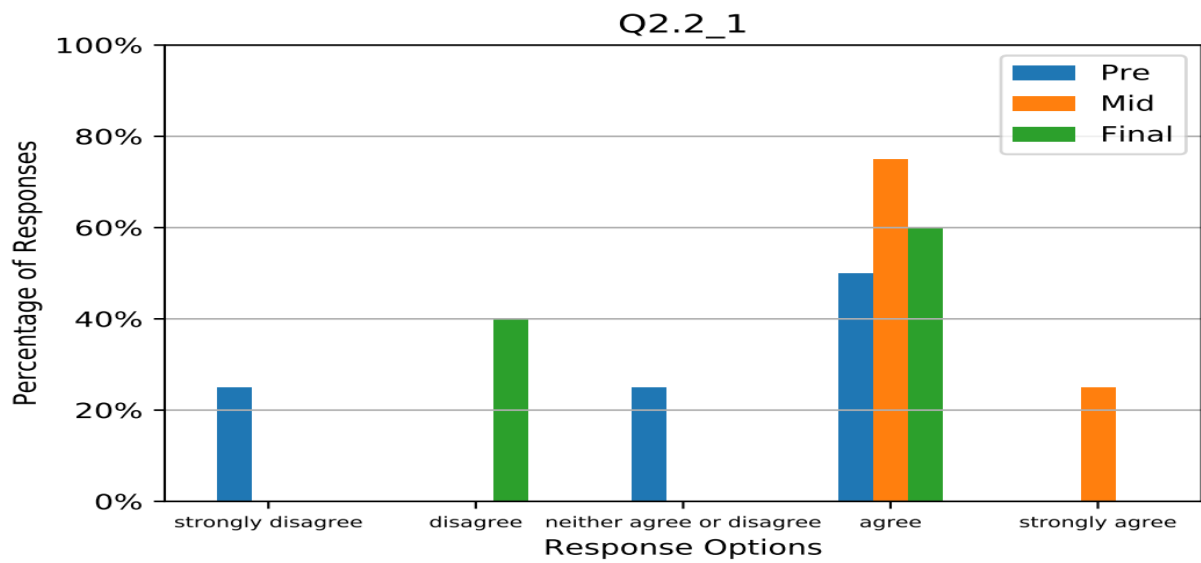


Mills Public Schools. At the start of the CoP, approximately half (50%) of all members of the Mills Public Schools team reported conducting audits of curricular materials to determine alignment with core standards; by the end of the CoP, that percentage increased slightly to 60% (see Figure 6).

Figure 6

Mills Public Schools Pre-, Mid, and Post-survey Responses

As a leader for equity, I...conduct audits of curricular materials to determine alignment with core standards and school-specific contexts

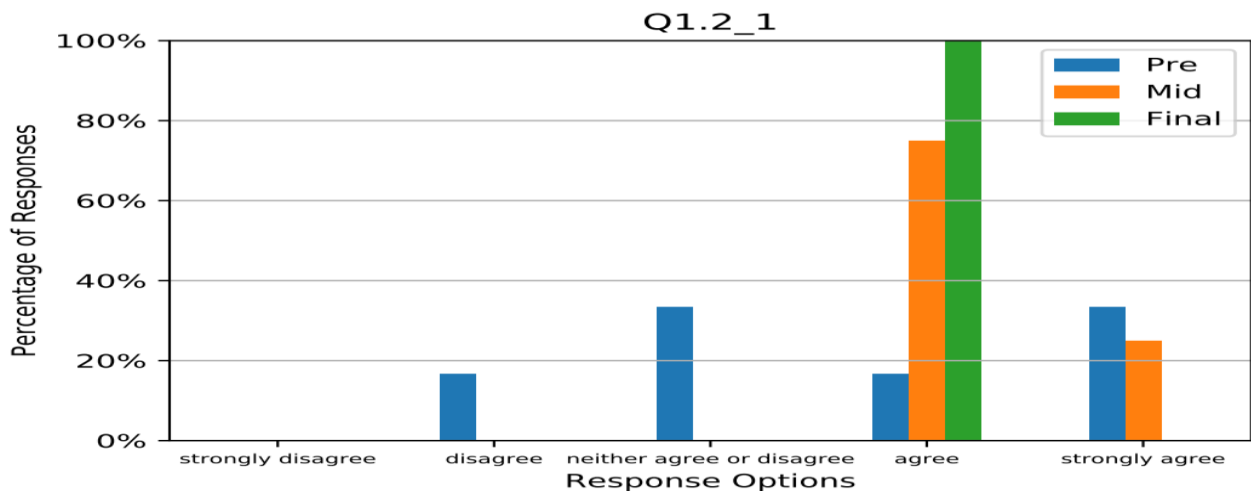


Rio Grande Charter Network. At the beginning of the CoP, 50% of the Rio Grande ExD team said that they understood and responded to positive and negative emotions so that emotions were not a barrier in the change process (see Figure 7). Remarkably, by the end of the CoP, 100% of the team reported being able to analyze emotional contributions and had the capacity to respond to the successes and mistakes of their peers.

Figure 7

Rio Grande Charter Network Pre-, Mid, and Post-survey Responses

As a leader for equity, I...identify and analyze emotional contributions to the social dynamic, including responses to successes, achievements, mistakes, disappointment, and setbacks

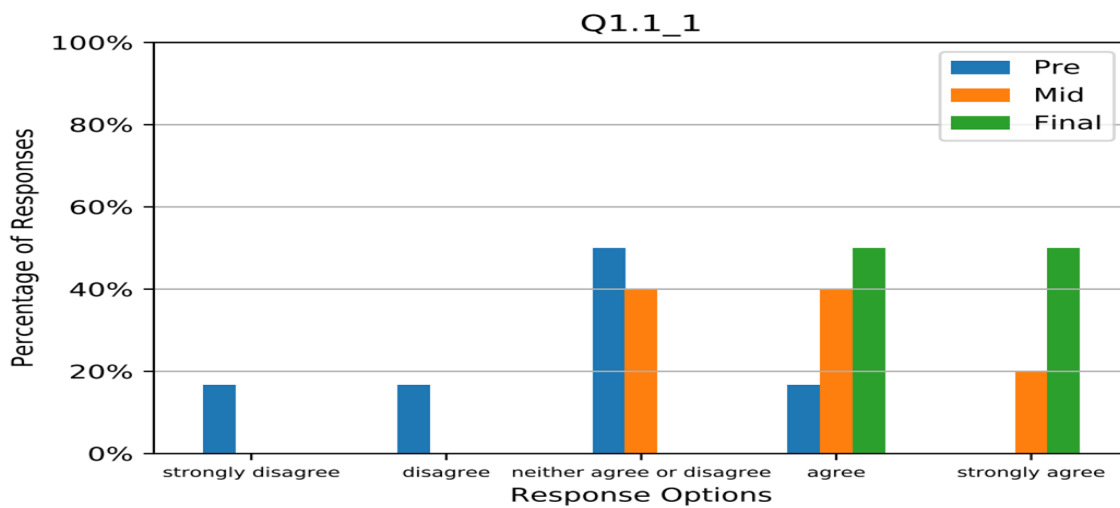


Longhorn School District. At the start of the CoP, slightly less than 20% of the Longhorn School District team reported being able to identify and discuss their power and privilege relative to their identity and leadership positions (see Figure 8). At the end of the CoP, 100% of the ExD team said they could both identify and discuss their power and privilege as it related to their identity and leadership positions.

Figure 8

Longhorn School District Pre-, Mid, and Post-survey Response

As a leader for equity, I...identify and discuss my relative power and privilege with respect to identity and leadership position

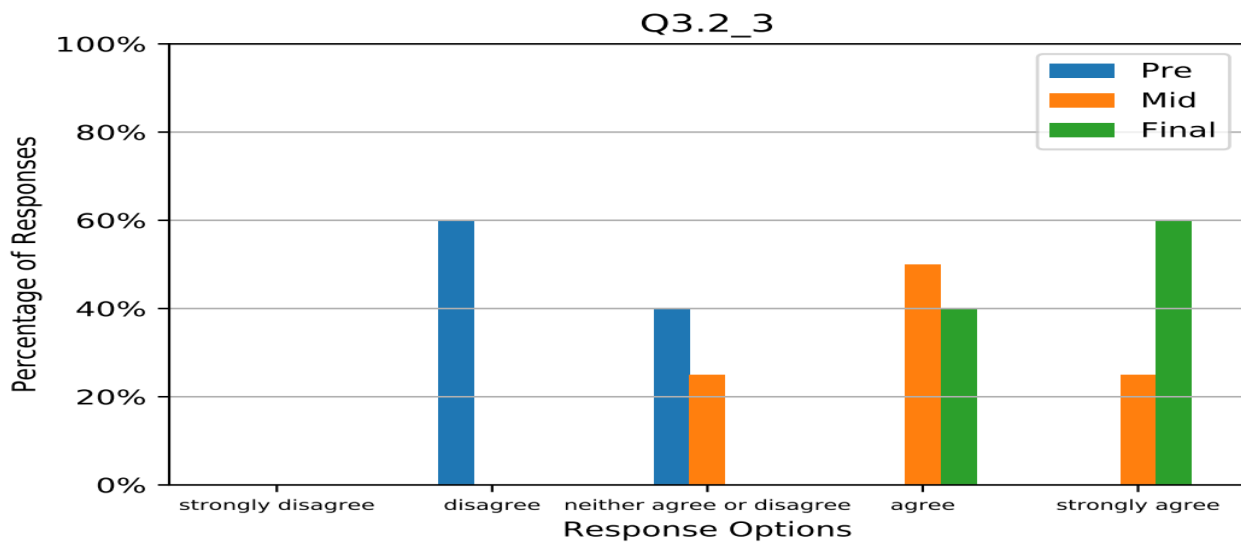


No Excuses Charter Network. When members of the No Excuses Charter Network began the ExD CoP, no one reported that they engaged in the development of a theory of change to disrupt inequitable policies and practices based on an analysis of evidence and data (see Figure 9). By the end of the CoP, *all* of the members of the No Excuses Charter Network had adopted this practice. Most notably, 60% strongly agreed and 40% agreed that they used data to engage in a theory of change aimed at disrupting inequitable policies and practices.

Figure 9

No Excuses Charter Network Pre-, Mid, and Post-survey Responses

As a leader for equity, I engage in the development of a theory of change to disrupt inequitable policies and practices



Research Question 3: To what degree do school district leaders of color describe changes in their policies and practices aimed at closing persistent opportunity gaps after participating in a CoP?

To answer this project’s final research question, we built on the within-district survey analysis provided above and examined interviews with members of each ExD team to understand what specific policy and practice changes they were making to close persistent opportunity gaps. We found that school closure and reopening plans due to the COVID-19 pandemic created a unique opportunity to understand how school systems were applying their learning from the CoP to design policies and practices aimed at closing persistent opportunity gaps.

Mills Public School District: Including Caregivers of English Language Learners in District Reopening Plans

The Mills ExD team’s focus during the CoP was on increasing learning outcomes for its English Language Learners (ELLs) population. Specifically, the team began the initial process of

designing a school for its ELL students. One learning for this team was the importance of including the voices of the most marginalized (i.e., students and the families of ELLs). As Mills schools began to close in Spring 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic and as its school leaders began planning for its Fall 2020 reopening, including the voices of ELLs and their caregivers became critical.

We had this crazy thing [COVID-19] happen that caused us to halt our schools and stop and try to put something together quickly. And then you have got a little more time to put the whole thing together again, for the next year, how are you going to do that? I would say that the questions that we were asking, the students that we were thinking about, and for example, I had an advisory, thirty-person advisory, **I made sure I had parents of English learners, participating in the advisory**, that sort of attention to designing in the margin, I don't know that I would have done it that way necessarily, you know, were it not for this. (Superintendent)

Arch Public School District: Including Parents and Community Members in School Reopening Plans

Similar to their peers at Mills, the ExD team at Arch Public Schools also described learning the importance of including the perspectives of the most marginalized when making district-wide policy decisions. The team's small test was focused on building the capacity of each of the district's principals to create and foster inclusive school cultures. As Arch prepared to reopen schools that were closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the superintendent and his cabinet prioritized including a diverse group of stakeholders, such as parents and community members. Notably, the inclusion of community members and parents influenced a school reopening plan that centered the needs of Arch's most marginalized students.

We put together a restored committee made up of teachers, principals, community members, parents and we reviewed some one hundred articles that have been written about this whole notion of coming back to school and the notion around equity as it relates to that.... **We were really, really conscious about the makeup of the committee.** And I believe a lot of that thinking came as a result of the prior training and a prior knowledge of how we needed to listen and hear other voices. I think we were very conscious of **how do we make sure that we provide the best resources to the most marginalized kids and families. And so that has been a real guiding principle for us as we move forward to this work:** making sure that those students who have the greatest need get technology, get a connection to the internet, also the parent training. (Superintendent)

Longhorn Public School District: Superintendent's Evaluation Tied to Reducing Suspension of Black Girls

In Longhorn Public School District, ExD team members focused on practices aimed at reducing the disproportionate rate at which Black girls were suspended when compared to their peers. While team members initially designed an afterschool program that focused on empowering Black girls, they realized that attending solely to Black girls would not be enough to

redress systematic bias in the district. Through a series of public forums, the ExD team was able to elevate Black girls' school-based experiences. The end result was the school board's decision to hold the district's superintendent accountable for reducing suspension rates for Black girls.

Well, we continued to keep up with the progress of those girls, we did see some progress, but when we looked at district-wide African American girls, we did not see progress. But those girls that we were targeting, that were started in the program that we were following, we saw progress in reductions of suspension.... **The [school] board is going to hold the superintendent accountable for monitoring the reduction of over-suspension of African American girls.** Will be tied to his evaluation which is going to be tied to all of our evaluations. (Chief Equity Officer)

Rio Grande Charter Network: Increasing Parent Engagement and Satisfaction

After parent surveys revealed increasing discontent about their voices not being included in changes to the charter network's policies, senior leaders on the ExD team prioritized increasing parent engagement. During COVID-19 school restart plans, the regional executive director realized that the parent meeting information sessions conducted by the larger network of schools across Texas did not speak to the individual needs and anxieties of parents in her region. Consequently, the regional executive director worked with the principals in each of her schools to tailor the larger regions messaging to parents about school re-entry in the midst of the pandemic.

I've thought about parents in our schools experiencing a lot of confusion and needing to hear from their leaders. What I would say is connected to the small test was the decision, what matters for parents is connection. And their connection is not necessarily to me. Their connection is to the principal. Their connection is to the teacher.... **The CEO and HQ would have their town hall, we would then regionalize the content of that town hall. I then would again regionalize that content, meet with principals, rehearse with principals. And then principals would have their own town hall.** (Regional Executive Director)

No Excuses Charter Network: Creating a More Equitable Uniform Policy

After learning that students across the No Excuses Charter Network in her region had to "earn" their uniforms by exhibiting positive character traits, the executive director worked with staff and families to create a more equitable uniform policy (see Appendix A). After meeting with a diverse group of stakeholders, some of the more meaningful changes included the acknowledgment that uniforms were a right, not a privilege. The second change was that students would no longer be punished if they came to school without uniform.

So 100% we redesigned our uniform policy, we called students, we called families, we called staff members. Not only did we redesign the uniform like what you actually wear to be more inclusive and gender-inclusive and identity-affirming, we also did away or dismantled any earnings which we used to have in our policy.... It was on policy that you start your school with a character t-shirt and then you join—you earn your polo. And that is now no longer in practice. We have values for what our dress code will be around like

community pride and signaling membership and belonging, and there will be no consequences for being out of uniform. (Regional Executive Director)

Recommendations

Based on the aforementioned findings, we provide important recommendations for the ExD portfolio as it continues to deepen and sustain its impact aimed at supporting school district leaders of color to design equitable policies and practices.

Continue Investing in the 5 ExD Teams

Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Philanthropies should continue its support of the ExD CoP beyond the initial 1-year period. Ongoing professional learning is integral to changing deep-rooted policies and practices that keep historically disadvantaged students at the margins. While the 1 year that senior leaders across these five districts participated in the CoP laid the foundation for initial shifts toward equitable policies, ongoing support with teams will be crucial to sustaining these efforts.

Next Iteration of the CoP should Include a Focus on Practice

The next iteration of the CoP should focus on practice, in particular deepening the instructional leadership capacity of members that centers equity. Given survey responses that showed little change in CoP members' efforts to conduct audits of curricular materials to determine alignment with core standards and specific school contexts, it will be crucial that efforts to shift equitable practices that begin in the superintendent's boardroom trickle down to classrooms in which students learn.

Continued Geographic and School-Type Representation

Future CoPs should include a geographic representation of schools that include both charter and traditional public schools. Diversity, in all of its forms, is a strength. One characteristic of the CoP that team members appreciated was the ability to interact with senior leaders from geographically diverse urban spaces, as well as the opportunity to learn about how education leaders in different organizational contexts (i.e., charter versus traditional) attempt to create equitable learning environments for historically marginalized students.

Equity Action Framework Tool to Facilitate Continuous Improvement

To deepen and sustain ExD team members' capacity to design equitable policies and practices, future CoPs should continue to use the Equity Action Framework Tool. School leaders need a common framework that identifies a range of organizational dynamics that enable or constrain equity. The EAFT provides common language for school leaders to identify the macro and micro moves necessary to enact equity-centered change in their schools and districts.